

My Two Bits

China has become an economic powerhouse by implementing policies designed to achieve its economic ambitions. It has not used democratic methods to achieve its ends and will not be converting to a democratic form of government at any time in the foreseeable future. While one can say, "Oh the poor people," one also has to admit that, generally speaking, the people – or at least the younger generations and those yet to come – will be far better off economically, and will have many more opportunities (thanks to what money can buy), than they otherwise would have had had China not taken the approach it did. In fact, when you look at how China has progressed and continues to do so, it's almost as though its future were being engineered. Which is no surprise, considering the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC):

General Secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC)

- Hu Jintao, a hydraulics engineer.

Members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau

- Wu Bangguo, chairman, an electronics engineer,
- Wen Jiabao, a geotechnical engineer,
- Jia Qinglin, an electrical engineer,
- Zeng Qinghong, a control engineer,
- Huang Ju, an electrical engineer,
- Wu Guanzheng, a control engineer,
- Li Changchun, an electrical engineer, and
- Luo Gan, a mining engineer.

Don't get me wrong! I'm not at all suggesting that the United States should abandon democracy for some type of enlightened enginoligarchy. However, I cannot help but believe that U.S. voters might be interested in electing people who understand how to achieve progress effectively and efficiently. It's not that people don't want Santa Claus to serve as their mayor, governor, congressman, or president. It's just that so many Santa

Clauses have made promises they could not fulfill – that they had no intention of even trying to fulfill – people have been left to wonder, "Why can't we do better?"

I've been working with engineers, geologists, contractors, and other construction industry professionals for almost four decades. They are, as a group, smart, savvy, practical, and focused on and capable of getting things done. They know how to manage projects and programs. They know how to deal with people. True: Some of them do not possess bubbly personalities and, as a consequence, might consider themselves not cut out to enter politics, even though any number of politicians have demonstrated that a less-than-gregarious demeanor can be perfectly acceptable to the electorate. Of course, some construction industry professionals are extremely outgoing while still possessing focus and the ability to develop and implement effective plans. While these latter, "classic" traits help construction industry professionals do well in their business pursuits, they don't help construction industry professionals in their political pursuits, because – unless I'm missing something – few of them ever get involved in politics. True: They serve on this advisory committee or that, but they're not the ones making the decisions. That's left to the "professional politicians"; i.e., those who run for office and get elected.

More often than not, the professional politicians are lawyers, a point any number of construction industry professionals make while sputtering in disgust. Have you ever thought to yourself, "Why is it that so many professional politicians are lawyers?" There is an answer, you know, and it's a simple one: Lawyers show up. They get involved in one community group or another, and participate fully, vigorously. They serve on various committees, make the board, become president, then move on to the next organization up the rung, all the while making friends, acquaintances, and admirers.

"I could do that," you might be saying to yourself, and that would be true: You or just about any other construction industry professional *could* do that... if you wanted to. But you're busy. You have obligations at work. You have obligations to your family. You just don't have enough time to get involved and stay involved in community activities, and – if you do – you're not interested in running for office, because [fill in the blank].

I know people read what I write, but I sometimes wonder if they do anything as a result. Maybe you agree with everything I've said so far. Maybe you would also agree that construction professionals need to get involved in politics, given that it would result in politicians who actually know something about many of the issues they were voting on, if not leaders who could make effective decisions for the betterment of their communities, states, and the nation as a whole. But are you going to get involved? Probably not, no matter what I say or write. Do you know a fellow construction industry professional who probably would and should get involved, and who'd you back with time, talent, and money? Maybe. Would that person be willing to run for office? You probably won't even bother to ask.

So here's the deal as I see it: We have a core group of, let's say, 100,000 people who are capable of running for public office, capable of winning, and capable of doing a great job once in office. How many of them will actually get involved? Maybe 20 or 30. Maybe. So, until more of you actually try to do something about making a change, no more complaints. I don't want to hear about Senator This or Representative That. No remarks, please, about Governor Here or Mayor There. True: They may have made some awful decisions from your point of view, but what good is your point of view if it's not being used to make important political decisions? While certain elected officials may be idiots in your opinion, at least they took a chance and got involved. Why? Who knows. Maybe they thought, "Someone needs to do this, and I guess I'll volunteer." Do they bring to the table what any number of construction industry professionals – like you – could bring? From what I've seen, I'd have to say, No. But what I have to say doesn't seem to make that much of a difference, anyway. I have been trying to hammer home this point for years, but it continues to fall on deaf ears. It's a shame that my only prod is a pen. While it may be mightier than a sword, clearly something stronger is needed. I wish I had it. I cannot help but believe we all would be better off if more of you said, "Okay. I'll try."