

The Detroit News

Opinion Editorials

We must demand better of Congress

By James V. McTevia

Over the past 50 years, I have walked into companies and seen situations that were even worse than I expected, no matter the horror stories I had heard before arriving.

The more I am able to see, in specific terms, what is happening with the most troubled business in America, the federal government, I am now getting the same feeling.

The latest numbers are jarring. A public survey shows just a 10 percent approval rating of Congress. As one of the survey researchers at Princeton University said, "People never love Congress, but clearly now we've reached an all-time low." Remember, these are people that we, the people, have hired to do their jobs.

In recent years, I have referred to legislators from both parties collectively as "A Congress of Fools." Individually, most people we send to Washington are smart. Most are sincere in their desire to do good things. Most are well-educated. But those qualities are overridden by the ability, once in Washington, to borrow money in seemingly endless quantity. Fiscal irresponsibility becomes their standard behavior.

Five hundred thirty-five Americans — a small enough number to qualify for a federal small business loan — are leading us toward financial disaster, the likes of which we rarely ever see in business. The voting members of the House and Senate, in both parties, aided and abetted by the White House (in the hands of either party) have accelerated our runaway debt to a speed that would dazzle even the "Star Trek" crew.

If this were a business, it would call for a significant turnaround, executed with a strong sense of urgency. Now would be the time for action to seriously curb spending, raise revenue and institute a strategic about-face, including new processes and procedures to curb management's addiction to blowing through cash and maxing out credit. With management this unpopular, change would likely be accelerated as a result of a shareholder revolt.

But this is politics, where job security is predicated on ignoring business principles. "Delivering," for Congress, means keeping spending high and revenue low, while passing the responsibility of making the toughest decisions to those who follow you. While that might be popular during campaign season, it is, quite simply, a recipe for disaster.

Congress finds it impossible to round up a majority in favor of fiscal reality and in favor of our grandchildren's children. Therein lies Congress' image problem. And therein lies the hope that Americans wake up over the next two months and send only candidates to Congress, from either party, who will make the tough choices to keep us out of the abyss.

James V. McTevia is managing member of McTevia and Associates LLC, management and financial consultants.

From The Detroit News:

<http://www.detroitnews.com/article/20120820/OPINION01/208200303#ixzz245rmLBmT>

<http://www.detroitnews.com/article/20120820/OPINION01/208200303/1008/W-e-must-demand-better-Congress>