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Michael Kelly: Moderate lambastes political extremists

BY MICHAEL KELLY
WORLD-HERALD COLUMNIST

Larry R. Bradley of Omaha, who retired as a major after 20 years in the Army, is as unhappy as the rest of us about attack ads and polarized politics.

"Reasonable people, middle-ground people, have just withdrawn," Bradley said. "All we have left are the zealots. The only way to resolve this is for the 70 to 80 percent of us in the middle to rear up on our hind legs and say, 'Enough!'"

To that end, he has written a book, "Neither Liberal Nor Conservative Be."

The subtitle - as a voter, you might approve this message - is "An Action Plan for People Disgusted by Polarized Politics."

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The notion that the nation is polarized, he says, is faulty: Rather, it's the political extremists who are poles apart.

"We've got two extremes controlling the agenda," he said. "They are like small children throwing tantrums in the supermarket. We adults need to get our heads together."

Though not everyone will agree with his positions on issues, Bradley said it's important to debate in neutral, analytical language and for common sense and moderation to prevail.

He argues for an extremely strong military defense system and for getting serious about energy independence.

That will "enable this country to tell the Middle Eastern and other oil-exporting countries to go to hell," he writes, adding that "declining revenues from oil will starve the jihads' movements."

All politics, he said, should flow from three principles: limited government, fiscal prudence and social tolerance.

Even among those principles, there is plenty of room for disagreement. Will America ever agree on social tolerance?

He favors a "live and let live" policy unless people are "severely harmed" physically, mentally, emotionally or monetarily.

On abortion - a controversy where it's hard to be a centrist - it's clear where he stands: "The belief that life begins at conception is a religious belief, not a scientific fact."

Over the years, Bradley said, he has been registered Democrat or independent. But he voted for Ronald Reagan and the first George Bush for president.

On Iraq, he parts company with the current President Bush, whose administration he charges with "bumbling and ineptitude" and "not fighting decisively to win."

Bradley is critical that the war's burden has

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fallen on a few.

"Our military has risked their lives every day on multiple tours for the last three years," he writes, "while the rest of the country frets about who will win 'Dancing With the Stars' or 'American Idol.'"

It's too late, he says, but a lottery draft - putting everyone's family at risk - probably would have kept us out of this war.

Bradley, a native of Springfield, Mo., received a political science degree from Missouri State. He split his Army career between combat units - he worked on the initial phases of the Bradley Fighting Vehicle - and research and development.

He is not related to Gen. Omar Bradley, a fellow Missourian and World War II hero.

After retiring from the Army, Larry Bradley worked in sales, was widowed and married an Omahan.

He is fed up with politics as usual. The book (\$15.95, at Borders and at www.KindredMindsEnt.com) is this Bradley's fighting vehicle.

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