

Advocate for better politics through the American Hope Campaign

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Braver Angels Jim Mayer and Peggy Prichard will be among the red/blue Election Day pairs.

This past summer, I attended the Braver Angels national convention in Kenosha, Wis. This was a convention unlike any other. I met people from all over the country — roughly equal numbers of red-leaning and blue-leaning and many who consider themselves independents.

The wide variety of sessions and events offered over the course of the convention included:

- A large group viewing and then discussion of the June 27 presidential debate.
- Civil debates, in the Braver Angels way (no winners, no losers), on a number of “hot button” topics.

— A group-created theatrical performance, with volunteer red and blue actors from throughout the country, about the problem of polarization and the need for depolarization.

— Breakout sessions on how to bring red and blue Americans together — on the personal level, in local communities and in the political arena.

— Common ground workshops on various “hot button” topics.

— Musical performances, concerts and sing-alongs — featuring music that addresses our need for coming together as Americans.

I enjoyed attending many of these sessions and events, but the thing that struck me most was the vibe — people were enthusiastic about talking with people they may disagree with. We wore name badges indicating our political leanings and I saw people intentionally seeking to have conversations with people who had different leanings than their own. And these were very substantive conversations — people were discussing significant topics that many Americans often avoid addressing.

In addition to the stimulating convention activities, our national Braver Angels leadership announced a set of bold initiatives — titled the American Hope Campaign — that will guide the organization’s efforts in the coming year. There are three aspects to the campaign:

— Have fellow Americans sign a petition that asks our political leaders to take responsibility for addressing polarization.

— Reach out to fellow Americans on Election Day, as red/blue pairs, sharing a message of unity.

— Help our nation find common ground on immigration via a series of regional red/blue common ground workshops.

Because all three aspects of the American Hope campaign involve outreach to and involvement of fellow Americans, I’d like to explain them in greater detail. You can learn more about any of the three [on the Braver Angels website](#).

Sign a petition asking politicians to address polarization

I would encourage anyone of voting age who is concerned about the problem of political polarization to consider signing the Braver Angels petition, which resolves that our political leaders should take responsibility for polarization. Summarized on the Braver Angels website, it says:

“We can fix our destructive political divisiveness starting with existing solutions that party leaders, elected officials, and candidates aren’t talking about. Party leaders can set the expectation that elected officials work together, build relationships, and bring our communities together, and that candidates clash about ideas and not personal attacks and stereotypes.

“Sign the petition to demand that our parties accept responsibility for detoxifying politics. ... By signing, we further demand that candidates and elected officials express their views about polarization as a vitally important issue facing the nation and our communities.”

Team up with someone on the other side on Election Day

The second part of the campaign is the Election Day Pairs activity, with red/blue pairs of Braver Angels from our local alliance going to polling places in Champaign County. We will be at voting centers where signs are allowed — as our pairs will be holding a sign stating: “We are red and blue voters committed to holding America together.”

Our purpose is to demonstrate that even though we may have different political beliefs, or vote for different candidates, we can still stand together respectfully and peacefully as fellow Americans. Our goal is to promote civility during this critical moment in our country’s history.

Sign up to participate in a Common Ground workshop

Over the next 12 months, the Braver Angels organization will address important issues surrounding immigration. The goal is to reach practical points of agreement and influence our political leaders to take steps towards a shared vision of progress.

Over the past three years, Braver Angels took a similar approach in their “Trustworthy Elections Campaign,” bringing together red and blue participants in 26 regional Common Ground workshops. This work resulted in a report detailing 23 specific solutions addressing seven broad areas of concern, all of which were adopted without objection, collectively across all 194 participants.

This report [can be found on the Braver Angels website](#).

Learn how to 'disagree better'

On Oct. 28, Braver Angels will hold a workshop on “Skills for Disagreeing Better” at the Mahomet Public Library, from 6:30-8 p.m. As part of the workshop, participants will learn

about the values and concerns of those who differ from them politically, as well as essential skills for communicating across differences and finding common ground.

If interested, email eci@braverangels.org.

About this series: This is the 15th installment of a [series of “Braver Conversations” columns](#), appearing every two weeks in Town Hall. Braver Angels is a national organization dedicated to bringing Americans together to bridge the partisan divide, with a local presence in East Central Illinois. Readers are encouraged to join these Braver Conversations and submit questions or topics they want to see addressed by local members. Learn more and submit questions at IL.braverangels.org. Email comments to: eci@braverangels.org.

Jim Mayer is a founding member of the East Central Illinois Braver Angels Alliance, and currently serves as a Braver Angels Ambassador — meaning he specializes in local community outreach for the organization. Jim is a semi-retired vocational counselor and educator.