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It's time for leaders to realize what voters really want

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Our supposed leaders are sometimes the last to get it.

Maybe that's why they continue to bicker and shout and pander to noisy special interest groups while most of the people they are supposed to represent would prefer cooperation, meaningful change and progress.

The sentiment, which I could -- if feeling uncharitable -- characterize as "shut up and do your job," is most recently reflected in a survey conducted by Intellitrends for the Detroit Regional News Hub. The results show that being willing to seek common ground -- instead of vowing to stand yours -- doesn't carry the political price it once did. Yes, people are that anxious for a new political atmosphere.

And young people -- you know, the future? -- are most adamantly so. They want a new Michigan, not all these old battles.

From the survey of 829 people conducted in December and January in nine southeast Michigan counties, some numbers to chew on, especially for

political leaders:

- About six in 10 don't see their elected leaders as working together effectively to revitalize this region -- and that cuts across county lines.
- Among 18- to 34-year-olds, 39% "love it" here but are "discouraged and frustrated by current conditions." Another 31% say they like it here, but are ready to consider moving, which probably means they are out of work or way underemployed.
- Among everyone surveyed, 61% said communities outside Detroit have to be extremely involved in rebuilding the city, while 30% said they should be at least somewhat involved. That's nine in 10 who understand that the region's fortunes rise or fall with its core city. The extremely-or-somewhat involved totals were 92% for Wayne County including Detroit; 91% for Oakland County, and 88% for Macomb.

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To me, that says Detroit-bashing for political gain in the suburbs should be history.

- Only 6% believe "we are on the right track" to revitalize Detroit, compared with 27% in a similar 2008 survey.

You can couple those findings with the latest Michigan Scorecard from the Center for Michigan and Data-Driven Detroit. This annual compilation of data from various surveys concludes that Michigan voters still rank the state's political leadership as "poor." That's hardly a surprise, considering the rancor in Lansing and Washington, where officials refuse to work together or fear there will be political consequences for doing so.

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And throw in a national survey released this week by the Center for Political Participation at Pennsylvania's Allegheny College. It found 95% of Americans believe civility in politics is important for a healthy democracy, while 85% said politicians should "pursue friendships" with members of the opposite party and that shouting over someone during a debate should be "against the rules."

Also in that survey, 73% said elected officials should do what's "good for the nation" instead of what's popular.

"We need to encourage our elected officials to ... start thinking about what's best for everyone," said Becky Johns, 22, of Lansing, communications coordinator

for Delta Dental and a regular visitor to metro Detroit.

She was among about 600 mostly-young people who spent the better part of April 16-17 in Royal Oak at Future Midwest, a conference on social media and digital business strategies. (Cutting edge stuff, and they met here! What's that tell you about young people wanting to build a future in Michigan?)

Johns said she's "not pointing to any one party. I just feel like they're not looking at what's best for the whole state." And Johns said she will keep that in mind when she votes in this very important election year.

So should we all.

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