

Guest columnists **Bill Richardson, John Bos and David Roitman:** **Help to depolarize America**



By [BILL RICHARDSON, JOHN BOS and DAVID ROITMAN](#)
Daily Hampshire Gazette Published: 9/29/2021 2:22:48 PM

We are seeking eight area conservative-leaning (Red) and eight liberal-leaning (Blue) area residents committed to depolarizing today's political process to participate in two half-day workshops on Saturday, Oct. 23 and 30, from 9 a.m. to noon. The Zoom workshops will be conducted by the Greenfield and Pioneer Valley Braver Angels Alliances. The Greenfield Alliance is well established. The Pioneer Valley Alliance is new and is building on the former Easthampton Better Angels Alliance.

We are Bill Richardson, the Red co-chair of Greenfield Braver Angels Alliance; John Bos, a Blue founder of the Greenfield group; and Dave Roitman, Blue co-chair of the new Pioneer Valley Alliance.

Bill Richardson

In March 2019 I read an article about a local Red/Blue workshop, which stated that more than 10,000 votes were cast in Franklin County for President Donald Trump in 2016.

However, Reds were less willing to discuss the issues feeling not welcome in the majority Blue state we live in. I fully supported the goals of depolarization and discussing the issues with others with opposing views, and participated in this workshop.

Since then I've become deeply involved in the Braver Angels (BA) Greenfield Alliance. We have discussed immigration, state voting laws, Afghanistan, abortion, gun control, critical race theory and infrastructure. In addition to our local Braver Angels Alliance discussions, I participate in the National Braver Angels Zoom debates on the same issues with hundreds of other participants.

Since it was founded in 2016, Braver Angels has grown to have alliances in every state and now has over 22,000 members. A BA representative recently spoke to a congressional subcommittee about how our political parties can learn to work together.

We're all in this together. I very much want other Reds to sign up for the Oct. 23 and 30 workshop that can lead us all to find common ground.

John Bos

I discovered Better Angels in 2017. A group of liberal Leverett residents hosted a group of conservative residents from Letcher County, Kentucky, for a weekend of dialogue in the jam-packed Leverett Elementary School auditorium.

Stunned by the results of the 2016 election, the Leverett residents wanted to understand why Letcher County residents voted almost

unanimously for Trump. I witnessed how the beliefs on both “sides” were expressed honestly and deeply, creating trust and care for each other. This dialogue process melted away stereotypes so that Leverett and Letcher County residents could see the “other” as human beings. The bonds between the two groups have become stronger than their political differences even though those differences remain.

A number of us from Greenfield wanted to bring this coming together process to our own community. We chose to align ourselves with Better Angels, the national organization formed in 2016 following America’s most divisive election in our history.

Renamed Braver Angels, this organization has developed a successful dialogue process and has trained facilitators to work with local groups. The process works!

Dave Roitman

Our two alliances are collaborating on this workshop because we see the impacts of polarization all around us. Students are afraid to speak up in class. Workers are afraid to speak their minds to co-workers. Meetings to strengthen public safety pit one side against the other, even as most people in the room agree on fundamental goals.

But polarization is not inevitable. It’s a bad habit that we can change, and our Valley will be better for it. Our new Alliance will take on challenges like “how do we agree on a set of facts?” “How do we deal with cancel culture?” And more fundamentally, “how do we develop mutual respect so we can work together across differences?”

Since we’re starting fresh, everyone joining will have a lot to say about what we do and how we do it. If you sign up for this workshop, you’ll see for yourself how Braver Angels works.

Workshop details

There will be four exercises. First red and blue groups discuss the most common stereotypes of their side, why these stereotypes are wrong and what may be true about them.

Second, the groups take turns discussing their side’s policies — what they like and don’t — while the other side listens. Afterward, they’re invited to share what they learned about how the other side sees themselves and what the sides have in common.

Third, participants ask questions of each other to better understand viewpoints, and then merge into mixed groups to further understand views and experiences.

Finally, participants collaborate “across the divide” to find common ground and generate ideas they can work on together.

While the workshop has room for eight red-leaning and eight blue-leaning participants, it also accommodates 25 observers. If you’re interested, contact us right away to have a seat at the table.

If you have questions or would like to register for the Oct. 23 and 30 Red/Blue ZOOM workshops, email droitman@braverangels.org, bill.richardson2323@gmail.com, or john01370@gmail.com.

Bill Richardson is a resident of Northfield. John Bos is a resident of Greenfield. David Roitman is a Florence resident.

