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Eckstrom speaks in Hartsville, decries 'toxic' political climate

Ardie Arvidson Feb 12, 2019



South Carolina Comptroller General Richard Eckstrom spoke to a joint meeting of the civic clubs in Hartsville on Tuesday at the Hartsville Country Club.

ARDIE ARVIDSON/MORNING NEWS

HARTSVILLE, S.C. –South Carolina Comptroller General Richard Eckstrom spoke at Tuesday's annual joint meeting of the civic clubs in Hartsville on the caustic political climate everywhere, fiscal transparency in government and the principles guiding civic organizations. The meeting was held at the Hartsville Country Club and hosted by the Rotary Club.

"Have you ever known the political climate to be more toxic than it is now?" he asked members of the three organizations represented – Rotary, Kiwanis and Lions.

"The political climate today is the most acrimonious I have ever seen," he said. "It is not just one party. It goes both ways."

He said individuals are in pursuit of one-upmanship.

A former Rotarian, Eckstrom touted Rotary's four-way test, an ethical guide meant for Rotarians to use in their personal and professional lives.

The four-way test says Rotarians must first consider: It is the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build goodwill and better friendships; will it be beneficial to all concerned?

"Sadly in politics we don't have that ethical framework," Eckstrom said.

He said the four-way test is like The Golden Rule — it says that people should treat others like they want to be treated.

"I am sure the Lions and Kiwanis have similar ideals," he said.

He said community service organizations breathe quality into their communities. He said service clubs can have a dramatic impact on politics.

Civic organizations demonstrate what can be achieved when groups work together for a common goal, he said.

Eckstrom said no one keeps secrets. There is transparency; unlike with government agencies.

The state's chief accountant is all about transparency in state spending.

He said transparency holds public officials accountable. He said people elect government officials, and they have a right to know what is going on. That is why he pushed to have spending records online.

"It is one of the most satisfying things I have worked on," he said.

He said the number of inquiries and request to his office has declined since people have access to spending records.

He gave some examples of how putting the state agencies' purchasing card purchases online has

helped curb their spending or held them more accountable.

He talked about the gas tax hike and how the money is being spent.

Before taking questions, Eckstrom encouraged the civic leaders in Hartsville to go online and see where their money is being spent by elected officials and agencies.

The Hartsville Rotary Club meets every Tuesday at the Hartsville Country Club for lunch. The Kiwanis Club meets on Thursdays for lunch at the Hartsville Country Club, and the Lions Club meets at Mr. B's in Lydia on Thursdays.

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