We are the change agents

I’m writing this in a moment of tremendous division and upheaval across our nation. It seems the only thing Americans agree on right now is a fierce desire for change.

Yet, there is a false narrative at work in most of the conversations I’m hearing blasted across the TV screen, in my newspapers and on my social media feed: It’s the idea that this change can only happen in one of two directions: to either the far right or the far left.

That isn’t what we need, and I truly don’t believe that is what the vast majority of people are seeking, no matter whom they voted for. We are seeking a transformation, leaving behind one way of being and seizing another, more enriching, way of being. But what does that look like, exactly, and how do we get there?

This was all very much on my mind the morning after the presidential election, when I attended the OC Community Foundation’s annual meeting. Chairman Doug Holle half-joked to a ballroom full of uneasy guests that “it was the most important post-election party you’ll ever attend,” because no matter how you cast your ballot, by supporting the foundation you’d be on the “correct side of something powerful.”

If you don’t know the OC Community Foundation, you should. This vibrant organization, headed by president Shelley Moss (full disclosure: She’s my close friend), brings philanthropists together with local nonprofits to improve our community. Last year alone OC Community Foundation put $82 million of donors’ money into organizations supporting everything from education to health, from arts and culture to the environment, human services and so much more.

What does that mean, exactly? At-risk kids learned to read. People with disabilities got services they need. People without homes were provided food and shelter. Veterans coming back from serving our nation received job training and housing and therapy to support their re-entry into the civilian world. Women received mammograms. Coastlines were cleaned, animals were rescued, children danced, seniors painted, poetry was written.

This is the kind of transformation we can all believe in. As Jim Doti, past president of Chapman University, noted in his speech at the meeting, “We are the change agents that make those things possible. If you have a dream, you can be a change agent.”

What I love so dearly about Orange County is that it’s a place where people don’t wait for permission. Our culture is a culture of vibrant innovators, risk-takers, entrepreneurs, people who look at things and say, “This can be better.” We don’t wait for institutions, be they government or what have you, to tell us how to be and what to do. Now, more than ever, let us come together to be the change agents.