

Inside the Bell

Why Do Politicians Fail Us?

In the democratic republic known as the United States of America we embrace the concept of a government "... of the people, by the people and for the people ..." (Abraham Lincoln, The Gettysburg Address, November 19, 1863). Our founders recognized the foolishness of attempting to place every issue before everyone and the equally foolish single supreme leader of a diverse cultural population. Their brilliant solution was a central government composed of legislative bodies composed of leaders chosen equally by the member states of the Republic and by the populations of those States as a whole. This bicameral legislature is balanced by an Executive chosen indirectly by the national population and a Judiciary chosen by the Executive with concurrence by the Legislature. Only if all four independent bodies agree can our legislators legislate and our executives lead.

So, why does this system consistently seem to fail the population it represents?

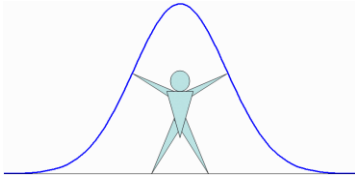
Every couple of years or so, we get to elect our leaders. Who are these people? As a group they're experts at raising money, giving speeches, making promises, ducking questions, shaking hands, kissing babies, smiling for the cameras, keeping up appearances and taking direction from their campaign managers and handlers to improve their polling percentages. (Is it any wonder we see so many actors remake themselves as Politicians?) In other words, these guys and gals are experts at getting elected.

Once elected, however, we expect them to be diplomats, social scientists, economists, security experts and military strategists. Few, if any, are experts at any of the skills required to a leader. They know how to get elected but not how to actually do the job they're elected to do.

To compensate, they surround themselves with staff, consultants and lobbyists. These folks are experts at getting noticed, getting on staff, promoting someone else's point of view and stroking egos. Our politicians are no more capable of sorting out the diverse opinions their entourage provide than they are of understanding the issues on their own. How can this system actually work? The short answer is, it doesn't, and, I think, our founders did not intend it to work.

The brilliance of the framers of our government is the balance of government branches. They frequently cancel each other. Only on important issues, where they all agree, can they actually produce final, constitutional legislation. In this system, more legislation fails than passes, and even the legislation that passes congress must have the support of the President and possibly survive a challenge, by the people themselves, through the Judiciary, of the legislation with which we disagree. We, the people often emphasize the balance between Executive and Legislative branches by voting the branches to be from different points of view.

At least this is how it worked prior to 1901. Prior to 1901 only one-third of the Presidents had a Senate and House of Representatives of the same party as



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themselves. Since 1901, 47% of our Presidents have had party affiliation identical with both the House and Senate. Since Calvin Coolidge used the radio to win the 1924 election the correspondence between the President and the Congress has climbed to 55%. That corresponds to when our Politicians began to meddle with our economy, social structures and personal lives. It also corresponds to the beginning of America's slide in world opinion.

Their efforts have rarely worked out well. Their lack of ability blinds them to the consequences of their actions. Prohibition, unconstitutional demands on the population during the 1940's, unrestrained earmarks on the budget, the impending collapse of Social Security and Medicare and the Affordable Care Act, come to mind. The unintended consequences of virtually every social and environmental program are a constant, painful reminder of the failure of governmental compromise and consensus.

Like the separation of state from church, the separation of the various branches of our government is critical to the survival of the Republic. Failure of the people and the States to enforce this separation will lead to continued abuse of power by our elected officials.

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