

Oslo's Big Expectations

Michael Sean Winters | Oct. 9, 2009 NCR Today

The Nobel Peace Prize is not good news for Barack Obama. Sure, he is having a great news day. In December, when everyone, or nearly everyone, is in the holiday spirit, he will have the chance to give an inspiring speech in Oslo. And, maybe some of those who have wondered why they voted for him will be confirmed in their judgment last November, not by their subsequent doubts, to look again at the man who has more promise in his pinky than the GOP has in its caucus.

But, politics is always about the management of expectations. Already, Americans expect President Obama to fix the economy. He has taken on health care reform and Americans expect him to get a bill through a troublesome Congress and actually improve the health care system. Now, on top of all that, the Nobel Committee announces that they expect him to bring peace to the world. God bless any man who has such expectations thrust upon him.

In the short term, Republicans were already arguing for a more belligerent policy in Afghanistan than the President, wisely, seems inclined to deliver. Now, they will say he is seeking to curry favor abroad rather than to protect American interests. Everyone should remember that trying to subdue Afghanistan seemed like a fool's errand all along and George W. Bush certainly did not accomplish that wild country's pacification during his almost eight years of managing the war there.

Of course, Obama is also lucky not least in having such wretched opponents. Just as Newt Gingrich overstepped, thinking he was standing on principle but not realizing that when people don't get their Social Security checks, they don't care about principle. That false step allowed Bill Clinton to regain his footing. Today, GOP chairman Michael Steele had no gracious words for the President's award. He joined Islamic Jihad and the Taliban in questioning the Nobel Committee's decision. Nice going Mr. Steele. Enjoy the company.

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