

The Other Anniversary

Michael Sean Winters | Nov. 5, 2009 NCR Today

Yesterday was not only the anniversary of the coronation of Pope John XXIII. It was also the one year anniversary of the election of Barack Obama to the presidency. The historic aspect of that election tended to obscure the darkening economic clouds that had been rushing in for the previous months, but now one year later they are still there, still dark and ominous.

Turning around the economy is always a slower process than one would wish, especially if you are now the incumbent. Some of the same people who voted for change in 2008 also voted for change in 2009, because they do not like what they see when they read the newspaper. Of course, voting for change in 2008 meant voting for the Dems and this year it meant voting for the GOP.

The health care debate, which has taken longer than Obama wished, is reaching its conclusion. Certainly the Senate should, like the House, move quickly to finish work on that bill and begin considering how government expenditures can best be used to promote job growth. There will be a wind at the Democrats' back again as soon as they pass health care reform.

Many of the President's other policy objectives have not been moving forward. Climate change legislation appears stalled and those who oppose it have been far more effective at arguing that the legislation will cost jobs than its proponents have been at arguing that it will create jobs. Indeed, whichever nation takes the technological and manufacturing lead on producing green energy is the nation that will become the dominant economic player in the years ahead. Last year, China doubled its output of energy from wind. Immigration reform will be very difficult to push in an election year. Don't Ask, Don't Tell and closing Guantanamo are even more remote.

But there is one promise the President has kept. He has returned civility to the Oval Office. Rahm Emanuel is a tough cookie, but behind closed doors. He has not become Obama's equivalent to Karl Rove. Indeed, there is no Obama equivalent to Rove which is a very good thing. And the President himself has declined to get into verbal nastiness, despite clear provocations such as the Tea Bag protesters with posters showing Obama as an African witch doctor. The President has not questioned the patriotism of his opponents. He has not shamefully tried to paint those who oppose his policies as aiding and abetting terrorists.

In Tuesday's elections, one of the things the winners shared was that they ran the more upbeat campaigns while their opponents relied heavily on negative ads and arguments. I do not think that difference was decisive, but it was noteworthy. One of the changes voters wanted, both in 2008 and 2009, was a higher tone from our elected officials. In this Obama has redeemed his promise.