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Three Articles To Make You Think

by Michael Sean Winters

NCR Today

Three articles today speak about American politics at a deeper level than the day-to-day partisan bickering and that warrant a careful reading.

The first two both focus on populism. George Will writes about the electoral limits of populism, noting that the last successful presidential campaign run on purely populist grounds was that of Andrew Jackson. Further, Will recognizes that populism can serve as a check on the ambitions of more mainstream politicians, but it can almost never convert itself to a governing philosophy.

Leon Wieseltier points out that the populism of former Governor Sarah Palin is fake at its core, that it is merely a new entry in the anti-elitism of some elites against that of others. After all, someone who has a best selling book, was elected to the governorship of her state, and mounted a campaign for national office is not exactly a political outsider no matter how often she repeats the word "rogue."

E. J. Dionne makes a very important note – and one that we will focus on further in subsequent blog posts – about the changing nature of Congress and why the changes suggest it is time to do away with the filibuster. Discussing the ways the Stimulus Bill was changed to be more "moderate," Dionne writes: "The moderates got their way because the stimulus need 60 votes, an absurd standard now that we have an ideologically polarized, parliamentary-style party system." This is a very important observation. The Founders made the legislative process pointedly cumbersome to ensure that no particular interest or section of the country could run roughshod over the interests of others. The Founders did not foresee the emergence of parties, let alone the kind of ideologically driven parties we have today.

I am not sure how you change a political system designed for one set of facts to accommodate a different set of facts. Any given change, at any given time, will help one party more than another. It would take an act of political courage for the party in power to enact reforms that did not help it, and courage is not in

ready supply on Capitol Hill. Not when the populists are banging at the doors.

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