

PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES II

Contributed by PT Editors

The ideas sound wonderful, but without the political machinery to make them happen, are they any more than make-believe?

Americans like a good fight, and the presidential primaries have certainly provided that. By now, voters have narrowed the field to 3-4 likely choices for America's 45th President:

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The candidate of experience rests her case on eight years as the President's wife. During that period, she squandered an historic opportunity to transform national health care while her husband fooled around in the hallway. By the way, he'll be back. The candidate of change remains charmingly ambiguous on most issues while lacking a track record to suggest what he really has in mind. That may also explain a reliance on 'national-government-fixes-all' solutions. Would sparse private sector or local government experience be relevant? The only veteran among the group favors extending what posterity may well deem America's most disastrous and poorly-executed war but will have accomplished a remarkable feat: keeping the White House in the hands of the same party that created the mess. The candidate of business has indeed made good money during a successful career. But is the Nation quite ready for another Harvard MBA in the Oval Office?

If all this sounds surrealistic, ask yourself: Is any of this campaign real? Is there any reason to believe that the many 'positions on the issues,' TV ads, town meetings, or choreographed debates are more than embroidered words for a nation starved for the real thing?

The ideas (or most of them) sound wonderful. But where is the driveshaft, the political apparatus to transform these giddy moments into practical reality? The country has long since morphed into a top heavy political system. We honor The Federalist, but it's time to admit the obvious: their innovative theory has inverted. A system originally designed to spread political decision-making across 'the extended republic of the United States' has instead concentrated it in the Capitol. And, Washington simply lacks the practical reach to make all things happen for all people. And, with little or no accountability to a gerrymandered constituency, the aftermath has been poorly conceived legislation and programs.

To 'our ailing Federalism,' add 'the traditions' of the Senate and House: filibusters, 'holds,' and a sclerotic seniority system that have stymied meaningful debate on all but the most trivial issues. Then stir in doctrines of 'Executive Privilege,' empowering the White House to start a war, ignore international treaties, and bring the nations' airports to a standstill while the Chief has his hair cut. The combined outrage has created a structural failure in the core institutions that enable Americans to govern themselves. Our inability to articulate thoughtful policy across broad areas such as energy, healthcare, education, agriculture, infrastructure—the gamut—is more than just 'politics.'

There are certainly many well-meaning, able and honest people in government. The candidates may well be among them. But what we've been promised simply doesn't stack up in light of current practice and past experience. It's all make-believe. Pinch yourself and find out.