

The K.F. Stone Weekly

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



February 22, 2015

A MEMO TO ALL THOSE CONTEMPLATING THROWING THEIR HAT INTO THE RING

TO: All Those Contemplating Throwing Their Hat into the Ring

FROM: KFS

RE: Reality Check

Now that we are already in what one might call "spring training" for the 2016 presidential season, it seems only proper to go over a couple of things which may (or may not) help put the long, seemingly endless upcoming season into proper perspective. For let's face it: running around the country in order to taste and test the political waters, being wined-and-dined by the one-tenth-of-one-percent who will wind up paying for the campaigns, and speaking before smallish groups who think you may just be the second coming of Robert Taft or Ronald Reagan (if you're a Republican) or FDR or JFK (if you're a Democrat) -- can be both heady and intoxicating. But beware: it can all prove to be wildly chimeric. Hence this memo: call it a reality check for the unrealistic. And who knows? Perhaps this check will help dissuade a few of you from running; actually help you decide to go back to your day jobs -- like being senators, governors or whatever in the hell you do when you're not in elected office.



If you haven't discovered it by now, two of the most important things you will need to possess during the upcoming season are the hide of a rhinoceros and a life story straight out of Horatio Alger. For from here on out, anything and everything you've ever done, said, joined or even mused about will fair game; prepare to be diced and sliced, reamed, steamed and dry-cleaned.

Republicans: if you show a bit of compassion for illegal immigrants, be prepared to be called a RINO ("Republican in Name Only") or a spineless liberal. Democrats: if you opine that Obama Care doesn't go far enough and should be replaced by a single-payer system similar to the U.K., Canada or most every other western nation, be prepared to be labeled a Communist. And woe betide any of you who doesn't have a definitive answer to any of a thousand-and-one issues; you will be accused of not being ready to play in the majors.

Then too, it is absolutely imperative that you post the following bit of wisdom from the recently departed Mario Cuomo on your shaving or makeup mirror: *You campaign in poetry. You govern in prose.* In other words, keep constantly aware that all those promises, all those simplistic, sound-bite solutions to incredibly complex, multidimensional challenges are easy; carrying through on any of them is next to impossible. It's easy to project bravery and self-confidence when the cage is filled with paper tigers and quite another when all the creatures have lethal fangs and claws.



The matter of issuing simplistic sound-bite solutions to complex multidimensional challenges is of utmost importance. We live in a time of great disillusion and danger. The grave threat posed by terrorists -- in the Middle East, the Maghreb and potentially Europe, from ISIS, Boko Haram and the North Koreans -- is far, far more pervasive and complex than any politician's "one-size-fits-all" solution suggests. To say "If elected, I will eradicate ISIS," or "Under my watch, Iran's and North Korea's nuclear ambitions will be thwarted" makes for a great headline or sound bite, but doesn't come close to suggesting how you're going to do it. To get into a debate over whether the president should use the term "Islamic terrorists" or not is way beside the point and betrays a lack of understanding. There are hundreds of millions of Muslims in this wide world -- and a lot in this country -- who will be with us in our fight to take down ISIS if we don't mistakenly and callously paint them with a single brush. Please realize dear potential candidates that part of the mission is diplomatic, and diplomacy must be done at a lower temperature and decibel level.

Be aware that the great difficulty President Obama has in getting anything passed by Congress is not going to suddenly disappear if you're the lucky (or unlucky) person who takes the oath of office on January 20, 2017. Neither Congressional gridlock nor nasty hyper partisanship can be overcome by a single forceful soul. Any of you who really, truly believes you have the power or ability to eradicate what has become a fatal systemic flaw might want to look in the mirror and ask "Do I have a messiah complex or what?"

During this long spring training season, I for one would keep in mind that every time you criticize the president for what he has or has not accomplished, or for what he has or has not said; every time you lay the blame on the other party for the inability to pass X or Y piece of legislation, you are guilty of using shadows to suggest substance. You aren't telling the American people what you would do if elected president; you are merely informing them that given the chance, you would do things much, much differently.

Whoopee!

Might I suggest that instead of throwing raw meat to the political base -- of acting as cheerleaders of negativity who scare the daylights out of the masses while promising things you know would only happen in an ideal world -- instead of that, why not deal in real issues. Who is going to have the guts to tell voters that the battle against ISIS and other terrorist organizations "is not your father's or grandfather's war"; that defeating the terrorists is not even remotely similar to defeating the Germans, Italians or Japanese in World War II? Who among you has the guts to inform the American people and their representatives -- all of whom you would have to lead and work with if elected -- that if we are to defeat this rampant evil it will take solid international cooperation, a serious rethinking of which autocratic regimes we call our friends, and -- dare we say -- a shared sacrifice on the part of the American people whether it be through higher taxes, greater national unity and even a restoration of the military draft? Any of you up to the challenge? Are any of you -- whether Democrat or Republican -- capable of looking your wealthiest benefactors in the eye and telling them that what their dollars are buying is *not* partisan complaisance but political courage? As my political mentor, the late Jess Unruh used to say: *"If you can't take their money, drink their booze and eat their food and then do what in your heart of hearts you know is right for the people . . . you don't belong in the majors."*

So please, think long and hard about whether you really, truly believe you are up to the challenge. Let your brain rule your ego. Know of a certainty what you do and do not know. And for those things you do not know, make sure you surround yourself with people who do possess that knowledge.

Without question, the season is very long . . . but it is *not* a game.

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