



THE VIEW

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WHAT WOULD THE FOUNDING FATHERS THINK NOW?

BY

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I just returned from three days in Washington, D.C. and because I am one who is absorbed by all things related to government I will admit to being as fascinated as ever with the milieu surrounding our nation's law making. So much so that I caught myself wondering at lunch one day about what the founding fathers might think about the process they created.

One of the best sources to consult regarding the ideas and motives of the folks who were willing to lay it on the line to create a new country that would work well enough so that they didn't have to go crawling back to the King of England is the Federalist Papers. These are the documents written by James Madison, Alexander Hamilton and John Jay that laid out the rationale for adoption of the government outlined in our current Constitution. You can almost see the sweat dripping from the authors' brows since they were writing after the initial attempt at government under the Articles of Confederation had failed miserably. This might be their last chance. They were, for the most part, trying to speculate about the day to day operations under the new Constitution in hopes that such speculation would lead to its adoption.

James Madison's Federalist Number 10, for example, advocated the adoption of the new government as contained in the Constitution as a sure antidote to the "violence of factions". He allowed as how representative government as described in the Constitution would prevent a "tyranny of the majority". The efforts of such a majority would be stalled by elected bodies that would be able to serve the larger interests of the nation. In addition, the vastness of the

country and the federal system that provided for power in the individual states would serve, according to Madison, as an impediment to the development of over bearing majorities since they must organize state by state. The factions that Madison was concerned about could be analogous to our modern day interest groups and political parties.

So what does all of this have to do with the day to day life in the Nation's Capital today? When Congress is in session almost everyone eats, sleeps, and breathes government. As I was having my lunch I noticed the round table next to me where six people in business dress were having a spirited discussion while making sure that their working papers did not brush against their mashed potatoes. Five out of the six working diners were actively engaged in interchanges with their "blackberries". For those like me who can barely use a cell phone a Blackberry is a brand name that has become a generic term for a device upon which the owner can not only send and receive phone calls and e-mails, and upon which he or she can literally store a projection of all of the things that must be accomplished for the day

As I stepped out onto the sidewalk I stepped into yet another fascinating phenomena of our representative government. I found myself surrounded by a group in bright red polo shirts. I walked for blocks and continued to encounter what must have been hundreds of people in these red shirts. I watched as on several corners buses would disgorge 40 or 50 more red-clad humans. The front of the shirt read "Divided We Fail," and on the back was the inevitable Web site address, "DividedWeFail.Org". I could not resist logging on to that Web site when I returned to my room to discover that it was the name for a project undertaken by the American Association for Retired Persons. This project signifies an earnest effort to lobby Congress for health care reforms and for programs providing greater security for the elderly. In sheer numbers alone, this group was bound to make an impression, and they had come from many of the States in the union to speak with one powerful voice. This red shirted army was by no means the dominant group walking the streets of Capital Hill. With the new Farm Bill being debated, representatives of every plant grown and animal bred were striding about with the looks of people on missions. It was important to get that last persuasive meeting in before the long August recess. It is that calendar that keeps the focus of the Congressional staffers who, ever mindful of the importance of their constituencies, have frozen the smile on their faces and shaken hands until they have become arthritic.



It is hard to watch this real life scenario of the representative democracy unfold without being appreciative of James Madison's wariness of the unchecked factions. By the same token, it is invigorating to ponder a national government with so much business to do that it nonetheless invites all of its' citizens to come and participate in person if they wish. In the words of Madison in Federalist Number 10, "their (the people's) elected representatives would have the intelligence and understanding to serve the larger interests of the nation."

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