



# THE VIEW

Issue #44

February 6, 2008

## LIMITED VISION OF THE POLITICAL PUNDITS

BY

MARTY WISEMAN, Ph.D.

Never has there been so fascinating a political season as the one we are now observing with the Presidential campaign. This rare race for an "open seat" has afforded us the opportunity to debate emerging political philosophies and challenge old ones as never before.

As I've leaned forward in my chair attempting to join the televised debates, one fact keeps occurring to me. When the positions of the candidates of both of the respective political parties are laid on the table, and likewise when the commentators explain them to us, it seems that the important places in the world have shrunk to two. These will be familiar to the reader as "inside the beltway" of Washington, D.C. and New York City's Wall Street. In a gross over simplification Democrats are accused of holding fast to the belief that all good things of a public nature must come from inside the beltway and in turn Republicans are saddled with the charge that anything worth doing must first be blessed by the denizens of Wall Street.

Only on rare occasions do the cable news channels reach out into the hinterlands to fill some time airing the quaint ideas of the average working Janes and Joes. These forays into real America come across as being more in the way of filler while the experts on the Washington/Wall Street axis catch their collective breaths.

A sampling of some recent public opinion polls may be somewhat revealing as to what those beyond the rarified air of Washington and New York may be thinking. Keep in mind that in the ramp up to the election of 2000 that put

incumbent George W. Bush into the White House virtually every indicator was trending Republican. This included the news of the over \$100 million campaign war chest that Bush had created prior to his official announcement. Things appear to have changed significantly since those days at the turn of the century. In an NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll when asked if things were generally headed in the right direction or if they were on the wrong track 68 percent of citizens responded that things were on the wrong track as compared to 19 percent who said things were headed in the right direction. By comparison responses to the same question in September 2001 showed that 72 percent of the public believed that things were headed in the right direction as compared to 11 percent who believed they were on the wrong track. In November of 2007 the Gallup Poll sought input on a variety of issues and as one would expect health care was one of those. One of the more startling of findings was gained when the poll listed an array of health problems facing the country. This included a list of diseases like cancer, diabetes, AIDS, heart disease and others. But also included in the list were a couple of more mundane items related to the availability of health care. Ironically the top two categories were "Access to Healthcare" and "Costs of Healthcare" comprising a combined 56 percent of the total with Cancer coming in a distant third at 14 percent.

The January NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll also addressed the economy by asking the question, "Do you generally approve or disapprove of the job that George W. Bush is doing in handling the economy?" To this question respondents DISAPPROVED at a 64 percent rate while only 29 percent approved. To a series of additional questions those questioned said that the Democrats would do a better job of handling the economy by a 43 to 25 percent rate, that the Democrats would do better at reducing the federal deficit by a 42 percent to 20 percent margin and 41 percent believed that the Democrats would do better at getting the country out of a recession as compared to 25 percent for the Republicans.

Several inquiries have placed the relative percentage of those who identify with one or the other of the respective parties at a five to 20 point margin for the Democrats. Early turnout figures for the primaries and caucuses prior to the February 5, "Super Tuesday" primaries revealed noticeably more participation on the Democratic side than Republican.

Finally, players on the political field put their money where their heart is. The Center for Responsive Politics compiled a comprehensive report on campaign contributions as released by the Federal Election Commission on January 7,

2008. One of the overviews contained in this report looked at contribution by business category. For example, of the nearly \$56 million contributed by the Securities and Investment industry, 60 percent went to Democrats and 40 percent went to Republicans. Real Estate leaned to the Democrats at a 53 percent to 47 percent rate. The category of Business Services showed 62 percent to 38 percent margin for the Democrats. This was identical to the Democratic margin in the Computer/Internet industry. The two big winners for the Republicans were Oil and Gas at a 72 percent to 28 percent Republican margin, and Manufacturing and Distribution with a 54 to 46 percent gap for the GOP. Overall, Democrats are outpacing Republicans in the all important campaign contribution arena.

All of these numbers taken together seem to indicate that those out beyond the horizon may be telling us something that has not been made readily apparent. Sometimes Washington and Wall Street might do well to listen.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

### **WILLIAM MARTIN WISEMAN, Ph.D**

William Martin Wiseman is Director of the John C. Stennis Institute of Government and Professor of Political Science at Mississippi State University. He received his Ph.D in 1986, his MPPA in 1980, his MS in 1974, and his BA in 1973, all awarded from Mississippi State University. In addition to his duties at Mississippi State, Dr. Wiseman is a guest professor at Jackson State University. Dr. Wiseman's areas of academic interest include American government, intergovernmental relations and federalism, county and municipal management, public personnel administration, and innovations in state and local government management.

Wiseman is a sought-after speaker on state and local government, state and local politics, political theory and rural development. Often a guest editorial writer in Mississippi daily and weekly newspapers, he can also be relied upon to evaluate federal, state and local election results for all media.

He is married to the former Bonnie Parker, and they have two children. He is active in the United Methodist Church.

Dr. Wiseman's e-mail is [marty@sig.msstate.edu](mailto:marty@sig.msstate.edu)

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