



# THE VIEW

Issue #50

May 5, 2008

## AS THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN WORLD TURNS

BY

MARTY WISEMAN, Ph.D.

The 2008 Presidential campaign continues to offer a fascinating array of twists and turns. Some are quite visible on the surface while others are just as unique yet not as readily evident.

The easy ones have become familiar by now. We are engaged in the campaign that features the first female with a legitimate chance to become President. The same can obviously be said for the first African-American with a legitimate shot at going to the White House. Perhaps the Republicans should not be left off the list of firsts since their candidate would be the oldest ever elected.

To be sure, there are other more subtle nuances at play in the campaign as it has unfolded so far. Take for example the whole church/state debate. Prayer in schools and at public events, the Ten Commandments displayed in public buildings, and a variety of arguments over Christmas displays and pageants have in the past demarked the battle lines between religion and government. Now we have taken this whole discussion over public right and wrong in the eyes of God to a new level. Through the miracle of video and audio equipment we have now made it possible to document what is said by preachers and the respective candidate's reaction to it. The whole church/state debate has now had the analysis of reaction to sound bites added to it, complete with an observation of how long it took the Democratic or Republican candidate to repudiate the politically incorrect theology of a pastor to whom he or she is or was associated. YouTube's "cup runneth over".



One other interesting circumstance that is evolving beneath the surface of this most unusual of election years is the diminishing ability of the labels of political ideology, which were so useful over the last 20 years, to either enhance or inhibit our political decision making ability. To be more specific, I am referring to the apparent demise of the "conservative" label as a sure fire way to cause the embrace of the candidate who professed loyalty to limited government and at the same time the rehabilitation of the "liberal" identifier that in the recent past has been used so effectively in the critical sense by those same conservatives. The evidence that carrying the liberal label is no longer the "kiss of death" in a race against an avowed conservative is as clear as the Barack Obama candidacy. Senator Obama has been labeled by some who keep score as the most liberal Senator, and his stable mate of sorts, Senator Hillary Clinton is certainly not far behind. While both appear to prefer the term moderate, because that is where the votes are, neither candidate blinks at being called the "L" word. How can this be only twenty years after the zenith of Barry Goldwater planted and Ronald Reagan nurtured Republican ideology? Two books on the shelf beside my living room chair caught my eye in this regard.

The first is a couple of years old, but still very current, and it is authored by staunchly conservative former Reagan White House political director Patrick Buchanan. The title itself is quite telling. *Where The Right Went Wrong: How Neoconservatives Subverted the Reagan Revolution and Hijacked the Bush Presidency* is harshly critical of the recent approach to governance by the decision makers both out front and behind the scenes of the Bush White House. The implication is that Ronald Reagan had left a conservative legacy that would have served its adherents for many more years had it not been squandered by those who were bent on adding incompatible initiatives to this well-founded ideology. Principally, Buchanan is referring to what he labels as an imperialist impetus around the globe. The interesting feature in comparing Buchanan's book with the second one is the similarity in the case that is made in describing the current state of affairs. *The Conscience of a Liberal*, by New York Times columnist Paul Krugman, obviously plays off of the title of the classic work of modern conservatism written by Barry Goldwater himself over four decades ago. Among other things, Krugman, like Buchanan, describes the demise of "new conservatism" or "movement conservatism" in terms of the ill-advised nature of the conduct of the war in Iraq and other foreign policy decisions of a questionable nature during the current Presidential administration.



In conclusion, the case can be made that the liberal position has joined the recently dominant conservative body of thought as a basis from which to carry on a legitimate campaign for the highest office in the land. The November Presidential election may, in reality, be a referendum on whether issues related to the economy, health care, the war in Iraq, and the future of energy production can best be solved by those holders of the recent neoconservative philosophy. Or will the liberal belief that government has a role to play in bringing these solutions about find its advocates in the majority?

## 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)

## ABOUT THE INSTITUTE:

Elected to the United States Senate in 1947 with the promise to "plow a straight furrow to the end of the row," John C. Stennis recognized the need for an organization to assist governments with a wide range of issues and to better equip citizens to participate in the political process. In 1976, Senator Stennis set the mission parameters and ushered in the development of a policy research and assistance institute which was to bear his name as an acknowledgment of his service to the people of Mississippi.

**Mississippi State**  
UNIVERSITY

Mississippi State University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation, group affiliation, or veteran status.

