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THE MORNING AFTER AND OTHER THOUGHTS ON THE PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURATION

BY

MARTY WISEMAN, Ph.D.

Washington wastes no time in moving on to the next order of business regardless of the size of the preceding event. The same was true of last week's Presidential Inauguration. Early on Wednesday, January 21 President Obama was up early, after dancing the night away at 10 Inaugural Balls, convening a meeting of the National Security Council and on Capital Hill confirmation hearings for Obama cabinet appointees were in full swing before the breakfast dishes could be cleared away.

Before nostalgia clouds the senses I would like to add a few thoughts to the numerous retrospectives that have appeared since the events of January 20 when the nation's first African-American President was inaugurated. Many superlatives have been used to describe the Inauguration Day crowds which numbered 1.8 million on the National Mall and another 250,000 lining the parade route down Pennsylvania Avenue. Washington news outlets reported that despite the overwhelming numbers there was not one arrest associated with inaugural events. While this perhaps may be stretching the truth slightly, many observers remarked at the cooperation of the multitudes which included among them significant numbers of virtually every ethnic group imaginable.

The Sunday afternoon concert at the Lincoln Memorial offered meaningful practice for the security forces assembled for the inauguration. Over 400,000 were in attendance at this event. The panorama from my vantage point halfway up the hill between the World War II Memorial and the Washington Monument was spectacular and it was made more so when most of that crowd was singing "Bye Bye Miss American Pie" with Garth Brooks and "This Land is Your Land" with its author, old but lively, Pete Seeger.

Because I was there with a group of 28 Mississippi State University students it was important that we have meaningful and bi-partisan events surrounding the inaugural activities. Perhaps the most enlightening of these was the presentation to the group by Sally

Atwater, wife of the late Reagan era Republican Party Chair Lee Atwater. Lee Atwater can well be described as the father of no holds barred, bare knuckled political campaigning. Atwater, who died way too soon from a brain tumor at the age of 39, was a pioneer in the use of modern opposition research and the use of evolving new strategies being made available by the explosion of cable television and the proliferation of computers. Sally Atwater concluded her service as head of President Bush's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities upon President Obama's inauguration. Mrs. Atwater, however, has never slowed down in her role as a Republican Party activist and she allowed as how over the next few days she would be closely involved with the selection of the next Republican Party Chair. She was quite candid in her assessment of what the GOP must do to effectively play its part as the loyal opposition and to chart a course for a return as the majority party. In her remarks Sally Atwater spoke admiringly of the Atwaters' long time friend, Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour.

Mississippians were prominent in many of our events of inauguration week. Rex Buffinton, Executive Director of the Stennis Institute's sister organization the Stennis Center for Public Service, among other things, arranged a private tour and lecture in the Pentagon, led by Long Beach, Mississippi native Admiral "Twig" Branch. Many will remember his father the "spark plug" of a Mississippi State quarterback in the early 1950's who went by the same nick name of "Twig". Grenada County native and widely known Democratic Party activist Burns Strider and his new consulting firm Eleison Group presided over a breakfast reception featuring many current and retired military leaders. Included among the group of retired Generals and Admirals on hand were retired General Pat Foote who was the first female Commander of the Army War College and Bassfield, Mississippi native Retired General Buff Blount whose father B. C. Blount is the virtual "Mayor for Life" of the Town of Bassfield.

But, alas, Washington is about doing the nation's business and on Wednesday it was most assuredly back to work. It would have been quite foolish to think that one would awaken on Thursday to the normal run of Washington work day traffic. Once again on that morning the streets were jammed with people most of whom were carrying signs. Traffic was again on the verge of gridlock. Thursday January 22 was the 36th anniversary of the Supreme Court's ruling in Roe V. Wade. Tens of thousands of people from all over America had come "to town" to insist upon the reversal of that 1973 landmark decision allowing women constitutionally protected access to abortions.

So with two key questions we begin the Obama/Biden era in earnest. The questions are, first, now that the Democratic dog has caught the nation's electoral bus what must they do to govern? Secondly, what strategies will the Republicans employ to regain their status as the majority party? Many who made their way home on Amtrak's Southern Crescent agreed that given the atmosphere created by two (or more) wars and the deteriorating economic situation, the Obama honeymoon would indeed be a short one.



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 email is marty@sig.msstate.edu.

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