

## Due Vigilance

Written by

Wednesday, 20 December 2006 02:24

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The November elections demonstrated that the real power in politics still belongs to America's citizenship - the voting citizenship, that is. Republicans were unseated not because Democrats could or would provide better leadership, but because the people believed that Republicans categorically failed in this mission on their watch.

Unfortunately, meaningful Republican representatives and senators lost their seats in the wash, such as Iowa's Jim Leach. It is bitterly disappointing that Iowans were unable to separate the wheat from the chaff in this instance. Leach, considered to be a moderate on many issues, reflected American ideology better than most elected officials of our time. He navigated the unseemly political waters for decades with keen intelligence and conviction, never forsaking his personal integrity. Iowans could confidently boast a well-respected and effective representative of our interests in Washington's legislative arena. There were years when the only good reason I went to the polls was to vote for Congressman Leach.

The same holds true for Iowa Senator Maggie Tinsman, whose conservative efforts uniquely focused on the well-being of women, children, seniors, and education in Iowa. She believed, and rightly so, that a topnotch education system is one of the best tools to attract industry. Iowans have sensible, relevant legislation in the aforementioned areas thanks to her tenacious and savvy negotiations. Senator Tinsman's long years of service have given rise to an ever-deepening commitment to Iowans, as opposed to the political arrogance or inertia that marks the careers of so many veteran politicians.

Both Republicans served with positive distinction, leaving nearly impossible shoes to fill. Meaning no disrespect to their replacements, I know that Iowa is not better off without them. Iowa did not lose Leach and Tinsman because their opponents were more desirable, but because voters considered them "old guard" Republicans. There is a considerable difference.

That said, and noting that there are exceptions, American politics are plagued by far too many career politicians, whose personal exposure to, let alone experience in, business, management, finance, etc. is nonexistent. This lack brings little to the table and makes for narrow legislation that often favors special interests. Couple this with the sparse number of eligible voters who actually cast ballots on a regular basis, and politics remain infested with this mostly feckless profile.

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In recent years, new faces in politics are more for show than to enact change, recruited by the parties more for their curb appeal than for their leadership skills. This is especially true in local politics, where we keep churning through the same candidates, many of whom lost previous elections because they were unsuitable. This is frustrating because it means nothing will change; the same politically toxic environment prevails.

So why are there so few citizens stepping up to run for political office independent of the respective parties? And why are so few eligible voters (a little more than 50 percent) showing up at the polls on a regular basis? And why are there so few outcries over the flagrantly objectionable activities and conduct on the part of so many elected officials and their appointees?

I think it is because Americans believe that the great battle for freedom and democracy was previously fought - and won - by our founding fathers and predecessors, turning their victory into some sort of guarantee for future citizens that nothing can ever take it away.

We somehow have the notion that we need not get involved because the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the law safeguard our freedom.

Too few Americans have a personal sense of responsibility for actively protecting our freedoms. We naively believe that American freedom is not vulnerable, and that our democracy is impervious to corruption and destruction. Most of us do not believe we must maintain due vigilance, let alone engage in ongoing battle to preserve freedom in America; that was accomplished long ago, extinguishing all possible threats.

Today, no matter how insidious those threats become, most Americans feel secure in our democracy, not really considering that a democracy is only as strong as its citizens' stewardship of it.

I don't know why we became so cavalier as a nation. I do know that we risk a legacy of apathy that will leave our children and grandchildren with insurmountable civic problems if we do not engage a little more now. The good news is that it has never been easier to do so. Between the Internet and telecommunications alone, the public has the means to know and act without leaving the comfort of its home. It is okay, even respectable, to publicly agree on or

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object to issues, policies, legislation, political conduct, etc. By weighing in *en masse*, we give direction to our body politic.

Silence, on the other hand, allows free reign of special interests, some of which are very real threats to American freedom.