

Bi-Party Tickets Totally Senseless

I receive a daily news feed from Salon, and for the past two days I have received articles about Obama-Hagel and McCain-Lieberman unity tickets. I have just three words for those who believe such events will happen: it ain't happening.

Abraham Lincoln was the last president to choose a vice president from the other party, when he ran for re-election in 1864. But Lincoln didn't run as a Republican. He ran on a fusion ticket, the National Union Party, comprised of Republicans, northern Democrats and southern Democrats who opposed the Confederacy. Lincoln's vice president, and eventual successor, Andrew Johnson was the military governor of Tennessee. He was later impeached, and the National Union Party was soon dissolved. But there is a lesson to be learned: if something happens to the president, and you have a vice president from the other party, you might inadvertently hand the responsibility of governing to your opponents.

That's why it makes no sense for either party to select a vice presidential candidate that their rank and file will not accept, not to mention it is an insult to party loyalists — quite often fine candidates — who want to be Vice President. It doesn't say much for party leadership when they believe that their best chance of winning is to persuade someone to jump ship. It also shows that the party may lack strong candidates who appeal to an important voting bloc, for instance pro-choice or pro-life, pro-military or anti-war, that could mean electoral victory.

Of the two major party candidates, Barack Obama has the greater problem finding a running mate; he needs a Democrat with strong foreign policy credentials who can also win Republican states, as opposed to a Republican who will come under fire from his own party. Two such senators come to mind: Bill Nelson of Florida and Senator Jim Webb of Virginia.

Webb, an acclaimed author and former Navy Secretary under Ronald Reagan is the better known of the two, though he is only a first-term senator. He is the primary sponsor for new G.I Bill and a pragmatic voice on military policy and criminal justice. Nelson, a member of the Senate Armed Services, Budget, Commerce, Foreign Relations, and Intelligence committees, was re-elected in 2006 in a landslide, with 60 percent of the popular vote. He is the most powerful Democrat in a pivotal and largely Republican state. Either man would unify Democratic voters better than a Republican defector. Between Nelson and Webb, I'd prefer Nelson, though I like the other man. Nelson has stood the test of re-election and Florida has been the more important battle ground in the last two presidential elections. Bill Clinton won the Sunshine State in 1996, while no Democratic presidential candidate has won Virginia since 1964.

A Democratic president could also appoint Republicans to his cabinet and vice-versa. John F. Kennedy followed that example; he appointed Republicans (C. Douglas Dillon) to serve as Treasury Secretary and Defense Secretary (Robert McNamara). Bill Clinton's last Secretary of Defense (William Cohen) was also a Republican. Even in fiction this happens: in Robin Gerber's novel *Eleanor and Ike*, Democratic candidate Eleanor Roosevelt proposes that she will name General Dwight Eisenhower as Secretary of Defense and in the *West Wing* Democratic president Jed Bartlet asks Arnold Vinnick, Republican senator and presidential candidate, to become his Secretary of State (though he refused).

If a President McCain or a President Obama is serious about the politics of inclusion, he should appoint key cabinet members from the opposite party for advice and counsel and to try to create a win-win situation when nothing else will do. The war in Iraq is one good example; we are in this war, like it or not, and it will take wisdom from both parties to develop the diplomatic, humanitarian and military solutions to extract our soldiers from there. We are responsible for the reconstruction of that country. Other areas where we must create bi-partisan win-win solutions are emergency management, Social Security, Medicare, energy independence and health care.

But neither president needs to risk their line of succession to create the wins.

About the Author

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