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Why There Is No Bipartisanship

Michael Sean Winters | Dec. 29, 2009 NCR Today

Republicans have been crying foul. They charge President Obama will failing to include them, with spurning bipartisanship. They say that a major policy initiative like health care reform should not be enacted on a party-line vote and point to the fact that Social Security was enacted with bipartisan support as were Medicare and Medicaid.

What the GOP fails to point out is that their party is not the same Republican Party with which Franklin Delano Roosevelt or Lyndon Baines Johnson dealt. They neglect to point out that there once was such a thing as a progressive Republican. Who is the George Norris of today?s GOP? Norris was a Republican Senator from Nebraska who, among other things, led the unsuccessful opposition to the appointment of Charles Evans Hughes, also a Republican, to be Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, a nomination made by fellow Republican President Herbert Hoover. Norris also opposed the nomination of John Parker to the high court as an associate justice, and this time he succeeded. Indeed, thirteen progressive Republicans voted against Parker, the only time a Supreme Court pick was rejected between the presidencies of William McKinley and Richard Nixon. Calling Sen. Norris ?a cancer in the Republican Party that must be cut out,? the executive director of Republican National Committee located a Nebraska grocer who was also named George Norris and convinced him to run against the Senator. The effort to unseat Norris failed but the temptation to ideological purity continues as Ms. Scozzafava found it when she ran for Congress in a special election in upstate New York earlier this year. When FDR proposed the New Deal, progressive Republicans like Norris supported him but the leadership of the Republican Party strove with all its might to defeat any and all of the President?s efforts to rescue the country from the Great Depression.

In the 1960s, when LBJ pushed through Medicare and Medicaid, he did so with the support of progressive Republicans like New York Senator Jacob Javits. The New York Republican Party also produced Nelson Rockefeller and John Lindsay. In the Senate Finance Committee vote on the Medicare bill, four of eight Republicans voted for the measure.

Where are the Republicans who stand in the mold of Norris or Javits? What would happen to a Republican who tried to reach out to the President? Look at the abuse heaped on Sen. Lindsay Graham of South Carolina for voting to confirm Sonia Sotomayor, even though he said he would never have nominated her but he thought a President had a right to have his nomination honored. If the GOP is upset with the lack of bipartisanship in Washington, they have no one to blame but themselves.

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