

## A Drowning Politician Will Grasp at a Straw Poll: Sharpening Old Saws For Today's Political Deadwood

*“Actions speak louder than sound bites”* – that’s a handy bit of mental mosquito netting for the political fever season (which seems to be pretty much all year, every year these days). After all, politicians’ sound bites aren’t just an annoyance. Like the bites of other blood sucking parasites, they are potentially dangerous to the public health. They are known to spread dangerous disinformation and even cause recurring episodes of dementia in the electorate.

The fact is, our political landscape has become rather overgrown and swampy in places, fraught with all sorts of dangers, and we need all the help we can get to make our way safely through. Unfortunately many of us miss a prime source of help in dismissing the traditional wisdom sayings as just so many “old saws”. With a little sharpening though, these “old saws” can be great tools for cutting through the thickets of political hype that overgrow the pathways to the polling booths.

For instance, when we see a politician floundering around in the currents of public opinion trying to catch hold of some issue that will keep him afloat, it becomes painfully obvious that *“A drowning politician will grasp at a straw poll.”* And when we see a candidate abandoning the broken down band wagon of his own campaign issue and scrambling aboard his opponent’s, we realize that *“Imitation is the sincerest form of campaigning.”*

The adage *“What goes up must come down”* is never more true than in the case of voter’s expectations – after the election.

*“Breathes there a man with soul so dead  
who never once to himself has said:  
‘Why did I vote for that turkey’.”*

We have often observed that, *“Every scandal has silver lining someone’s pocket.”* But then *“Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of candidates?”* Only the opposition research knows, its their job to find out (or make it up).

When trying to save their skins, many a politician has been encouraged to hold on to the last grasp by these maxims: *“A scape goat in time saves mine”*; and *“It ain’t over ‘till the fat cat sings.”*

Here's an adage that many a disappointed candidate could have profited by: *“Where ignorance is bliss, ‘tis folly to challenge an incumbent”*. This is particularly true in areas subject to a high incidence of sound bites. Another use of the *‘ignorance is bliss’* weakness of the electorate is that *“Where ignorance is bliss, tis folly to be consistent.”*

Now, might we assume that the sight of such wanton open-mindedness and flexibility on the part of the candidates would disturb the electorate? Well, perhaps the electorate has resigned itself that where politicians are concerned *“Core beliefs, like beauty, are only skin deep”*.

It does happen occasionally, though, that the electorate displays a little spunk and strays from the two tribal reservations. Successfully managing that crisis requires some of the most advanced political skills. But it affords great opportunity also, for *“While no one can fool all the people all the time, in a three way race you have to fool only a plurality.”*

The foremost requirement of this maneuver is to find a clueless shill with plenty of money, and an oversized ego. Then, if worked correctly, “*A fool and his money are soon third party’d.*”

But back to that most basic of all political tasks, fooling the voter. One of the prime means of confusing our political discourse is to use this misnomer “policy”. Though the term is still in common use, we are no longer subject to ‘policy’ in the proper sense of the word. Policy has been largely replaced by ‘spin’. Can it be said that “*Spin is the best policy?*” (although that sounds like an oxymoron, doesn't it?)

Spin, for those who don't know, is a sort of high-tech, accelerated flip-flop. Spinning gives a politician the great advantage of being simultaneously on all sides of an issue. Don't get it? Here's how a ‘spin’ works. A politician, the average politician lets say, signs onto all possible sides of an issue at one time or another, covering it with vague, contradictory promises. Then flipping begins by highly professional “spin doctors”. At a certain rpm, much as a color wheel becomes white, the rapidly spinning collection of contradictions becomes all things to all people. Or at least it becomes such an indistinguishable blur to the lay public that no one can contradict the pronouncements of the official soothsayer/spin doctors.

Well, I'm sure you get the idea how wonderfully applicable these old sayings are to today's complex world. Let me end on a cheery note. Despite it all, “*Hope springs eternal in the body politic.*”

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Bill Kitchens

The above commentary was written some time ago and represented the state of politics in America at the time, when there was still some fun in politics. There is still good use of these “old saws”, but American politics has changed very greatly in the past few years – and not for the better. It is of even greater importance to keep up the mental mosquito netting these days, and maybe wear a hard hat also.

I must admit that, right at the moment, the prospect of a third party looks good; but I must fight the illusion. What we really need is a good two party system.

Good luck to you my dear readers.

Bill Kitchens