

George Will-March 13, 2007

“The Political Argument Today”

Addressing a near-capacity audience at the University of North Florida’s Fine Arts Center on March 13, Pulitzer Prize columnist George F. Will characterized the political argument in America today as a classic conflict between freedom and equality.

Mr. Will said “we’re living in an atmosphere of dueling nostalgias.” Conservatives want to *live* in the 1950s, he said, when government was smaller and family values reigned supreme, while liberals want to *work* in the 1950s, with big government, big business, and the promise of a benign welfare state.

In a fast-paced, witty presentation, laced with anecdotes and analogies drawn from his famous affection for baseball (his wedding ring, he pointed out, had the Major League Baseball logo on it, “so Mrs. Will would know how important she is to me!”), Mr. Will said we are living with a new “disjunction”—the discovery that we cannot increase individual wealth while ensuring individual security. “We may talk like Jeffersonians, but we still insist on being governed by Hamiltonians.”

We have produced a “learned dependency” on government, he added, but government suffers from the “fatal conceit” that it can not only predict the future but also control it. “And it can’t even run Amtrak!”

Citing healthcare as one of the main political issues in America today, Mr. Will said “we all want medical care, but we don’t want to pay for it.” Politicians, he added, will talk about the sins of pharmaceutical companies. “They’ll want price controls, which would stop all creativity and innovation and new products,” he predicted.

Mr. Will asked the rhetorical question, “What is it about profits that so many people find offensive?”, then made his case for economic freedom and the need to give our private sector the flexibility to create, adjust, innovate and compete in a global society.

He particularly lamented the unequal burden being placed on younger generations by entitlement programs such as Social Security and Medicare, and the fact that a diminishing number of people pay income taxes. “Our aging population is not only the healthiest, but also the wealthiest in history,” he observed.

Turning to the U.S. involvement in Iraq, Mr. Will said “We went in there with the mistaken belief that the Iraqi people want what we want, and that we

could simply *unleash* democracy.” But we neglected to ask the crucial question, “What happens next?” after toppling the Saddam Hussein regime.

Mr. Will managed to end his presentation on a positive note: “Things are getting better. There are no rivals for our modern society.”

-Ronald P. Myers

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