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## **Well, That's Politics** **by Sheldon Richman**

So Barack Obama, the man who promises to reform Washington, has picked as his running mate someone who has been a fixture of the U.S. Senate nearly his entire adult life. Sen. Joseph Biden of course had no trouble accepting the honor. Insider, outsider — he's whatever you're looking for.

Well, that's politics.

When Biden was running for president, he said of Obama, "Right now I don't believe he is [ready to be president]. The presidency is not something that lends itself to on-the-job training." Now he says Obama is "a wise leader. A leader — a leader who can deliver. A leader who can deliver the change we need."

Well, that's politics.

What changed Biden's mind? He says he saw Obama in action. Actually, what he saw was Obama campaigning. A political campaign is theater. The candidate, guided by his consultants and their focus groups, says what he needs to say — promises what he needs to promise — to create a certain mood in the relevant constituencies in order to win their votes. In other contexts we'd call this activity huckstering, and it would be suspect.

Well, that's politics.

Obama's last primary opponent, Hillary Clinton, also thought he was unqualified to be president. She tried to frighten us with the thought that he'd be the one to answer the ringing red White House phone at 3 a.m. Now she thinks otherwise: "When Barack Obama is in the White House, he'll revitalize our economy, defend the working people of America, and meet the global challenges of our times." On the seventh day, presumably he will rest. This inexperienced, unqualified man has come a long way in a few months.

Well, that's politics.

Senator Clinton's husband, the former president, Bill Clinton, declared at the convention, "Barack Obama is ready to be president of the United States." Yet just a couple of weeks ago, when

asked about Obama's qualifications, he said no one was prepared to be president. He neglected to mention that when his wife was in the race.

Well, that's politics.

George Orwell, who understood the nature of politics like no one else, defined "doublethink" in his novel *1984* as "the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them.... To tell deliberate lies while genuinely believing in them, to forget any fact that has become inconvenient, and then, when it becomes necessary again, to draw it back from oblivion for just so long as it is needed...."

You saw this power in the faces of the cheering crowds in Denver. (Republicans are no different.) Everyone knows that Obama has now been declared both unqualified and qualified for the presidency by at least three prominent leaders of his own party. But by the grace of doublethink, we need not be troubled by this contradiction.

Well, that is politics.

The upshot is that it's best not to believe anything anyone in politics says. The line about spotting a politician's lies by the moving of his lips isn't a joke. It's a pearl of wisdom.

Is this just cynicism? No, it is idealism of the highest order. When one is passionately dedicated to truth, justice, and freedom, one necessarily despises the insults to our intelligence routinely delivered by politicians of all stripes. The condescension is bad enough, but it is worse by being for the sake of acquiring power. When the only method political "leaders" can think of for accomplishing their social goals is the threat of physical force, idealistic people will scorn them and their fraudulent humanitarianism.

Physical force? That charge may come as a shock. If so, ask yourself what program any leading political figure proposes that does not ultimately require forcing the taxpayers to surrender their earnings under threat of imprisonment.

The next time a politician talks about how much he cares about the middle class or the poor, ask why he or she doesn't use the method the rest of us are expected to use when we need other people's cooperation: persuasion.

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