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Experts doubt 3rd-party solution

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Saturday, February 11, 2012

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The solution to what ails America's political system is unlikely to be provided by third parties.

That was the consensus Friday among three political experts, including former U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis, during a discussion in Charleston sponsored by the Charleston Law Review and the Riley Institute at Furman University.



Inglis, an Upstate Republican who lost his job to a tea party-backed challenger, recalled a memorable campaign moment between himself and a night watchman shortly before the 2010 GOP primary. The man held up his pocket copy of the U.S. Constitution and asked Inglis if he supported doing away with all case law and returning to that.

"Being not a very good politician obviously, I said no," Inglis joked. He said he then held up his cellphone and explained to the man that the Constitution is silent about how these devices should be regulated.

He then tried to crack a joke, saying that as a lawyer, perhaps Inglis should support doing away with all case law so he could stay busy in court re-establishing it. The watchman didn't laugh.

While Inglis ended up losing that primary to U.S. Rep. Trey Gowdy, Inglis noted Republicans are hard at work trying to co-opt tea party voters and bring them into their fold.

That inclination by the two main parties -- to attempt to absorb third-party movements -- is just one reason that these parties are unlikely to move America's political needle much, at least not in terms of getting their members elected.

Furman political science professor Donald Aisei cited several other reasons, including winner-take-all elections, the Electoral College and single-member districts drawn to favor one main political party or another.

Jeri Cabot, an adjunct political science professor at the College of Charleston, noted only 23 of the nation's 7,382 legislative seats are not held by a Republican or Democrat -- and 16 of those are held by independents who don't identify with a political party.

Still, Aisei explained the interest in third parties, as both Republicans and Democrats become more ideological. "People comfortable in the zone of consensus have nowhere to go," he said. "You're either all in or you're all out." Cabot noted polls show both the Republican and Democratic parties have majority unfavorable ratings.

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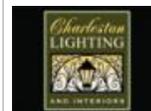
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Aeisi and Cabot agreed third-party movements can help set the nation's agenda, even if their supporters rarely get elected and often end up in one of the two major parties.

Cabot recalled a quote from U.S. historian Richard Hofstadter: "Third parties are like bees: once they have stung, they die."

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Leo Wiser

Score: -1

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9:56 AM on 2/11/2012

"Terms like partisan, non-partisan, and bi-partisan should go out the window in favor of working together for the good of the country as a whole."

That sounds wonderful, so who decides which ideas are "good" and should be pursued, and which should not?

Wait, that is the debate! Is it not?



Leo Wiser

Score: -2

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9:31 AM on 2/11/2012

"Politics has created and maintained the barrier between parties."

Politics is about policy, in most cases the parties have very different visions of what makes good policy and what makes bad policy. That is the divide, and it always has been.

The Tea Party believes that fed govt behavior should be restrained by the US Constitution, and I agree.

2 replies



Coleman Dangerfield

Score: 2

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8:15 AM on 2/11/2012

If you believe "You're either all in or you're all out." that may mean that you vote straight-ticket by party line. Politics has created and maintained the barrier between parties. Both

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