

Winner Take All, Winner Do All?

In a column last year (that out of shameless promotion used Alexander Hamilton in the title) I declared myself to be a Federalist. By that I meant that I believe that of the things that government can and need do, many should be done at the federal level because.....well, it just makes sense not to have 50 different policies on some things. I believe that Federalism is more important today than it was in Alexander's day. Just as the world has shrunk in so many ways due to modern media and technology, so has the United States.

When I apply my federalist principles to energy and environment policy, I come down differently on each. While I don't think it makes sense to have 50 different electricity policies, it is hard to say that states should not have a role in setting their course (hopefully guided by a national energy policy).

But on environmental policy, as much as I always try to take a walk in everyone's shoes, I cannot find footwear that allows me to think that environmental policy should not be set and supported at the federal level. States

should have a role in helping to design it up front, and in implementing it after it is set, but I don't want a state upriver or upwind from my state doing anything it wants to relative to the water or the air that I have to deal with.

Over the past few decades, I would argue that that there has been a trend at the federal political level where the winner interprets an election outcome as the granting of a mandate on all things. The raw interpretation of the election seems to have evolved into something akin to "that was that, now I can do what I want to do" and "this is what the people wanted me to do when they voted for me". But that interpretation ignores two facts.

The first is that we are a deeply divided country when it comes to politics and leadership. Not everyone votes for the winning candidate. Elections are not landslides and margins can be slim. In political terms, election mandates are getting harder to find, and if an elected official decides to only represent the winning side, he or she is not representing the rest, and they are not doing their job right.

The second fact is that different Americans feel differently on different issues. There could be a

few voters out there who have designed their own algorithms to balance their positions on a long list of issues and then use the outcome to decide which presidential candidate to vote for. But I don't think so. I think most cast their vote based on one or two issues, or on the campaign rhetoric that feels "right" to them. It is on that basis that a candidate "wins".

It is clear from surveys that the people who vote in a candidate may not necessarily agree with that candidate on all issues. The vast majority of them are not saying to the winning candidate "OK...do what you want now....you know best and don't worry about us"

The last Administration was certainly heard to utter the words "elections have consequences". But the new administration is bluntly saying "people voted us in, and they don't care about this or that or any of the issues now".

There are two schools of thought on a representative form of government. One says we elect leaders to a full-time position that someone has to do because none of us have the time to learn all that we should to be able to do the job. We give them the power to

learn, adapt and vote accordingly. The other says we elect people to be the mouthpiece of those that elected them, and that a representative should not stray too far from what the voters said.

When it comes to the environment and climate change, either of these approaches should get to the same place. If you believe in the "send them to DC and let them learn and do a good job", then a federally elected official should be looking at the climate science and data and using his or her position to take action on research and policy. If you believe in the "poll us" idea, then the polls show high and growing concern about climate change and increasing support for doing something about it, and thus you should do take some action accordingly.

People feel differently about different things and don't get to vote individually on each of them. A new Gallup [Survey](#) shows that the percentage of Americans concerned about climate change is at its highest ever. Yet I am confident in saying climate was not an issue they based their vote on. There were too many other things. But that doesn't mean that they don't care about it.

A new president and his administration should not think that the voters gave them a blank check on anything and everything, and that means that on an issue like climate change they are acting against the majority when they put people who do not believe in science and environmental improvement in charge of it.

Elections do have consequences. Elected officials have been given direction by the voters on some things, but not on most of them. Once elected, an official represents all of his or her constituents. They may only think about that when the next election approaches, but it sure would be nice if they didn't wait until then. On something like climate change, the time until the next election is long, and [time is precious](#). We can't afford to waste any of it. We should remind them of that.

Best,

Dan