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Republican Perspective

By Christopher Panton

King George VII, Meet Emperor Barak I

Allow me introduce you to the future King George VII, a tiny tot who is currently third in line to the British throne, after grandpa Charles and William, his dad. His great grandma is, of course, Queen Elizabeth II, who, at age 88, is the second longest reigning British monarch with 61 years under her sash. She is only out-distanced by her great-great grandmother, Queen Victoria, weighing in with 64 years.

The British monarchy (and, before that, the English monarchy), has been around since Alfred the Great of the ninth century. In those good old days, kings and queens of England were unapologetic autocrats. Over the centuries, the concept of power-sharing and, eventually, suffrage gradually evolved, culminating in the mid-17th century English civil wars. Following the defeat of the Royalists, the civil government (Parliament), stripped the monarchy of many of its powers, especially that of the Divine Right of Kings, which was understandably so dear to the reigning Stuarts who had cooked it up in the first place.

From this 17th century brawl, the modern so-called constitutional monarchy flowered. Today, royal powers may indeed be limited, but Queen Elizabeth, as constitutional monarch, performs a fundamental and vitally important function; namely, that of head of state, which means that she is the poster-person representing the U.K. to the rest of the world and to the country itself. If there exists a single focal point that defines whatever pride and achievement are left in Britain, then her job is to provide it - a leadership role of Brobdingnagian size, difficulty and consequence.

A republic, as an alternative form of government, is based entirely on a civil structure. Republics come in all shapes and sizes, but generally, there is some sort of president who, in one form or another, is the head of state, and there is some sort of a prime minister who acts as head of the government. However, the United States has a rather weird setup. The head of state and the head of the government are one and the same person! And, if that wasn't enough, this double-hatted individual is an elected politician!

So, a U.S. president can be either a good or bad head of state mix-'n-matched with being either a good or bad head of government. I'll leave it to readers to make their own decisions about the double-identity performances of past presidents. Just a couple of examples from me: I think that Ronald Reagan made a very passable head of state and was a sound head of government, whereas Jimmy Carter was totally lousy and thoroughly under water in both categories.

Well, what about our present incumbent? As I pointed out in an earlier column, his overall demeanor was devastatingly captured in his most recent State of the Union message. You know, the "my way or the highway" speech - an attitude reinforced by many high-handed unilateral actions, some of dubious constitutionality. He has also been described a number of times as aloof, a characteristic that, at one point, the administration's PR tried to pass off as intellectual superiority! My bible, the Economist, more than likely hit the nail on the head when, in a leading article, they simply said: "he's lazy." His imperial behavior certainly qualifies him to be Emperor Barak I, Head of Government - and a bad one at that.

As head of state, Emperor Barak is not doing so well either, if his waning popularity numbers mean anything; being both head of state and of government tends to facilitate mingling the performance in one role with the other. Globally, as head of state, he looked decidedly un-statesmanlike when Russian

President Vladimir Putin ran rings around him - twice. On a world tour about a year ago, he managed oafishly to break a number of protocols when officially meeting Queen Elizabeth, followed by practically kissing the feet of the Saudi king and almost tipping over when bowing from the waist to the Emperor of Japan. On a side trip, he also managed to antagonize the Israelis. Not bad for one tour.

Clearly, on the basis of the current president's failures alone, the roles of head of state and head of government in the United States desperately require separation. A genuine United States head of state will need to have an appropriate background in statesmanship, have no axe to grind, have no political affiliation and be able to remain impeccably above the Washington fisticuff circus, thereby being an inspiration to us all.

Amazingly, there is one obvious candidate who can meet all the necessary criteria. Clue: Why wait until you're 70 or more to become the British monarch when you can be head of state in the United States at a productive, younger age? Yes, yes! The time is indisputably right to bring back a George!

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