The President as Statesman

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Conclusion

Wilson’s party and foreign policy may have suffered a massive setback in the 1920 elections, but his theoretical program for responsible government emerged unscathed, at least judging by its long-standing influence on American political science. Throughout the twentieth century, political scientists have evaluated the workings of American government by measuring them against Wilson’s ideal, in which a responsible party, led by a masterful president, integrates the separated legislative and executive powers and brings coherence and effectiveness to the policy-making process. Only in the past decade or so has Wilson’s program been seriously called into question. The growing doubts have been prompted by the fact that it cannot account very well for divided government, in which the two parties split control of the executive and legislative branches. Since Eisenhower, this pattern has been the norm rather than the exception. To Charles O. Jones, a professed Madisonian, the possibility and even the normality of divided government is but one more piece of evidence demonstrating that the dominant “presidency-centered, party government perspective” is a hindrance to understanding and evaluating the dynamics of what he terms “the separated system.” Even James Sundquist, long a vocal Wilsonian, acknowledges that “those who still cherish the idea of party government have an obligation,” namely, to retool the theory first developed by Wilson so that it can better account for the persistent realities of American politics.¹ But if Wilsonians hope to succeed in crafting their new synthesis, they will need to come to better terms with the political fortunes of Wilson’s program from his day to our own.

As the preceding chapters indicate, Wilson’s program began to falter not at midcentury, but much earlier, in his own presidency. To be sure, he established a highly effective method for the presidential leadership of legislation during the New Freedom period, in which he used carefully timed speeches on Capitol Hill to call forth each measure and focus public opinion on the key principles at stake, all the while working with and through legislative leaders to draw the bills out of Congress. But Wilson’s skillful blending of public rhetoric and persuasion behind the scenes was not enough. He also had to rely on the dispensation of spoils and the legislative caucus, even
though he had condemned these practices and predicted, rightly it turned out, that presidents could not sustain their use. And despite the impressive sweep of Wilson's interpretive statesmanship, the diversity of his coalition and the strains of the war kept him from fostering the realignment he had long deemed essential.

The war also brought to the fore the problems with Wilson's conception of "the two presidencies." While he believed in common counsel with his party's legislators in domestic affairs, he held that necessity dictated the executive could and should exercise "very absolute" control of the nation's foreign relations. He sought to do this amid the crisis of the World War. However, members of Congress, including, most significantly, many of the leaders and rank and file of his own party, were not prepared to cede to Wilson the control he presumed. He fought back against what he regarded as legislative encroachments on his office, using all the energy and independence and prerogatives of diplomacy and command that the separation of powers secured for him. He prevailed, at least during the hostilities, and American national security policy was the better for it. But as Wilson used and defended the separation of powers in this way, he repudiated the parliamentary ideal of responsible party government. He also spurred the institutional rivalry and jealousy between the presidency and Congress, thereby endangering Senate ratification of the Versailles Treaty. Desperate to maintain his exclusive grip on the nation's foreign affairs, Wilson lashed out at his Senate opponents on an extended speaking tour, destroying all hope for ratification in the process.

One of the many prices that Wilson had to pay for this failed rhetorical strategy, which amounted to a rejection of his own teaching and the example of his first term, was that it enabled his critics—then and now—to paint unbalanced portraits of his leadership. The defining moment in this regard came on July 22, 1920, when Senator Henry Cabot Lodge formally invited Warren Harding to be the Republican Party's candidate for president. After Lodge condemned Wilson's "scheme which would turn the Government of the United States into an autocracy based upon a plebiscite," he warned Harding in no uncertain terms that "the makers of the Constitution . . . strove to guard against either usurpation or trespass by one branch at the expense of the other two. In that spirit, we all know well, you will enter upon your great responsibility." Harding, the junior senator, accepted the implicit conditions on the nomination. As president, he would be an agent, not the principal, of a Republican Party dominated by legislators. "I believe in party government," Harding responded in his own inimitable way, "as distinguished from personal government, individual, autocratic, or what not."
Of course, the irony is that Wilson's program—in its essence, before it was confounded by the alternative logic of the separation of powers—was fully aligned with Harding's premise that "party government" was superior to "personal government." That is why Wilson had come out against Albert Stickney's program in 1879 and Theodore Roosevelt's in 1912. That being said, the respective presidencies of Wilson and Harding made clear that they meant different things by "party government." For Wilson, this allowed, indeed required, the president to take an active leadership role in interpreting the party's principles and coordinating the legislative agenda. For Harding and for the Republican presidents who followed him into office in the 1920s, these concepts essentially meant deferring to their party brethren in Congress. As a result, Harding's defeat of Wilson led directly to what Wilfred Binkley termed a "renaissance of Congressional Government." 3

It was left to Woodrow Wilson's assistant secretary of the navy to reassert the powers of the presidency. Political scientists have generally agreed that while the modern presidency was more or less fully developed by Franklin Roosevelt during the crises of the Great Depression and World War II, this development had its origins in the presidencies of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. Franklin Roosevelt completed the augmentation and institutionalization of presidential power that his progressive predecessors had initiated.4

In the realms of foreign and national security policy, there is indeed great continuity across these three presidencies. Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and Franklin Roosevelt held to the same expansive interpretation of presidential prerogatives in this regard. If Wilson's use of these prerogatives was more controversial, it was primarily because unlike Theodore Roosevelt he led the nation amid the turbulence of a global conflict, and unlike Franklin Roosevelt he did so before this expansive interpretation was legitimated in constitutional and political terms.5

But Wilson did not use a unilateral, presidentialist approach in his domestic leadership; the same cannot be said of the Roosevelts. Franklin Roosevelt used his cousin's model to drive the domestic agenda, having most of the key measures of the New Deal drawn up by the "brains trust" in his administration, after which he simply sent them down for ratification, frequently without warning, to the Democratic leadership in Congress. Franklin Roosevelt was more blatant, however, not always bothering with his cousin's pretense of covertly submitting administration bills via an ally in Congress. Also like Theodore Roosevelt, FDR came to conclude that the best way to line up votes for his domestic agenda was appealing over the heads of his party's legislators to the people at large. Indeed, as Sidney Milkis has dem-
shownstrated, in the wake of FDR’s failed purge campaign in 1938, he gave up altogether on the idea of governing through his party, relying more and more exclusively on the personal aides, administrative experts, and ideological allies that had played such a crucial role in his presidency. Roosevelt’s push for the establishment of the Executive Office of the President in 1939 made this strategy more feasible. So did a number of policies enacted during the New Deal (e.g., Social Security and agricultural subsidies) that transferred the loyalties and attention of voters from political parties to the administrative state over which Roosevelt presided. 6

As a result of these changes, circumstances that Woodrow Wilson had long warned against—a government dominated by an executive unconstrained by any sense of collective responsibility—had for all practical purposes been established by Franklin Roosevelt’s second term. Just as Warren Harding’s presidency amounted to a practical repudiation of Wilson’s program, so too did Franklin Roosevelt’s, albeit from another direction.

Perhaps the best evidence that Franklin Roosevelt departed from Wilson’s program is found in the Wilsonian critiques of Roosevelt’s presidency that began to circulate in the early 1940s. Political scientists and reformers wasted little time in expressing dissatisfaction with the political order that Roosevelt established. On the one hand, despite the power that the president had aggrandized in the executive branch and in his own person, his estrangement from Congress, worsened by the retreat from party government, meant that the nation’s legislative machinery remained adrift at a crucial moment in history. On the other hand, the concentration of power in the president was not combined with a more exacting accountability. Indeed, insofar as Roosevelt had consolidated his power by giving up on party government and a good working relationship with Congress, the president was less accountable than ever before, a situation that portended a dictatorship in the eyes of some observers. 7

This critique produced two different kinds of remedies, both of which Woodrow Wilson had advocated at various points in his own career as a reformer. The first remedy called for instituting parliamentary-style cabinet government in the United States by amending the Constitution. This solution was advocated, in one form or another, by Harvard professor and New Deal adviser William Yandell Elliot, the journalist Henry Hazlitt, and State Department official Thomas K. Finletter. (Political scientist Edward Corwin issued a similar call for the creation of a joint executive-legislative cabinet, though he argued that this could be done without amending the Constitution.) 8

The second remedy focused not on formal changes in presidential-con-
gressional relations but rather on the development of more principled and programmatic political parties, which could then informally unite the separation of powers in a parliamentary fashion. The informal, party-based approach to responsible government quickly gained ascendance, no doubt because it was more in keeping with the movement toward behavioralism that was then emerging in American political science, a movement that downplayed the importance of formal constitutional arrangements. E. E. Schattschneider's *Party Government*, published in 1942, emerged as an early treatise in the new line of political science. Schattschneider also had a hand in the most renowned presentation of the party government argument when he served on the drafting committee that produced "Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System," the 1950 report of the American Political Science Association's Committee on Political Parties.9

Schattschneider and his colleagues on the committee made no call for constitutional amendments to bring about responsible government in the United States, deeming such fundamental changes to be at once too difficult to attain and essentially unnecessary. Instead, the members of the committee held that the prospect of more responsible government ultimately hinged on an intellectual and cultural conversion on the part of the American people, arguing in their foreword that "the weaknesses of the American two-party system can be overcome as soon as a substantial part of the electorate wants it overcome." The committee proposed that the moment of conversion could be hastened by a series of party reforms designed to democratize the party organizations and sharpen the parties' focus on national issues and programs. These reforms would prepare the parties to serve as responsible instruments for translating majority will into national policy, on the one hand, and stimulate the voters' trust in and desire for programmatic party government, on the other.10

Evron Kirkpatrick and Austin Ranney have demonstrated that the Committee on Political Parties let its hopes for reform and normative judgments drift into and confound its empirical analysis. Among the resulting unsteady assumptions of this analysis were that a party system consisting of two ideologically coherent, programmatic parties could thrive amid the diversity of Madison's extended republic; that citizens would vote on the basis of well-reasoned judgments about what the alternative programs of two parties entailed for the future; and that the American people would eventually recognize and embrace the merits of responsible party government.11

The Committee on Political Parties thus relied on several assumptions that had been embodied in Wilson's program and demonstrated to be problematic during his presidency. Perhaps the committee might have reached
different conclusions had it scrutinized the difficulty that Wilson experienced in his efforts to have the various factions of the Democratic Party adopt a coherent stand on national issues; to persuade citizens to transcend family traditions, ethnocultural concerns, and sectional grievances in the voting booth; and to dispel the criticism of the party discipline imposed by the Democratic Caucus during the New Freedom. But given the dedication of the Committee on Political Parties to the ideal of party government, its members more likely would have concluded that in Wilson's day the parties had yet to be sufficiently reformed. At midcentury, the potential power and legitimacy of democratic, national, and issue-oriented parties appeared to reformers to be untapped and closer at hand.

The ensuing decades, however, have indicated that no matter how "responsible" political parties are, they cannot galvanize the powers separated by the Constitution in the manner that Wilsonians desire. The shortcomings of the informal approach to constitutional change, which hamstrung Wilson as he sought to implement his program, have also limited contemporary reformers. Not that the party system has not been reformed. Indeed, many of the changes called for by the American Political Science Association (APSA) Committee on Political Parties, most notably the spread of the primary system, have since been adopted. The two major parties are now more democratic, homogeneous in their principles, and animated by issues of national policy than ever before. However, by freeing up the candidates from the influence of party organizations and by increasing the ideological temper of the parties, party reform has in some ways worsened the collective action problem in American politics, bringing politicians into office who are simultaneously more individualistic and zealous. Perhaps because of these ironic developments, Americans are no more convinced of the need to put the presidency and Congress into the hands of a group of like-minded officeholders than they were in Wilson's day. Indeed, in recent decades, the voters have tended to do the opposite, to divide control of the government between the increasingly polarized parties, leading some political scientists to suggest that rationally or not, voters have internalized the Madisonian model.

In the wake of the failure of party reform to establish more responsible government in the United States, the other strand in the Wilsonian tradition, emphasizing the need to amend the Constitution's separation of powers, has enjoyed more prominence in the past two decades. The shift from party to constitutional remedies is reflected in the name of the organization that now serves as the redoubt for Wilsonians: the Committee on the Constitutional System. Political scientists James Sundquist and James MacGregor...
Burns, former Secretary of the Treasury C. Douglas Dillon, and Lloyd Cutler, counsel to Presidents Carter and Clinton, are a few of the members who have been active in driving the committee’s agenda. The committee’s “Bi-centennial Analysis of the American Political Structure,” published in 1987, provides a common platform of changes that have been proposed elsewhere by its members. Although advocating further party and campaign finance reforms, the crux of the committee’s recommendations involves the establishment of such parliamentary mechanisms as legislators serving in the cabinet and coincidental electoral terms for Congress and the president. Some members of the committee go so far as to advocate mechanisms that would allow for the calling of new elections in the face of an impasse between the branches.  

The Committee on the Constitutional System has returned to the amendments that the young Woodrow Wilson proposed, thus following the logic of the Constitution to its conclusion. Committee members recognize that the Constitution prevents the government and politics that they desire, so they are seeking to amend it. However, while the theoretical rigor of the committee is commendable, it is less than complete, and it runs into serious political difficulties.

The separation of powers, after all, is only one obstacle to responsible government in the United States. The various ethnocultural, regional, and economic fault lines in the American electorate—the historical precursors of which frustrated Woodrow Wilson’s quest for a sustaining realignment—make it unlikely that a disciplined and programmatic two-party system will follow in the wake of the imposition of parliamentary mechanisms in Washington. Even though the earlier APSA Committee on Political Parties never came up with a feasible solution to this problem, it was correct in observing that the constitutional amendment of the separation of powers “would make sense only when the parties have actually demonstrated the strength they now lack . . . the experience of foreign countries suggests that the adoption of the cabinet system does not automatically result in an effective party system.”  

Recent research in comparative politics validates this claim. When a parliamentary system of government is combined with a heterogeneous society, the result is often a multiparty system, coalition government, and an informal though nonetheless effective system of veto points among elites struggling to foster the modicum of consensus needed to govern. Leaders in parliamentary regimes of this sort experience many of the same difficulties in setting policy priorities, targeting resources, and imposing losses on orga-
nized interests that leaders attempting to govern in the United States have struggled with, Woodrow Wilson among them.\textsuperscript{17}

Furthermore, the members of the Committee on the Constitutional System have yet to come to terms with the suspicion of centralized power, the antipartisanship, and the dislike of balancing individual rights against the public interest that continue to distinguish American political culture.\textsuperscript{18} Here the members of the committee have followed the precedents of the APSA committee and Woodrow Wilson himself. The curious staying power of the resistance to responsible government, notwithstanding the best arguments of Wilson and subsequent reformers, indicates that the resistance is more than an artifact from a bygone era or the result of false consciousness, a dependent variable that can be swept away if the right reform program is found. Rather, the American aversion to responsible government is embodied in and emanates from one of the foremost independent variables in American politics, the Constitution itself. American political culture might thus be seen as the first line of defense of the Founders’ Constitution against reforms imported from Great Britain.\textsuperscript{19}

Sooner or later, the Committee on the Constitutional System, which continues to push the need for systematic change, has to confront the political impossibility of amending the separation of powers. While citizens are no doubt concerned about gridlocked government and irresponsible partisanship, the prospects for marshaling the tremendous amount of political capital needed to secure a series of constitutional amendments designed to centralize power in a majority party in Washington are now more remote than ever. Indeed, the one fundamental reform to enjoy support in recent years, term limits for members of Congress, is a whiggish measure intended to level, not enhance, political power in the national government.\textsuperscript{20} The debate over constitutional reform thus comes full circle, back to the dilemma that Wilson first faced as a graduate student and was never able to resolve fully: formal amendment of the separation of powers appears to be a necessary precondition for the full establishment of responsible government in the United States, but barring an unforeseen crisis, such a change is out of the question politically.

If it is not possible to amend the forms of the separation of powers, then Wilsonians might draw some solace from the evidence pointing to the drawbacks of doing so. The first is age-old: while the separation of powers might keep what one wants to happen from happening, it can also put a stop to what one opposes. Consider the example of a reformer who in 1993 reported that he was supportive of President Clinton’s initiatives in reaching
out to the 103d Congress. Yet he still held that constitutional reform was needed “to encourage cooperation between the branches, so that platforms can be enacted and implemented and the government held accountable for the results at the ensuing election.” Two years later, however, during the 104th Congress, in which the House was controlled by a Republican majority that had presented a clear platform to the voters, this same Wilsonian acknowledged that there was something to be said for a system that “checks power” and “protects the poor and the vulnerable, as well as the environment, from the mean-spirited and reckless legions in the House of RepresentatIVES.”

It is also worth noting that the arguments of Wilson’s formidable opponent, Sir Henry Maine, still echo in Westminster. Reformers in the United Kingdom, the polity long regarded as the model of responsible government by American reformers, also look across the Atlantic for their model. They hold up the autonomy of Congress, the independence of American politicians, and the constitutional guarantee of rights in the United States as remedies for the government ministry’s domination of Parliament, the tight party discipline, and the unwritten constitution that they see as stifling debate and threatening freedom in the British system.

The separation of powers, moreover, can be defended not only as protective of liberty but also, in some key respects, as conducive to efficient government. Many Wilsonians have made a point of arguing that the eighteenth-century arrangement is especially obsolete, even dangerous, in the face of the international challenges of the twentieth century. This critique certainly has not been validated here—quite the opposite, in fact. Woodrow Wilson discovered for himself during the war that there is much to be said for the “Newtonian Constitution” and the independent, energetic executive it provides for when governing in an emergency. The Framers of the Fifth French Republic acknowledged as much when framing their constitution amid the crisis of 1958. They self-consciously sought to create such a president, one with special responsibilities for foreign and defense policy, in order to prevent the turbulence and indecisiveness that had plagued government after government in the purely parliamentary Fourth Republic. Contemporary Wilsonians need to acknowledge that the separation of powers is not the hindrance to effective national security policy that they have made it out to be.

Wilson’s inability to secure Senate ratification of the Versailles Treaty does not disprove this point. Unlike the diplomatic and military crises of the war, in which Wilson needed to and could act quickly and unilaterally, the ratification issue allowed for, indeed, required, full deliberation and the es-
tablishment of a broad, bipartisan consensus before action was taken. Without this consensus, the nation’s support for the new, extensive, and ongoing commitments required by the treaty would have been in doubt, and, by Wilson’s own logic, the regime of collective security he envisioned would have been weakened. Lloyd Cutler is a Wilsonian wont to complain about how the separation of powers undermines foreign policy effectiveness, but even he admits that “there is merit to the view that treaties should indeed require the careful bi-partisan consultation essential to win a two-thirds majority.”

It is of course no easy thing to assemble a two-thirds majority in the Senate for treaty ratification, or, for that matter, to combine the presidential endorsement and simple majorities in both the House and Senate that are required for everyday legislation. The difficulty in assembling coalitions for action across the House, Senate, and presidency stems from the different political interests, electoral imperatives, constitutional powers, and policy perspectives of officeholders in these institutions. And, of course, in an age of divided government, partisanship does not solve but rather exacerbates this difficulty. It is certainly a cumbersome system, but the Founders designed it to ensure, insofar as they could, that any national policy emerging from it would be backed by a thoughtful and general consensus as is appropriate for an expansive and diverse republic. When there is a sustaining consensus behind a policy agenda, as there was during the New Freedom, the separation of powers does not stand in the way. When, as in the case of the Versailles Treaty, the requisite support does not exist, the separation can and probably should lead to further debate or, if it comes to it, even outright gridlock.

In light of the preceding discussion, the challenge for Wilsonians attempting to develop a more workable synthesis of “responsible government under the Constitution” is to accept the emphasis of Wilson’s phrase in a way that he never completely did. The goal, that is, should be to develop a program that fully comes to terms with the entrenched logic of the separation of powers and the benefits accruing under it, and that as a result seeks to complement and improve rather than supplant it.

For this synthesis to take form, Wilsonians may well need to reconsider one of the key assumptions of their traditional model, namely, that the president is the American prime minister, the legislative leader of the majority party. Wilson’s celebratory introduction of these roles in Constitutional Government, as we have seen, coincided with an unmistakable theoretical ambivalence. His presidency proved the ambivalence was justified. The prime ministerial conception of presidential leadership is completely confounded by divided government, which presidents have usually confronted in re-
cent decades, and which Wilson faced after 1918. But even before the end of Wilson's first term, in which he worked with Democratic majorities, he was reaffirming the Congress-centered program for responsible government that he had put forward in his early writings, admitting in private conversations that he lacked the direct influence over the legislators to be the prime ministerial leader for which he had long called. Then there is the great difficulty prime ministerial presidents face in reconciling their party leadership with the national leadership roles assigned to the president in the Constitution. Partisan action, as Wilson knew, does not become the chief of state, chief executive, chief diplomat, and commander in chief. Time and again, on issues ranging from patronage to his participation in congressional elections, he was torn between the imperatives of national and party leadership. And he pleased no one: by the end of his term his supporters believed him to be wrecking the party, while his opponents saw him as a zealous partisan.

The point here is not that presidents should forgo legislative leadership or party action. The Constitution bids the executive to play a legislative role, and as Wilson demonstrated, a skillful president can have great impact. And so long as presidents campaign on a party ticket and use the party to bolster their administration, it will be a partisan office. That being said, presidents and political scientists need to recognize that the executive leadership of the legislative branch in the United States cannot match the efficiency that prevails in the Westminster model. There is also a need to acknowledge the stark tradeoffs between the party leadership role that Wilson essayed and the more fundamental national leadership roles that the Founders assigned to the office. Those wanting to bolster the authority of the presidency might return to the example of the early presidents, who sought to raise their administrations above the appearance (if not always the reality) of partisanship. A president, for example, could follow Wilson's general method of blending public rhetoric and private persuasion in working for a bill's adoption while abstaining from his open declarations that he was doing so as a party leader. Indeed, in a divided government, that option is the only one; in a united government, it still might be the best one.

If the presidency-centered conception of party government has all too often undermined the authority of the office when vigorously pursued by executives, it has not done much for the parties either. The powers, incentives, and nonpartisan ideals accompanying the president's national leadership roles give him the means and the inclination to go his own way—with or without his party, as Wilson did in his diplomatic and wartime leadership. This tendency has been strengthened in the twentieth century by the dramatic increase in the administrative power under the executive's command,
the spread of the direct primary, and the development of electronic media. Sidney Milkis and Theodore Lowi have persuasively argued that insofar as presidents beginning with Franklin Roosevelt have been able to govern administratively without depending on the regular support of their partisans in the legislature and to pursue their ambitions by appealing directly to voters rather than relying on their parties to mobilize the electorate, the modern office is antithetical to the idea of party government. 30

As Wilsonians reconsider the basics of their model, they might recognize that in contrast to the presidency, Congress is hospitable to partisanship. The presence of multiple officeholders with divergent views and ample opportunity to express them allows and even calls for party action. The Founders expected partisans in their legislature and did not see this prospect as necessarily undesirable. In Federalist 70, Publius contrasted the different purposes of the sole—and thus energetic—executive and the more numerous—and thus deliberative—legislature. Speaking of the workings of the legislature, he observed that “the differences of opinion, and the jarrings of parties . . . though they may sometimes obstruct salutary plans, yet often promote deliberation and circumspection, and serve to check excesses in the majority.” 31

That ample room is given to party government in the workings of Congress is especially true for the House of Representatives, the most majoritarian body in the Founders’ design, the body that they intended to be most responsive to public opinion. Wilson deemed these general elements as essential components of responsible government. The same holds true for the unmistakable interdependence of leaders and followers and the regular and clear confrontation of opposing parties that characterize the House. Its leaders are selected by the members of the majority party, who delegate power to their leadership in order to realize common party goals more efficiently. These leadership posts are coveted by the more ambitious and proven legislators because they carry the power to exercise significant if not compelling control over what Congress does. At the same time, however, if the leaders want to maintain the power that has been delegated to them, they must serve the purposes of their supporters in the majority. 32 One of the challenges the majority leadership confronts in this regard is defending their party against criticism from their counterparts in the minority. If debate between the parties in the House of Representatives does not always produce the eloquence and high drama of the House of Commons, it nevertheless does provide a forum in which the two parties regularly raise and debate the issues facing the nation.

What is more, developments in recent decades have revealed a poten-
tial for party action and leadership in the House that many political scientists, subscribing to Wilson’s depiction of a decentralized and parochial Congress, have long assumed was impossible. Students of these trends have taken to calling the collective result “conditional party government.” “The ‘condition’ in conditional party government,” John Aldrich and David Rohde state, “is that there is reasonable cohesion on policy preferences within each party and differentiation between the two.” This condition has largely prevailed in the 1980s and 1990s. Following broad changes in the electorate, most notably the drift of conservative southerners into the GOP, which made the Democratic Party more liberal and the Republican Party more conservative, the parties in the House have become more ideologically coherent and polarized. This change has led both Democratic and Republican majorities to limit the ability of committees to thwart common party goals and to empower party leaders to achieve them. As a result, Democratic Speakers Jim Wright and Tom Foley and Republican Speaker Newt Gingrich have been able to exercise a real agenda-setting power. The rise to power of Gingrich is especially interesting, demonstrating that a legislator with great ambition and a vision that resonates with his fellow partisans can facilitate a transformation in the goals of the party’s delegation. Gingrich was not simply an agent empowered by a unified group of partisans in the 104th Congress; he helped bring about that unity.

The new possibilities of party action and leadership in the House allow for a sharper and more focused debate over the means and ends of government. These possibilities also cut away at the common but problematic expectation that party and legislative leadership can only be exercised from the White House. And they do so within the context of the separation of powers. Gingrich and his Republican majority, for example, for all of their initial revolutionary momentum, could only start the debate and present their legislation to the other institutions in the lawmaking nexus; they could not dictate the outcome. House majorities that want to retain their power and sustain their agenda have no choice but to work with senators and presidents to frame policies backed by a sustaining consensus in the large and diverse American nation.

This concluding sketch of possibilities for a new Wilsonian synthesis does not provide for responsible government of the sort that Wilson always held up as the ideal. Rather, it is offered as a closer approximation—and no doubt others can be developed—of what responsible government must be under the Constitution. Woodrow Wilson traveled a good way down this intellectual road. American political scientists, with the benefit of his example, the
insight of his teachings, and the lessons of his presidency, can and should go further.

In the final paragraph of *Congressional Government*, Woodrow Wilson made a point of saluting "the sound sense and practical genius of the great and honorable statesmen of 1787." He challenged his fellow citizens to live up to their example of statesmanship not through "blind worship" of the Constitution but rather through critical scrutiny of how it had come to work in their own day. "When we shall have examined all its parts without sentiment," Wilson argued, "and gauged all its functions by the standards of practical common sense, we shall have established anew our right to the claim of political sagacity."37 To honor the example of Wilson's statesmanship, we must submit his program for responsible government to the same unsentimental examination.
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