Republican Hopefuls Enter the Fray

By Mel Lavine

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It didn't help my mood to be watching seven Republicans who want to be elected president in 2012 debate on Monday night. I tuned in already feeling sorry for myself. When it was over, I was inconsolable.

Maybe I missed the former governor of Utah and President Obama's recent ambassador to China. But John M. Huntsman Jr. declined an invitation to participate. It's said he will get into the race soon. Maybe he'll be the spark. I never thought I'd ever say this but I missed Sarah Palin. Maybe when she's done her remedial reading on Paul Revere she'll light the fire.

When I first typed this, I slipped and wrote 1912, instead of 2012 . Maybe my unconscious was telling me something. 1912 - that was the last time there were three first-class leaders competing for the office – Woodrow Wilson, the reform governor of New Jersey, the irrepressible Theodore Roosevelt seeking a third term, and the socialist labor leader Eugene V. Debs. In the century since mediocrity or worse has too often been the hallmark of the nominees.

These days with the economy shaky and unemployment widespread, the Republicans seek to pin the blame on President Obama. But it really belongs with his predecessor and party for their "anything-goes" years of tax breaks and favors for the rich and powerful and their costly military adventures. Yet people's memories are short. When millions are in pain, as they are today, the president in the limelight is the target.

The news of Obama's seeking to win back Wall Street cash with hopes of mending fences, as the New York Times reported, does not advance his stature as a tribune of the people. Nor does his silence on the problem of climate change. Nor on his promise to nominate and fight for strong people to protect consumers under the Dodd-Frank financial reforms.

It may be smart politics in today's environment, but then again it may not. In his biography of FDR, Ted Morgan writes of a traveler passing through Toledo in the winter of 1931 "when the depression seemed invincible." On both sides of the street of the industrial town crowds of men "stretched endlessly."

“They were not waiting for a handout or a soup kitchen. They were not rioting or picketing. They were doing very much the same thing that Mr. Hoover was doing, which was exactly nothing. They did not expect government to do anything for them. They did not think that government could or should do anything for them. Underlying the depression was a vast national passivity.”

Franklin Roosevelt was governor of New York and getting ready to run for his party’s nomination for president. By temperament and conviction, as Morgan wrote, Roosevelt was unprepared to accept the way things were.

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