Political talk

by Susan_Estrich

Listen to Texas Gov. Rick Perry.

"We've got a great union. There's absolutely no reason to dissolve it. But if Washington continues to thumb their nose at the American people, you know, who knows what might come out of that."

No, governor, I don't know.

"Texas is a very unique place, and we're a pretty independent lot to boot," he tells us, or he told an audience of Texas Teabaggers. He also said that Texas entered the union in 1845 with the understanding that it could pull out, which turns out, according to media reports quoting the Texas State Library and Archives Commission, not to be true. Texas negotiated the right to divide itself into four additional states, not the right to secede from the Union.

Trivia.

Perry has been getting a lot of attention anyway, for his three tea parties on Tax Day and for his ridicule of Department of Homeland Security Sec. Janet Napolitano. He describes himself as someone who could be at the center of a movement: "It's a very organic thing," he says, "a very powerful moment, I think, in American history." On Tax Day, he told cheering veterans: "I'm just not real sure you're a bunch of right-wing extremists. But if you are, we're with you."

It sounds so geniune, so passionate, so real that you might actually forget that what you're hearing is pure political talk. Perry is not running a secession movement; he's running for re-election. It's a powerful moment in his career because he's running for re-election against another powerful Republican, Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison. So Perry is running against Washington. Washington is now the source of all evil â€” all of it, presumably, occurring since Jan. 20 of this year, when the Texan in town left.

If this sounds so obvious as to be almost ridiculous, then the equally obvious answer is that it doesn't matter. The crowds who have been cheering Perry don't question his motives, and neither do many of those who repeat his lines. Frankly, they couldn't care less. And why should they? They have problems of their own.

In normal times, it's fringe candidates who talk about secession, not incumbents. In normal times, everyone

else says who cares.

What makes it easy for Perry to "fire up" the crowds, as local headlines put it, is what makes it irresponsible for him, or anyone else who calls himself a leader, to do so. When people are hurting, they get angry. When people get angry, they look for scapegoats. We all do it. Who among us, facing money problems, doesn't go through the list of who else's fault it must be? We don't need help doing that. We don't need political leaders giving us new options for who to blame and who to hate, promising a "national movement" to overturn the democracy we have. That's demagoguery, not leadership, and it works all too well in hard times.

Is Washington spending too much money? I don't know. If the people of Texas want to give theirs back, if they really think they have more than they'll need to educate their kids and care for their sick and help their newly homeless, then all I can say is that California most certainly does not and would be happy to have any leftovers from anywhere. Gov. Perry, meet Gov. Schwarzenegger. His hand is out. But angry talk by those who are supposed to be leaders can only lead to even angrier words or deeds by those who follow them, not understanding that it was just political talk in the first place.

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