What's Wrong With America's Two-Party System?: Preeminent Scholar Visits UNH To Discuss Death And Life Of American Political Parties

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DURHAM, N.H. -- The key to understanding American politics is not understanding who won, but who lost and why, according Theodore Lowi, one of the preeminent political scientists in the nation who will speak at the University of New Hampshire this week.

Lowi, the John L. Senior Professor of American Institutions at Cornell University, will discuss the two-party system and the state of American politics Wednesday, April 25, 2007, at 4:30 p.m. in Richards Auditorium, Murkland Hall. His talk is titled “The Death and Life of American Political Parties.” It is free and open to the public.

“Ted Lowi is one of the most prominent political scientists in our time. His ‘End of Liberalism’ book literally stood alone in the field for years as the most thoughtful and thought-provoking treatise on change in American politics. His more recent work on shifts in political institutions and loyalties has captivated students and faculty across the country. In addition, he is a dynamic and challenging speaker whom we are very proud to have as our guest on campus,” says Marilyn Hoskin, dean of the UNH College of Liberal Arts.

Lowi is a leading critic of the American two-party system and believes that the existing parties do not provide adequate representation for our diverse nation. “We watch politics like it’s a game, and the key to the game is who won. But it’s misleading to always look at who won and why. I stress the opposite. The key to national elections is who lost and why they lost,” Lowi says.

For example, Roosevelt and the Democrats didn’t win in 1932, he says. Rather, the Republican Party collapsed after being in power for 70 years. It is only by understanding why a candidate lost that we can understand how that political party, which he calls a coalition, transforms into something different.

“The Republican Party died in the 1990s and morphed into a conservative party. The Republican Party is no longer the party of Lincoln and Reagan. It’s the party of the conservatives of the early British conservative, imperialistic system,” Lowi says.

And according to Lowi, the Democrats will not win in 2008; the Republicans will lose. Only after this “death” of the Republican Party will it transform into something different.

However, there will never be a true third party in America, Lowi says, even though some such as the Libertarian Party and independent candidates like Ross Perot have had a measured impact on politics.

“There will never be a major third party as long as state laws discriminate against third parties. The two-party system is a myth. It’s not good for America. There is one thing that the Democrats and the Republicans can agree on, and that’s that we should discriminate against third parties,” Lowi says.
Lowi has served as president of the Policy Studies Organization, the American Political Science Association, and the International Political Science Association. He has written or edited more than a dozen books, including “The Pursuit of Justice” (with Robert F. Kennedy), “The Personal President,” “The End of the Republican Era” and “A Republic of Parties: Debating the Two-Party System.” His classic work, “The End of Liberalism,” has been called the most influential book written about American politics during the last half-century.

Lowi’s talk is sponsored by the Political Science Department and the College of Liberal Arts. For more information, contact the Political Science Department at 603-862-1751.

**PHOTO:** A high-resolution photo of Lowi is available for download at http://unhinfo.unh.edu/news/img/lowi.jpg.