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Jeb v. Hillary?

What's with this tendency to see elective office as a hereditary peerage?

By Michael Tanner
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There is something distinctly troubling about the news this week that big Republican donors are trying to recruit former Florida governor Jeb Bush to run for president against Hillary Clinton in 2016. It has nothing to do with whether or not Bush would make a good president. By all accounts he was a very good governor — he scored a lifetime grade of B on the Cato fiscal scorecard — and he has some positive ideas for the future of the Republican party and the country. But do we really need the son of one president and brother of another (and grandson of a U.S. senator) to run against the wife of a former president?

Another Bush v. another Clinton? Maybe we should just pin on white or red roses and join the Yorkists or the Lancastrians.

Jeb, of course, is not the only Bush considering his political options. His elder son, George P. Bush, is running for Texas land commissioner, widely considered a stepping stone to an eventual congressional or gubernatorial run. Nor are future generations of Clintons off the political radar. The Clintons' daughter, Chelsea, recently told CNN that she is open to a future run for office, although she hasn't decided yet what office she will seek. Oh, and let us not forget that Chelsea's mother-in-law, former Pennsylvania representative Marjorie Margolies, is running to regain her congressional seat.

Speaking of Congress, Representative John Dingell (D., Mich.), currently the longest-serving member of Congress, and himself the son of a former congressman, announced that when he retires at the end of this term, his seat should naturally be inherited by his wife. Unsurprisingly, Debbie Dingell is considered the prohibitive frontrunner for the seat. This may be something of a comedown for Mrs. Dingell, however. The chairwoman of the Wayne State University Board of Governors had previously explored a run for the Senate, but backed off to avoid a primary fight with Representative Gary Peters. Still, it seems only fair — a Dingell has held that seat for the last 81 years.

We should have been finished with this hereditary-peerage thing back in 1776. In fact, Article I, Section 9, Clause 8 of the Constitution specifically says: "No title of nobility shall be granted by the United States." Yet, according to one recent survey, 39 members of Congress have close relatives who also have served or are currently serving in Congress. This doesn't count those who have relatives who were governors or prominent state-level politicians, or those who have relatives who ran for office but did not win. CNN reports that a full third of U.S. senators have family members who either hold or have held political office.

Thus, on the Democratic side of the aisle, we have Senator Mark Udall, son of former congressman and presidential candidate Mo Udall, seeking reelection in Colorado, while his cousin, Senator Tom Udall, does so in New Mexico. (Senator Mike Lee of Utah, a Republican, is also related to the Udalls.) Senator Mark Pryor of Arkansas, fighting for reelection, is the son of former senator and governor David Pryor. Senator Mark Begich of Alaska, another endangered Democrat, is the son of a former congressman. It sometimes seems as if every member of Senator Mary Landrieu's family is involved in Louisiana politics.

Nor is it just Democrats who see politics as the family business. Senator Lisa Murkowski of Alaska is the daughter of a former senator and governor. Missouri senator Roy Blunt's son is the state's lieutenant governor. And, of course, Senator Rand Paul is the son of the trailblazing Ron Paul.

Perhaps all of this is one reason why so many politicians feel entitled to run our lives. They simply see themselves as following in the footsteps of their kingly progenitors, endowed with the divine right to rule. They might see it as a call to public service or as *noblesse oblige*, but it is all too often mixed with a belief that they know better than the rest of us.

Politicians constantly remind Americans about the dangers of inherited wealth. Yet, 80 percent of millionaires didn't inherit their money. Shouldn't we be at least as worried about the dangers of inherited political power? America doesn't need royalty.

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