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**How Big is Our  
"Mediocrity Problem?"  
Solidarity America  
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In the last century, a United States senator suggested that, in America, "mediocre" people needed representation on the Supreme Court and that representation would come in the form of confirmation of a "mediocre" judge by the Senate.

The senator was Roman Hruska, a Republican from Nebraska, and he was referring to the nomination by President Richard Nixon of G. Harrold Carswell as an associate justice. Nixon's nomination set off a firestorm, with opponents citing Carswell's mediocre performance as a judge and his lack of qualifications to sit on the high court.

Senator Hruska leapt to the defense of Carswell with both feet: "Even if he were mediocre, there are a lot of mediocre judges and people and lawyers. They are entitled to a little representation, aren't they, and a little chance? We can't have all Brandeises, Frankfurters, and Cardozos."

That plea for a fair hearing for mediocrity in American life seemed to be a highlight of modern political silliness, but Hruska apparently was just a little ahead of his time.

Republicans of the 21st Century are likely to recall Hruska with fondness, as he came to the defense of a Supreme Court candidate who never made it to the bench, because, although they have no corner on the mediocrity market, they are far and away in the lead in politics and in their membership.

GOP voices in the U.S. are being raised in praise of a prospective candidate for high office who just about admitted on a national television interview that she doesn't read

newspapers and has just announced her resignation as governor of Alaska at the end of this month - not that the two are related.

It wouldn't be much of a faux pas to admit not to have read newspapers in one's lifetime, but that admission is indicative of an aversion to knowledge of anything that has happened over the past 40 years outside of one's own small circle.

Then there are GOP senators who have denied that the global climate is changing, not for the better. It's not that they have any special knowledge of research that has been done on the question, just that their masters in Corporate America have told them that they'd be unhappy if they were required to curtail their pollution of the environment with greenhouse gases. Besides, if companies were required to reduce emissions of various toxins, it would cost jobs and that would be "bad for the economy" (that is, it would likely cut into profits).

In the case of Sarah Palin, reporters noted several times during the recent presidential campaign that campaign staffers were chagrined that she routinely refused to be briefed on the issues and that made for many embarrassing moments for the governor and for the McCain campaign.

Her performance was, at best, mediocre, except when she was reciting the GOP talking points on the stump. There was no oratory, just recitation, as when she kept repeating across the country that Obama had been "palling around with terrorists."

The Republican base - which in the past year has been retreating into itself and shrinking - loved Palin's absence of knowledge of the issues. Speculation was that they felt that she was "one of them." Her down-home demeanor showed that anyone could run for high office and be received well by at least some of the electorate.

John McCain doesn't escape from his mediocre decision to pick her as his vice presidential candidate, either. Without knowing anything about her, he appeared to respond to the enthusiasm of his right-wing colleagues in the party, who thought she would bring excitement to the race and energize the GOP.

The constant defense by Republicans of the Bush Administration against any investigation or suggestion that crimes might have been committed by members of the executive while in office shows an ignorance of the U.S. Constitution and what it means to be a nation of laws. In the case of those defenders, being called mediocre would be something of a compliment.

Then, there are those politicians of both parties who, before they take office are strongly in favor of such things as single-payer universal health care and the Employee Free Choice Act, but who then fall silent about those issues after they take the oath of office. While the inaction might not show mediocrity of intellect, it certainly shows a tendency to mediocre application of principle.

Governor Palin's announcement of her resignation at a July 3 press conference satisfied no one about the reason for such an action in the middle of her first term as governor, with some describing her as finding it difficult to "focus," when she returned from the presidential campaign trail to her job as chief executive of Alaska. She rambled and never did give a solid reason for resigning. She dismissed the various ethical charges

as not worthy of consideration and a distraction.

That the soon-to-be ex-governor of Alaska was chosen to run for vice president when the only elected office she had held and completed was as mayor of the small village of Wasilla is a testament to the mediocrity of both McCain's thinking and the GOP in its outspoken support of her, even after her constant stream of blunders and mis-statements that were heard around the world. It almost - not quite - makes one feel sorry for one who is so unaware of herself.

She has lots of company. America is filled with public figures who, if they are not mediocre, act in the most mediocre manner in conduct of the people's business. They are staunch defenders of the status quo and protectors of those who hold the power in the nation's political system.

At a time of such distress and danger to the public welfare, and perhaps even the future of the nation, that kind of action takes mediocrity to its highest form.

We only have two parties in our political system and both of them constantly try to outdo each other in crowding the middle ground. They are parties full of safe-players and that makes for a mediocre show, like the one that has brought the business of New York to a halt because of the chaotic nature of the past five weeks in the State Senate, where no business has been conducted because of the two-party fight for control.

A hard-charging politician acting on principle, without regard for his or her own political future raises that person out of the ranks of the mediocre, but there are so few of them at any level of government that they are barely noticed. They may not last long in office, but we need more of them to make a few waves and take action in the best interest of all the people.

No one wants to own up to Senator Hruska's contention that there are "a lot of mediocre" folks out there who need representation, too, so that's why we're awash in mediocre office holders. Let's assume that that's not the case, but if we have not become a mediocre people, we need to demand better of our politicians and our system, or change the way we do the people's business.

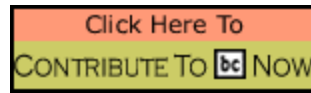
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**BlackCommentator.com** Columnist, John Funciello, is a labor organizer and former union organizer. His union work started when he became a local president of The Newspaper Guild in the early 1970s. He was a reporter for 14 years for newspapers in New York State. In addition to labor work, he is organizing family farmers as they struggle to stay on the land under enormous pressure from factory food producers and land developers. Click [here](#) to contact Mr. Funciello.

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