

# ***PERSONALLY SPEAKING***

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## **THE MASTERS IN AUGUSTA, THE MESS IN WASHINGTON**

**Mayo Research Institute**

***Permission to quote is granted when the source is acknowledged.***

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**The Masters has been played in Augusta for more than 80 years. Only the best players in the world are invited or qualify to play.**

**What a gorgeous setting. The course has been prepared with the greatest care. Fairways and greens are beautifully manicured and the azaleas are in bloom. The Masters is a thing of special beauty. Along the Tidal Basin and in the Washington suburbs the cherry blossom trees are in full bloom but they cannot hide the ugly political landscape.**

**But that's only the beginning. The Masters is about the people. The golfers who must conduct themselves on the course as gentlemen. Never pouting or whining when they shank a tee shot or blow a four foot putt. In a high-anxiety tournament, they must master their emotions. It's a tradition at the Masters. The winner is presented with a green jacket that is worn with singular pride. In sharp contrast, members of Congress resort to bullying their adversaries, routinely attacking and maligning them without any sense of shame. It's a tradition in Washington**

**In Augusta young and talented golfers compete intensely for the green jacket. The galleries sometimes are so silent that all that one hears is the chirping of the birds on the course. In Washington party politicians run from competition defaulting to the way things are and always have been. Governing means for instance passing a continuing resolution on the budget that allows them to shy away from taking a stand on unresolved issues. Old men and women bicker endlessly, even in matters of little concern to the American public. The result is gridlock.**

**The galleries at the Masters are filled with people who came to watch – they never shout or cheer while a player is concentrating on his next shot. They applaud respectfully when a player has done well. They cheer wildly when the last player in the run for the green jacket has finished the fourth and last round. Even the announcers broadcast in hushed voices so not to interfere with the golfers. What you see so wonderfully displayed is a culture of active but respectful competition. In Washington what you see is a culture of a grinding, self-destructive competition that reduces to *just talk* and no action.**

**In Washington notably on cable television paid political party strategists shout their talking points and interrupt one another for the purpose of blaming the other party for all that is wrong in**

**America. In Washington disrespect, lying, and money rule. At the Masters respect, truthfulness, and performance rule.**

**In Washington and elsewhere, once a group has established its rulers, those rulers gradually substitute their own particular good for the general good of the group as the norm of group action. Some call this the iron law of oligarchy. Nothing better demonstrates the self-centered behavior of U.S. senators and representatives than this law. In 2011, a nonelection year, members of Congress hosted more than 2,800 fundraisers. Because federal law prohibits the use of public buildings for soliciting donations or receiving payments senators and representatives *while in session* make countless numbers of fundraising phone calls at a nearby privately owned building where they also hold private fundraising events. Clearly, in Washington the particular good of getting re-elected has replaced the general good of serving the American people.**

**In a presidential election year the common wisdom asserts that America is divided along geographic lines. Democrats control voting on the west and east coasts. Republicans tend to predominate in middle America. Red states and blue states. Wisdom is taken for granted in Washington. It belongs to old men and women in the Senate or the House of Representatives as a right they were granted in the last round of elections. Year in and year out in Augusta, wisdom is the duty of the management, players, and fans, helping make the Masters an extraordinary sports event. It's more than a pity that our nation's capitol doesn't function more like Augusta. It's a tragedy that threatens self-governance.**

**In the end human motives and behavior make a difference. In Washington strictly partisan politics twists members of Congress like a corkscrew. In Augusta golf demands that everyone involved follow a code of conduct that assures that the best man wears the green jacket.**

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