

[Politicians or Statesmen: a blog by Rabbi Marc D. Angel](#)

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Henry Adams, a 19th century American historian and author, distinguished between a politician and a statesman. A politician is someone who listens to what people are saying, and then molds his/her agenda accordingly. A statesman is someone who thinks carefully and arrives at intelligent conclusions—and then works to persuade the public to adopt his/her policies.

Politicians are essentially petty self-promoters who will say what people want to hear, who will pander to the whims of the masses. They say one thing today, another thing tomorrow; one thing to this audience and another thing to a different audience. They tell jokes, hug children, spout off truisms. Their goal is to be popular enough to get elected and stay in office. They can be bullies, buffoons, or big mouths: it doesn't matter to them as long as they can get people to talk about them and vote for them.

Statesmen are a much rarer breed. They actually take the time and trouble to think carefully. They have a long range vision of what is best for society. They espouse ideas and ideals that the masses may—or may not—readily understand or appreciate. They try to remain above the fray, and to guide people to a better, larger view of what is at stake. They are people who avoid sound-bites and photo ops.

Political campaigns of our time often seem to be in the province of politicians, not statesmen. People run to become President of the United States, but they sound as though they are running for president of their high school class. Instead of contests for who provides the soundest and most intelligent vision for the future of the nation, the political battles seem to be popularity contests.

Will Rogers once said: When I was a boy I was told that anyone could become President of the United States; now I'm beginning to believe it.

People in all generations complain that their political leaders are politicians rather than statesmen. But it is the people who elect them! Apparently, the public does not demand or need anything more than glib showmen for their leaders.

People deserve exactly the leadership that they choose for themselves, whether for good or ill. This applies not only to political leaders, but to leaders of all sorts. It's easy enough to complain that our leaders are mere politicians and panderers; but we somehow seem to forget that we are the ones who have elected them or have allowed them to stay in office.

As long as the public will laugh at the politicians' jokes and rejoice in the politicians' one-liners, then the politicians will continue their reign. Until the public will demand more of their leaders and more of themselves, we will have politicians...not statesmen. And we will all be the worse for it.

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