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PRESIDENT SELINA IS BACK!



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Julia Louis-Dreyfus (Photo credit: [Wikimedia](#))

Need a break from the cries of a “rigged” GOP convention or questions about the loyalties of 715 Democratic Party super-delegates? You are in luck. HBO’s President Selina Meyer is back! On Sunday, the network premiered its wildly popular show *VEEP*, starring Emmy Award-winning Julia Louis-Dreyfus as its wacky and irrepressible president locked in an electoral college tie.

For the uninitiated, the show, now in its fifth season, offers an inside view of presidential politics with a heavy dose of high jinx. To bring you up to date: Selina ran for president in Season 1, tanked in the polls and joined the ticket as Vice President; the president resigned in Season 3 and she took over the top job; last season, Selina ran for the presidency in her own right, and the season ended on election eve with her having a lead in the popular vote but only 269 electoral college votes – one vote shy of the required majority. As President Meyer’s advisers patiently explained, when no candidate reaches 270 electoral votes, the US Constitution provides that the leader of the free world is chosen by the House of Representatives, with each state having one vote. As fortune would have it, last season ended with control of the House “too close to call.”

The last time this happened in real life was in 1824, when the House installed John Quincy Adams, beating out Andrew Jackson, who led in popular and electoral college votes (though not a majority). Jackson charged that the process was undemocratic, and was vindicated four years later by beating Adams in a re-match. (Jackson just suffered another blow by being booted from the \$20 bill, but that's another story.)

Trying to get away from wall-to-wall coverage of the real election contest, I tuned into *VEEP*'s new season fully expecting to watch trench warfare for the hearts and minds of House members who would be selecting the next president. Instead, Selina got a reprieve – Nevada was now back in play, and if she could overtake her opponent in that state, she would actually win six additional electoral college votes – and the election. This sounds awfully familiar to the predicament that Al Gore faced in 2000 – he, too, led in the popular vote, but was short of 270. His hopes of winning depended upon the arcane election laws of Florida. Viewers of *VEEP*, on the other hand, need to get ready for the nuts-and-bolts of Nevada election law.

The lesson of Florida in 2000 and Nevada on *VEEP* is that the American system of electing a president is nothing less than a crazy-quilt of laws – each state having its own peculiar voting rules. In the nomination contests, we have seen primaries and caucuses; delegates who are bound for one or two ballots at the convention, or not bound at all; winner-take-all states, and those that allocate delegates proportionally. The process is a veritable obstacle course that requires a score card just to follow the process. Come November, we will also see an array of inconsistent state laws, some allowing early voting, others that do not; many with strict voter ID laws; and a few with same-day registration.

Whether art imitates life or vice-versa, the presidential election process follows a 230-year old script, written by our Founders. Its central premise is that the manner by which we elect our national leaders is dictated by the states. Except for a few overriding constitutional provisions (such as the post-Civil War amendments) or federal laws (see the modern Voting Rights Act), it is the states that enact election laws that govern how we vote and which votes get counted. So, to squeak out an electoral college majority, Gore's tipping point was Florida's recount law and Selina's is Nevada's.

Virtually everyone calls for the reform of this 18th century system of electing the president, but little ever gets done. I'm hoping Selina Meyer has something to say about it. Can't wait until next week!



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