

Washington, According to Will Rogers

By Dennis Knight

I have the task of making a report on Washington, and if I had been paying attention, my piece would have been written by the politicians themselves. But I wasn't, so I have found someone else to do my work, an acute observer of politics who had the ear of an entire generation.

Will Rogers *was* paying attention. One quarter Cherokee, he was born in 1879 in Indian Territory, part of what later became Oklahoma. He was in his life a cowboy, vaudevillian, humorist, columnist, movie and radio star. He died in 1935 at the age of 55 in a small airplane crash with aviator Wiley Post at Point Barrow, Alaska. If you are over eighty you may have heard him on the radio, seen him in movies or on a stage twirling a lariat and spinning insights into American life, especially Congress and Washington. "I don't make jokes," he said, "I just watch the government and report the facts."

Will Rogers reported a heap of facts. I have picked some doozies, and I now have the pleasure of presenting to you Washington, According to Will Rogers. Allow me to quote:

- ✚ Alexander Hamilton started the U.S. Treasury with nothing, and that was the closest our country has ever been to being even.
- ✚ I bet after seeing us, George Washington would sue us for calling him 'father.'
- ✚ About all I can say for the United States Senate is that it opens with a prayer and closes with an investigation.
- ✚ The man with the best job in the country is the vice-president. All he has to do is get up every morning and say, 'How is the president?'
- ✚ This country has come to feel the same when Congress is in session as when the baby gets hold of a hammer.
- ✚ The more you observe politics, the more you've got to admit that each party is worse than the other.
- ✚ There ought to be one day – just one – when there is open season on senators.
- ✚ If stupidity got us into this mess, why can't it get us out?
- ✚ If I studied all my life, I couldn't think up half the number of funny things passed in one session of Congress.
- ✚ It's a pretty good thing we don't get all the government we pay for.
- ✚ There is no more independence in politics than there is in jail.
- ✚ Politics is applesauce.
- ✚ I'm an amateur, and the thing about my jokes is they don't...do no harm. But with Congress, every time they make a joke, it's a law. And every time they make a law, it's a joke.
- ✚ A senator got up today in Congress and called his fellow senators sons of wild jackasses. Now, if you think the senators were hot, imagine how the jackasses must feel.
- ✚ It's easy being a humorist when you've got the whole government working for you.

Mr. Rogers' words are as pertinent today as they were eight decades ago, and writing a report on Washington is easy street when you've got Will Rogers doing your job.