

# **Mr. Smith Goes to Washington**

## **Willing Suspension of Disbelief**

Gary North

1. The coin toss fails: a newspaper blocks it. The governor sees the headline on Smith. Who printed the newspaper with the story of Jeff Smith as the lead story? Why?
2. Why does the send-off crowd sing “Auld Lang Syne”? How? No one knows the words.
3. Paine would have known about Jeff Smith, yet he is shocked at Smith’s reference to Paine and his father, who was murdered when they were young idealists.
4. We never again see the pigeons after the train station.
5. Why did Smith leave behind the birds and his luggage at the station? With whom?
6. Why would newspapers have ridiculed a new Senator? Senators have information that newsmen want. They also have power. The Senate would have been outraged at this treatment of one of their members, not embarrassed, as the movie has it.
7. Smith would have been arrested and sued for battery for punching reporters.
8. A bill cannot be written overnight and introduced on the floor of the Senate, as Saunders explained.
9. A Senator cannot introduce a bill by reading a speech. It must go through committees, as Saunders explained.
10. By tradition, the House will not consider any bill initiated in the Senate that involves spending federal funds, e.g., the boys camp.
11. The gallery is filled by pre-teen boys, who cheer the speech.
12. Saunders tells Diz they should get married immediately – no mention of a license.

13. Smith asks Paine: “Who’s Taylor?” Yet his father had owned a small-town newspaper, and Taylor owned most the them.
14. Basic to Section 40 was its secrecy. By attacking Smith, Paine opened the door to an investigation, which Taylor had warned would be fatal.
15. Taylor and Paine had bought the land under fake names, and these documents would have been in the public records.
16. The witnesses committed perjury if they were sworn in – jail time if caught.
17. Taylor’s thugs run children off the road – a felony. Guaranteed outrage by parents.
18. Word would have gotten out: Taylor ordered this.
19. The publicity of the kids’ newspaper has no effect in Washington – no telegrams.
20. The filibuster has no point or structure – just filling time.
21. The movie hinges on Paine’s repentance and confession, not the filibuster.

Here is the problem. The movie rests on the script writers’ deliberate deception of the viewers, especially the key scene: the filibuster, which could easily have been stopped by the Senate. It was a movie based on always telling the truth, which rests on a deliberate lie. Yet the movie is beloved, a classic feel-good movie.

Capra had done the same thing the year before with another movie starring Stewart and Arthur, with Arnold again playing the villain. The movie was *You Can’t Take It With You*. It won the Academy Award and won an Oscar for Capra. It was based on a Pulitzer Prize-winning play. Wikipedia summarizes the plot.

Successful banker Anthony P. Kirby (Edward Arnold) has just returned from Washington, D.C., where he was effectively granted a government-sanctioned munitions monopoly, which will make him very rich. He intends to buy up a 12-block radius around a competitor's factory to put him out of business, but there is one house that is a holdout to selling. Kirby instructs his real estate broker, John Blakely (Clarence Wilson), to offer a huge sum for the house, and if that is not accepted, to cause trouble for the family.

This is impossible. The local munitions factory had legal access to public streets,

and these are kept open by law. No one can buy them. The entire premise of the script is clearly preposterous, yet viewers believed it. They suspended their disbelief.

In *It Happened One Night*, Gable gets the car back from the man who drove away with his luggage. How? Running? Impossible. He then stole the man's car. He would have been arrested for grand theft auto. He could not have proved that the man stole anything. The man would have pleaded: "An honest mistake, your honor. They had left my car. I thought they had moved on. I did not notice his suitcase in the back seat."

Next, the editor of the newspaper gets Gable \$1,000 in currency within a few minutes. Where? Multiply this by at least a factor of 17 to get to today's money.

The script won the Oscar. Capra won the Oscar.