

# The Political Forum

*A review of social and political trends and events  
impacting the world's financial markets*

Mark L. Melcher  
Publisher  
[melcher@thepoliticalforum.com](mailto:melcher@thepoliticalforum.com)

Stephen R. Soukup  
Senior Editor  
[soukup@thepoliticalforum.com](mailto:soukup@thepoliticalforum.com)

Monday, August 4, 2003

## THEY SAID IT

“There are ‘consensus politicians’ and ‘conviction politicians.’”

Lady Margaret Thatcher

**THE GROWING IMPORTANCE OF THE CENTER.** A wise wag once said that there are two kinds of people in the world: those who divide the world into two kinds of people and those who don't. I am of the first group. As someone who writes about politics for a living, I routinely divide the world, or at least the U.S. public, into two groups, usually either Republicans and Democrats or liberals and conservatives, but sometimes into more novel categories, such as normal people and wackos, which, as a practical matter, is usually not much different from the first two groupings.

There are, of course, endless ways that the American public can be divided into two parts for purposes of discussing and analyzing politics. For example, there are boys and girls, Westerners and Easterners, city and country folk, and old and young. Another breakdown that can be useful at times is between individuals who are socially acclimated and baby boomers (present readers accepted, of course).

Recently, as I have watched the early rounds of the upcoming presidential election, I have become interested in a division involving what, for lack of a better term, I will call activists and non-activists.

On one side in this dichotomy, there are persons who feel so strongly about one or more of the so called “wedge” issues that nothing else matters to them. The issue may be abortion, gun ownership, gay rights, African-American rights, Hispanic rights, the war in Iraq, the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, the environment, the death penalty, or any of a myriad of similar hot button concerns. But whatever the particular topic, these single issue advocates hate the thought of voting for a politician who does not share his or her view on the subject in question. Indeed, they almost always harbor a deep personal dislike for such politicians.

In opposition to this crowd, there is a large group of voters who are solidly in the center. These people care about and have opinions concerning the wedge issues, and on any given day might

---

Subscriptions to The Political Forum are available by contacting:  
The Political Forum

8563 Senedo Rd., Mt. Jackson, Virginia 22842  
Tel 540-477-9762, Fax 540-477-3359, Email [melcher@thepoliticalforum.com](mailto:melcher@thepoliticalforum.com),  
or visit us at [www.thepoliticalforum.com](http://www.thepoliticalforum.com)

emphasize one over the other. But no single issue of this sort is decisive for them. In fact, most are deeply suspicious of people and politicians who take what they consider to be extreme positions on these controversial topics.

They might be in favor of abortion rights, but can understand the need to impose some restrictions on the “right to choose.” Or they may be quite firmly against abortion, but sympathetic to the idea that under some circumstances abortion is a necessary evil. They may own guns and hunt, but not be opposed to restrictions on the ownership of some types of firearms. They may be completely accepting of gays as individuals, but indifferent, or even antagonistic toward some of the issues that are important to some gay rights group, such as marriage, adoption of children and participation in the military. They may care deeply about the environment, but are all too aware that radical environmentalism could cost them their jobs either directly or by damaging the economy. They might have preferred that Bill Clinton had been able to keep his pants on, but believe that his behavior was more amusing than troubling.

Instead of concentrating on the wedge issues, these people focus their political concerns on the things that every politician promises, regardless of party or ideological leaning. And they vote for the one who they think can best honor these promises.

They want a healthy economy, jobs, a rising stock market, low interest rates, safe neighborhoods, good schools, fair taxes, excellent, accessible and affordable health care, and security at home. They would prefer to live in a moral society, largely because that means social stability, but they don't obsess about morality as a national issue. As regards sexual matters, they generally believe as George Bernard Shaw's actress friend, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, was supposed to have said, namely that “it doesn't matter what you do in the bedroom as long as you don't do it in the street and frighten the horses.”

And increasingly, it appears that they also want a federal government that is responsive not only to issues of national importance but to the problems that they as individuals face in their everyday lives, right down to assuring that their children don't take drugs and know all there is to know about sex. While they may tell pollsters that they are against “big government,” by all accounts they have little fear of an ever larger and ever more intrusive federal establishment. In fact, the first thought most of them have when confronted with a problem is that the government should do something about this.

It is worth noting that if I am correct about all of this, then there have been some important changes in the sensitivities and views of the American center in the past few decades, as the baby boomers have come of age politically. Among these is the fact that those of us who feel strongly that the President should be a man of moral character, as well as those of us who would like a smaller and less intrusive government, have become members of one of the special interest groups on the right rather than an integral part of the center.

Now, as I said two weeks ago in an article about what I called “national constituency politics” (“What Will We Do With The Drunken Sailors?” July 21, 2003), the folks in the first group, those whom I call the activists, are extremely important collectively. When taken together, they represent the grass roots of both parties. They are the committed ones, the true believers, the workers, the door bell ringers, and most especially the source of considerable campaign money.

As I also said in that story, every federal level politician, including the President, must have a critical mass of these special interest groups in his or her corner.

In fact, for the past several decades, most political analysts, including yours truly, believed that these special interest activists were so crucial to the success of a presidential campaign that the first and most important step a presidential candidate had to make was to be certain that all were squarely on board. Then, after performing this important chore, which was called “solidifying the base,” the candidate could go out and do battle for the votes of the center.

Recently, I have concluded that this tried and true campaign strategy is no longer valid; that Bill Clinton changed it with so little fanfare, and over such an extended period of time, that this change has gone largely unnoticed by the collective punditry. In fact, if you pay attention as the race unfolds, you will find that most of the leading political pundits will still form their election analysis around the old paradigm, that the key to victory is a happy and united ideological base plus a piece of the center.

The new paradigm, as I see it, is to concentrate on winning the center first and to worry about the activist special interests groups second. This is a subtle difference, but it carries with it some important social and political ramifications.

Bill Clinton didn't develop this policy out of whole cloth. As I indicated earlier, it evolved slowly from the early days of his first candidacy when he became aware that if he were to solidify his entire liberal base first, he would alienate such a large portion of the center that he could not win. So he opened his race by eschewing the liberal label and announcing that his candidacy was not about the old liberal acid tests, but about “the economy stupid.”

To add emphasis to his claim that he was a new style “centrist” Democrat, as opposed to an old style liberal, he made a special trip home to Arkansas to preside over the execution of a black man who was so severely retarded that he didn't eat the desert at his last meal, telling the guards he would save it until later. And he made a point of talking about safer streets and a strong military. It wasn't a full fledged new paradigm campaign, but it contained, out of political necessity, the seeds of a major difference in the old way of doing things.

By the time his eight years were nearly over, Bill had so slanted his presidency to the center that Steve and I wrote the following in March 1999 in a piece proclaiming the death of classic American liberalism at the hands of Bill Clinton.

“For starters, let me say that I am aware that definitions are important to this discussion. Most Democratic politicians still consider themselves “liberals,” even though many don't publicly use the label today. But if Bill Clinton and his ardent Democratic supporters in Congress are liberals, then what, pray tell, were those old time Democrats who believed in big defense cuts, vigorous wealth redistribution, limited use of the military, abolition of the death penalty, generous welfare benefits, “human rights” as a centerpiece for foreign policy, diligent attention to overzealous law enforcement and to the rights of the accused, relaxed immigration policies, and strict federal enforcement of sexual harassment statutes . . .

As president, Bill takes credit for large cutbacks in welfare spending; signs legislation that virtually abolishes due process for illegal immigrants; signs the “Effective Death Penalty Act,” which severely limits death row appeals; opposes international efforts to ban land mines; supports legislation authorizing “roving wire-taps;” single handedly shreds 20 years of work by the radical feminist movement; dotes on, and accepts campaign contributions from, the very same Chinese whom he once referred to as the “Butchers of Beijing;” supports large increases in defense spending; and is arguably promiscuous in his use of military power.

So far as I can tell, only two tenets are still sacred to Bill and his fellow “liberals” in Congress. They are racial quotas and abortion rights, neither of which were part of the traditional liberal agenda.

There were several elements to this strategy that are worth noting. For starters, Bill could afford to disregard the interests of some of his party’s activist groups because he did not have to worry in either of his election campaigns about a third party candidate emerging from within his own ranks, which is the killer consequence for a presidential politician who ignores his base.

The first time around, his liberal *bona fides* were so good that anything he did to portray himself as less devoted to the radical left wing of his party was viewed by the activists in this wing as an election ploy. The second time around, he had such good control over the party machinery that, despite his “character” problems, there was no chance that anyone could launch an assault on him from the left. And just as importantly, he made certain that he kept faith with the largest, most important, and most committed special interest advocates, the abortion rights crowd and the left-wing leaders of the African-American community, even as he moved to the center on many of liberalism’s longest held tenets.

Now I don’t know what election strategy Al pursued in the last election, other than worrying about whether his “earth tones” were earthy enough. But the one thing that is clear to me about George W. Bush’s campaign against Gore was that his “compassionate conservatism” was aimed directly at the political center, at the expense of some key elements of his conservative base.

More importantly, he has governed in the same manner. Like Bill, he has made a concerted effort to keep many of the most powerful of his party’s special interest groups satisfied, most especially the anti-abortion activists and the Christian coalition. But, also like Bill, he has assiduously courted the center to the chagrin of many of his supporters. Among other ways, he has done this by providing more and more, and bigger and bigger government at every opportunity, with little if any regard for the long term consequences of out of control spending and the vast accumulation of power at the federal level, concerns that lie at the heart of much of his conservative base.

From the perspective of the Republican Party, this is, of course, a good thing. As Bill demonstrated, it is difficult to unseat a sitting president who has strong support from the center. But from the standpoint of a concerned conservative, who believes that the battle against the Leviathan state is crucial to the long term health of a market economy, having a Republican president who has decided to abandon this battle in exchange for an easy reelection is in many ways worse than having a liberal in charge who is doing the same thing.

As a campaign strategy, there is really no question that this is powerful stuff. It enabled Bill to become the first Democrat elected to two full terms since Roosevelt, and it looks increasingly as if it will allow George Bush to escape the family legacy and avoid an ignominious reelection collapse. But whether it is good for the country is another question.

It is, I think, worth remembering that not only did Bill's tenure severely damage the credibility and viability of some of his party's most ardent activist groups, such as the radical feminists, but it also helped to produce the current political climate, in which someone who wholeheartedly embraces virtually all of the activist causes, such as Howard Dean, can be labeled a wacko, even by the liberal, mainstream media.

On whom and how severely Bush might wreak such damage to conservative causes remains to be seen. His political advisors, most notably head honcho Karl Rove, have assured conservative activists that this campaign strategy will facilitate not only the president's reelection, but the election of larger majorities in both the House and Senate. And this, in turn, he implies, will allow the president to revert to his allegedly conservative roots in his second term, tackling such issues as market reform of Social Security and Medicare. Such promises are, however, far easier to make than keep.

In the end, there is a strong possibility that the strategy of playing to the center first will do irreparable harm to many true conservative causes. Indeed, there is every reason to believe that in 2012, a candidate who professes an affinity for both lower taxes *and* smaller government will be considered entirely out of step with the political mainstream. Indeed, by that time such a candidate might even be labeled a total wacko, even by the conservative mainstream media.

**THE NEW AND IMPROVED GENDER GAP.** In the previous piece, Mark notes that there are endless ways that the American public can be divided into two parts for purposes of discussing and analyzing politics. Aside from his "activists" vs. "centrists" analysis, one of the most interesting parsings this year could be the old boy-girl one, or as it is referred to in political parlance, the "gender gap."

Ever since the 1992 presidential election, when the young, charming, and good looking Bill Clinton came from nowhere (or Little Rock, whichever you prefer) to trounce the older and somewhat awkward George H. W. Bush, Democrats have been crowing and Republicans fretting about the fact that Clinton beat Bush handily among women voters, who, almost single-handedly provided his margin of victory. Indeed, 1992 was "the year of the woman," and Bill Clinton rode the crest of this wave all the way to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

In the 1996 contest, the story was much the same. The older, less amiable, and markedly less telegenic, Bob Dole was no match for Clinton, who along with Al Gore, appealed directly to a large constituency of "soccer moms." Again, Clinton won a significantly larger chunk of women's votes and cruised to re-election. The gender gap was, in the estimation of many analysts, particularly those on the left, a real and sustained phenomenon.

Again in 2000, the Democratic candidate (in this case Gore) won a larger share of women's votes than did his opponent. But this time the story was somewhat different. Looking at the

numbers, Republicans were able to make a credible argument that the proverbial worm had turned, and the gender gap now favored them. Yes, the Democrats still appealed to a majority of women, but the GOP appealed to an even larger and growing majority of men.

Last week, this new gender gap was confirmed by early poll numbers presented by none other than Mark Penn, the man who made his name and reputation as Bill Clinton's personal pollster. At the Democratic Leadership Council's annual "conversation" in Philadelphia, Penn unveiled his numbers, which showed dramatically waning support for Democrats among men in general and white men in particular. According to a *Washington Post* account, Penn's conclusions were both dramatic and disturbing for Democrats, whom he told, "unless the party strongly repositions itself, President Bush will be virtually impossible to beat in 2004."

Though Penn's data shows that President Bush is vulnerable, it also shows that Democrats have two significant problems with male voters. First, men associate the Democratic Party with high taxes and big, inefficient government, two things of which they are none too fond. Second, in the wake of September 11, men, by what *the Post* called a "huge gap," trust Bush more than any Democrat on matters of national security. And given the tone of the early campaign, neither of these opinions appears too likely to change.

Certainly, none of the Democratic candidates has distinguished himself (or herself, I guess, if Carol Moseley Braun is still running) on taxes. This spring when the President pushed to eliminate the phase-ins and to make all the rate cuts passed in 2001 effective immediately, he did something very smart, economics aside. He made it necessary for his Democratic opponents to promise to raise taxes.

Prior to this year's tax bill, Democrats who wanted to undo the Bush tax cuts could argue that they simply wanted to halt any further tax cuts. Now, though, any reneging entails actually promising to raise taxes. And all of the Democratic hopefuls have taken the bait.

As the editors of *The Wall Street Journal* put it, all of this makes for pretty good political theater and should make the Bush team feel a little more confident about their prospects. They wrote:

Karl Rove often gets credit for being smart, but it doesn't hurt that President Bush's chief political strategist is lucky. His latest good fortune is the battle between Howard Dean and John Kerry over how much to raise taxes. The scrap is a microcosm of the current Democratic problem.

Consistent with his punch-in-the-gut campaign style, Mr. Dean wants the full monty. In the name of his Vermont "fiscal conservatism," the Democrats' new Presidential front-runner proposes to repeal all three of the Bush tax cuts, right down to the last penny for every taxpayer. In addition, as he recently told NBC's Tim Russert, he'd raise the income threshold on the payroll tax, another huge tax increase on anyone making more than \$87,000 a year.

Mr. Kerry, who has lost his New Hampshire lead to Mr. Dean, says this is going too far. "Real Democrats don't walk away from the middle class," he charges, explaining that he'd preserve the Bush tax credits for children and marriage penalty relief. But he'd

still repeal the rest of the Bush tax cuts, including the rate cuts on income, dividends and capital gains. (Apparently the Massachusetts Senator thinks no one in the middle class owns stock.) Mr. Dean fired back that this is a sign that Mr. Kerry lacks the courage of Democratic “principles.”

Mr. Rove must be wondering what he did to deserve this. In pursuit of Mr. Dean, every Democratic Presidential candidate is now proposing some kind of tax increase, from the humongous (in Mr. Dean's case, \$2 trillion over 10 years) to merely the huge.

As bad as this seems, things may be even worse on the national security front. Somehow, all of the Democratic presidential wannabes, except Joe Lieberman, got it in their heads that George W. Bush’s approach to dealing with the enemies of the United States is simply too macho, whether in Afghanistan, Iraq, or here at home, and that they can neutralize his advantage on national security issues by being more, “sensitive.”

A couple of months ago, when the President, in full flight gear, landed on the deck of the USS Abraham Lincoln, his opponents had multiple hissy fits, calling his landing and meet-and-greet, “showy,” “undignified,” and “ostentatious.” A few weeks later, the President challenged those remnants of the Saddamite regime waging a guerilla campaign against American soldiers in Iraq, defying them to “bring it on.” And again his opponents began foaming at the mouth. Howard Dean and John Kerry called the comments “reckless” and “unwise,” respectively, and Dick Gephardt accused Bush of “taunting” the enemy and engaging in “phony macho business.”

Over the past couple of weeks, this same scene has played out over and over again. Accusations of “phony macho rhetoric” have become a staple of the Gephardt campaign. And Dean, Kerry and the rest have tripped all over themselves to call the deaths of Uday and Qusay Hussein overkill, and then to call the display of their bodies grotesque and morbid.

As I indicated earlier, Joe Lieberman is the sole Democratic candidate who seems to understand Penn’s warning that “if Democrats can’t close the security gap, then they can’t be competitive in the next election” This is not surprising, of course, since he was a victim of this new gender gap in 2000, when men repeatedly told pollsters that they liked Bush better than Gore because Bush is a man’s man and Gore is, well, a guy who paid a woman consultant a ton of money to tell him that he’s an “autumn” and therefore looks better in “earth tones.”

But Lieberman is not going to be the Democratic candidate, and it’s probably too late for any of the other hopefuls to find a color or tone that will make them appear aggressive enough to convince the majority of American males that they have what it takes to stand up against a crowd of murderous, America-hating Arabs. So, the new gender gap would appear to be a winner for George Bush, the swaggering, self assured cowboy from the Great State of Texas, whether the ladies like it or not.

**THE CATHOLIC MIGRATION CONTINUES.** For most of the twentieth century, the Catholic vote was reliably and resolutely Democratic. In the early part of the century, the majority of Catholics were poor immigrants, whose “papist” views were considered to be dangerous by the elite, wealthy, and almost exclusively Protestant GOP ruling class. Thus, as

they settled in and began to prosper, they naturally become a reliable and steadfast component of the Roosevelt coalition.

The Catholic-Democrat alliance hit its peak in the early 1960s. Jack Kennedy received an astounding 75% of his fellow Catholics' votes in 1960, and four years later, Johnson bested even that impressive total, tallying nearly 80% of ballots cast by Catholics.

By the early 1970s, though, things had begun to change a bit. In 1972, Nixon became only the second Republican (the first being Eisenhower in '56) to win a majority of the Catholic vote. And in the 1980s, Reagan and George H.W. Bush put together three consecutive campaigns that produced Catholic majorities.

Though many factors are credited for breaking the Democratic stranglehold on Catholic votes, nearly all observers agree that one of the most significant was the tumult that both immediately preceded and followed the Supreme Court's 1973 ruling in *Roe v. Wade*. The Democratic Party's recognized position on abortion is in direct conflict with Catholic doctrine, and after *Roe*, many of the Catholic faithful were forced to choose between party and the Church. Not surprisingly, a good number chose the Church.

All of that said, though abortion has pushed the collective Catholic vote to the right over the past three decades, the Catholic realignment from Democrat to Republican remains incomplete. Indeed, the aforementioned back-to-back-to-back Catholic victories strung together by Reagan and Bush the elder were matched by Bill Clinton and Al Gore, who captured a majority of Catholic votes in '92, '96, and '00, respectively.

But that may be changing. You may recall that in the April 21 issue of this newsletter, I wrote a piece entitled "Excommunicated . . . Or Something Close To It," in which I reported on the potential impact of a Doctrinal Note on Catholics in American politics issued by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger's office in the Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith in Rome.

This Note, I wrote, was bad news for many Democratic politicians, as it admonished them as Catholics to uphold and support the teachings of the Church in their public lives. The following quote, which I also cited in the original article, comes from a *Weekly Standard* piece by Joseph Bottum, and sums up the note's content and potential bearing quite nicely.

"A well-formed Christian conscience," the note declared, "does not permit one to vote for a political program or an individual law which contradicts the fundamental contents of faith and morals."

The Doctrinal Note marks at least the beginning of the end of the Vatican's toleration of what the pope's biographer George Weigel has called "Cuomoism" in the American Church: the effort to finesse abortion by declaring oneself personally opposed but politically supportive of laws allowing abortion. Catholics have a "duty to be morally coherent," the Doctrinal Note declares, and the Catholic fight on the life issues – abortion, euthanasia, and cloning – is not some merely prudential question, to be decided by political give and take. The Catholic Church doesn't take political positions

– except when politics intrudes into something, like the right to life that ought to be beyond the power of politicians.

In my piece, I noted that both Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle and California Governor Gray Davis, two openly pro-choice Catholics, had been admonished by their respective Bishops for professing to be Catholics, yet contradicting Church teachings in their public lives, most especially when it comes to the issue of abortion. And, again citing Bottum, I also noted that several other Catholic Democrats could, in theory, be similarly chastised by their bishops under the guidance provided by Doctrinal Note. Bottum wrote:

There's quite a list of pro-abortion Catholics in Washington – beginning with Nancy Pelosi, the Democratic minority leader in the House – who could use similar instruction in “the duty to be morally coherent.” Just in the Senate, there's Biden, Collins, Daschle, Dodd, Harkin, Kennedy, Kerry, Landrieu, Leahy, Mikulski, Murray, Reed, and more.

All of this, I concluded, was likely to have the effect of pushing the Catholic voting bloc even further to the right, perhaps pushing it into the arms of the GOP permanently. Then last week, it received another push, a shove, actually.

When the Senate failed to invoke cloture (the poor man's filibuster) on the nomination of devout and unapologetic Catholic William H. Pryor to the federal bench, the long-simmering tensions between Senate Republicans and Democrats over President Bush's judicial nominees finally boiled over. Some in the GOP accused their Democratic colleagues of anti-Catholic bias, and the Democrats, particularly the Catholic contingent, fired back with the rather bizarre charge of “religious McCarthyism.” Needless to say, things got ugly quickly.

Now, I do not have the space to get into an extensive examination of the merits of either side's claims in a piece such as this, but I'm not entirely sure that the merits matter too terribly much anyway. Some on the right criticized their fellow Republicans for resorting to playing the “religion” card simply because they couldn't get their way, while others suggested that the claim of anti-Catholicism was ludicrous, in that the Democrats would be just as likely to reject the nomination of any other similarly inclined jurist, be he an evangelical, a Mormon, or a pro-life atheist. Democrats, they noted oppose the belief, not the religion. At the same time, Democrats like Pat Leahy (VT) and Dick Durbin (IL) argued that it would be difficult for them, as Catholics, to carry an anti-Catholic bias. And all such arguments carry some merit. But as I said, I don't think logic matters.

Whether the Democrats in the Senate are self-loathing Catholics or simply equal-opportunity *fidesphobes* is beside the point. The bottom line is that many Catholics, particularly many Catholic leaders, believe, based in large part on what they witnessed in the Pryor case, that the Democrats have established a litmus test that denies Catholics ***who entirely embrace the beliefs of their Church*** the opportunity to participate fully in American public life. These sentiments were expressed most notably by Archbishop Charles Chaput, bishop of Denver, who reproached Durbin in particular for the way in which he dealt with Pryor. The archbishop wrote:

I've never met Mr. Pryor, but his political life is a matter of public record. He has served the State of Alabama with distinction, enforcing its laws and court decisions

fairly and consistently. This is why President Bush nominated him to the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, and why the Senate Judiciary Committee approved him last Wednesday for consideration by the full Senate.

But the committee debate on Pryor was ugly, and the vote to advance his nomination split exactly along party lines. Why? Because Mr. Pryor believes that Catholic teaching about the sanctity of life is true; that the 1973 Supreme Court *Roe v. Wade* decision was a poorly reasoned mistake; and that abortion is wrong in all cases, even rape and incest. As a result, Americans were treated to the bizarre spectacle of non-Catholic Senators Orrin Hatch and Jeff Sessions defending Mr. Pryor's constitutionally protected religious rights to Mr. Pryor's critics, including Senator Richard Durbin, an "abortion-rights" *Catholic*.

According to Senator Durbin (as reported by EWTN), "Many Catholics who oppose abortion personally do not believe the laws of the land should prohibit abortion for all others in extreme cases involving rape, incest and the life and the health of the mother." This kind of propaganda makes the abortion lobby proud, but it should humiliate any serious Catholic. At a minimum, Catholic members of Congress like Senator Durbin should actually read and pray over the "Catechism of the Catholic Church" and the encyclical "*Evangelium Vitae*" before they explain the Catholic faith to anyone.

How much, if at all, this will affect Catholic voters' affinity for Democrats is, of course, impossible to tell at this point. But if I were a Democratic politician, I think I would be more than a little concerned. As I said earlier, the Catholic voting bloc has been migrating right for several decades, but appears in no great hurry to reach its inevitable destination. The last thing the Democrats want to do is give devout Catholic voters that final push that lands them permanently within the folds of the GOP, particularly given that the fastest growing and largest ethnic minority group, Hispanics, is also overwhelmingly and devoutly Catholic.

Senate Democrats seem utterly convinced that their unprecedented obstruction of President Bush's judicial appointments will not cost them anything at the ballot box. And up until the Pryor incident, I was inclined to agree with them. Judicial appointments are, after all, generally well down the list of important issues for most voters. With the Pryor nomination, however, Senate Democrats may have pushed things too far. And in the end, this may cost both them and their party dearly for many election cycles to come.

---

THE POLITICAL FORUM

Copyright 2003. The Political Forum. 8563 Senedo Road, Mt. Jackson, Virginia 22842, tel. 540-477-9762, fax 540-477-3359. All rights reserved. Information contained herein is based on data obtained from recognized services, issuer reports or communications, or other sources believed to be reliable. However, such information has not been verified by us, and we do not make any representations as to its accuracy or completeness, and we are not responsible for typographical errors. Any statements nonfactual in nature constitute only current opinions which are subject to change without notice.