

Mark L. Melcher Publisher
melcher@thepoliticalforum.com

Stephen R. Soukup Editor
soukup@thepoliticalforum.com

THEY SAID IT

“There are many methods for predicting the future. For example, you can read horoscopes, tea leaves, tarot cards, or crystal balls. Collectively these methods are known as ‘nutty methods.’

“Or you can put well-researched facts into sophisticated computer models, more commonly referred to as ‘a complete waste of time.’”

Dilbert creator, cartoonist Scott Adams

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Life Without Elections

DOMESTIC FORECAST '05: LIFE WITHOUT ELECTIONS.

At the beginning of my forecast piece last year, I lamented the fact that my predictions, in contrast to Mark's, necessarily dealt with very specific events that were predetermined by the election calendar and would have incontrovertible outcomes. This, I argued, made my job of forecasting domestic political events more perilous, as the accuracy of my prophecies would be knowable long before the end of the year.

Ah, to have such problems today. As it turns out, last year's piece was a breeze. Of the seven predictions I made, six of them were dead on, namely that President Bush would win re-election; that the GOP would increase its majority in the House slightly and in the Senate by 3-5 seats; that erstwhile Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle would be one of the Democratic Party's election day casualties; that the Culture War would burn “white hot” in the campaign, with the election eventually being determined in part by the issues of abortion and gay marriage; and that the GOP would solidify its position as the majority party in the country. All things considered, I did pretty well.

This year, in contrast, there are precious few specific, concrete events on which I can focus my auguring. So, like Mark did last week, I have tried to determine not only the outcome of important events over the next twelve months, but which events qualify as important. So here goes.

Prediction #1: At year's end, Donald Rumsfeld will still be Secretary of Defense, despite the fact that he will remain the preferred whipping boy of the anti-war factions on both the political left and right.

Over the past month or so, the intensity of the effort to rid the nation of the services of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has increased exponentially. The members of the mainstream media have disliked Secretary Rumsfeld since the invasion of Iraq began. The entrenched military establishment has detested him intensely since Day One of the Bush administration. And the political left has hated him since roughly 1962, when he was first elected to Congress. But the proverbial long knives did not really come out until last month, when the Secretary made the mistake of being honest with the soldiers he was visiting in the Middle East, telling one of them in response to a question planted by a reporter that "You go to war with the army you have."

This response, despite being honest and taken entirely out of context (the full answer, which wouldn't fit in a sound bite, is actually fairly thorough and thoughtful) violated the Prime Directive of the modern therapeutic state: it was "insensitive." And this, of course, brought howls from all corners. In addition to the usual suspects, a handful of Republican legislators, including two highly decorated and well respected Vietnam War heroes, called for Rumsfeld's head, criticizing not only his insensitivity in responding to the soldiers, but his handling of the entire war, from initial invasion plan to Abu Ghraib and on to the post-invasion reconstruction effort. At that point the "smart" reporters and pundits all began their "Rumsfeld watch," waiting with baited breath for the day when they would, at long last, see him forced to resign in disgrace.

Well, I have news for them: it's not going to happen, not today; not tomorrow; not this year. I doubt seriously if Secretary Rumsfeld will serve out the entirety of the second term. He is 72, after all. But he'll hang on for a while, certainly through this year.

There are a handful of reasons why Rumsfeld will survive. For starters, George W. Bush is almost certainly one of the most stubborn and independent men ever to occupy the White House. The very fact that official Washington wants Rumsfeld gone is, one would guess, more than enough reason for the President to keep him. Indeed, it is not unreasonable to think that the chorus of Rumsfeld bashing will actually extend his tenure beyond where it might otherwise have ended. And if you don't like the "stubborn" explanation, consider the negative impact on the morale of the entire administration if Bush began providing every head that the mob requested.

A second reason that the Secretary of Defense will remain is that, in the opinion of his boss and a great many others (including yours truly), he is one of the very best Defense Secretaries the nation has ever had, the howls from his detractors notwithstanding. The accusation that he allowed the military to go to war unprepared is preposterous, to say the least. And the charge that he is solely responsible for not adequately anticipating the intensity of the post-Saddam terrorist insurgency is equally ridiculous.

Though neither the mainstream press nor Rumsfeld's critics on Capitol Hill will ever admit it, the entire "the troops aren't equipped" and "the vehicles lack armor" critiques of Rumsfeld have largely been proven to be complete fabrications or, in some cases, the fault of Congress, not the Department of Defense.

When the planted question was asked of Rumsfeld, better than 97% of the vehicles in that soldier's unit had been "up-armored," and the process for armoring the remaining 20 vehicles was already underway, and was, in fact, completed the day after Rumsfeld's visit. Theater-wide, Army Brigadier General Jeffrey Sorensen has said that roughly 35,000 vehicles need to be up-armored, yet, according to the (Nashville) *Tennessean*, Congress has only funded armor for 29,000 of those.

As for Rumsfeld's allegedly fatal flaw of being unable to anticipate every development in a war and to field an army that performs flawlessly, that may be the dumbest criticism of all. As von Clausewitz famously put it, "no

battle plan long survives contact with the enemy.” Or, as Rich Lowry and David Rivkin put it in a *Los Angeles Times* piece published on Friday, “[W]aging war is unavoidably difficult, unpredictable and deadly. To think otherwise is certain to weaken public support for the use of force and therefore only undermines our ability to apply it when necessary.”

Of course, the biggest reason why Rumsfeld will survive the latest attack on him – and the reason I think that the Rumsfeld story will qualify as one of the most important of the upcoming year – is that while the Defense Secretary’s political critics paint themselves as earnest and concerned advocates for the American soldiers being sent to war under incompetent leadership, their criticism actually smacks more of political opportunism. A brief look at Secretary Rumsfeld’s most aggressive and vociferous political critics is instructive.

First there are the omnipresent Democratic hecklers, who insist that the war was “the wrong war in the wrong place at the wrong time,” and who, despite the fact that they spent the last four decades asserting that the murderous military thugs at the Pentagon need to be reined in more aggressively by their civilian masters, now insist that all would be well in Iraq if only the short-sighted and obdurate Rumsfeld paid more attention to his brilliant and noble generals.

Then there are the two Republican Senators, John McCain and Chuck Hagel, who have presumed or, in Hagel’s case, acknowledged intentions to run for President in 2008, and therefore have an interest in putting some distance between themselves and the policies of this administration.

Of course, there is also the disgraced former Senate Majority Leader, Trent Lott, who was, in his eyes, thrown to the wolves by the Bush administration simply because he waxed nostalgic about the good old days of Jim Crow and who loves budgetary pork almost as much as life itself and fears that Secretary Rumsfeld will cut more domestic military bases, perhaps in Mississippi. And finally there is the

archetypal RiNO, Maine’s Susan Collins, who feels about opportunities to criticize her fellow Republicans the way Ted Kennedy feels about plates of fried cheese: in short, she’s never met one she didn’t like.

What all of these critics share is the belief that the war in Iraq is going badly and will continue to degenerate. They also share the ability to learn from the political mistakes of others. They know, for example, that John Kerry was soundly defeated two months ago, despite running a *de facto* anti-war campaign against a largely unpopular war. And they know that one of the more pertinent reasons he lost was because the American people, by and large, really like President Bush. So the critics have found themselves another scapegoat, one they believe is less popular and thus more easily blamed for the setbacks in Iraq.

As noted above, the truly important aspect of the Rumsfeld story is that the ranks of the Secretary’s critics can be expected to swell considerably over the next several months. As the work in Iraq proves more and more difficult, more and more Republicans will begin to worry about the potential effects of the war on their future political prospects and will suffer buyers’ remorse.

Some, like Senator Hagel, will insist that trouble in Iraq indicates that the GOP should not have abandoned its long tradition of realism and embraced the hokey idealism of the neocons. And others, like Senator McCain, will insist that the war was well conceived but poorly executed. In both cases, the newcomers, like their predecessors in the movement, will temper their criticism, coming down against the war, but not wanting to appear disloyal to the President personally. And in this endeavor, the Secretary of Defense will make a perfect scapegoat. Like God, if Rumsfeld didn’t exist, he would have to be created.

Prediction #2: At year's end, Dick Cheney will still be Vice President.

I know this seems like an obvious one. And I agree; it is. But there are those who don't think so. And since it follows the pattern set by the last prediction, I thought I'd address it briefly, particularly since it broaches the subject of whether George W. Bush will, in his second term, play politics according to inside-the-beltway expectations.

There are those, both on the left and the right who expect that George W. Bush will, over the next year or two, replace Dick Cheney with someone younger, more charismatic, and more politically ambitious. As Mark and I have noted a handful of times over the past few months, Vice President Cheney has indicated that he has no political aspirations beyond the Bush presidency and therefore has no intention of running for President himself in 2008. And some political observers just can't accept that. It is contrary to everything they think they know about the political movers and shakers in this town.

The way things will play out, according to these conspiracy nuts, is that the Vice President will check himself into the hospital complaining of chest pains, will be declared "at risk" by his doctors if he continues his current stress load, and will subsequently resign. He will then be replaced by someone like Secretary of State-designate Condoleezza Rice or former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani; someone who wants to run for president in '08 and will thus have the opportunity to seek the proverbial "third term" of the Bush administration as the near-incumbent.

This is, in a word, absurd.

Though I know there are those who disagree with me, I continue to believe that Dick Cheney's is the most consequential vice presidency in living memory. He is not, as the leftist caricatures portray him, the evil puppet master pulling the strings of the dimwitted marionette (i.e. George W. Bush). But, he is a vitally important component in this administration, with input and responsibility far surpassing that

of any of his immediate predecessors. The idea that George Bush would toss him aside simply to secure political advantage for his party is beyond ridiculous, completely disregarding the President's sense of loyalty (which is legendary), his reliance on the Vice President's contributions, and most notably his stubborn refusal to surrender to conventional Washington wisdom.

And this doesn't even take into account Vice President Cheney's potential thoughts on such a scheme. Does anyone really believe that Cheney, the alleged brains of this operation, would allow himself to be used so callously and pushed out so brusquely? I, for one, wouldn't bet on it. He may be a 63-year-old with a bad ticker, but I would not want to be the guy assigned to give the Vice President the bad news and politely escort him from the grounds.

After four years of seeing George W. Bush up close, there are still a great many Washington insiders who still have no idea what he is about. For better or worse (and there is undoubtedly some of both), George Bush refuses to be a slave to inside-the-Beltway expectations. He will not change Vice Presidents simply out of partisan expediency any more than he will accept the assessments of the so-called experts who insist that policy, be it foreign or domestic, cannot be changed in a non-incremental manner in this town. Which brings us to . . .

Prediction #3: President Bush will push his triumvirate of domestic policy reforms: tort reform, Social Security reform, and tax reform. Though conventional wisdom will maintain that Bush is tilting at windmills on all three fronts, he will, again, prove the skeptics wrong. Some form of tort reform will be passed this year. And while Social Security reform and tax reform will not, Bush will advance both causes considerably, giving lie to the maxims that one is the "third rail" of government and that the other cannot be addressed in a comprehensive and radical manner.

• **Tort Reform.** For years, conservatives were told that their fantasies about enacting tort reform at

the federal level were just that, fantasies. Too many lawyers in Congress; too much money flowing into the system from the plaintiffs' bar; and too many truly injured "average" Americans collectively made the idea of tort reform highly impractical at best. Or so we were told.

But no one seems to have delivered that message to President Bush, who has, over the last couple of weeks, laid out a three-pronged strategy for comprehensive tort reform, at least one prong of which appears to have a real shot at being enacted quickly this year. In the President's estimation, the three primary components of tort reform legislation should be: class-action reform; medical liability reform; and asbestos litigation reform. Of these, class action reform appears to have enough support on Capitol Hill to be swiftly passed and signed, if, as the President has noted, a "good piece of legislation" is introduced and scheduled.

Medical liability and asbestos litigation reform will, in contrast, prove more difficult, though neither should be definitively written off at this point. Consensus, even among the respective Republican caucuses, will be difficult to achieve on both fronts, and both prospective remedies will permit the usual demagoging by Democrats on behalf of the "little guy." At the very least, remedies for both problems now have the expressed support of President Bush, something they have never before had from him, or from any other President for that matter. At minimum, both issues will be debated openly and aggressively, thus raising the public's interest and understanding, perhaps setting the scene for passage, either late in the session or in future sessions.

- **Tax Reform.** The inside-the-Beltway consensus is that while President Bush will talk a good game about tax reform, he will neither push reform too hard nor support even in principle anything terribly radical. Both contentions make perfect sense (which, naturally, is why they have become conventional wisdom), though I'm not sure I'd wager too heavily on both proving entirely accurate. Twice now, George W. Bush has defied Washington wisdom on taxes, pushing

through marginal rate and dividend tax cuts under conditions that most of the so-called experts said made such cuts impossible to enact.

It is true that Bush will not make taxes his foremost priority this year (more on that in a minute), and it is also true that we are unlikely to see a flat tax or national sales tax replace the current income tax regime any time soon. But that does not necessarily mean that the President will not act boldly, pushing reform far more radical than most of the allegedly informed observers expect.

It is believed, for example, that the President and his advisors currently prefer tax reform plans that would favor savings and capital creation. And while it certainly wouldn't quite constitute the broad attack on the status quo that abolition of the IRS would, elimination of the capital gains and dividend taxes, the two taxes that most inhibit savings and investment, would nevertheless be truly revolutionary by Washington standards.

Late last week, the President named two former Senators to head his bipartisan commission on tax reform, Republican Connie Mack and Democrat John Breaux, and gave them instructions to look at every possible option and to report back to him by July 31st. The inclusion of Breaux on this commission is particularly instructive and good for those who expect the President to move boldly.

Though a Democrat, Breaux has been an uncompromising and farsighted advocate of market-friendly reforms for several years. As head of President Clinton's National Bipartisan Commission on the Future of Medicare, Breaux pushed greater competition and greater private-sector involvement in the Medicare system and complained loudly when Clinton summarily dismissed his recommendations. Breaux was also a member of the Center for Strategic and International Studies' National Commission on Retirement Policy and in 1999, based on the findings that commission, sponsored legislation permitting workers to retain two percent of their payroll taxes for deposit in private retirement accounts. The

inclusion of Breaux on President Bush's tax team will almost certainly lend an air of bipartisanship to the commission and its conclusions, while nevertheless maintaining their free market bent.

- **Social Security Reform.** Without question, President Bush's highest profile domestic agenda item will be Social Security reform. Already, the scope of the undertaking and the potential pitfalls contained therein are drawing comparisons to the Clintons' attempted overhaul of the health care system in 1993. More than a few Republican legislators are worried that Bush's single-mindedness on the issue will, like Clinton's health care debacle, cost his party its Congressional majority.

Indeed, the architect of the revolution that swept the GOP to power in 1994, former Speaker Newt Gingrich, has been one of the most outspoken critics of the President's presumed plans for Social Security reform. Though the President's plan won't officially be unveiled until late this month, there are whispers that it will propose indexing benefit increases to inflation, rather than to the rise in wages. This, Gingrich and others argue, will be painted by reform's opponents as a "cut" in benefits and may well doom the entire effort before it is even off the ground. Gingrich and his allies, including longtime privatization advocate Grover Norquist of Americans for Tax Reform, favor private accounts, but balk at the political damage that may be wrought by the indexing changes. Their concern is not, in my opinion, entirely unwarranted.

This lack of consensus among those who should be allies in the endeavor is the principle reason I believe reform will stall this year. Before President Bush will have the opportunity to sell Democrats and the public on his plan, he will have to sell his own party.

Fortunately, in this effort, the President will have several advantages that the Clintons did not have in '93. Perhaps the most important of these will be the help he will receive in this undertaking from a handful of high-profile, well-respected, and effective private advocates of reform, who will raise an estimated \$100

million to help wage the lobbying and public relations campaigns necessary to win the hearts and minds of both voters and hesitant legislators. And the most important of these advocates may well be our old friend Steve Moore.

Many of you undoubtedly know Steve as the President of the Club for Growth and the onetime Director of Fiscal Policy Studies for the Cato Institute. Mark and I have known Steve and thought very highly of him for so long that we used to refer to him in print as "one of the brightest *young* economists in Washington." (He's now well into his mid-40s.) In 1999, he and Richard Gilder started the Club for Growth to promote pro-growth economic policies and candidates. In less than five years, Steve, through a combination of nerve, dedication, energy, and political brilliance, turned the Club into one of the most effective and respected political advocacy groups in the nation, even earning it the title of "the most fearsome 527" from Slate's liberal columnist Timothy Noah.

As you may have heard, Steve left the Club for Growth last week. According to the *Wall Street Journal's* Paul Gigot and John Fund, Steve will, "be forming the Free Enterprise Fund, which will raise money to lobby for private Social Security accounts, tax reform, and other good things." While we don't see this as a positive development for the Club for Growth, we do think it is good for those who favor Social Security reform. Mark and I expect that Steve will do as remarkably well in his new undertaking as he has done in those previous.

In any case, I believe that President Bush will make considerable headway on the issue during the next several months. And while I don't expect that a bill will be enacted this Congressional session, I do think that the administration and its allies will advance the cause far enough that the presumption that Social Security is the untouchable third rail of government will disappear as quickly as has much other conventional wisdom during this president's tenure in office.

Prediction #4: Corruption will re-emerge as a major issue, causing Republicans considerable consternation, and perhaps costing Democrats a presidential frontrunner.

Republicans have a couple of potentially major problems on the corruption/ethics front. For starters, the GOP has occupied the majority in Congress just long enough to have grown comfortable with its position and the power that position enables it to wield. And, as any schoolboy knows, with power comes corruption or, at the very least, what we Catholics refer to as the “near occasion of the sin,” i.e., the opportunity to be corrupt.

I wrote a long piece on GOP Congressional temptations a couple of weeks ago, so I won't dwell on the issue here. I will simply make two brief points. First, there is little doubt that some within the party have, indeed, leveraged the power of the majority in ways that would be deemed unethical at best. And two, the party dodged a major bullet last week when, due to a popular uprising amongst the rank-and-file House members, GOP leaders abandoned their plans to “dumb-down” the caucus's ethics rules. I doubt that we have heard the last of the accusations – some scurrilous, some not – that members of the majority party in Congress have behaved less-than-admirably over the past decade. But at least House leaders maintained the ethical sense and ability to handle such charges themselves.

At the same time, George W. Bush, as a second-term President, now faces what columnist Brendan Miniter recently labeled “the legacy of Richard M. Nixon.” As Miniter noted two weeks ago, “Only two other presidents have won re-election since Tricky Dick resigned in disgrace amid the Watergate scandal in 1974 and both of them – Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton – found their second terms mired in scandal.”

For a variety of reasons – some ideological, some merely occupational – the media will hunt relentlessly for scandal in this administration. And while I have no doubt about the President's personal integrity, every administration has some bad eggs, and there is always a possibility that someone will do something so

heinous as to cast aspersions on the entire Presidency. And as last week's Armstrong Williams-Department of Education payola mini-scandal demonstrates, there is no shortage of opportunities in this town to bend the boundaries of ethical behavior and risk compromising the reputation of the administration in the process.

All that said, if I were a Democrat I might be a little worried that the real corruption/scandal news this year would focus on one of my own, rather than one of the Republican power brokers. As I noted in the aforementioned recent piece on corruption, the U.N. Oil-for-Food disaster is one of the biggest, most odious scandals in recent memory. Indeed it looks as if this monstrous outrage may have tentacles that reach all the way to the White House. Unfortunately for Democrats, that's the *Clinton* White House.

On December 17, *The Washington Times* reported the following regarding the Oil-for-Food program:

A federal grand-jury investigation of pardoned financier Marc Rich's role in the U.N. oil-for-food scandal has focused on whether he helped Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein reward the families of Palestinian bombers who carried out suicide attacks in Israel, sources said yesterday.

Law-enforcement authorities and congressional investigators said the grand jury wants to know whether cash funneled to Saddam by oil traders — including Mr. Rich — to help arrange multimillion-dollar Iraqi oil deals for political leaders and well-heeled investors was used by the now-deposed dictator to pay the bombers' families . . .

“Can we legitimately speculate that some of the blood money Saddam paid to kill people in Israel may have originated or at least been touched by Marc Rich through the United Nations' dreadful oil-for-food program?” said a source close to the probe. “We know Saddam Hussein was getting a rake off from the U.N. program and Rich was in the middle of that.”

Rich, you may recall, is the billionaire tax-evader extraordinaire pardoned by Bill Clinton on the final day of his presidency against the advice of every legal advisor in both his White House and the Justice Department. Clinton partisans have called the pardon “inexplicable,” but that’s not entirely true. As liberal blogger Mickey Kaus noted when this latest chapter in the Marc Rich story broke, there is a not-unreasonable explanation for what happened and why Clinton granted the pardon. To whit:

Even if the latest allegations about Marc Rich – that he helped broker Saddam’s oil-for-food deals–prove accurate, that won’t be the main reason Clinton’s pardon of the fugitive financier was scandalous. Saddam could presumably always get *someone* to broker his lucrative schemes – if not Rich, then another high-level operator. **The Marc Rich pardon was scandalous mainly because it taught a generation of Americans that you could buy your way out of punishment . . .** But buy with *what?* . . . Here’s an instance where the convenient case for public figure privacy in matters of sex – made most conveniently by Clinton himself, but also by Jeffrey Toobin, Andrew Sullivan, etc. – completely breaks down. It turns out to be fairly important whether Clinton was or wasn’t having sexual relations with Denise Rich, Marc’s glamorous ex-wife, who lobbied for the pardon (or with someone else who might have gotten to Clinton). It’s hard to explain Clinton’s gross error any other way. Lord knows I’ve tried!...Someday some historian will focus on this sort of interpersonal causal chain and win a National Book Award for his provocative thesis – as Philip Weiss memorably put it, **“Follow the nookie.”** But if reporters had been more responsible in reporting on Clinton’s personal life – and less cowed by the Stephanopouloses and Carvilles – actual voters would have had this highly relevant information in real time when they made their decision in 1992. (emphasis in original)

Now, given that the former President’s dear wife, the current junior Senator from New York and presumed front-runner for the Democratic presidential

nomination in 2008, was also Bill’s enabler-in-chief and one of the most vocal advocates of the morally corrupt supposition that private behavior and public character are entirely distinguishable, it would seem that this mess reflects badly – very badly, in fact – on her. Though I long ago gave up the expectation that Bill and Hillary Clinton’s ethical and moral laxity would eventually catch up with them through the legal system, I can’t help but think that in this case, it may catch up with her through the political system. As Kaus concluded the above-cited post: “Do Democrats really want to elect the woman who let all this happen under her nose? Just asking!”

Prediction #5: In the only truly notable elections of the year, the New Jersey and Virginia Governor’s races, the GOP will net one pick-up, proving that all is right with the world and that tales of realignment in both states are overblown.

Four years ago, in the off-year elections of 2001, Democrats picked up the Governors’ mansions in both New Jersey and Virginia, causing them to delude themselves that they had momentum going into the 2002 midterms. This year, the GOP will regain its rightful position leading the Commonwealth of Virginia, while Democrats will hold on to the statehouse in New Jersey. The results will stop, for the time being at least, the unfounded speculation on the part of handful a of Republican and Democratic political operatives that these respective states are undergoing realignment. New Jersey is blue. Virginia is red. Period.

The deciding factor in New Jersey will almost certainly be money – Goldman Sachs money to be exact. Senator Jon Corzine has already announced that he is a candidate for governor and he will do and spend whatever it takes to win.

The deciding factor in Virginia will likely be taxes. Though mainstream media pundits like to play up the national-level prospects of outgoing Governor Mark Warner, labeling him a miracle worker for governing effectively in a Southern state, Virginia voters are not likely to view Warner’s tenure in quite so glowing

terms. Indeed, each of Warner's three predecessors – Democrat James Wilder, Republican (and prospective presidential candidate) Senator George Allen, and Republican James Gilmour – was extremely popular and will likely be remembered more fondly by Commonwealth voters than Warner, who will almost certainly be remembered as a serial tax hiker.

Though Virginia Republicans surrendered the moral high ground on taxes during the Warner years, likely GOP nominee Attorney General Jerry Kilgore has the opportunity to regain it. Come election day, voters will undoubtedly recall that when Gilmour left office, the hated car tax was on its way to being phased out. Yet after four years of Mark Warner, Virginians are still paying the tax, despite the fact that the state's allegedly dire fiscal situation has improved dramatically. If Kilgore can connect Warner and the Democrats to the car tax (which shouldn't be too difficult), he'll win in a walk.

Prediction #6: The national Democratic Party will continue its long and agonizing descent into madness.

Given that Mark and I were, just a couple of weeks ago, accused (yet again) by now-former readers of being little more than right-wing propagandists, I had planned to try to get through this piece without picking too much on the disaster that is the Democratic Party. But after the events of the last week or so, I can't fail to mention how the Democrats appear to have learned nothing from the November election and, in fact, seem to be headed in exactly the wrong direction.

In a span of just a week, the nation witnessed:

- One Democratic Senator and 31 Democratic members of the House of Representatives, led by John "Turkey Bandit" Conyers, formally protest and vote to decertify the presidential election results;
- A handful of self-righteous Democratic Senators

grill the nation's first Hispanic Attorney General nominee because they believe him to be insufficiently nice to terrorists;

- The "conscience of the party," Senator Ted Kennedy, actually lecture the Attorney General-designate about how cruel it is to simulate drowning on a prisoner, presumably because actually drowning people is somehow less offensive than merely simulating it;
- The Democrats' most recent presidential nominee reverting to type and reliving the carefree days of his youth by criticizing the American commander-in-chief while in the middle of a war zone and meeting with the enemy (in this case Syrian President Bashar Assad) while American soldiers are in harm's way;
- And, perhaps most ridiculously, several high-ranking Democratic officials suggest that arguably the most politically inept party chairman in history, Clinton bagman Terry McAuliffe, would be better than any of the current candidates for the job and propose that he stay on for an additional term.

I know I complain sometimes that Republicans have come by the moniker "the stupid party" honestly. But watching the Democrats with mouth agape last week, I came to the conclusion that there's something to be said for being stupid but sane, as opposed to completely bonkers. The Democrats, it would appear, have decided to change their party motto, taking a line from Walt Kelly's Pogo, "We have met the enemy . . . and he is us."

President Bush will face many hurdles over the next twelve months, and he will win some battles and lose others. In the aggregate, though, I would bet on Bush to succeed more than to fail. He is still popular and charismatic, still has broad support for even some of his more radical policy proposals, and, most importantly, still has the Congressional Democrats as his opponents. In all cases, but especially this last one, the odds are in his favor.

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