

**Mark L. Melcher** Publisher  
melcher@thepoliticalforum.com

**Stephen R. Soukup** Editor  
soukup@thepoliticalforum.com

## THEY SAID IT

"If Carl Sandburg had lived to see this massive avalanche of bacon greasing its way down Capitol Hill, he would have named Congress, not Chicago, the hog butcher for the world. Or perhaps he would simply have seconded P.J. O'Rourke's timeless observation in *Parliament of Whores*: 'Giving money and power to government is like giving whiskey and car keys to teenage boys.'"

--Jeff Jacoby, "*The Republican Pork Barrel*," The Boston Globe, August 4, 2005

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## MAD DEMOCRATS AND FECKLESS REPUBLICANS.

Regular readers know that one of the more notable recurring themes on these pages over the last couple of years has been what we have termed the Democrats' "descent into madness," which is the process by which the Democratic Party has increasingly abandoned the centrism of the Clinton years and embraced its more radical, more antagonistic, and more volatile elements.

One of these elements is the growing tendency of the mainstream of the party to accept the hard-left depiction of the "War on Terror" as "neoconservative" adventurism. In doing so, Democrats associate their party with the anti-Semitic undertones implicit in such distortions of the war effort and of the conservative impulses to utilize the tools of American foreign policy to battle the forces of tyranny. I've returned to this theme probably a dozen times since rejoining Mark in the Spring of 2003, using it to explain everything from the rise of Howard Dean to the delusional embrace of John Kerry's "electability," to the re-ascension of Howard Dean as party chairman.

As a conservative, I have taken some satisfaction in pointing out many of the Democrats' more ridiculous follies, but I have always tried to temper my amusement with the acknowledgment that the complete marginalization of one party in a two-party system is, in the long run, unhealthy. Though the Republicans might benefit from the Democrats' madness in the near term, over time, an unbalanced and therefore uncompetitive party is almost certain to damage the political discourse and, by extension, the nation as a whole. As I put it in one of my final pieces before the election last year, "the two-party system functions best when both parties are competitive and coherent."

Unfortunately, the events of the last couple of months have made it all too obvious that this concern of mine is entirely legitimate. The Republican Party now operates with a functional monopoly on power in Washington, which often means that it operates with total impunity, confident that any political missteps will be met with little if any political fallout, given the feebleness of the Democratic opposition.

Indeed, on a whole host of issues, the Republicans in Washington – and those on Capitol Hill in particular – have shown exceptionally poor judgment, a lack of political leadership, and, in some cases, downright disdain for the desires and beliefs of the majority of their constituents. And many have done so brazenly, knowing full well that however poorly they may do their jobs, their constituents are unlikely to punish them by taking the side of the thoroughly discredited Democrats.

The most obvious examples of the Republicans' contempt for the beliefs of those responsible for their election can be found in the recent passage of a raft of bills, many of which openly forsake the principles of small government and fair play that had, for at least a quarter century, been the hallmark of the GOP and the conservative movement. The energy bill and the highway bill in particular are aggressively bloated pieces of pork-barrel pandering that expand the size of government, expand the corporate welfare system, expand the regulatory Leviathan, abandon free and competitive markets, and generally betray the principles that once formed the foundation of the modern Reaganite Republican Party.

Now, I know that the media, Congressional leaders, and the White House are all spinning the energy bill as a great victory for President Bush. And in some respects it is. The President, the Vice President, and the rest of the administration made comprehensive energy legislation a priority in the first months of their first term and have fought, in vain until now, to see a bill passed and signed. So the enactment of the bill is, in fact, a testament to the sheer determination of this White House to overcome considerable

resistance from Congressional Democrats and equally considerable apathy from many in the President's own party. But that doesn't mean that this a particularly good bill, either for the GOP or for the nation in general.

The 1724-page energy bill (The Energy Policy Act of 2005; The Domenici-Barton Energy Policy Act of 2005) contains some \$14.6 billion in tax breaks (roughly \$12 billion after offsets) and potentially billions more in loan guarantees and other subsidies for energy producers in virtually all energy sectors. It mandates doubling the amount of ethanol used to some 7.5 billion gallons by 2012, which will add an estimated 10 cents to the cost of a gallon of gasoline for East and West coast drivers. It fails to provide any sort of liability protection for manufacturers of methyl tertiary butyl ether (MTBE), a government-mandated fuel additive that has become the target of product liability suits. It provides \$1.5 billion in government money to be disbursed to oil companies for deep-water offshore drilling, with the leading contender for control of the disbursement being a non-profit company based in Sugar Land, Texas – the hometown of House Majority Leader Tom DeLay. And last but not least, it mandates, by some estimates, roughly 270 new federal bureaucratic rulemakings and studies. With regard to this last point, our old friend Steve Moore wrote the following about the bill and its regulatory components last week:

What hasn't been reported [about the energy bill] is the huge and intrusive regulatory apparatus this bill creates for basic home appliances. To give the reader a flavor of the technical mumbo-jumbo contained in the bill, consider the provision dealing with ceiling fans: "All ceiling fans made after January 1, 2007 shall have certain functions like adjustable speed controls, speed controls separate from the lighting, reversible fan rotation options, etc." The bill is ambiguous as to whether money will be authorized for ceiling fan police to monitor home ceiling fans to ensure compliance.

This Orwellian bill similarly regulates battery chargers, vending machines, portable electric lamps, space heaters, freezers and refrigerators. Recall that some ten years ago, when Congress regulated toilets to save water, irate Americans were stuck with toilets with such paltry water pressure that they didn't flush. Many went to Canada to purchase bootlegged toilets. We may soon have to do the same to obtain freezers that, well, freeze. The bill includes \$450 million for a public education campaign for such purposes as ensuring that Americans have the proper air pressure in their car tires and that their air conditioners and heating systems are energy efficient. There is even \$6 million to encourage Americans to ride their bikes rather than drive, so we can be more like the Cambodians.

As bad as the energy bill may be, though, its atrociousness is nothing compared to that of the highway bill (The Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users), a \$286.4 billion pork-fest that contains roughly \$24 billion in "earmark" handouts for virtually every congressional district in the nation and which funds some 6000+ congressional pet projects, many of which aren't even tangentially related to transportation or infrastructure.

Naturally, the bill funnels a grossly disproportionate amount of funding to Alaska, the home state of the bill's author, House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Don Young, who actually had the gall to complain that the nearly \$300 billion tab wasn't nearly big enough to suit his tastes. Addressing the question of Young's still unfulfilled cravings for pork, Jeff Jacoby, *The Boston Globe's* token conservative, wrote the following:

One wonders what more Young could have wanted. The bill funnels upward of \$941 million to 119 earmarked projects in Alaska, including \$223 million for a mile-long bridge linking an island with 50 residents to the town of Ketchikan on the mainland. Another \$231 million is earmarked for a

new bridge in Anchorage, to be named – this is specified in the legislation – Don Young's Way. There is \$3 million for a film "about infrastructure that demonstrates advancements in Alaska, the last frontier." The bill even doffs its cap to Young's wife, Lu: The House formally called it "The Transportation Equity Act – a Legacy for Users," or TEA-LU.

As if to add insult to injury, Speaker of the House Denny Hastert – heir to the throne captured by Newt, Dick Armey, and the rest of the Republican Revolutionaries – declared that the bill was not quite nearly as bloated and pork laden as it appeared and even went so far as to give it a Keynesian justification. According to the editorial board of the *Wall Street Journal* (and thus presumably Steve Moore again) Hastert explained his expectation that the President would sign the bill by noting that "it is 'only' \$2.4 billion more than the President's 2005 veto limit, which is 'only' \$28 billion more than his 2004 veto limit of \$256 billion, which was 'only' a 17% increase over the previous six-year highway spending level." All of that is, in a word, nuts. But worse still, Hastert proudly called the bill a plan to "fuel America's economy by growing jobs." Even ignoring the atrocious use of the verb "to grow," that has to be one of the more jarring phrases uttered by a *Republican* congressional leader in the last couple of decades.

The problem here is that the Congressional Republicans believe – and I suspect rightly so – that they can get away with such reckless and wasteful spending because Republican voters, who now constitute a slim majority of voters nationwide, understand that if the Democrats controlled the levers of government, spending would almost certainly be worse, as hard as that is to believe.

During last fall's elections, John Kerry, then the spokesman for his party, talked a good game about cutting spending and reducing the deficit, but the actual specifics of the policies he proposed differed dramatically from the rhetoric, with proposed new spending and tax plans that would have cost somewhere between \$1 trillion and \$3 trillion over

ten years. And does anyone doubt that “Chairman” Rangel (Ways and Means), “Chairman” Obey (Appropriations) and “Chairman” Spratt (Budget) would run up the tab even more, were they actually in charge? Of course not; which is precisely what the spendthrift Republicans are counting on.

Unfortunately, this tendency to take the support of voters for granted is limited neither to Capitol Hill nor to matters of spending and size of government. Both Mark and I have long believed that the Bush administration’s greatest failing in the conduct of the Global War on Terror is its unwillingness or inability to keep the American public informed of the progress of the war and to continue to make the case for the effort and its costs.

As countless analysts, pundits, and other assorted “experts” have written (including Mark on more than one occasion), this war will be won or lost not on the battlefields of Iraq or Afghanistan, but in the battle for American public opinion. Yet the Bush administration seems unwilling to fight this particular aspect of the war with any alacrity or consistency.

Two months ago, it appeared that this issue had come to a head and that the President had, at long last, come to the conclusion that he had to “do something” to stem the ebb of public opinion on the war in Iraq. President Bush traveled to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, gave a moving prime time speech on the necessity of the war and the progress being made, and, in so doing, did rally the public back to the cause. But as a follow-up to that address, the administration has done . . . well . . . nothing. And today poll numbers show that support on Iraq is slipping again.

We have tried in vain for two years to explain why the Bush team is so disinterested in making the public case for the war. We have little choice this late in the game but to conclude that at least part of the reason for their reticence is their belief that they don’t actually have to make the case, since their domestic opponents are so thoroughly unhinged on the matter. With the Minority Whip in the Senate declaring publicly that the actions of American soldiers remind him of those of Soviet murderers and Pol Pot’s Khmer Rouge death

squads and the ranking member of the House Ways and Means Committee equating American soldiers to the Waffen-SS, it is not especially difficult to see how the Bush administration could come to the conclusion that the opposition to the war effort is so detached from reality that a PR campaign on behalf of the undertaking would be politically unnecessary.

They are, of course, right about this, at least to a point. Anyone who supports the war is compelled to support President Bush and his specific plan simply because there is no viable alternative. As frustrated as supporters may get with the lack of progress or, more to the point, with the lack of information about progress, there is little chance that any of them will turn to the Vietnam-guilt-addled Democrats, knowing full well that the impulses of that party would be to abandon the Iraqis just as they abandoned the South Vietnamese three decades ago.

And while this lack of sane opposition may, in a very narrow and short-term sense, be good for the Bush administration and for Republicans in Congress, it is not good for the nation. Bloated spending bills and an administration that appears unconcerned about slipping public support for a major war effort are significant concerns, but they are also merely the tip of the proverbial iceberg with regard to potential future problems. The last time that one of the two political parties was so completely and thoroughly demoralized and discredited (roughly 1932-1980), the majority party had a free hand to experiment with the nation’s political and social structures and, in some cases, damaged them so badly that the negative repercussions still reverberate today.

What makes this entire issue even more worrisome and frustrating is the fact that it appears to have no ready solution. While Republicans stray from the principles that enabled their election, Democrats continue to deny reality and profess ignorance about what their principles even are. And even the one bright spot for concerned Republicans, the powerful organization whose mission it was to oblige Republican legislators to adhere to the principles of the party, has been dimmed considerably of late.

There was a time not too long ago (less than a year, in fact), that the Club for Growth provided some hope for keeping wayward Republicans in line. By forcing Republicans to face real, serious opponents *from within their own party*, the Club managed to make itself into one of the most powerful, influential, and valuable forces on the political right. Unfortunately, the Club appears to have become frightened by its own success.

After last November's election, the aforementioned Steve Moore, then President of the Club, left the organization over an apparent difference of opinion about its strategy going forward. And while the move has certainly worked out for Steve and for readers of the *Wall Street Journal*, it has been notably less successful for the Club and thus for the GOP in general. As it turns out, the Club's power and influence were, in large part, direct outgrowths of the force of Steve's personality and talent. And the "new" Club for Growth is all but guaranteed to disappoint and to leave Republican legislators feeling even more secure in their incumbency.

Last week, Patrick Basham, a Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute, published a piece entitled, "Democracy Demands Ousting the Incumbent Class." I dove into the article expecting to be highly critical of it. Yes, ousting the incumbent class would be nice, I thought, but given that there is no serious, sane opposition to that class, doing so will be next to impossible.

I was wrong about Basham's piece, since it turned out to be a simple, generic call for addressing the age-old advantages of congressional incumbency. But I was right about my initial reaction to his headline. Democracy would, indeed, function better if the incumbent class could be ousted. But as things stand today, such an ouster would be irresponsible at best, given that the only replacement class would likely serve merely to exacerbate all of the negative features of the current ruling class.

All of this is not to blame the Democrats for the GOP's current bout of disaffection and fecklessness. Responsibility for that falls squarely on the shoulders of the Republican leaders who have strayed from

the party's core principles. But it is to argue that the nation and, in fact, the Republican Party would be better served if the Democrats would quit catering to and associating with a very tiny base movement that has driven the party out of the responsible mainstream. If Democrats did that, there is a chance that Republican leaders might wake up in time to salvage their stranglehold on power. But even if they didn't, the nation would almost certainly be better off in the long run.

In sum then, the Democrats' descent into madness has, at times, been kind of fun to watch, but in the interests of the nation and its two-party system, it needs to stop soon.

## WHITHER TERRORISM?

In case you didn't know it, and I can't imagine that you didn't, militant Islam, or whatever label you choose to pin on the murderous cult that is threatening the world with terrorism, is eventually going to lose the "war on terror," or the "global struggle against violent extremism," or whatever label you choose to pin on the ongoing dustup between militant Islam, or whatever you want to call it, and the rest of the world.

Militant Islam isn't going to lose simply because the United States, its principle nation-state enemy in this struggle, is a much more powerful entity, although it is, but because the "war on terror," or whatever you want to call it, isn't just a battle between a large, peculiar, murderous cult and a group of nation-states, but is really a battle between a large, peculiar, murderous cult and "modernism," or "progress" or whatever label you want to pin on the inexorable march of global, secular consumerism, which is more powerful than militant Islam and the United States combined.

Indeed, when the dust settles on this dust up, militant Islam will have gone the way of the Druids, only there won't be any "stone circles" in the fields or big rocks sticking out the ground as "silent evidence" of their former presence on earth. In fact, it is much more

likely that the entire world will be dotted with Golden Arches, as silent evidence of the enormous, global power of the force that made the world inhospitable for retro Islam.

Now I am not trying to be cute here about a serious subject. But it occurred to me last week as I listened to the pundits and experts on the “war on terror,” and on the “global struggle against violent extremism,” or whatever you want to call it, wax eloquent about what must be done to “win” this conflict, that it might be useful to address this issue from a slightly different angle.

For starters, as I have already said, there has never been any question about who is going to win this thing. This isn't like the Revolutionary War or the War of 1812 or World War I or World War II or Korea or Vietnam or even the Cold War, where the outcome was at least in some doubt. This is more like the war that European settlers waged against the Native Americans. Everyone knew that the conflict was going to be nasty and that it would take a while. But there was never any question about who was going to win. Like it or not, the Native Americans were, like the Islamic terrorists today, fighting more than just a bunch of well armed expatriate Europeans. They were fighting what General Electric used to call the “March of Progress.” And they didn't have a chance.

Moreover, the militant Islamic terrorists seem to be confused about what victory would look like. Needless to say, this does not bode well for them. They seem to have adopted the logic of the Cheshire Cat, who told Alice that “if you don't know where you're going, almost any road will take you there.” And while there may be some hidden wisdom in this line, it hardly seems to be an auspicious slogan upon which to wage war against an entire civilization.

Some of these murderers profess that the goal of all the bloodshed is to reestablish the Abbasid Caliphate, which was centered in Baghdad during the 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries and was, according to Arab historians, “the intellectual center of the world” at that time. This may be a noble goal, but it seems to me at least to

be unachievable, especially considering that the means by which these killers hope to achieve it has nothing to do with expanding the intellectual capital of the Arab world, but instead rests on convincing emotionally stunted, young morons to blow themselves up in the middle of a crowded bus in hopes of hooking up with 70 or so virgins in Paradise.

The incompatibility of creating an endless supply of young men ignorant enough to fall for this adolescent wet dream, originally fabricated to make an impression on a bunch of medieval desert riff-raff, while at the same time attempting to rebuild a new “intellectual center of the world” out of this same raw material, seems not to have penetrated the gloom of the caves in Afghanistan, the filth of the slums of Cairo, and the decadence of the coffee houses in Riyadh.

Another goal that is said to be high on the list of the terrorists is to drive the “infidels” out of “Arab lands.” Now, this too seems to me to be a bit of a stretch, somewhat akin to getting the “Princes” of the “Royal House of Saud” out the high priced warehouses of the Upper East Side of New York City.

After all, the “Arab lands,” from which these people want to expel everyone except Arabs who do not subscribe to the same outlandish beliefs as they do, happen to be located on top of the richest oil deposits in the world, at a time when the world happens to be especially thirsty for oil.

J. Paul Getty, who knew something about oil, once noted that while it may be true that the meek shall inherit the earth, he felt that it was unlikely that they would inherit the subsoil rights. And while these terrorists may not be meek, they are, in fact, weak when compared to other forces at work in the world that also have an eye on controlling the oil rich real estate of the “Arab lands.”

Now I am not saying here that militant Islam will simply wither away in the face of the march of history. More than likely, the battles that lie ahead will be bloody and extend over a long period of time. I am saying that when considering these upcoming battles

it is worth remembering that the outcome is not in doubt. Militant Islam cannot win a place at the world table. It has no moral force. It has no natural allies. It controls no territory of any significance. The qualities that it promotes among its followers are not the kind upon which a successful and lasting social order can be built. Finally, it offers nothing that can compete with the prospects of a “good life” as it’s currently being sold around the world by everyone from Starbucks to the Chinese textile and tennis shoe producers to Virgin Records.

Within this context, it is also useful to keep in mind, as I have said in these pages before but have never seen noted by anyone else, that the tenure of militant Islam as a major player on the world stage is inversely related to its successes on the battlefield. Needless to say, this is contrary to the position that the winners of most of history’s wars enjoyed.

Theoretically, if the movement would stop murdering people willy-nilly around the world, it could be around for a very long time. Indeed, its acolytes could probably go on forever jumping up and down in the streets, as is their wont, shaking their fists, and shouting about what a raw deal they have gotten for the past 1,000 years at the hands of the infidels and how they are going to do something about it as soon as they get around to it – Allah willing, of course, which is by no means a given, given that old Allah hasn’t done much for their cause in the past 1,000 years or they wouldn’t be jumping up and down in the streets all the time in the first place.

On the other hand, every time they do get around to doing something about it, like blowing up a bus or flying an airplane into a building, the waters in which they swim, to borrow a metaphor from Mao, who knew something about terrorism, get a little more unfriendly, as was demonstrated in the United States following the 9/11 attacks and as we are seeing today in England as a result of the suicide bombings there.

Unfortunately, it looks as though this will be the general pattern for the “war on terror” or the “global struggle against violent extremism” or whatever

you want to call. That is, Islamic terrorists attack something somewhere and those countries that feel threatened by Islamic terrorism and have chosen to fight back escalate their collective commitment to the conflict, but always in proportion to the severity of attack that was suffered.

For example, a really big strike within the United States prompts the creation of a Department of Homeland Security and the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. Three subway cars and a bus are blown up in London and the English tighten the laws a little governing immigration and speech. Eventually, if the terrorists finally launch “the big one,” either killing thousands or tens of thousands of innocent people in a chemical, biological, or nuclear attack, or trying to do so but failing, the United States and at least some of its allies will pull out all stops and all hell will break loose.

Oddly enough, the reality of this progressive approach to fighting terror was recently noted by the *Washington Post’s* resident keeper of the political correctness flame, columnist Richard Cohen. He put it this way when writing about what might happen if suicide bombings in London continue or if they were to occur in the United States.

Then the admirable words of George Bush and Tony Blair, who both have embraced the humanitarian values of mainstream Islam, will be sorely tested. Politicians are sure to demand aggressive profiling, immigration restraints -- a kind of guilty-until-proven-innocent approach to Islamic minorities. Draconian measures will be demanded -- not the A-bomb, of course, because the war against terrorism is not a war for territory, but, as the saying goes, whatever it takes. Terrified and enraged people can be remarkably brutal and illogical.

This is, of course, an amazingly stupid way of conducting a war against an enemy that recognizes no moral or practical restraints whatsoever and has openly

declared that it will eventually do something that is truly horrendous. I mean, while I am no expert on warfare, I have read Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, closely perused Clausewitz's *On War*, and watched America fight numerous wars throughout my life, and I have never heard or read of anyone who knows anything about the subject who has a kind word to say about the use of the doctrine of proportional response in modern warfare

This may be a civilized and even a just way to deal with street criminals, i.e., you don't hang a waif for stealing a "pocket-handkerchief," as was done in Oliver Twist's day. But allowing militant Islam to set the intensity level in a hot war is insane. Not only does it put thousands of innocent people at risk based on a morally suspect bow to political correctness, but it also provides an enormous edge to the bad guys. If it were up to me, I would bring on the "Draconian measures" now, before large numbers of people get hurt.

But, as even Richard Cohen understands, this isn't likely to happen. Instead, the "war on terror" is most probably going to move ahead one increasingly deadly step at a time until the bad guys take it a step too far. In the meantime, their world is going to become increasingly smaller and less hospitable as the above-mentioned "March of Progress" continues unabated around the world.

*The Washington Post* had an excellent front-page article yesterday concerning the use that the global terrorist community is making of the Internet. The article, entitled "Terrorists Turn to the Web as Base of Operations," did a great job of discussing how "al Qaeda has become the first guerrilla movement in history to migrate from physical space to cyberspace." I won't quote it here, but I would highly recommend this frightening story to anyone who is interested in the subject of global terrorism.

That said, it is worth noting that while the Internet has certainly done wonders for communications among terrorists around the world, it will ultimately be the instrument of their destruction, as it spreads a vision of a future that is somewhat more in keeping with the aspirations and dreams of people worldwide than the prospects of a medieval Caliphate run by a band of fanatical killers.

Oddly enough, one of those fanatical killers stated this proposition himself shortly after the 9/11 attacks. He was an al Qaeda big shot whose name was Maulana Inyadullah. His highly informative and accurate statement was that "The Americans love Pepsi-Cola, we love death." Not surprisingly, this nut case is dead and people around the world are learning to love Pepsi, just like Americans.

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