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THEY SAID IT

With President George W. Bush's approval ratings plummeting in recent weeks, the inability on the part of Democrats to capitalize on the president's waning fortunes has caused some leading scientists to postulate that the Democratic Party may not exist at all.

Dr. Marisa Drazin, a leading scientist who for years has been questioning the existence of Democrats, said today that what many have thought to be the Democratic Party may in fact be nothing more than a black hole.

"When the president loses ten or twelve approval points, one would normally expect those approval points to go to the opposition party," Dr. Drazin said. "But instead, those points have vanished into thin air, leading one to conclude that the so-called Democratic Party does not exist."

Theories about the nonexistence of the Democratic Party are nothing new, said Dr. Drazin, who pointed out that scientists first developed them during the 1988 presidential campaign of then-Massachusetts Gov. Michael Dukakis.

While the silence of the Democratic Party in recent weeks seems to bolster theories of the party's nonexistence, she said, there are still some nagging pieces of evidence to the contrary, such as the perpetually outspoken DNC chairman, former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean.

"I've discussed the Howard Dean phenomenon with my colleagues," Dr. Drazin said. "And it's the consensus of the scientific community that there is no logical explanation for Howard Dean."

-- "SCIENTISTS DOUBT EXISTENCE OF DEMOCRATS: Opposition Party Could Be Black Hole, Experts Say," *The [satirical] Borowitz Report*, September 22, 2005.

DeLAY, DEMOCRATS, AND THE FUTURE OF THE GOP.

Last week was not a particularly good week to be a Republican.

On Wednesday, House Majority Leader Tom DeLay was indicted for "conspiracy" to violate Texas campaign finance laws and was forced by caucus rules to resign his leadership position, at least temporarily.

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Also on Wednesday, conservative commentator and former Reagan Education Secretary Bill Bennett had a discussion with a caller on his radio program in which he discussed the proposition that crime could be reduced by “aborting every black baby in this country.” He noted, of course, that controlling crime this way would be “impossible” and “morally reprehensible,” but his comments were nonetheless condemned as racist by the usual suspects and “not appropriate” by some not-so-usual suspects, namely White House spokesman Scott McClellan.

As if that weren’t enough, the Securities and Exchange Commission broadened its week-old investigation into the questionable timing of the sale of family stock by Senate Majority leader Bill Frist.

And finally, *New York Times* reporter Judith Miller was released from jail, reportedly in order to testify about what she was told about the identity of former ambassador (and current blowhard) Joseph Wilson’s wife by Vice President Dick Cheney’s Chief of Staff I. Lewis “Scooter” Libby.

By week’s end, nearly everyone who follows politics – conservatives, liberals, election forecasters, purportedly impartial media types – agreed that it had been the kind of week that has the potential to “nationalize” next fall’s midterm and turn it into the kind of “wave” election that occasionally washes the majority party from power.

Democrats in Congress and elsewhere were visibly and unashamedly “giddy,” while Republicans and conservative pundits were warning of “dark days” ahead and suggesting that the political situation might actually get worse before it gets better. All things considered, by last Friday, the long-awaited “end of the Republican era” looked to many as if it just might finally be at hand.

Somehow though, despite all the grim news and the ever-grimmer predictions, I didn’t quite understand all the gloom. Granted, the GOP has had better weeks, and certainly it could do without the indictment and investigation of its leaders on charges of corruption

and fraud. And, of course, there is no question that if an election were held tomorrow that none of this would help Republican candidates and would almost certainly spell doom for many of them.

That said, I think the doomsayers and worrywarts are once again drastically misinterpreting the state of American politics. Moreover, I think that many are overlooking the positive developments that the past few weeks have brought the GOP, which, while less dramatic and headline-worthy than the negative ones, may prove significantly more important over the long haul. Indeed, I think a case can be made that the political dynamic unleashed roughly a month ago by Hurricane Katrina and intensified last week by the indictment of Tom DeLay actually favors the re-emergence of a competent, confident, *conservative* GOP. And, since no one else is going to make this case, I will.

I’ll begin with the DeLay affair by stating my sincere belief that the doomsayers are badly overstating his importance to his party and the effect that this particular indictment will have on the electorate. For one thing, as virtually everyone who has no axe to grind in this matter has noted, the indictment itself is weak. For another, the public is beginning to figure this out. Public opinion polls taken Wednesday showed only a small percentage of Americans believed that Travis County Attorney Ronnie Earle’s pursuit of DeLay was politically motivated. But by Thursday night and into the weekend, many of the same polls were showing considerably greater cynicism on the part of the public.

Over the next several weeks, my guess is that this cynicism is likely to grow. Byron York, who writes for both *National Review* and *The Hill*, reported late last week that Earle has allowed his better-than-two-year pursuit of DeLay to be filmed for use in a documentary, hardly an act one would expect from a simple, non-partisan, county attorney doing his job. Moreover, according to York, a screening of a rough cut of the film shows that Earle considered the building of his case a near “religious” duty. York put it thusly:

A new film featuring Travis County, Texas prosecutor Ronnie Earle as he pursued the investigation that led to the indictment of House Majority Leader Tom DeLay portrays Earle less as a partisan figure than as a messianic leader on a mission to rid American politics of the “evil” influence of money. A copy of the still-unfinished film, entitled *The Big Buy*, was obtained by National Review Online Friday.

On several occasions in the film, Earle engages in monologues on what he believes is the sinister effect of money in politics. “The root of the evil of the corporate and large-monied interest domination of politics is money,” Earle says as he takes the filmmakers on a nighttime drive around Austin. “This is in the Bible. This isn’t rocket science. The root of all evil truly is money, especially in politics. People talk about how money is the mother’s milk of politics. Well, it’s the devil’s brew. And what we’ve got to do, we’ve got to turn off the tap.”

In another scene, Earle describes how he deals with offenders in cases like the campaign-finance investigation. “It’s important that we forgive those who come to us in a spirit of contrition and the desire for forgiveness. That’s important. But if they don’t, then God help them.” The film then dissolves to a picture of DeLay. In yet another scene, Earle describes corporate political contributions, which are illegal in Texas (although state law allows corporations to fund the administrative activities of political action committees) as a problem that is “every bit as insidious as terrorism.”

Now, a sympathetic public may not help DeLay in his legal problems, but it certainly helps alleviate any problems the Republican Party might have with the public as regards this affair.

Despite the obvious weakness of the legal case against DeLay, Democratic leaders, most notably party chairman Howard Dean and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, broke all land-speed records racing to the nearest microphone after the indictment was announced on Wednesday in an attempt to capitalize on DeLay’s legal troubles.

On Friday, our old friend (and former head of GOPAC and spokesman for Newt Gingrich) Rich Galen mocked Democratic plans to parlay the DeLay scandal into a strategy to retake Congress next year, arguing that the Democrats simply don’t have leaders who are capable of making the case for the party and its platform to the American voters, irrespective of the GOP’s problems. And while I certainly agree with Rich and have, in fact, made similar arguments myself, I think the bigger problem with the Democratic leaders is that they are so desperate and have such awful political instincts that they actually appear to be setting themselves up to come out on the losing end of the indictment of one of their most powerful political rivals.

Look. DeLay is drowning here. Even if he is exonerated, his career as a big-time player is almost certainly over. The smart thing for the Democrats to do would be to sit back and watch the show as one of their most reviled rivals fights for his political life. But, as is their wont, this crop of Democratic leaders has decided instead to do precisely the opposite of the smart thing, tying itself very publicly and very assertively to the prosecutorial discretion of a man who is clearly obsessed and who has a record of crashing and burning spectacularly in his efforts to take out his political rivals. If, as many experts believe will be the case, the charges against DeLay are dismissed without trial, Ronnie Earle will be discredited yet again – this time in front of a national audience – as a partisan hack. And because of their impetuosity and recklessness in using Earle’s potentially tainted indictment for political gain, if that happens, the leaders of the Democratic Party will be similarly discredited.

Moreover, even if DeLay is tried and convicted, there is likely to be very little upside for the Democrats. Throughout the last decade, every time a big-shot Democratic politician was caught with his hand in the proverbial cookie jar (or, in Bill Clinton's case, with other parts of him in places they shouldn't have been), the official response of most of his fellow Democrats, including many of those now attacking DeLay, was to diminish the crime by claiming that "everyone does it." The Vice President was shaking down indigent Buddhist nuns? Everyone does it. He made illegal fund-raising calls from his White House office? Everyone does it. The President sold nuclear secrets to the Communist Chinese in return for a few measly campaign dollars? Everyone does it. He got caught diddling interns no more than a couple of years older than his daughter? Everyone does it. Etc., etc., *ad nauseum*.

The net effect of all of this insistence that "everyone does it" is that the Democrats largely convinced the American public that everyone does, in fact, do it. And this means that the public's reaction to DeLay's indictment is likely to be simply to sigh and concede that it's just another case of Washington business as usual. The last Democratic president was disbarred, for crying out loud. When it comes to political scandal, the American public has, principally due to efforts of folks like Nancy Pelosi, Harry Reid, and especially Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Chairman and former Clinton shill Rahm Emanuel, been desensitized. DeLay's problems may increase public cynicism about politics, but they're not likely to increase cynicism about Republicans exclusively.

In any case, the Democrats are bound to be disappointed by the outcome of the DeLay matter, regardless of what it may be. Even if their wildest dreams come true; even if DeLay is tried, convicted, and sentenced to hard labor, none of that is likely to produce the Watergate-esque Democratic mandate on which Pelosi, Dean, and the rest of them appear to be betting.

Maybe it's me, but the hatred the Democrats seem to carry for Tom DeLay, the vigor with which they are pursuing his demise, and the glee with which they've greeted the appearance of that demise is reminiscent of the way they felt about and dealt with former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich. For four years – from November 1994 to November 1998 – Newt was not only the leader of the newly ascendant Republican majority, the first Republican Speaker in nearly half-a-decade, and the arch-conservative whom all liberals loved to hate, he was also Democratic target number one. And when he fell, following the disappointing midterms of '98, Democrats rejoiced, believing that they had felled both the Speaker and the majority he led.

Only a funny thing happened next: Newt was replaced (circuitously) by Dennis Hastert, the party went back to work and carried on, and the Republican House majority was actually expanded in each of the next three Congressional elections, giving the GOP a longer tenure in the majority without Newt than with him. It turns out that Newt was not the supernatural creature Democrats believed him to be and that the Republican majority did not dwell exclusively in his soul. They "got" Newt, but they were no better for it.

The belief that the Republican stranglehold on power is illegitimate and somehow "paranormal" is rampant among today's Democrats and Democratic sympathizers. To most Congressional Dems, DeLay has replaced Newt in the myth and now represents the supernatural force whose demise will topple the GOP. To others, Karl Rove is the mystical beast who somehow manages to keep the GOP in power with his heretofore unimagined powers of manipulation and mind control.

Either way, this belief in the "great man" theory of Republican dominance is prevalent among Democrats and appears to spring from two fonts. First, a full eleven years after the fact, most Democratic politicians have still not come to grips with the idea that they have been relegated to the minority. To them, they are and always will be the rightful majority party – opinion polls and election results to the

contrary notwithstanding – and the only way the GOP can maintain its “fraudulent” hold power is through trickery, the incredible skills of one man, or some combination of the two. Therefore, they are perpetually delusional, believing that if they can just “get” the top banana, whoever he may be, they can regain their rightful position.

Second, most of these politicians suffer from some misconceptions about what happened in the last decade, misconceptions that spring from the conceit noted above and from a misunderstanding of recent history. The Democrats believe, mistakenly, that what they are doing is no different from what the Republicans did in the 1990s, when they set out to “get” Bill Clinton. The GOP got him by torpedoing his health care reform plans; they got him by hyping Whitewater; they got him by looking into his sex life; and so on. And not only did they “get” Clinton, they won the majority because of it.

What these Democrats fail to grasp is that in a cosmic ideological sense, Bill Clinton mattered, while Newt, DeLay, and even Rove really don't. Clinton was the rearguard of a dying ideology and as such was the last vestige of a once powerful regime. Crippling him crippled the ideology. By contrast, Newt, DeLay, and Rove are, to change awkward metaphors, merely cogs in the ascendant political machine. “Getting” them doesn't matter nearly as much, since once each is gotten, another, perhaps one more effective, will replace him. Hastert replaced Newt. Blunt will replace DeLay. Mehlman could easily replace Rove. And nothing has changed, will change, or would change.

Actually, that's not quite right. It's not that nothing will change in DeLay's absence. In fact things are changing already. It's just that DeLay's departure will not change the overarching political trends, one of the most notable of which is the slow but steady decline of liberalism. Even if the Democrats somehow manage to retake Congress next year – something I think is unlikely at this point, but certainly not impossible – the change in power is likely to represent a one-off event rather than a political sea change similar in magnitude to '94.

But there will be change with DeLay gone. Indeed, DeLay being gone is, in and of itself, change, and positive change at that. All of the above notwithstanding, the fact that Tom DeLay has been forced to resign his position as House Majority Leader and will probably never get it back is not Ronnie Earle's fault; it's not Howard Dean's fault, or Nancy Pelosi's; it's Tom DeLay's fault. DeLay has played fast and loose with the rules for a long time, walking right up to the edge of, if not actually across, several ethical lines. Here's how I put it just after the election last November:

Though DeLay may, for the time being, be out of legal jeopardy, that does not mean that he's entirely in the clear or has behaved entirely respectably. Last month, the House Standards of Official Conduct Committee admonished the Majority Leader on two counts, one for the fundraising incident and one for improperly using his office in an attempt to compel the aid of the Federal Aviation Administration during the heat of the Texas redistricting battle. And speaking of the Texas redistricting battle, that was hardly DeLay's or the GOP's finest hour, demonstrating as it did DeLay's willingness to employ raw power to achieve his goals, regardless of the consequences, the bridges burned, or the unseemliness of the whole business.

The problem is that it's not as if DeLay's current troubles represent an isolated incident. Last week, columnist David Brooks suggested that DeLay is a “scandal waiting to happen,” and noted that “House Republicans know that DeLay has been playing close to the ethical edge for years.”

Though there will be those who will insist that DeLay has been extremely valuable to the Republican Party, both as a public leader and as a behind-the-scenes organizer and fundraiser, and though much of that is true, it is long past time for the GOP to move beyond DeLay. The ethical lapses, the aggressively iron-fisted

governing style, and most importantly, the profligate spending that have characterized his tenure in the leadership have, over time, weakened DeLay and the party, wearing away his support among conservatives in the House and in the electorate.

Since DeLay was indicted, there have been several stories in both the mainstream press and the conservative press about how the GOP is in trouble and how DeLay is the embodiment of that trouble. By and large, this is true. The GOP does, indeed, have serious problems, and DeLay is a big part of that.

DeLay's now-infamous comment in the wake of the Katrina disaster that the federal government spending had been "pared down pretty good" was emblematic of the type of ideological drift that has come to characterize the Republican majority during his tenure as majority leader. The DeLay years have not exactly been what most conservatives – in the House and in the electorate at large – had hoped they'd be, and conservatives have therefore grown disillusioned. And this as much as anything else has been the Majority Leader's principal problem. As John Fund put it this morning, "The ouster of Tom DeLay last week came over a dubious Texas indictment on campaign finance violations. But he was in hot water with the conservative base before that for a series of bizarre statements opposing budget cuts to pay for the costs of Hurricane Katrina relief."

Given all of this, the ouster of DeLay should be considered a net positive development for the GOP. It has been hard over the last several weeks to see the silver lining in the clouds cast over the administration and the Republican Party by Hurricane Katrina, but it's been there, and the removal of DeLay is part of it. Katrina and the much-maligned \$200 billion spending promise that followed in her wake forced the GOP to take a long look at itself. And while many in the party didn't like what they saw, the debate to follow could well change that.

For the first time in longer than almost anyone can remember, the Republicans in Congress are actually having an internal debate over issues of spending

and the size of government. DeLay's removal as Majority Leader will almost guarantee that that debate is more rigorous and intellectually honest than it would otherwise have been. The same can be said, by the way, of the elevation of Republican Whip Roy Blunt to the position of "temporary" Majority Leader. Though Blunt is most often described as a "DeLay acolyte," he is actually much more in tune with the conservatives in the GOP caucus than DeLay, which is precisely why those conservatives rejected David Drier, handpicked by both DeLay and Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert to serve as interim leader, and elevated Blunt instead.

There is no guarantee, of course, that Blunt will prove any more conservative than DeLay or any less enamored with the trappings of power, but certainly his promotion suggests that there is reason for hope. And despite all of the pessimism and the warranted worry about the GOP, hope is actually the theme of the week.

If nothing else, the indictment of Majority Leader Tom DeLay last week will force Congressional Republicans to confront their problem with corruption, or at least the appearance of corruption. Add this to the facts that the party is already reengaged in the debate over spending, that actual conservatives are beginning to reassert themselves and, in fact, asserted their will in replacing DeLay, and that President Bush appears, at long last, to have figured out that the strategy that he needs most desperately to change in pursuit of victory in Iraq is his public relations strategy, and there are several reasons for Republicans to be hopeful.

Make no mistake about it, last week was, indeed, a bad week for the GOP. The party is, as countless pundits and commentators have noted, at real risk of losing its majority. The good news is that the remaining leaders of the party finally appear to understand this and appear willing at least to try to do something about it.

In normal times and under normal circumstances, it would be asking a lot of a party to right itself, to overcome the indictment of one of its most

prominent figures, and to improve its standing among the electorate in just 13 short months. But as we have written in innumerable pieces, these are not normal times.

The Democrats have bungled and, for all the world, appear intent on continuing to bungle the DeLay situation. That's to be expected, though, since the current leaders of the party have a propensity for bungling. The Democratic Party, as it is currently constituted, appears unlikely to beat the GOP in attracting voters. It is far more likely that if Republicans lose, they will have beaten themselves. And while last week's indictment of Tom DeLay suggests that there is a serious risk that they will do just that, the party's response to the indictment and its responses to other crises suggests that they may not.

In short then, the gloom and doom of the last week may be justified for the rime being, but there is reason for conservatives to believe that things will get better in the very near future.

THE NEW POLITICAL PARADIGM, UPDATED.

As best as I can tell from looking back at the archives, the first article I wrote specifically about the changing political paradigm in America was dated November 29, 1995. It was entitled "Conservatism? What Conservatism?" A key paragraph read as follows:

For starters, I would argue that most of today's "conservatives" are little different from yesterday's liberals. This is not so much a criticism as a simple observation about the political realities of the day. The concept that every problem demands a government solution has burrowed so deeply into the American psyche that the transformation of most conservative politicians into old-style liberals was all but inevitable.

During the intervening 10 years, Steve and I have written many articles on this subject, including a three-part series in 1999 entitled "The Dawn of a New Political Era." A recurring theme in these pieces has been to relate how the narrowing differences between the two parties on so many key issues, from budgetary decisions to regulatory matters, can be attributed to the growing power of the great bureaucratic beast that the politicians created but can no longer control, as well as to the enormous influence that corporate America now wields within both parties.

We have also discussed at some length over this period how moral and ethical considerations have become increasingly important to the general public as a means for differentiating between the two parties, and how the parties themselves have come to rely on these issues to impress upon the public that they are relevant to their deepest beliefs and concerns.

Looking back on these articles, I am satisfied that our forecasts have been very much on track. In fact, the inability of the Republicans to do anything at all to curtail the budget deficit has confirmed our oft-stated observations about the increasing sameness of the two parties when it comes to traditional governmental functions.

And the widespread agreement among pollsters after the election last November that "moral values" played a significant part in President Bush's reelection confirmed much of what Steve and I have been saying over the past decade about the huge divide that has developed between the two parties over religious and moral matters and the increasing importance of this divide to the electoral process.

But this week I would like to discuss some of the events that have occurred along the path from the old paradigm to the new, and then make a few additions to my prior observations about the nature of the new political order.

For starters, I would note that in reviewing some of the articles mentioned above, I noticed that we routinely viewed the process of change from the

perspective of the organizational character of the two political parties, rather than looking at it from the standpoint of the politicians themselves. As a result, we seem to have assumed that the changes we forecast would occur via a relatively tranquil and orderly process; an evolution, so to speak, that would not follow an intelligent design but would spring forth from a primal instinct to adapt to the changing environment in order to survive.

What we failed to appreciate was the fact that entire species of politicians would die out in this evolutionary progression; that the process would be chaotic and nasty, the political equivalent of the late Cretaceous period some 65 million years ago when the dinosaurs vanished. Furthermore, we failed to realize that these vanishing political species would not go gently into that good night but would rave and rage as their comfortable, symbiotic relationship with the world around them disintegrated.

One thinks of the intense anger that is still evident in the speeches and pronouncements of Al Gore and John Kerry, the despair that each still exhibits at his respective loss, the petulant, irrational, and almost insane charges that each routinely levels at the President, ranging from accusations that he “stole” the election to having “betrayed the American people.” These men and others like them are a dying breed, the liberal sophists, who divide the United States into separate camps of oppressors and oppressed and view themselves as modern day knights-errant, whose destiny is to smite the former and rescue the latter, armed with a compassion for mankind that is unique to them and a mastery of the federal government’s power to do good.

One also thinks of Charlie Rangel, the Harlem Congressman, who, for most of his 35 years in the House, was in almost perfect harmony with the age. A Democrat when Democrats shook the political ground around them with each step they took. A “black leader” when “black leaders” were revered. And a race baiter when race baiters were considered to be courageous speakers of truth to power.

He was a perpetually cheerful man back then, like Willie Loman, selling his wares with a smile and a shoeshine. You want freedom from personal responsibility? Sure, you got it. Freedom from the need to work? Of course. Freedom from traditional moral constraints? Why not? An endless litany of excuses for destructive behavior? Why yes. Abortions on demand? Certainly, little girl. You deserve it. He was a liberal’s liberal, a provider of destructive government largess, both material and spiritual.

Then change came in on little cat feet, like Sandburg’s fog. And now the smile is gone, replaced by bitterness, anger, and patently irrational rhetoric. Rangel charges that President Bush is the modern day Bull Connor, a charge that is not only ridiculous but far out of touch with the real problems being faced on a day-to-day basis by those the good Congressman purports to represent. Like his liberal cohorts, Gore and Kerry, Rangel’s rhetoric marks him as a member of a dying breed, noisily sinking into the tar pit of history, bleating bromides and spewing venom to a public that isn’t even watching.

It is worth noting that Republicans are not excluded from this round of evolutionary extinction. The entire species of traditional conservatives, for example, is under dire threat of extinction. Unlike the old-line liberals, these old-line conservatives are unusually quiet about their dilemma, which has something to do with their nature, something to do with the fact that most have yet to come to grips with their pending fate, and a lot to do with the unusual adaptability of the species. Rather than raging as they enter the lexicon of extinct, historic oddities, these “conservatives” are merrily evolving into a mutant species that can not only survive but thrive in the world of big, oppressive, and corrupt government.

And this brings us to some observations about the nature of the new political paradigm. As Steve and I have noted in many articles over the past 10 years, this paradigm is notable for a steep decline in meaningful debate over issues that once were the lifeblood of the American political process. The rhetoric often sounds impressive and even impassioned. After all, the

politicians parrot the words and phrases used in years past by the old-line liberals and old-line conservatives, back when it all meant something.

But their words and phrases have little meaning in the grand scheme of things, the outcome of most of the important issues having been already determined before the debate began by bureaucratic needs and by the practical resolution of myriad demands of thousands of special interest groups that registered at the door with money and a promise of votes.

Cornell University's great political science professor and American political science icon Theodore Lowi identified the early stages of this phenomenon years ago and described the process as follows: "The decline of a meaningful dialogue between a liberalism and a conservatism has meant the decline of meaningful adversary political proceeding in favor of administrative, technical, and logrolling politics."

One of the House's most conservative members, former House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, recently put meat on this bone with his public contention in the face of complaints about runaway federal spending that the GOP Congress had "pared [federal spending] down pretty good; I am ready to declare ongoing victory."

Politicians will, of course, continue to differentiate themselves around the issue of moral and ethical values. But I suspect that this time around the Democrats will be better prepared for the debate, and both sides will have hardened their positions, so that the impact of the issue on the marginal voter will be less

The significant new element that I would add to this picture is a quest for competence. In a society that is obsessed with material goods and personal comfort, the American people have come to demand a federal government that is an active, dynamic participant in both of these pursuits. And not only that, they seem more than willing to pay a large share of their income and an even larger share of their personal

freedom for this kind of personal government, which is increasingly replacing the roll that a personal God once played in the lives of many of them.

But they want it to be done right and with no excuses. They don't want to hear that the government has neither the responsibility nor the power to not only alleviate individual hardship when it occurs but to address the task of seeing that such hardship doesn't occur. They will willingly pay for a war if the President says the war is necessary to assure their safety and comfort at home. But they won't tolerate a war that is not run properly or not fulfilling its assigned task. They will tolerate huge expenditures for "emergency management," but they will expect emergencies, when they come, to be handled with competence.

The bottom line on this is that the next election and the ones following will highlight competing claims of administrative acumen to a degree not seen in American politics since Herbert Hoover ran in 1928 as the "Wonder Boy" of governmental management, the "Great Engineer," the man who believed in the "dynamics of mastery."

No doubt, administrative talent is a good quality and one worth having on the resume of a U.S. president. The problem arises if the public begins to expect more than the government can deliver and then blames the shortcoming not on their unrealistic expectations but on the man in the White House. That problem could become an integral part of the new political paradigm. Indeed, it may already have become so.

END NOTES. Harriet Miers.

In the first piece above, we argued that the developments of the last several weeks had been trying for Republicans, but would, in time, yield positive results for the party by forcing it to confront its problems and to listen to its extremely disillusioned conservative base. With the nomination to replace retiring Justice Sandra Day O'Connor on the Supreme Court, President Bush had an opportunity to consolidate this resurgence of conservatives and to propel these positive trends. And in nominating White House Counsel Harriet Miers, the President failed on both counts.

Whether Miers is a true conservative and “constructionist,” we can't say. Nor can we say how she will perform as a justice. What we can say is that very, very few conservatives are going to be happy with this pick, and the ground the President had made up with his base over the last couple of weeks may well be lost as a result.

At a time when President Bush needs desperately to be conscious of the political ramifications of his actions, he appears to have completely eschewed politics in picking Miers. Unfortunately, he appears also to have eschewed legal and judicial qualifications and to have picked based principally on loyalty and familiarity. For a President with a restive base and an increasingly justified public reputation for cronyism, such a move is both brash and dangerous.

While it would be both foolhardy and rash to predict that Miers will not be confirmed, it is entirely reasonable to foresee that her nomination will cause great consternation for the administration and great problems among conservative activists, both on and off Capitol Hill. And it is conceivable, that one or more of these problems could lead to Miers' nomination being rejected. Already there is speculation (according to *National Review's* constitutional expert Ramesh Ponnuru) that Ms. Miers will not receive a “well-qualified” rating from the American Bar Association. Such a development certainly would give cover to any conservatives wishing to reject Miers for any of a host of reasons.

In short, Ms. Miers nomination is the political inverse of the Roberts nomination. As well calculated as the Roberts pick was, the Miers pick appears equally poorly calculated.

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