

Mark L. Melcher Publisher
melcher@thepoliticalforum.com

Stephen R. Soukup Editor
soukup@thepoliticalforum.com

THEY SAID IT

I should look almost with apprehension and with pain upon this intoxicating augmentation of wealth and power if it were my belief that it was confined to the class who are in easy circumstances... .[But] the average condition of the British labourer, we have the happiness to know, has improved during the past twenty years in a degree which we know to be extraordinary, and which we may almost pronounce to be unexampled in the history of any country and of any age.

--From William Gladstone's Budget Speech of April 18, 1863, which was famously misquoted by Karl Marx in *Das Capital* to imply that the then Chancellor of the Exchequer had stated that the vast wealth accumulation of the prior 20 years had been "entirely confined to the classes of property."

In this Issue

"The Poor Have Us Always With Them."

More Winners and Losers.

"THE POOR HAVE US ALWAYS WITH THEM."*

A front-page story in the *Wall Street Journal* last Tuesday said Democrats have decided that the domestic theme for their new stint as the majority party will be to "target the wealth gap," or as the paper also described it, the "divide between rich and poor." According to the newspaper, this "gap" "was not far behind voter anger over Iraq and congressional corruption in driving Democrats to victory" in the elections. In support of this "wealth gap" theme, the *Journal* says that the Democrats' new "campaign manifesto" will be the catchy phrase, "We will make our economy fairer."

The same issue of the *Wall Street Journal* contained a number of "Letters to the Editor" attacking an op-ed piece that the paper had published a week earlier entitled "Class Struggle. American Workers Have A Chance To Be Heard." That article was written by Virginia's new Democratic Senator-elect Jim Webb. The former Republican and former Secretary of the Navy under Ronald Reagan described this "ever widening divide" as a dire threat to America and stated that it is the direct consequence of the "politics of the Karl Rove era," which he said are "designed to distract and divide the very people who would ordinarily be rebelling against the deterioration of their way of life."

Webb didn't put forth any specific suggestions for restoring the "way of life" that he says has been deteriorating, or to stop the deterioration, for that matter. But several buzzwords and phrases he used to describe the dreadful economic horrors that Americans have been experiencing during this "Karl Rove era" provide an indication of the kinds of remedies Democrats are sure to seek.

These include "a vast underground labor pool" of illegal immigrants, "incestuous corporate boards," the "Wal-Marting of cheap consumer products," the "collapse of pension programs" in the wake of corporate reorganizations, outsourcing of jobs, "a sense of entitlement" among elites, a failed education system, stagnant wages, "disappearing jobs," globalization, and long lines of shoppers at retail establishments that

sell high-priced, electronic entertainment gadgets. (Actually, we made that last one up. But you get the point.)

Now for the record, we agree with most of the above-mentioned letters to the editor, which collectively argue that Webb's charges and concerns about the "wealth gap" are a lot of nonsense. Moreover, we are not at all convinced that the "anxiety" about this "wealth gap" was as important to the outcome of the recent elections as the *Journal* seems to think.

But having said that, we will now stipulate that returning to the class warfare theme, which once was a staple of liberal politics, is an excellent strategy for Democrats. In fact, sublime might be a more appropriate adjective. After all, addressing the very real concerns that average Americans are having as a result of the giant and unrelenting forces of global change cannot help but be a better vote getter for them than their current, domestic signature issues, which include hosannas for homosexual marriage, demands for abortion on demand, hand wringing over global warming, and rants against Christianity and traditional morals and mores.

Indeed, it is our belief – and our concern – that the Democrats will make excellent political progress during the next two years if they make class warfare the central theme in every debate over every domestic issue, including but not limited to minimum wage, education, trade, support for unions, entitlements, corporate governance, globalization, social security, and immigration. This would provide a much needed unity to their political message and go a long way toward helping them explain to voters what the Party "stands for," which hasn't been all that clear for some time now.

But more importantly, if the Democrats stay on this message, it will be nigh impossible for today's Republicans to offer a unified defense that doesn't paint them as greedy protectors of "the rich" and betrayers of the "working stiff," which is, of course, the point of it all. This is not to say that there are no good counter arguments to be made against the

"income inequality" claims that Democrats will be putting forth on these issues. It is simply to note that the best arguments that Republicans can make require an intellectual understanding of traditional conservative principles that few if any of them have today, and fewer still would feel comfortable making even if they were capable of doing so.

Regarding this last point, it is worth noting that the majority of Republicans in Congress today, including most of the party's potential candidates for the presidency, are actually squishy liberals when it comes to domestic issues, or to use the term favored by the President and current head of the party, "compassionate conservatives." As with liberals, their first reaction when presented with a problem is to consider what the federal government should do in response. In effect, this virtually guarantees that the centerpiece of the GOP's collective defense is likely to be "we want what the Democrats want only less." And this is a loser's position if there ever was one.

There are, of course, a few genuine conservatives left in the Congress who will rise to the occasion and fight back. But the bulk of these are what we call "talk show" conservatives, meaning that their arguments are valid, as far as they go, but are generally reminiscent of what used to be called "barbershop talk," which has moved from the rapidly disappearing, tonsorial establishments of Main Street, USA to the television "talk show" circuit, where "journalists" play the roles of the former towns squires and town cranks and present banal arguments with considerable flourish for the edification of a nation that is seeped in opinions and mired in ignorance.

In any case, our purpose this week is not to provide conservative arguments to be used against the upcoming Democratic emphasis on the "income gap." We will present specific views on these matters as they come forth. Instead, we would like to make a few general observations about income equality and the government's role in wealth redistribution, all for the purpose of providing an intellectual foundation from which to watch and to comment on the upcoming battles over these subjects.

For openers, it should be noted that while income inequality was a factor in the peasant revolts that occurred in Europe during the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries, the kind of class warfare that Jim Webb and his fellow Democrats are attempting to revive in the opening days of 21st century America are firmly rooted in the industrial revolution which took place in late 18th century and early 19th century Europe. During this extraordinary period, which marked the beginning of modern day industry, the gap between the traditional poor and the newly minted bourgeoisie did indeed widen dramatically, and the living conditions of the men, women and children who provided the physical labor to get capitalism underway were dreadful, to say the least.

Not surprisingly, this circumstance gave rise to a great deal of social protest and to the formation of many political movements designed to right the perceived wrongs, the most important of which was communism. Indeed, the book that arguably did more to promote the spread of communism across Europe than any other was Engels' classic, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. It was published in 1845, when the author was just 24 years old. This was three years before he and Marx issued their famous *Communist Manifesto*, and 22 years before the publication of Marx's *magnum opus*, *Das Capital*.

Engels' book was historically inaccurate, sadly out-of-date in many respects, intentionally misleading in many areas, and, as a prelude to Marx's book, displayed an abysmal ignorance of the fundamentals of economics and sociology. In fact, the terrible conditions that Engels described were already in the process of improving dramatically when his book was published. To some degree this improvement resulted from legislative initiatives aimed at righting some of the wrongs. But more importantly, it was a response to several factors that Engels and Marx chose to ignore and which, wonder of wonders, Jim Webb and his fellow Democrats are ignoring today.

These included the fact that the tremendous increase in wealth that was occurring across England in the wake of the industrial revolution was doing more than

just "trickling down" to the workers. It was pouring forth to them in such abundance, and increasing their standard of living to such a degree, that Gladstone described this phenomenon in his budget message of 1863 as "unexampled in the history of any country and of any age." Also instrumental in the remarkable increase in the standard of living of the poor was a growing understanding by the capitalist manufacturers that their economic interests were best served by the humane treatment of the "human capital" that was keeping their factories operating, and a further understanding that these workers, if treated properly, would become customers for the goods they were producing.

Marx was so embarrassed by this economic miracle, which ran totally contrary to his thesis that capitalism would produce constantly worsening conditions for workers, that he deliberately misquoted Gladstone's comments in his Inaugural Address to the International Working Men's Association in September 1864 and then repeated the "mistake" in *Das Capital* three years later. Needless to say, this established a precedent for his intellectual heirs that lives on today, as evidenced by the willful ignorance displayed in Webb's above-mentioned *Wall Street Journal* piece and that is likely to be a hallmark of the Democratic positions, with no agenbite of inwit, in the debates over "income inequality" that are forthcoming.

On a practical and more immediate level, it seems likely that the principle argument that Republicans will employ in the debates ahead will be that government redistribution programs not only don't work but actually hurt the economy and thus hurt the very people that these plans are designed to help.

This is a barbershop argument. It is largely true, of course, as far it goes. But it has become extremely hackneyed over the years, assuming the nature of such phrases as "early to be bed, early to rise . . ." and "a penny saved blah, blah, blah." Like these platitudes, most people understand it to be true, but are not very much interested in its practical applicability if it interferes with their immediate gratification. Hence, explaining to a low wage worker that an increase in

his minimum wage will be bad for him in the long run is not likely to turn him against the pending pay raise even if he believes the dire prediction.

Moreover, this argument is sadly out of date, in that it fails to recognize the fact that the entire federal government today is nothing more than a giant wealth redistribution network. That is what the government does. In fact, that is almost all that it does. It takes in trillions of dollars a year, mostly from the middle class, skims a good bit off the top for “operating expenses,” and gives it back in the form of various goods and services to the people who gave it to them in the first place. We described this process as follows in an article we wrote for Lehman Brothers five years ago entitled “The Term Corporate America May Be Taking On A Whole New Meaning.”

To use academic public policy terminology, today’s governmental spending is, for the most part, not redistributive but distributive, meaning that the process isn’t designed to take money from one group (the rich, for example) and give it to another (the poor), but to take it from everyone and give it back to everyone in the form of direct payments or favors of one kind or another, after exacting what is usually referred to in not-so-polite company as vigorish.

The word vigorish, as I use it here, is a gambling term, meaning, “a charge taken on bets by a bookie or gambling establishment.” It is appropriate here, I believe, because, in a very real sense, the American tax system has become something akin to casino gambling, whereby everyone “contributes” to “the house,” which returns all but a fixed percentage (the vigorish) back to the players, either through direct payouts or through “comps,” or favors of various kinds. In the casino, the players happily accept paying this vigorish because they hope, through a combination of skill and luck to get back more than they contributed at the expense of the other players.

The game in Washington isn’t voluntary, so most of the players aren’t as happy about the whole thing. But the idea is the same. The big difference is that luck has nothing to do with determining winners and losers in Washington. In the Washington game, the big winners are those who hire the best professionals to play the game for them. These players are called lobbyists, and more often than not, the most effective among them are those who are provided with the most generous amounts of money with which to grease the palms, via “campaign contributions,” of the men and women who run the game.

When viewed from this perspective, it is not at all surprising that Democrats would be anxious now that they have regained power to put the distribution ball in play. For years, Republicans were in charge of the game and raked in the lion’s share of payoffs. Now the Democrats are in charge and they are smart enough to recognize that the prospects of a huge shift in winners and losers is certain to increase the amount of money that will flow in to influence those who are running the game. Hence, the “campaign manifesto,” “we will make our economy fairer.”

This is not to say that conservatives should not point out that radical plans to redistribute wealth have the potential for doing more harm than good to those whom such plans are designed to help, or that they may damage the overall economy. It is simply to say that arguments such as these are not likely to be all that persuasive if the Democrats who are advocating such programs don’t give a damn if they actually make the poor better off or not, or hurt the economy, so long as they make the Democrats themselves better off.

Finally, no discussion of government efforts to make the economy “fairer” would be complete without a bow to the wisdom of Bertrand de Jouvenal, who wrote the definitive book on the subject, entitled *The Ethics of Redistribution*, which was first published in 1952. We cannot hope to do justice to this enlightening tome in this short article, but the

following quotes from this book will provide insights that we think might be valuable to keep in mind while watching the upcoming debate over governmental wealth redistribution efforts.

The State sets up as trustee for the lower-income group and doles out services and benefits. In order to avoid the creation of a “protected class,” a discrimination fatal to political equality, the tendency has been to extend the benefits and services upward to all members of society, to cheapen food and rents for the rich as well as the poor, to assist the well- to-do in illness equally with the needy.

The more one considers the matter, the clearer it becomes that redistribution is in effect far less a redistribution of free income from the richer to the poorer, as imagined, than a redistribution of power from the individual to the State.

Insofar as the State amputates higher incomes, it must assume their savings and investment functions, and we come to the centralization of investment. Insofar, as the amputated higher incomes fail to sustain certain social activities, the state must step in, subsidize these activities, and preside over them.

This results in a transfer of power from individuals to officials, who tend to constitute a new ruling class . . . This leads the observer to wonder how far the demand for equality is directed against inequality itself and is thus a fundamental demand, and how far it is directed against a certain set of “unequals” and is thus an unconscious move in a change of elites.

And then there are the following excerpts from Oxford scholar John Gray’s introduction to the 1990 Liberty Press edition of de Jouvenal’s book.

The resources needed to support a subsistence minimum cannot be derived

solely, or even primarily, from taxation of the rich. Such resources must be extracted from the middle classes, who are also the beneficiaries of income-transfer schemes. . . [de Jouvenal] further notes that a policy of redistribution is bound to discriminate against minorities, since it will inevitably favor the preferences and interests of the majority – a fact remarked upon also by Hayek . . .

The regime of high taxation inseparable from the redistributionist state has the further undesirable consequences of diminishing the sphere of free services in which people engage in convivial relations without the expectation of payment—and thereby corroding the culture of civility that sustains liberal civilization . .

The modern welfare state is not defensible by reference to any coherent set of principles or purposes. It has not significantly alleviated poverty but has instead substantially institutionalized it. This is the upshot of path breaking studies such as Charles Murray’s *Losing Ground*. A generation of welfare policy has inflicted on its clients such disincentives and moral hazards as to leave their last state worse than their first . . . if any social group benefits it is likely to be the middle class majority rather than the poor . . . the institution of the family is disprivileged under any redistributionist regime: [Quoting Robert Nozick now] “To such views, families are disturbing; for within a family occur transfers that upset the favored distribution.”

So there you have some ideas to contemplate as the debate over Democratic efforts to make the economy “fairer” nears. A final point to keep in mind is the following wisdom from Burke’s famous “Thoughts and Details On Scarcity,” written by him in 1795.

In a fair distribution among a vast multitude, none can have much. That class of dependant pensioners called the rich is so

extremely small that if all their throats were cut, and a distribution made of all they consume in a year, it would not give a bit of bread and cheese for one night's supper to those who labour, and who in reality feed both the pensioners and themselves.

But the throats of the rich ought not to be cut, nor their magazines plundered; because, in their persons they are trustees for those who labour, and their hoards are the banking-houses of these latter. Whether they mean it or not, they do, in effect, execute their trust – some with more, some with less fidelity and judgment. But on the whole, the duty is performed, and every thing returns, deducting some very trifling commission and discount, to the place from whence it arose. When the poor rise to destroy the rich, they act as wisely for their own purposes as when they burn mills, and throw corn into the river, to make bread cheap....

A perfect equality will indeed be produced; that is to say, equal want, equal wretchedness, equal beggary, and on the part of the partitioners, a woeful, helpless, and desperate disappointment. Such is the event of all compulsory equalizations. They pull down what is above. They never raise what is below: and they depress high and low together beneath the level of what was originally the lowest.

Good luck and Godspeed capitalists. You're going to need it in the months ahead.

* The full quote from which the title of this piece is taken comes from Lady Caroline in Saki's great short story, "The Unbearable Bassington". It goes as follows: "No one has ever said it, but painfully true it is that the poor have us always with them."

MORE WINNERS AND LOSERS.

In the three weeks since the election, we have had a little time to take stock of the results and thus to determine more clearly who the real winners and losers were, beyond the simple partisan breakdown. We now know, for example, that two of the biggest losers of this election season were Karl Rove and Ken Mehlman, who were previously presumed to be unflappable and unstoppable political geniuses.

You see, Rove and Mehlman put together a fantastic ground operation that carried the GOP to victory in 2000, 2002, and again 2004. But their long-term strategy for making the Republicans the semi-permanent majority party fell apart three weeks ago. That strategy, which was premised on the idea that independents are a dwindling and relatively insignificant faction of the electorate and that elections can be won exclusively by engaging and energizing one's political base, failed miserably this time around.

It's not that their plan didn't work, just that it proved woefully insufficient. Confident predictions of a rank-and-file GOP revolt notwithstanding, Republicans again turned out in heavy numbers and again voted overwhelmingly for their party, just as Rove and Mehlman had expected they would. But the party lost independents by a hefty margin and, in so doing, managed to lose the overall vote by a hefty margin as well. Frankly, given the scope of the failure this time around of the Rove-Mehlman approach, the GOP should be grateful that its losses were still relatively mild. They could have been much, much worse.

Of all the losers in this year's election, however, perhaps the biggest, though probably the least often mentioned, were America's black voters. Now, we are quite aware that most Washington observers would disagree rather fervently with us on this point. After all, several senior black members of Congress are poised to take over the leadership of important House committees, including the powerful Judiciary and Ways and Means committees. In addition, a black man has just been elected Majority Whip, the third most powerful position in the House. As such, it would

appear that black voters are better represented in the halls of power than ever before.

But that's only part of the story. There are at least three other crucial elements to it that are likely to be much less comforting to black Americans. For starters, those black politicians who will be front and center in the next Congress are sure to be among the most controversial and potentially embarrassing Democratic politicians in the nation, and at least a couple of these individuals appear to be more intent on settling personal political scores than on representing their constituents or stewarding their party.

As we noted in our post-election article two weeks ago, incoming Judiciary Committee Chairman John Conyers is generally considered something of a loose cannon, or, as *National Review's* Ned Rice put it, Conyers is "the House's version of a senile uncle puttering around the place with his bathrobe open muttering about Mamie van Doren's chest or fluoridated water." For the time being, though, Conyers has taken a backseat in the loony bin to Ways and Means Committee Chairman-designate Charlie Rangel, who seems hell bent on further alienating his party from the military, on upsetting his constituents, and on angering the overwhelming majority of Americans, all to prove a point that is largely bogus.

Rangel has, of course, proposed reinstating the draft, in large part because he believes that the nation's elites avoid military service, while its lower economic classes bear that burden unduly. And this, he believes, leads elite-class politicians (i.e. George Bush) to treat soldiers as fungible and to sacrifice them cavalierly.

Of course, Rangel is wrong here on all counts. Numerous studies show that the education level and reading comprehension of the nation's soldiers are both considerably higher than those of the population at large. Moreover, Rangel insists on calling America's soldiers stupid failures, insisting that they would not be in the military if they could be successful elsewhere. To top it all off, both the nation in general and Rangel's own constituents think he's out of his mind. More than 70% of poll respondents oppose plans to

bring back the draft, and just last week *The New York Daily News* reported that Rangel's plan is being met with derision back in his Harlem district, with one of his constituents asking the paper if the Congressman has been "smoking pot or something."

Just as troubling as those who are representing black America on the national stage are those who won't be. All four black candidates for statewide office – Republicans Lynn Swann, Michael Steele, and Ken Blackwell and Democrat Harold Ford – were defeated early this month, which means that there remains only one black politician in the nation who represents a constituency that is larger than a gerrymandered, racially homogenous Congressional district, namely Illinois Senator Barak Obama.

We have long argued that one of the critical reasons that black politicians remain at the fringes of political discourse is because the artificially created "black districts" allow them to do so without fear of electoral consequences. And this, in turn keeps black voters on the political fringes, as well as denying them the representation they should, by rights, receive. If politicians are assured of reelection simply by spouting tired, racially fraught, old liberal platitudes, what in the world would motivate them to do otherwise?

There are only two ways to break this cycle. First, the parties could stop the practice of overt and aggressive gerrymandering, which would force black politicians to modify their positions to please a wider, more ideologically diverse constituency. But since that is extremely unlikely, given the fact that the current arrangement favors incumbents from both parties, the only other answer is for black politicians to seek statewide office, and thereby force themselves to address broader constituencies and to modify their positions accordingly.

Here, Harold Ford's campaign for the Senate can be seen as a model. Ford wanted to represent a conservative Southern state (Tennessee), and he ran a campaign consistent with that goal, thereby offering black voters a political platform they would otherwise never have been offered. Ford had to temper his views and thus moved to the center. In so doing, he

promised to bring his black constituents to the center with him.

Unfortunately, Ford and all the other black candidates lost, thereby ensuring that the only black politicians in Washington (with the notable exception of Obama) will be those who owe their political allegiance exclusively to the left-wing fringes of the political spectrum. And this all but guarantees that black voters will continue to have representation that does them precious little real world good, despite the trappings of power.

The final reason that the election was a net loser for black voters is the manner in which the current power arrangements in the incoming majority were reached and the reasons that power was divvied up thusly. In addition to the aforementioned Conyers and Rangel, prominent black politicians in the next Congress will include House Majority Whip James Clyburn and, most likely, House Intelligence Committee Chairman Alcee Hastings.

Clyburn is a talented enough politician, but it is unlikely that he would be the new Majority Whip were it not for the support that he was given by incoming Speaker Nancy Pelosi. And it is unlikely that Pelosi would have supported him so aggressively had the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) not insisted so fervently that she do so. If Hastings does indeed become chairman of the Intelligence Committee, that too will be because of the CBC's insistence. The CBC wanted those prominent spots, and Pelosi has found it impossible thus far to say no.

Now, the real issue here is why Pelosi feels it difficult to say no to the CBC. Clearly, she feels that she needs the support of the Caucus, but why is that support not automatic?

As it turns out, Pelosi has some problems with the CBC, and those problems stem from the fact that she took aggressive action last Congress against Louisiana Congressman and CBC member William Jefferson, removing him from his seat on the House Ways and Means Committee. Jefferson, you may recall, is the Congressman who was caught with \$90,000

worth of alleged bribe money in his freezer and who commandeered National Guard resources to check on the safety and well being of his home in New Orleans in the midst of Hurricane Katrina evacuation and rescue efforts. Pelosi took action against him because he deserved it. He is most assuredly one of the most corrupt members of the Congressional delegation from one of the most corrupt states in the union. And Pelosi rightfully saw him as a liability.

Nevertheless, the CBC objected, claiming that Jefferson was being treated unfairly, freezer full of cash or not. Rather than punish a likely corrupt official and thus deliver his constituents from his dishonest and therefore ineffectual leadership, the CBC chose to defend Jefferson, to protect one of their own. And they chose to pick a fight with Pelosi over the matter.

What this means is that the CBC has picked a fight with Pelosi – and won – simply because it believes the accumulation of power by its members is more important than honest and effective representation of their constituents. It should not be forgotten here that Alcee Hastings, the man they and Pelosi are backing for the coveted chairmanship of the Intelligence Committee, is himself a manifestly corrupt individual, being one of fewer than ten federal judges in the entire history of the nation to be impeached, convicted, and removed from the bench for “high crimes and misdemeanors,” in his case, bribery related corruption.

Last September, in our post-Katrina piece, we noted that one of the most significant and under-appreciated problems facing black communities nationwide is the indifference of black political leaders and the Democratic establishment in general to matters of corruption and social disintegration that affect the nation's black communities detrimentally and disproportionately. We put it thusly.

What precipitates poverty, particularly in cities like New Orleans, Detroit, Washington, D.C., and East St. Louis, is corruption, the breakdown of the family, and what has become known as “the culture

of dependency.” And what precipitates those factors is the civil rights and liberal establishments’ tolerance for such things, their absolute and steadfast refusal to acknowledge that there are problems plaguing the black community that are entirely unrelated to white racism.

President Bush has a phrase that many conservatives detest, which he uses in conjunction with his education policies, “the soft bigotry of low expectations.” This phrase, more than any other, captures the liberal establishment’s attitudes toward predominantly black cities in this country. For reasons we can’t even begin to imagine or understand, the liberal and civil rights establishments are willing to tolerate conditions in predominately black municipalities that they would not tolerate elsewhere, *despite the fact that the people who suffer most from of these conditions are themselves black.*

By Mayor Nagin’s own estimation, anywhere from a third to half (33%-44%) of New Orleans residents over the age of 16 are functionally illiterate. This as much as anything that happened in the last week is a disgrace and represents a serious and unqualified threat to the city’s black population. But instead of worrying about how this utter failure of the city’s public school system contributes to the creation of a permanent underclass, or how it almost certainly contributed to the failure of many residents to heed the evacuation orders, folks like Jackson and Sharpton are out caterwauling about the lack of quotas at FEMA and making excuses for violent armed thugs who terrorized the city for the better part of a week.

What the CBC’s actions in defense of folks like William Jefferson and Alcee Hastings demonstrate

is that the Democratic Party establishment remains more dedicated to power than to good governance, campaign slogans notwithstanding. The CBC apparently believes that it is more important to achieve positions of prominence than to ensure that black constituents are represented in Washington faithfully and honestly. And the rest of the party is willing to go along, apparently believing that party unity is a more worthy goal than the eradication of the “culture of corruption” in Washington.

There has been considerable speculation among analysts and pundits of the left and the center-left about the effect that the Congressional Black Caucus is having on the Democratic Party. Many believe that the CBC’s campaigns in support of Jefferson and Hastings have hurt the party badly. While we’d concede that point, we’d argue that they have actually hurt black Democrats (which is to say the overwhelming majority of black voters) more than anyone.

In local politics nationwide – from Detroit to New Orleans, from East St. Louis to Newark – black establishment leaders defend the manifestly corrupt status quo, despite the deleterious impact that the corruption has on predominantly black communities. In defending Jefferson and Hastings, the CBC has signaled that it too will defend the status quo, corruption be damned, in order to retain or accumulate power. And this hurts no one more than black voters.

We realize that we’re in the distinct minority here in arguing that the midterm election was bad for black voters. Most analysts, pundits, and politicians appear to believe that the ascendance of black politicians to positions of power is not only significant, but significant enough to overwhelm any potential downside concerns. We couldn’t disagree more. When the new Congress is seated next January, black voters may well be represented more prominently, but that’s not to say that they will be represented more honestly or effectively.

Copyright 2006. The Political Forum. 8563 Senedo Road, Mt. Jackson, Virginia 22842, tel. 540-477-9762, fax 540-477-3359. All rights reserved.

Information contained herein is based on data obtained from recognized services, issuer reports or communications, or other sources believed to be reliable. However, such information has not been verified by us, and we do not make any representations as to its accuracy or completeness, and we are not responsible for typographical errors. Any statements nonfactual in nature constitute only current opinions which are subject to change without notice.