

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

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

## THEY SAID IT

Arise, ye pris'ners of starvation!  
Arise, ye wretched of the earth,  
For Justice thunders condemnation,  
A better world's in birth.

No more tradition's chain shall bind us.  
Arise, ye slaves; No more in thrall!  
The earth shall rise on new foundations,  
We have been naught, we shall be all.

--Eugene Pottier, *The International*, Paris, June 1871.

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## 2007 ON THE HOME FRONT: MORE SOUND AND FURY.

If we had thought things through a little better, we would have saved the title of last week's piece, "Filled with Sound and Fury," for this week, since the quote from which that phrase was drawn, "full of sound and fury *signifying nothing*" is, in our estimation, much better suited to the domestic political scene. (And please, no comments about how this tale is "told by an idiot." Methinks we know that.)

For the fact is that despite all of the hype surrounding the new Democratic Congressional majority and its "mandate for change," when the dust settles on 2007, it is likely that very little will actually have changed in Washington. The "do-nothing" Republican Congress will have been replaced by the "do-nothing" Democratic Congress, but little else will be different. And that's a good thing, generally speaking.

*Prediction #1: "Blessed Gridlock" will return.*

We won't pretend that we were pleased by the results of the 2006 midterm election. While we never subscribed to the theory that a Democratic takeover of Congress would be a colossal disaster, we would nonetheless have preferred that the GOP had retained power. As the old saw goes, you don't change horses midstream – all the more so when that stream represents a global clash of civilizations and the new horse appears predisposed to lie down where the water is deepest rather than to press on toward the far shore.

In any case, the Democrats now control Congress and intend to use their newfound power to make things difficult for President Bush. So be it. The Republicans did that to Bill Clinton in the '90s, and the Democrats desperately crave payback.

What President Bush will get, in return, is an opportunity to break out his veto pen. For six years, the Republicans in Congress did what they wanted, and the President merrily signed every lousy piece of legislation they passed. But those days are over. If there is a silver lining to the dark cloud of the

Democratic majority, it is that Congress and the President will be working at cross purposes, meaning that they will agree on very little. And that means, in turn, that very little will get done and very few bills will be signed. Good.

The gridlock that will grip the nation's capital for the next two years will not be quite as blessed as that which gripped it during the '90s – in part because of the war and in part because of the fact that all of the Bush tax cuts will, in the absence of legislation, expire in 2010. But it will be pleasant nonetheless.

That doesn't mean that the Democrats will do nothing on their own, mind you. Unfortunately, they will do quite a bit, much of it damaging or potentially damaging to the nation and to the financial markets. In their first day in power, for example, the Pelosi-led House Democrats abolished the old GOP rule mandating a three-fifths majority to increase taxes. Under the new rule, a simple majority will be sufficient. And that is a portent of economically destructive actions to come, we're afraid.

All things considered, though, "divided power" will once again work its magic, keeping both the Pelosi-Reid Democrats and the Bush Republicans from enjoying themselves too much and from advancing their legislative agendas notably.

*Prediction #2: The Democratic Congressional majority, like its GOP predecessor, will be beset by scandal, corruption, and political depravity. Indeed, corruption will be a major storyline in the new Congress. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi will remain largely unpopular with the American public. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid will remain largely invisible to everyone but his immediate family. In short, "business as usual" will continue in Washington.*

Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi has promised to clean up the ethical swamp that is the House of Representatives. She is unlikely to be able to keep that promise. Indeed, she is unlikely to try, at least in a conventional sense. The Speaker has, of course, offered a package of ethics reforms, but these reforms aren't really about Congress at all. As Daniel Henninger noted in last Friday's *Wall Street Journal*:

If you stare at these [ethics] rules awhile, eventually you notice that they are less about the members of Congress than about someone else. They are about the bad people who lead the innocent lambs of Congress astray. They are about "lobbyists" and "private interests" and, not least, "corporate jets," which for the modern member of Congress appear to be the rough equivalent of demon rum.

The catch here is that while some lobbyists may be a problem, they are not *the* problem. *The* problem is that a shocking number of House members are deeply and irredeemably corrupt, and no number of restrictions on lobbyists or on "earmarks" or on campaign finance donations is going to change that. And Madame Pelosi knows this full well.

How does she know it? As it turns out, many of the most hopelessly corrupt members of Congress are her fellow Democrats, some of whom she has either tried to arm with significant power or has actually succeeded in doing so. Mrs. Pelosi's campaign assertion that the Republicans ran the "most corrupt Congress in history" may have been technically correct, though we doubt it. In any case, that doesn't mean that all the corruption was perpetrated by Republicans.

Indeed, Mrs. Pelosi's new majority sports some notoriously corrupt members in some very high places, even if one leaves out John Murtha, the would-be House Majority Leader and unindicted ABSCAM co-conspirator; Alcee Hastings, an impeached federal judge and Madame Speaker's initial choice to head the House Intelligence Committee; and William Jefferson, the Louisiana Congressman who stashed \$90,000 in bribe money in his freezer,

Among others, there's John Conyers, the incoming Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee (and thus the man responsible for legislative oversight of the nation's legal system), who "accepted responsibility" a week-and-a-half ago for ethics violations stemming from his use of taxpayer-supported official staffers to work on his reelection

campaign, the presidential campaign of former Senator Carol Mosely-Brown, and JoAnn Watson's campaign for Mayor of Detroit. The Ethics Committee report on Conyers' indiscretions was conveniently enough released late in the afternoon on Friday, December 29 – just before New Year's weekend – virtually ensuring that no one would see it, much less pay it any heed.

Conyers is not alone, of course. West Virginia Democrat Alan Mollohan has been under federal investigation for nearly a year now for possible bribery involving the purchase of land in partnership with a "friend" for whom he had just secured a \$2.1 million earmark. But that pesky investigation isn't going to stop Speaker Pelosi from allowing Mollohan to assume the chairmanship of the House Appropriations Subcommittee for Science, State, Justice, Commerce and Related Agencies – *the subcommittee that coincidentally handles appropriations for the Justice Department*. Asked about Mollohan, the investigation, and the propriety of allowing him to chair the relevant subcommittee, Pelosi responded: "Quite frankly, I think the Justice Department is looking into every member of Congress. I always say to everybody, 'You're now going to get a free review of your family tree – past, present and future, imagined and otherwise.'" Wow. Elliot Ness she's not.

Now, if you think we're picking on the Democrats here, that's not our intention. We're simply pointing out that for all of their bluster about ethically challenged Republicans and the GOP's "culture of corruption," the Democrats are no better. If the Congressional Republicans were more corrupt than their Democratic counterparts, it was only marginally. And despite the new Speaker's superficial dedication to rooting out sleaze and coercive governance in "the people's House," her actions suggest that she will run that House much as her predecessors did.

Unfortunately for Mrs. Pelosi, this isn't something that the American public is going to miss. By making ethics and corruption the centerpiece of her campaign and now her governing strategy, she increased exponentially the interest in such matters. That's good for the GOP and for us, but not so good for her.

Between the conservative blogosphere, talk radio, and Fox News, tales of Democratic corruption will get a great deal of air play, far more than they did the last time the Democrats ran Congress.

The net effect of all of this is that an already cynical public will grow even more so in 2007. Already there are signs of disillusionment with the new Democratic majority. Last spring, former White House chief of staff Leon Panetta lamented that "you can attack one party for having a lack of ethics, but if any of your own members have problems, it dulls the message with the American people. They begin to put everybody in the same box."

And that is precisely what is happening. In the weeks after November's election, the net approval rating for Congress, already in the low 20s, actually fell. Speaker Pelosi's personal approval rating is two points lower than President Bush's (though her negatives are much lower than his). And even some Democrats have grown frustrated at what they see as the "same-old same-old." Just last week, former Clinton administration lawyer Greg Craig complained in a *Washington Post* column that even from his "perspective inside the Beltway, it looks like 2007 is business as usual."

The good news in all of this is that someday someone is actually going to notice what is happening in American politics and propose to do something about it – something that would alleviate the problem and ease the public's cynicism about government in the process. And we believe that someday is now.

That's right, we believe that 2007 will be the year during which a prominent public figure starts with Lord Acton's chestnut about power corrupting and then actually makes the logical leap to conclude that what is corrupting the elected members of the federal government is the power of the federal government.

In fact, we believe that this public figure will latch on to the corruption and abuse of power issues, channel the public's disgust with most politicians, and ultimately make the case that the key to alleviating the cynicism and cleaning up Washington is to reduce

the power of the federal government. Moreover, we believe that he will make this case, which will be presented rather eloquently and effectively, the centerpiece of his campaign for the presidency. The problem here is that we suspect that the public figure in question will be Newt Gingrich.

Given what we've seen and read about and from the former Speaker over the last several months, we're convinced that he is poised to try a comeback. Newt has been positioning himself on a number of issues, including the Iraq war, Congressional overspending, and ethics in government, all in what appears to be a prelude to a run at the presidency. Newt has always been able to gauge voters, conservative voters in particular, better than just about anyone else. And he's also always been able to develop themes and plans that slake the voters' thirst.

It's easy to forget now, but Newt's ultimate triumph, the masterful midterm election of 1994, came only two years after the Republican Party hit bottom. Recall that in 1992, the incumbent president not only lost the race to a largely unknown Southern governor, but also lost roughly one in six votes to a loopy little Texas billionaire who happened to tap into a vein of discontent in the electorate. Newt not only recognized the source of that discontent, but promised to fix it as well. We suspect that he will attempt to do the same thing again, to turn around his party's fortunes in a two-year span by cutting to the heart of the problem and proposing a solution.

He will fail, of course. But he'll give it a try.

In our opinion, Newt Gingrich is unquestionably one of the most talented and engaging public figures of his generation, but he also carries quite a bit of baggage. For starters, the mainstream media detests him and did a rather nice job of convincing much of the American public to do so as well when he was Speaker of the House. Additionally, Newt remains Newt, a man who like so many other public figures of his age (i.e. Baby Boomers), appears to believe in nothing quite so deeply as his own indispensability. Newt will not be president. But, assuming we are correct about his intentions, he will alter the terms of the debate, and that can't hurt.

Our hope is that Newt will serve the same function as was served by Steve Forbes in the 1996 and 2000 Republican primary campaigns. He will be the guy who has the least chance of winning the nomination but who nonetheless espouses the most sensible and conservative policy proposals. In so doing, he will force his opponents (including the eventual nominee) to adopt positions of their own to address the important concerns that he raised and that they might otherwise have ignored.

In any event, we expect that the Democratic Congress will do little to endear itself to the American electorate and will, in fact, further disaffect most nonpartisan or "independent" voters. And this, in turn, will affect the race for the presidency.

Which brings us to....

*Prediction #3: The race for the White House will heat up, with both frontrunners encountering surprising difficulty. The anti-Washington mood of the electorate, in evidence last November, will be exacerbated by Democratic parsimoniousness and by partisan bickering. Candidates not considered Washington "insiders" will benefit, at least in the short run.*

Serious political analysts and pundits have been trying, largely unsuccessfully, to explain the immediate, overwhelming, and rather surprising affection that a segment of the electorate has shown for Illinois freshman Senator Barack Obama. Some claim it's his charisma that has the public all worked up; others say it's his wit and intelligence; still others his race (his father is black and his mother white) and his potential to help heal some of the nation's longstanding racial wounds. All are probably right, to a point. But what is most endearing about Obama, we think, is that he is not a Washington lifer. Eventually his lack of experience will do him in, but right now, the fact that he has been in Washington for only two years is a significant advantage.

The same goes for Republicans like Rudy Giuliani and Mitt Romney. They are not Washington insiders. And that is to their advantage. In a normal year, with a normally disposed electorate, Giuliani's chances in a Republican primary would be extremely slim,

his admirable actions in the aftermath of 9/11 notwithstanding. But this is not a normal year. And this is not a normally disposed electorate.

By contrast, both John McCain and Hillary Clinton have been in Washington and in the public's consciousness as Washington insiders for so long that they can't help but be hurt by the anti-Washington mood. Hillary will be hurt more by this than McCain, who has cultivated a "maverick" image that will insulate him a bit. Nonetheless, both frontrunners will find themselves threatened far more than they will like.

In addition to Obama, Giuliani, and Romney, we suspect that at least one other "outsider" will make some noise in the pre-primary season, probably on the Democrat side. Former Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack has already announced his candidacy, and, for obvious reasons, he will be a threat to gain early momentum by winning the Iowa caucuses. It is also possible that a heretofore largely unknown candidate will enter the race, sensing the opportunity to take advantage of the anti-Washington sentiment. We wouldn't be surprised, for example, to see Tennessee's incredibly popular Democratic governor Phil Bredesen throw his proverbial hat into the ring, offering the Democrats the opportunity to nominate a candidate who might actually be able to win a state south of the Mason-Dixon.

And speaking of Democrats and their political fortunes south of the Mason-Dixon....

*Prediction #4: Hurricane Katrina will claim her final victim, toppling the Democratic administration of Louisiana, putting a Republican Indian-American in that state's governor's mansion.*

The single off-year election this year will be in Louisiana, where Governor Kathleen Blanco appears set to seek a second term. Her likely opponent will be Congressman Bobby Jindal, the man who should have beaten her four years ago and who *will* beat her this time around.

Blanco, you may recall, is perhaps the only elected "leader" who performed more poorly as Katrina

destroyed New Orleans than did that city's mayor, Ray Nagin. Of course, Nagin was reelected in spite of his incompetence. Blanco will not be. In our estimation, the only way the Democrats can hold this seat is to convince the Governor not to run or to defeat her in the open primary. Otherwise, this seat turns red.

The most interesting aspect of this election, as we see it, is that it will not merely bring to a close the deadly incompetence of Blanco's Democratic administration, but will also denote the complete rehabilitation of the Louisiana GOP. Recall that just 16 years ago, the Republican candidate in Louisiana's governor's race was former Klansman David Duke (not to be confused with the "conscience of the Senate," former Klansman Robert Byrd). At this time next year, Louisiana will be swearing in a "person of color" (Congressman Jindal is of Indian descent), who also happens to be a Republican. Jindal is a good conservative, has been a good Congressman, and will be a good governor. And David Duke, for his part, will be rolling over in his grave.

In truth, Duke won't do this, since he's not dead yet (but you get the point). Duke actually spends his time gallivanting around the globe, going to places like Tehran, telling anyone who will listen about the destructive power of "the Jews" and blaming Israel and its agents of influence in the United States for destabilizing the Middle East, particularly Iraq. And that brings us at long last to....

*Prediction #5: The Democrats' "descent in madness" will continue in spite of their recent electoral success. Indeed, the descent is likely to accelerate. When all is said and done, the Democrats will be bitterly divided among themselves over matters of national security, and one of the party's longstanding core constituencies will be destroyed as a coherent voting bloc.*

Last Wednesday, just as Congressional Democrats were embarking on their long-awaited, much-anticipated return to power, "anti-war" protestors led by moonbat extraordinaire Cindy Sheehan decided that they would use the opportunity to remind Democratic leaders just who was in charge. Sheehan and her friends shut down the House Democrats'

kick-off press conference, just to prove that they could and to remind the likes of Nancy Pelosi and Rahm Emanuel that they expect the newly empowered Democratic Party to end the war in Iraq.

Right on cue, Democratic leaders proceeded to attack President Bush on Iraq and to label his proposed troop “surge” a “failed policy,” despite the fact that the policy hasn’t even been finalized yet, much less implemented. Madame Pelosi took her marching orders from the fringe anti-warriors one step further, suggesting that she may seek to hold up or deny funding for the President’s war plans, thereby threatening to repeat the stunning success of the anti-Vietnam movement (a “success” which, by the way, led to the overthrow of a democratic regime, the slaughter of hundreds of thousands, and dispossession of millions more).

Now, we know that the nation itself is deeply divided over Iraq. And we know as well that even the GOP is divided on the issue. That notwithstanding, those divisions pale in comparison to the division among Democrats, which is not only deeper and more entrenched, but also more likely to fester into a gaping wound.

The majority of elected Democrats feel that the war was a mistake but that to end it now would be difficult, not just strategically, but politically as well. A small bloc within the party still believes that the war should be won. But by far the loudest and most vocal faction believes that American surrender should begin immediately, consequences be damned. Moreover, this latter group believes that it was responsible for the Democratic Party’s victories last fall and because of this that the party can and should do whatever possible to ensure this surrender, up to and including openly cheering America’s defeat. This is a recipe for political disaster.

All the Democrats have to do is sit there and keep their mouths shut and everything will be okay, for them anyway. If the troop “surge” succeeds, Democrats won’t be able to do anything about

President Bush’s political rehabilitation anyway. If it fails, President Bush won’t be able to do anything to stop the country from joining the Democrats in advocating the abandonment of the effort.

Given the division of power on national security matters and the mood of the nation in general, there is nothing practical the Democrats can do to stop President Bush from taking the actions he deems necessary in Iraq. And most of them realize that. Yet the vocal and increasingly aggressive “anti-war” faction does not care and prefers to let its hatreds and prejudices dictate its action, unconcerned about the possible consequences for themselves, their party, and the nation. To say this is irrational doesn’t do it justice. It’s madness.

But by far the “maddest” reaction by the political left to the Iraq war remains its slow and steady climb down into the fevered swamps of anti-Semitism. Since the beginning of the war on terror – even before the invasion of Iraq – the Democratic Party has been flirting with unapologetic anti-Semitism, quietly whispering that the war in all its manifestations and even terrorism itself are the result of the United States’ relationship with Israel. These whispers have grown progressively louder and today are nearing the volume of a scream. The positions of a handful of Democrats and Democratic supporters on such matters as the war in Iraq, the broader war on terror, and national security policy, are indistinguishable from those of, say, the aforementioned David Duke.

In fact, strongly voiced, anti-Israel sentiments, coupled with ugly borderline anti-Semitism, have long been a centerpiece of the party’s far left extreme, but have by and large remained relegated to that fringe. Now, however, anti-Israel and anti-Semitic sentiments are emerging into the party’s mainstream and threaten to become a guiding principle of the new majority. The ascension of Israel-baiters like David Obey, John Dingell, John Conyers, and Robert Byrd to positions of power (House Appropriations Committee Chairman, House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman, House Judiciary Committee Chairman,

and Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman, respectively), points to the escalating significance and mainstreaming of anti-Semitism within the Democratic Party.

Such prominent Democrats as former President and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Jimmy Carter and former (and possibly future) presidential candidate Wesley Clark have recently joined the ranks of those who have openly expressed their belief that American policy toward Israel is the root of all evil in the Middle East and that nefarious Jewish conspiracies wield undue influence in the United States (and presumably elsewhere in the world). Just last week, Clark was asked by political gadfly Ariana Huffington why he is so convinced that President Bush intends to attack Iran's nuclear weapons facilities. He replied that the Jews would make him do it. To wit:

When we asked him what made him so sure the Bush administration was headed in this direction, he replied: "You just have to read what's in the Israeli press. The Jewish community is divided but there is so much pressure being channeled from the New York money people to the office seekers."

We long ago gave up predicting that large numbers of Jewish voters would eventually migrate toward the Republican Party, and for good reason. Despite the Democrats' latent anti-Semitism, according to Gabriel Schoenfeld, Jewish voters still voted for Democrats this fall by a shocking margin of 88% to 12%.

But at the very least, the Democrats' slide into anti-Semitism is likely to cause problems within their ranks, as prominent Jewish Democrats are forced to acknowledge publicly what is happening to their traditional party of choice and are consequently compelled to fight back. Some already have. Notoriously liberal Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz, for example, has spent the last several weeks chasing Jimmy Carter around, trying to get the former President to debate some of the anti-Israel charges in his new book. The result has been to push Carter further into the fever swamps. In fact, Carter now claims (without substantiation) that colleges with large numbers of Jewish students have cancelled his speaking engagements, all because folks like Dershowitz are maligning him and wielding their apparently superhuman powers of persuasion.

In sum then, it looks like 2007 will be an interesting year on the American political scene. Everything will be different, yet nothing will have changed. For political junkies like ourselves, 2007 will be one of the most fascinating if ultimately uneventful years we could imagine. We hope we feel the same way when it's over.

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