

Mark L. Melcher Publisher
melcher@thepoliticalforum.com

Stephen R. Soukup Editor
soukup@thepoliticalforum.com

THEY SAID IT

Skeptical conservatives – one of the Right's less celebrated subcultures – are conservatives because of their skepticism, not in spite of it. They ground their ideas in rational thinking and (nonreligious) moral argument. And the conservative movement is crippling itself by leaning too heavily on religion to the exclusion of these temperamentally compatible allies.

Conservative atheists and agnostics support traditional American values. They believe in personal responsibility, self-reliance, and deferred gratification as the bedrock virtues of a prosperous society. They view marriage between a man and a woman as the surest way to raise stable, law-abiding children. They deplore the encroachments of the welfare state on matters best left to private effort.

They also find themselves mystified by the religiosity of the rhetoric that seems to define so much of conservatism today. Our Republican president says that he bases “a lot of [his] foreign policy decisions” on his belief in “the Almighty” and in the Almighty’s “great gifts” to mankind. What is one to make of such a statement? . . .

The presumption of religious belief—not to mention the contradictory thinking that so often accompanies it—does damage to conservatism by resting its claims on revealed truth. But on such truth there can be no agreement without faith. And a lot of us do not have such faith—nor do we need it to be conservative....

Heather McDonald, *The American Conservative*, April 28, 2006.

WITHER THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT?

One of the most enduring traditions of televised sporting events is something called “color commentary,” which consists of one or more experts providing tidbits of information that he or she has picked up from friends and contacts associated with the sport along with observations about the action itself, usually based on his or her prior or present involvement in the game. This has become so much a part of the sports scene today that many fans bring portable radios or televisions to games in order not to miss the commentary, even though they are viewing the action firsthand.

Not all of this commentary is useful or even insightful. But it sometimes is, and even when it isn't, it adds to the fun. Consider this: “I learned this week that the offensive right guard has an injured shoulder, so watch for the defense to blitz on that side.” If a blitz occurs on that side, causes a fumble, which results

In this Issue

Wither the Christian Right?

Political Overreach.

Subscriptions are available by contacting:

The Political Forum LLC 8563 Senedo Road, Mt. Jackson, Virginia 22842
Phone 540.477.9762 Fax 540.477.3359 melcher@thepoliticalforum.com www.thepoliticalforum.com

in a game-winning touchdown by the defense, the “color commentator” is nothing short of a genius. If nothing unusual happens with respect to the bad-shouldered guard, the comment is forgotten. In either case, the observation gave everyone an opportunity to talk a little about the importance of offensive guards, blitzes, and shoulder injuries. So, to paraphrase the society pages of yore, a good time is had by all.

As you’ve probably guessed by now, this little discourse on color commentary is an introduction to some of our own regarding the 2008 presidential race, and to note in advance that while it may turn out to be irrelevant, it could be important, and even if it isn’t, it provides an opportunity to discuss an interesting aspect of the upcoming Super Bowl of American politics. The gist of our color comment for the week is this:

Democratic presidential hopefuls are likely to talk a great deal more than usual about God and faith and “moral values” during this upcoming election, and the Republican candidates are likely to be noticeably less aggressive in courting the religious right this time around than George Bush was, which could – *could* – cause a small but important shift in the tectonic plates of American politics that would bode poorly for the Grand Old Party.

Now the best way to begin addressing this subject is to note that just over two years ago, pundits, politicians, and pollsters all agreed that President Bush’s victory over John Kerry and the GOP’s happy results in both the House and the Senate races had a lot to do with the edge that Republicans had over Democrats on the subject of “moral values.” This view was so widely accepted at the time that such prominent Democrats as Hillary Clinton and Nancy Pelosi not only publicly acknowledged it but also vowed to do something about it.

Among other comments on the subject, Madam Pelosi told CNN’s Wolf Blitzer that because “faith is such an important part of the lives of most people in our country” Democrats have to convince voters

that “many of the people who are in politics on the Democratic side do so according to the – the gospel of Matthew and indeed the Bible.” She admitted that “we don’t demonstrate it clear [sic] enough” but argued that “Democrats are faith-filled” and vowed to get this fact across better in the future.

For her part, Hillary joined in on this theme in a post-election speech at Tufts University, asserting that Democrats should, in response to the use of the Bible by conservatives to support their opposition to gay marriage, routinely cite the words of Jesus to support the liberal agenda for helping the poor and doing other good works. Two months later, in a speech to a religious group in Boston on the eve of President Bush’s inaugural, she praised the President’s faith-based initiative, noted that she has “always been a praying person,” and invoked God’s name repeatedly in her 50-minute speech.

In the intervening two-plus years, the Democrats haven’t exactly marched in unison “down to the river,” as the expression goes. And, of course, no Democrat has suggested that the Party abandon such bedrock liberal tenets as support for abortion on demand, gay marriage, embryonic stem cell research, and efforts to restrict public displays of the Christian faith.

But as the *Wall Street Journal* noted last week, there is has been no shortage of displays of public piety among the Democratic candidates of late. Examples cited by the *Journal* included Barack Obama’s recent appearance in the pulpit at Rick Warren’s mega evangelical Saddleback Church outside of San Diego, *Newsweek*’s photo of Hillary praying before the cameras in New York Riverside Church, and John Edwards’ speech from the pulpit at Riverside during a recent ceremony honoring the memory Martin Luther King.

By all accounts, these events are part of a much broader strategy among Democrats to honor the pledges of both Nancy and Hillary to compete aggressively for the votes of the God-fearing, if not by walking the walk, at least by learning to talk the talk.

Hanna Rosin wrote an interesting article on how Democrats might approach this task in the most recent issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*. Entitled “Closing the God Gap,” the article cites a small political consulting group named Common Good Strategies, run by two young activists “who both belong to a small but growing club of evangelicals who are also Democrats.”

According to Rosin, Common Good Strategies worked on several campaigns in the most recent election in which the Democratic candidate did much better among religious voters than Democrats did nationally. She notes that while details varied from campaign to campaign, in no case did the candidate actually change his or her position on any given issue in order to impress the devout. Instead, she says, Common Good Strategies helped the candidates “create a new language to use in talking about faith and values, aimed in part at neutralizing hot-button issues.” To wit:

On abortion, for instance, they banned the word *choice* and pushed *reduction*, going one step further with Clinton’s idea that abortion should be “safe, legal, and rare”: “We must work together across our differences to reduce the need and numbers of abortions by reducing unplanned pregnancies and helping women and families get the support they need when facing a crisis pregnancy,” read a brochure for Sherrod Brown, the Democratic Senate candidate in Ohio....

The two consultants also advised candidates to attack Republican positions on moral grounds, from the left. Where anti-gay-marriage amendments came up, for example, they expanded the issue and talked about how many marriages were disintegrating because of financial stress, which they name as the No. 1 cause of divorce in America.

Each candidate had a distinctive style, but a few themes recurred: following Christ’s example by serving others, promoting the common good, protecting the environment as

God’s creation, alleviating poverty—endless references to the underserved and uninsured and out-of-work.

Now it is important to keep in mind when considering all of this that no one, not even the kind souls at Common Good Strategies, is predicting a major political realignment here. The idea is that in a sharply divided political environment where outcomes are now routinely determined by a handful of votes in a single state, making even small inroads into the opposition camp’s centers of strength can be decisive. In a recent article entitled “Cloudy Horizon,” syndicated columnist Maggie Gallagher put it this way: “Democrats don’t have to win a majority of white evangelicals, just cut into the Republican dominating margin in this group to shift the Republican Party into permanent minority status.”

Of course, this kind of political maneuver is easier said than done, as Republicans have learned over the years from their failure to lure a significant portion of African-American voters away from the Democrats. In fact, the possibility of significant Democratic gains among the faithful probably wouldn’t even be worth mentioning if it weren’t for the fact that the Republicans just happen to be involved right now in a heated dispute among themselves over the importance of the Christian right to the Party’s long-term prospects. Believe it or not, some Republican strategists are going so far as to question whether efforts to keep this voting block locked up are actually responsible for the party’s current woes.

The first hint we got of the existence of this rift came last summer during a lunch we had with a bright young man who is generally regarded as an up and comer among the new generation of GOP strategists. During our conversation, he posited the view that if the Republicans have any hope of remaining the majority party, they need to find a way to muzzle the Christian right without losing its support.

Now this is a smart guy and we were there to learn, not to argue. But we suggested that the Christian right has become to the GOP what the labor unions

used to be to the Democratic Party, i.e., an extremely important source of grass roots support, both in money and political organization. And we recalled the importance of “family values” to the 2004 election, as noted above.

His response was to cite numerous polls showing that the adamancy of the Christian right on a great many controversial issues was costing the GOP support from large groups of voters who are important now and likely to become even more so in the future, including but not limited to unmarried working women, the gay rights community, and many Christians who consider themselves to be both conservative and religious but hold liberal views on some or all of the “hot button” issues that energize the Christian right. As one example, he noted that the GOP had lost a great deal of political support among the all-important middle-of-road swing voters just one year earlier when Florida governor Jeb Bush and the Republican Congress waged a highly publicized battle against a court decision to remove the feeding tube from Terri Schiavo.

Several weeks after this lunch, our friend’s concerns entered the public square so to speak in the form of a highly visible debate between two of the Republican Party’s leading intellectuals, Heather MacDonald and Michael Novak.

MacDonald got the ball rolling with an article in an August issue of *The American Conservative* that was devoted to essays by an impressive group of 31 intellectuals and political scholars addressing the topic, “What is Left? What is Right? Does it Matter?” Her article, parts of which are quoted in the “They Said It” section above, created quite a stir because it is rare for a conservative to offer a spirited defense of atheism, and rarer still for a conservative who is as highly regarded in the community as she is. Among other things, Ms. MacDonald is a John M. Olin fellow at the highly respected Manhattan Institute and a recipient of 2005 Bradley Prize for Outstanding Intellectual Achievement.

A response to Ms. MacDonald came almost immediately in the form of an article in *First Things* by Michael Novak, one of the nation’s leading Catholic

scholars and an icon of the American conservative movement. Novak did not discuss MacDonald’s contention that conservatism is “crippling itself” by leaning too heavily on religion. Instead, he expressed his regard for her personally, said that, as a theologian, he understood the basis for the questions she raised about God, sympathized with her “bewilderment” when Christian conservatives give thanks to God, and politely noted that this later phenomenon was not a new thing in American politics. To wit:

If the words of George Bush bewilder her, as when he says that his foreign policy is much affected by his Christian faith, it seems to me that she must often have had to bracket, as well, the words of Washington, Lincoln, virtually all our presidents and Congresses, and even the language of many of our founding documents. Is she bewildered by “endowed by their Creator” and the Declaration’s other words about “Nature’s God,” “Supreme Judge of the world,” and our nation’s “firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence”?

It is worth noting here that MacDonald did not suggest that Republicans do anything specific in response to her argument that conservatism would be better off if its positions were based on rational thinking and non-religious moral argument rather than on revealed truth. But there can be little question that her complaint, and the subsequent debate it sparked among conservative intellectuals, opened a Pandora’s box of protests and objections from other Republicans who share her skepticism about the role of the Christian right in the Republican Party, most of which came complete with demands that something be done about it.

Space does not permit an in-depth look at the arguments. Part of the problem is that they come from a variety of factions that have different reasons for demanding that the party not be so slavish to the agenda of the religious right. There are libertarians who oppose any and all strictures placed by government on individual freedom, whether they involve moral behavior or national defense. There are what might be called traditional Republicans, who view

Bush's romance with the religious right as a threat to the big-tent party of Ronald Reagan, which, in their view, respected the religious views of Catholics and Evangelicals but balanced them against the need for the party to appeal to a broader spectrum of voters. There are those who generally support "family values," but have very specific and heart-felt differences with the religious right over some individual issues such as abortion and gays rights. And then, of course, there are a few atheists and agnostics, who believe that a political party whose philosophy is informed by superstition is likely to make serious mistakes.

As such, there is no "representative view" of GOP antagonists of the Christian right. But the following quote will give a flavor for the kind of rhetoric involved. It comes from an article on Townhall.com from a fellow named Craig Shirley, who is a long-time Republican lobbyist and conservative activist and author of a book entitled *Reagan's Revolution: The Untold Story of the Campaign That Started It All*.

Cynical politicians have manipulated the social right, through the meddling in the Terry Schiavo case, to the banning of gambling on the internet and a constitutional amendment defining marriage has helped transform the conservative movement, which was once about the expansion of freedom, into "Big Christian Brother" which is now concerned with the expansion of virtue. It is the height of intellectual dishonesty for a political party to say out of one side of its mouth, overturn Roe because we believe behavioral issues belong at the state level, while out of the other side of its mouth say we need to federalize the private act of marriage. Republicanism has become incoherent for most Americans

It is not clear how all of the various Republican candidates feel about this debate. What is clear is that none of the front runners are anxious to be viewed as a champion of the religious right in the mold of George Bush, who not only declared that Jesus Christ was his favorite philosopher but was highly vocal in

his support for the Christian right's positions on all of the so-called "hot button" issues. Indeed, none of the GOP frontrunners seem as anxious as the leading Democratic candidates to promote their faith as an important qualification for the highest office in the land.

Giuliani is a social liberal, thrice married Catholic, who is unlikely to be headlining his stump speeches with devotionals either to the favorite causes of the Christian right or to Jesus' role in his decision making process. Romney is a Mormon, who will doubtless take positions that are generally more pleasing to the Christian right than the other frontrunners, though he will probably avoid discussions of faith as much as possible. And the best that can be said about John McCain's relationship with the Christian right is "uneasy truce."

It is possible that support for the GOP among Evangelicals and devout Catholics will be unaffected by any of this. But it is also true that devout Christians are the one block of voters who could find reasons within their faith to absent themselves from politics altogether, rendering unto Caesar that which is Caesar's. We'll see.

POLITICAL OVERREACH.

It is easy to forget now, but that greatly hailed, "welcome change from politics as usual," which accompanied the Republican takeover of Congress 12 years ago, was incredibly short-lived. Yes, the GOP majority captured by Newt and the boys in the midterm election of 1994 held for more than a decade. But the practical, political effectiveness of that fresh new GOP majority actually survived for only a few months. Indeed, before the close of that first year, nearly the entirety of the new majority's political capital had been spent, squandered really, and the political momentum had shifted back in Bill Clinton's favor.

Historians will debate how and why the Democratic president was able to assert his primacy over the GOP Congress. Many will conclude that it was just

a case of Bill being Bill, of the greatest politician of his generation regaining his footing, learning from his mistakes, and doing what he had always done so well, namely making people like him. Others will note as well that Bill was aided by the tragic bombing of the Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City, which provided him the opportunity to demonstrate leadership and played directly to his political strengths as “emoter-in-chief.”

All of that is well and good, but no discussion of this shift in power would be complete without addressing the Republicans’ role in their own demise. What happened in that first year of the GOP majority was classic political overreach. Led by the stalwart Newt Gingrich, the Republicans believed that they had been given a mandate by the electorate, and they acted accordingly. By fall, Newt had arranged a face off with Bill over the federal appropriations bills. Neither man blinked and the result was the partial shut down of the federal government for five days in November and for 21 days beginning in December.

This turned out to be an unmitigated public relations disaster for both Newt and the GOP. And neither ever recovered.

The fact of the matter is that Newt, Dick Armey, Bob Dole and the rest of the intrepid new GOP leadership had misread the electorate and misread it badly. They imagined, or at least exaggerated great national trends in the previous year’s election results and, taking those artificial trends to their extreme conclusion, made themselves look foolish and overly partisan. Bill helped some, of course, but most of the damage done to the GOP was self-inflicted.

We were reminded of all of this last week as we watched the newly ensconced Democratic majority exert its will regarding the war in Iraq and declare its intentions regarding other high-profile policy issues, most notably global warming, or “climate change,” if you prefer. Nancy Pelosi, Harry Reid, John Murtha, Barbara Boxer, and all the rest appear, like Newt and the Republicans before them, to believe that they have been given a mandate for bold, brash, and sometimes belligerent action. And like the Republicans before

them, they are wrong. Indeed, the Democrats are, as we write, in serious peril of overreaching and of destroying or at least debilitating their majority.

For roughly four years, we have been writing about the Democrats’ capacity for acts of sheer political lunacy, describing it routinely as their “descent into madness.” This is not to say that we believe individual Democratic politicians are clinically insane. Some may be, of course, but we wouldn’t know, nor would we pretend to know. Rather, this is simply to note the Democrats’ collective ability to engage in acts that defy rationality and that are largely inexplicable in a political context, or any other context for that matter.

Given the Democrats’ electoral success last November, one might reasonably presume that this “descent into madness” had been halted, that they had figured out a way to connect with a broader political constituency and to present themselves and their policies as the more considered and responsible alternative. But one would be wrong.

It is true that some of them have tried hard to bring a degree of sanity to the party. Last year, for example, Rahm Emanuel, then chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, attempted to soften the Democrats’ ideological edges and to paint a centrist image of his party. Indeed, Emanuel, a onetime aide to Bill Clinton, designed a brilliant if somewhat derivative campaign plan for the midterm election that portrayed the Party as a calm, reasoned alternative to the fatigued and ethically suspect Congressional Republicans and to the bumbling Bush administration. The plan worked, persuading enough voters that the Democrats would govern from the center and would eschew partisan hostility and ideological radicalism. But the plan had one significant flaw, that being that it was patently untrue.

Indeed, now that the Democrats are firmly in control, the calm, soothing centrism of Rahm Emanuel has been replaced by the shrill, brusque liberalism of Nancy Pelosi. And the promise to govern more “fairly” than the Republicans has been thrown aside. More to the point, Pelosi and company have used their newly acquired power to engineer a constitutionally

questionable and deeply troubling confrontation over the war in Iraq. And now, after last week's tomfoolery, the Democrats can no longer claim to be even notionally supportive of the war effort or of those engaged with the enemy on the nation's behalf, platitudinous claims of "supporting the troops" notwithstanding.

That the Democrats felt the need to hold a vote on a "non-binding" and thus totally irrelevant resolution condemning President Bush's change in strategy in Iraq was hardly surprising. They've been itching to have their "no confidence" vote for years, and the utter pointlessness of the exercise fits the Democrats' long-term strategy perfectly. Offer no solutions. Accept no responsibility.

What was somewhat surprising, though, was the candidness with which the Speaker of the House and her surrogates conceded that their ultimate aim, the "second phase" of their anti-surge strategy, is to deny the President the ability to wage the war effectively by forcing him to accept their plans, the net effect of which would ultimately be the "redeployment" of American troops, a strategy which is very much akin to surrender. One would think that the Democrats might be at least a little embarrassed, both by the probable unconstitutionality of their plan and by its brazen embrace of operational American defeat. But again, one would be wrong. Apparently, they believe that the electorate is so sufficiently supportive of their agenda that its extremism is welcomed.

This is overreach.

As has been the case for the last 30-plus years, Democrats insist on learning the wrong lessons from Vietnam. The majority of those who are the most eager to embrace the anti-warrior spirit and to cripple the "war-monger Bush" are tired, aging hippies, liberal Baby Boomers, relics from that earlier era in which opposition to the Vietnam war eventually forced American capitulation.

The problem is that the American loss in Southeast Asia turned out to be an unmitigated disaster. It was a disaster for the United States, which suffered a severe

blow to its credibility and to its capacity to project force worldwide. It was a disaster for the people of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, who were slaughtered by their Communist masters by the hundreds of thousands. And most relevant for our purposes today, it was a disaster for the Democrats, who effectively conceded the issue of national security for the better part of the next three decades and thereby forfeited their political majority.

Most Americans appear to understand all of this. They understand that losing a war is bad. They've seen "The Killing Fields." And they don't trust the Democrats where matters of foreign affairs and national security are concerned. Yet the Democrats, apparently blinded by nostalgia and vanity, insist on viewing the Vietnam defeat as a victory. They "changed the world," after all, as all of them, from John Kerry to Howard Dean to Hillary Clinton, will gladly tell you.

And now, for all intents and purposes, they have turned their national security strategy over to John Murtha, a man who was overwhelmingly rejected by his own caucus for a leadership position last year; who even *The Washington Post* notes shows "alarming ignorance about conditions in Iraq" and appears uninterested in learning more; who has falsely accused American soldiers of heinous crimes; and who was best known prior to his recent anti-war screeds as a marginally corrupt pork-promoter who only narrowly escaped indictment in the ABSCAM scandal. Yesterday, columnist Robert Novak detailed Murtha's power grab and the Democratic leadership's role in it. To wit:

Rep. John P. Murtha at long last felt his moment had arrived. He could not keep quiet the secret Democratic strategy that he had forged for the promised "second step" against President Bush's Iraq policy (after the "first step" non-binding resolution of disapproval). In an interview last Thursday with the anti-war website MoveCongress.org, he revealed plans to put conditions on funding of U.S. troops. His message: I am running this show.

Indeed, he is. Murtha and his ally, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, were humiliated last Nov. 16 when the Democratic Caucus overwhelmingly voted against Murtha as majority leader. Three months later, Murtha has shaped party policy that would cripple Bush's Iraq troop surge by placing conditions on funding. That represents the most daring congressional attempt to micromanage ongoing armed hostilities in nearly two centuries, since the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War challenged President Abraham Lincoln . . . unless there is an unexpected retreat of Democrats, Murtha will be driving U.S. policy.

We don't think it's an exaggeration to call this a disaster-in-the-making for Speaker Pelosi. It's one thing to oppose the surge or even publicly to express opposition to the so-called "escalation." But it is something else altogether to attempt to undermine the President of the United States, the nation's commander-in-chief, while the nation is at war.

And note that we use that word, "undermine," deliberately, since that's how Murtha and his anti-war allies at MoveCongress.org have expressed their intentions. "Chairman Murtha will describe his strategy for not only limiting the deployment of troops to Iraq," MoveCongress noted in a press release for an event they sponsored for Murtha, "but *undermining* other aspects of the president's foreign and national security policy." [emphasis added]

The potential damage here is enormous, and not just to the war effort, to troop morale, and to the campaign to dispirit the enemy. The political damage to Pelosi and the Democrats could be significant as well. Pelosi, Murtha, and the rest may believe that they are doing the right thing, but the public is unlikely to agree.

Late last week, *Investor's Business Daily* ran a short blurb on a recent poll which showed that an overwhelming majority of American's (66%) believe that victory in Iraq is important (either very important or somewhat important) and a smaller though still significant

majority (58%) are "hopeful" that "we will succeed." On both questions, even Democrats responded positively, with 53% of them saying that victory is important and 43% being hopeful. Given these numbers, we suspect that an overwhelming majority of Americans – Republicans, Democrats, and others – would strongly disapprove of any effort to prevent or "undermine" a potential victory.

If nothing else, the Democrats can kiss the support of the military goodbye for at least another generation. Democrats had made a pitch to veterans and, indeed, had attracted a few high-profile veterans to their cause last fall, including onetime Republican Secretary of the Navy Jim Webb. But the reaction to the Pelosi/Murtha plan to "undermine" the President has been overwhelmingly negative. We think that comments offered by columnist and retired Army Colonel Ralph Peters summarize quite nicely the reaction that most members of the armed services, even erstwhile liberal members, will have to the Democrats' war on the war.

Peters, you may recall, described himself last fall as someone who agrees with the Democrats on most domestic issues but who generally despises their foreign policy stances. Nevertheless, by election time, he had concluded that the Republicans were equally feckless and that they deserved to lose at least one house of Congress. He wrote, "The Republicans are going to get a dose of castor oil. They need it. If we, the people, are lucky, the Dems will take the House, while the Republicans will hold on to a majority in the Senate."

We think it fair to say that the good Colonel is no longer terribly thrilled that Nancy, Jack and the Democrats did, in fact, take the House. This past Saturday, he wrote:

Congresswoman Pelosi, have you no shame? As a former soldier who still spends a good bit of time with those in uniform, what infuriates me personally is the Doublespeak, Stalin-Prize lie that undercutting our troops and encouraging our enemies is really a way to "support our troops."

As for bringing them home, why not respect the vote the troops themselves are taking: Sustained re-enlistment rates have been at a record high. And our soldiers and Marines know they'll go back to Iraq or Afghanistan. And no, Senator Kerry, it's not because they're too stupid to get a "real" job like yours or because they're "mercenaries." Some Americans still believe in America. If our troops are willing to fight this bitter war, how dare Congress knife them in the back?

Naturally, with respect to immediacy and importance, all other issues pale in comparison to the war. But Iraq is not the only issue on which the Democrats appear to be overreaching.

One such issue, in our estimation, is global warming. The fact that the Democrats seem hell bent not merely on taking action on the issue, but on delegitimizing any dissent on the matter is, we believe, another example of their continued descent into madness. The science is hardly settled. Consensus has hardly been achieved. And proposed solutions will hardly address the problem. We suspect that most voters are sympathetic to the Democrats' views on global warming, if for no other reason than the fact that most voters are incredibly ill informed and are thus likely to gravitate to the position that rewards their ignorance. But we believe that they will not take too kindly to Democratic efforts to demagogue the issue.

Comparing global warming dissenters to Holocaust deniers, for example – something that liberal columnist Ellen Goodman did last week – is unlikely to win fans. If the Democrats' are smart, they will avoid at all costs echoing Goodman. But given their track record since reclaiming the majority, we're skeptical about their prospects for doing so, which is to say that they will likely continue to press too hard, to overreach, and to alienate erstwhile sympathetic voters.

This overreach need not be fatal to the Democratic majority of course. It didn't do in the Republicans right away, after all. But it will certainly hurt them. If nothing else it will cost them political capital and momentum. Additionally, it could cost Nancy Pelosi her speakership. House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer has always been a thorn in Mrs. Pelosi's side. And with Pelosi's blatant disregard for the caucus's rejection of Murtha, he not only has cause to challenge her but will likely have many powerful allies if he chooses to do so in the 111th Congress.

The Democrats' slide into madness should, by all rights, have been halted by their victory last November. But it appears that they are so far gone that not even the seizure of power has been able to save them.

For now the only consolation the Democrats have is that they are fortunate to have the current GOP as their political opponents. President Bush, unlike Bill Clinton before him, steadfastly refuses to fight back against those who would dismantle his presidency. The House GOP conference is comprised of the bland and uninspiring. And the Senate Republican minority is populated by self-absorbed blowhards such as Chuck Hagel, who will gladly aid the Democrats in undermining the President if it means that he will be asked to appear on the Sunday morning talk shows; and by ill-informed panderers like John McCain, who will gladly acquiesce on global warming if it means that his "maverick" status will remain intact.

The Democrats are overreaching. And it will cost them. Just how much depends on a number of factors, not the least of which is their opponents' ability to right their own ship and take advantage of the overreach.

Copyright 2007. 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.