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THEY SAID IT

What menaces democratic society in this age is not a simple collapse of order, nor yet usurpation by a single powerful individual, but a tyranny of mediocrity, a standardization of mind and spirit and condition enforced by the central government, precisely what [Harold] Laski calls “the collectivist discipline.” He foresaw the coming of the “social welfare state,” which agrees to provide all for its subjects, and in turn exacts rigid conformity. The name democracy remains; but government is exerted from the top downward, as in the Old Régime, not from the masses . . .

The omnicompetent, paternalistic state, guiding all the affairs of mankind, satisfying all individuals’ wants, is the ideal of twentieth-century social planners. This arrangement is intended to gratify the material demands of humanity, and twentieth-century social aspiration, so saturated with the ideas of Bentham and of Marx, scarcely conceives of wants that are not material. That men are kept in perpetual childhood--that, in spirit, they never become full human beings--seems no great loss to a generation of thinkers accustomed to compulsory schooling, compulsory insurance, compulsory military service, and even compulsory voting. A world of uniform compulsion is death to variety and the life of the mind; knowing this, Tocqueville felt that the materialism which democracy encourages may so far obsess the public consciousness as to stifle, in all but a few independent souls, the ideas of freedom and variety.

Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, 1953

IT’S HILLARY ALL THE WAY, REDUX.

She’s banging heads, you know. She’s kicking butt and taking names. She’s steamrolling the opposition. Pick your cliché and she’s doing it. Last January, in an article entitled “It’s Miss Hillary All The Way,” we argued that the former First Lady of the United States would be the next President of the United States, and we have seen nothing in the intervening four months to change our minds. No one wants to believe this, of course. “People don’t like her,” they say. Her “negatives” are very high, they say. But according to the polls, someone out there likes her. Indeed, it appears that a lot of someones out there like her. Or at least they like her better than they like the other candidates for the nation’s top government job, and that is all it takes to win.

Now we don’t make a habit of quoting poll numbers, especially 17 months before an election, but given the stakes involved in this one, it is worth noting that as of last week, the old gal leads her closest competitor, Barack Obama, by 22 points in the CBS News/New York Times poll, by 15 points in the Fox News/Opinion Dynamics poll, and by 10 points in the Diageo/Hotline poll.

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And the interesting thing about these numbers is that she's not even breaking a sweat and he appears for all the world to be sucking air and looking for a bottle of Gatorade. Our take on Obama last January was that he is way out of his league and that the only thing he has going for him is a handful of "star-struck, uber-liberals who have been gobsmacked by the sight of a clean and charismatic black politician, having mistakenly come to believe by the process of exposure that the likes of such sleaze bags as Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton, John Conyers, and Alcee Hastings were the best that they could expect from the African-American community."

But as we noted then, and still believe today, this isn't enough to carry him through a long campaign against the likes of Hillary Clinton who hasn't even had to play her strong suit yet, which, as we noted in that article, is the fact that she is unhindered by scruples, principles, conscience, morals, or ethics." Indeed, as far as we can tell, she's still playing the game cleanly. No reports of pets turning up dead, no reports of private detectives snooping through the trash of the opposition, no bodies adorning the civil war cannons in Fort Marcy Park. And whether Barack knows it or not, this is not a good sign for his aspirations. It appears that the lady doesn't take him seriously enough to turn the plug-uglies on him. Proof of this lies in the fact that David Geffen, former Clinton confidant turned enemy, has, so far as we can tell, not yet awakened with the severed head of a dead horse in his bed.

Last week, two new books were published which called attention to Hillary's flawed character and corrupt past. And they didn't make a ripple in her popularity numbers. Why? Because everyone knows what she is. This woman may have secrets that would bring her down if known, but whatever they are they don't have anything to do with her propensity to lie, cheat, and go to extreme lengths to destroy her enemies. That's not only common knowledge, but it is part of her "charm." Her reaction to such charges is a play on the old joke, the punch line of which is: "You make the phrase 'dysfunctional crack whore' sound like a bad thing"

She could be beaten, of course. The problem is that her opponents don't know how to do it. They're shooting at the turret instead of the tracks. Or vice versa, who knows? But she's not going to be taken out by revelations that her moral compass points in a different direction than, say, Mother Teresa's. Her strong suit is that she's an attercop. That's the reason that those who like her like her.

More than likely, when her opponents finally figure out that attacking her "character" isn't working they'll begin attacking her for being a liberal, which isn't going to work either. George McGovern and Michael Dukakis lost because they were too liberal. Al Gore and John Kerry didn't lose because they were too liberal. They lost because they are dorks. Everyone is a liberal these days. The era of big government is here to stay. George Bush spends money like a drunken sailor, added an expensive new drug program to an already bankrupt Medicare system, launched a democratize-the-world campaign that would make Woodrow Wilson blush, and expanded the size and authority of "Big Brother" beyond the dreams of J. Edgar Hoover.

And with the baby boomers moving toward retirement age, the tendency for more and more Americans to rely on the federal government for everything from day-to-day sustenance to financial security to individual happiness is only going to get worse. No politician from either party is going to run on a platform of dismantling the nanny state at a time when the nation's largest and most self-important generation is starting to think about who's going to take care of them in their old age. In fact, with the use and price of pharmaceuticals skyrocketing and reaching the critical point among families across the nation, it's only a matter of time before Republicans can no longer afford to fight back against HillaryCare.

The pundits would have you believe that this presidential contest is going to be all about the war in Iraq. And certainly Hillary's exceedingly dovish foes in the Democratic primaries are beating her up a little on this issue. But she'll survive this onslaught and by the time the real campaign begins, she and her Republican

opponent will most likely share much the same overall view on the war, that being that it was a mistake, that we have to turn the fighting over to the Iraqis as quickly as possible, and that we have to perform this task judiciously. It should come as no surprise to anyone when this coming together on this critical issue happens, since both candidates will be reading the same polls. Cindy Sheehan is no Einstein, but even she figured out that the extreme positions on this and virtually every other issue will slowly but ever so surely be sucked to the center-left by this presidential election.

Our take on the Republican race hasn't changed much since last January when we said that we were less optimistic about McCain's chances than the pundits and more optimistic about Romney's. Indeed, it seems increasingly likely to us that Romney is the best high odds bet since Giacomo, a 50-to-1 shot, won the Kentucky Derby in 1995, paying \$102.60 for a \$2 win ticket. As for Giuliani, once again our position hasn't changed since January, when we noted that while he is honest, smart, charming, articulate, and highly competent, he is too liberal on the social issues to win the nod from GOP primary voters.

For what it's worth, we're not as enthusiastic about Fred Thompson's candidacy or as optimistic about his chances of gaining the GOP nomination as most conservative pundits appear to be. There's no question that he has become this season's most intriguing candidate, running this season's most unusual campaign. But we're not convinced that he has either the drive or the energy to run a serious, year-long race. Moreover, unlike many analysts, we're certain that his primary campaign opponents (assuming he runs) have not overlooked his record as a Senator, which was considerably less conservative and less consequential than he and his supporters would have us believe. Ten years ago, he held what were forecast to be "explosive" hearings on the Clinton crowd's fund raising activities among the Chinese, but never laid a glove on anyone, Chinese or American. And a few years later, he was a key sponsor and promoter of the McCain-Feingold Campaign

Finance Reform Bill, which has to rank very high up in the history of American government as one of the dumbest laws ever passed.

So it's Hillary against McCain, Giuliani, or Romney, probably Romney. And, as we indicated earlier, whoever the GOP candidate is, he will center his attack on Hillary on the fact that she is a corrupt, liberal, libertine harridan with a worthless, cheating husband. And a lot of people, especially young women, are going to decide that it might be kind of fun to have a corrupt, liberal, libertine, harridan with a worthless, cheating husband in the White House rather than another rich, boring, old white guy who plays golf or jogs and has a "ranch" somewhere.

We hope we're wrong about this, of course. But when thinking about the upcoming presidential race it is, we think, important to set aside all the old "truths" about what the American people like and believe. To say that American voters are marching to different drummers today than they did a short time ago would be a great understatement. Besides the fact that the baby boomers are hitting the age wall, many Americans appear to be ridden with anxieties over melting icecaps, drowning polar bears, millions of illegal immigrants running loose in the streets, the possibility of massive casualties from terrorist attacks, an unpopular war with no way out, and the pending bankruptcy of Social Security and Medicare. And, guess what? An increasingly number of Americans are looking to the omniscient, paternalistic state not just to protect them from the vicissitudes of life but to protect them from having to worry about them.

Our fear is that these people will vote for the individual who makes the most convincing promises that "everything will be all right, honey. Big Brother will take care of it." Women tend to do this better than men, even women like Hillary Clinton, who would have scared the hell out of most Americans not too many years ago.

DEMOCRATIC AHABS.

Ever since last November's election, many in Washington, and on the Democratic side in particular, have been waiting for the proverbial "other shoe" to drop. After 12 years in the minority – six of which saw Democrat Bill Clinton investigated mercilessly and eventually impeached, and the other six of which saw Republican George W. Bush repeatedly challenge Congress with no opposition oversight and thus no serious repercussions – the Democrats once again wield the committee gavels and, more to the point, the subpoena power that goes with them.

Over the last several weeks, it has appeared more and more likely that the Democrats will get their long-awaited revenge. Egged on by the utter incompetence of Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, who has managed somehow to make the erstwhile perfectly ordinary dismissal of a handful of U.S. Attorneys look like the political crime of the century, a number of committee chairmen in both houses have sought to inflict as much damage on the administration as possible and thereby to exact not only a measure of payback, but, if they're lucky, to enhance their party's chances of keeping the leadership of Congress and picking up the White House 17 months from now. Needless to say, all of this has caused a certain amount of giddiness among Democratic partisans, concern among Republicans, and excitement among the left-leaning elements of the mainstream press.

The general sentiment in political circles is that the cumulative effect of the Democrats' multiple and multifaceted investigations will, indeed, do substantive damage both to President Bush and to the GOP as a whole. What follows is a nice summary of this inside-the-beltway conventional wisdom, written by "The Politico's," Josephine Hearn and Jim VandeHei, and published just over a week ago:

The new Democratic majority's zeal for congressional investigations goes well beyond Alberto Gonzales and the fired federal prosecutors.

Aided by a new investigative team including a former mob prosecutor and a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter, Democrats have launched more than three dozen probes of the administration ranging from the White House to obscure agency heads. The House Oversight Committee alone has conducted 20 investigations.

With few legislative accomplishments in hand – and only a few prospects in the offing – it seems plain the 110th is shaping up as "The Oversight Congress."

This is troubling news for the Bush White House and Republicans. No fewer than six administration officials have resigned already amid the congressional probes – and many more are in Democratic sights.

Hearn and VandeHei went on to note that all of the scalps claimed by the Democrats thus far belong to rather minor administration players (e.g. the head of the Education Department's student loan program, the head of the Minerals Management Service, and an Interior Department official). Yet hope springs eternal on the left and in the press that eventually one of these investigations will spur the resignation or dismissal of someone of whom voters (or even well-seasoned political junkies) might actually have heard.

Of course, the biggest prize in this hunt is Karl Rove, the advisor to the President whom the left sees as "Bush's Brain" (to borrow the phrase coined by James Moore and Wayne Slater, authors of a book by the same name). Rove is the purported architect of both the 2000 and 2004 election victories, the personification of all that is evil in the eyes of many Democrats, and the man whom liberals everywhere love to hate – perhaps even more than Bush himself. Many Democrats, but House Government Reform and Oversight Committee Chairman Henry Waxman in particular, believe that Rove is the lynchpin in this administration. He is, thus, the single most important target of the manifold investigations. As veteran

Washington journalist Robert Novak noted recently, “Waxman is tirelessly making life miserable for a confused administration during George W. Bush’s last two years as president. Bringing down Rove ranks high on Grand Inquisitor Waxman’s agenda.”

Last month, Democrats grew more optimistic that Rove, who frustrated the left immeasurably when he escaped near certain political death in the Valerie Plame affair, would soon be packing his bags and heading back to Texas or, better yet, to jail. Waxman, who is apparently still investigating the lobbying efforts of Jack Abramoff (despite the fact that Abramoff himself pled guilty a year-and-a-half ago) questioned Susan Ralston, a former Rove aide and, before that, an aide to Abramoff. Ralston set the media and leftie blogosphere a’twitter when she requested immunity for her testimony, thus raising the specter that she might have dirt to give the committee on her former bosses and their relationship.

But whatever Ralston knows or doesn’t know, and whatever she is willing to share with the committee, it is difficult to see why anyone who is interested in politics should much care. Yes, “getting” Rove would make many Democrats very happy. But aside from the petty and fleeting pleasure of *schadenfreude* or the equally transitory joy of political payback, we’re not entirely sure what Democrats think they’ll gain by any of this.

The presumption is that the GOP is staggering right now and that by getting Rove, the party can be knocked down and perhaps even knocked out. We doubt it. While it is true that a bona fide scandal would generate some negative headlines for President Bush, it would likely have little lasting political impact.

The Democratic strategy here is based on two premises, both of which are false and, just as important, both of which suggest that the Democratic position heading into this election is considerably weaker than most political analysts would have us believe.

The first flawed premise on which the Democratic strategy is based is the presumption that they, the Democrats, are the nation’s natural and permanent

majority party and that any deviation from this is an historical anomaly fashioned by political trickery and deception. Yet, for more than a quarter of a century, the GOP was the clear majority party. Of course, the Democrats, in their arrogance and self-delusion, never accepted the fact that the public had rejected them. Rather, in their opinion, voters were “tricked” into voting for Republicans by smooth operating snake-oil salesmen, who confused them about their true political interests.

First, it was the actor, Ronald Reagan, who charmed the masses by “acting” like a genial, trustworthy steward of the people’s interests. After Reagan, it was Lee Atwater, the late chairman of the Republican National Committee, who helped George H.W. Bush manipulate public sentiment, extending the Reagan-Bush era another term. After that, it was Newt Gingrich, who, along with Dick Arme, cleverly constructed a “contract” with voters that promised better, more efficient government, but actually delivered Republican self-interest and greed. And finally there is Rove, the grandest wizard of them all, the man who helped the dolt George W. fool the people over and over again, convincing them to vote for him, to support his tax cuts for the rich, to back his foolish and self-absorbed “war on terror,” and even to reelect him despite his obvious ineptitude.

For nearly three decades now, the Democratic Ahab’s have been chasing their white whales, apparently failing to notice that unlike the real Moby, these guys are eventually caught and yet nothing much changes. Reagan was done in by term limits; Atwater by brain cancer; and Newt by his own voracious and self-destructive appetites. Yet the GOP remained the majority party, at least until last fall, when Rove’s “magic” apparently failed him.

Regardless, the idea that one person can be responsible for the Democratic Party’s electoral woes is absurd, as delusional as it is arrogant. And “getting” Rove will no more boost the Democratic Party’s fortunes than did getting any of the others before him. We don’t want to overestimate the intelligence of the American voters here, but we have to give them at least a little credit. Voters make their choices based on which candidate or party is the most appealing or, as with

last year's election, on which is least unappealing, not because of some magical mind game perpetrated by a political wizard.

The second false premise on which the Democrats' strategy hinges is the idea that somehow George W. Bush still matters. But he doesn't, at least electorally.

It is almost surreal to watch and listen as the Democrats in Congress and on the stump continue to rail against the President; to criticize his handling of the war; to attack his policies; to denounce his deception and dishonesty. And it never seems to occur to any of them – from Howard Dean to Henry Waxman to Barack Obama to Hillary – that George W. Bush is not going to be on his party's ticket in 2008. Indeed, given the historical oddity of Vice President Cheney's pre-announced retirement, there is exactly no chance whatsoever that the GOP nominee next year will be, in any way, shape, or form connected to the Bush administration.

In 2004, the Democrats ran on a platform that could be summarized by three words: Anybody But Bush. It didn't work. It's even less likely to work next year, given that the Republican nominee, like the Democratic nominee, *will not be Bush*.

The Democrats have invested so much of their time and energy over the last six years in opposing Bush, just for the sake of opposing him, that they seem incapable of doing much else. As we note in the above piece, there is a reasonable chance that the next President of the United States will be a Democrat. But that won't be because the party destroyed Bush. With regard to 2008, Bush is almost entirely irrelevant.

And that goes double, by the way, for Karl Rove. Waxman et al. believe that they can do some damage by getting Rove. But whom, one has to wonder, do they think they'll damage? Last we checked, not one of the Republican candidates for President had signed Rove up to run his campaign. Moreover, given the

recent collapse of Rove's grand strategy to make the GOP the permanent majority party, it is highly unlikely that any of them will.

Indeed, if the Democrats were smart, instead of trying to take down Rove and to make him too toxic for any GOP candidate to touch, they'd be trying to figure out a way to convince the eventual GOP nominee that Rove is an indispensable part of a successful Republican campaign. Though it would be unfair to lump him in with perpetual strategist-loser Bob Shrum, it's hard to imagine that Rove will go down in history as a true master of American politics. If anything, one could very easily make the case that Rove's true legacy will be the absolute shambles in which his strategy left the party he was purportedly trying to help. If Rove were allowed to construct an electoral blueprint similar to the one that he helped create for '06, the Democrats might just manage to recapture their lost glory.

In any case, it is doubtful that the powers that be in the Democratic Party will heed our advice to leave Rove and Bush alone and to focus their energies on more productive endeavors. And that, we guess, is a good thing. Not only does it make it less likely that the Democratic candidates will actively strive to develop well-rounded enticing campaign themes, but it should also keep the scolds in Congress preoccupied.

It is worth recalling, we think, what Josephine Hearn and Jim VandeHei wrote about this Congress, namely that "With few legislative accomplishments in hand – and only a few prospects in the offing – it seems plain the 110th is shaping up as 'The Oversight Congress.'" If the Democrats want to spend their time chasing after Bush, Cheney, Rove, and everyone else in the administration, ordinary Americans should consider themselves lucky. There are, we're sure, a great many more damaging ways in which they could be spending their time, such as trying to achieve "legislative accomplishments" that cost money and inevitably harm the economy.

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