

Mark L. Melcher Publisher
melcher@thepoliticalforum.com

Stephen R. Soukup Editor
soukup@thepoliticalforum.com

THEY SAID IT

In this country, in which political authority is the possession of the body that wields opinion...there is a strong and dangerous disposition to defer to the publick, in opposition to truth and justice. This is a penalty that is paid for liberty, and it depends on the very natural principle of flattering power. In a monarchy, adulation is paid to the prince; in a democracy to the people, or the publick. Neither hears the truth, as often as is wholesome, and both suffer for the want of the corrective. The man who resists the tyranny of a monarch, is often sustained by the voices of those around him; but he who opposes the innovations of the publick in a democracy, not only finds himself struggling with power, but with his own neighbors. It follows that the oppression of the publick is of the worst description, and all real lovers of liberty should take special heed not to be accessories to wrongs so hard to be borne. As between the publick and individuals, therefore, the true bias of a democrat, so far as there is any doubt of the true merits of the controversy, is to take sides with the latter. This is opposed to the popular notion, which is to fancy the man who maintains his rights against the popular will, an aristocrat, but it is none the less true; the popular will, in cases that affect popular pleasure, being quite as likely to be wrong, as an individual will, in cases that affect an individual interest . . . The people being sovereign, require the same flattery, the same humoring of their wishes, and the same sacrifices of truths, as a prince....In America, it is indispensable that every well wisher of true liberty should understand that acts of tyranny can only proceed from the publick. The publick, then, is to be watched, in this country, as, in other countries kings and aristocrats are to be watched....

James Fenimore Cooper, *The American Democrat*, 1838.

POWER TO THE FRINGES.

There being no high pressure steam engines, railroad trains, computers, or other such fancy technological wonders around in the late 18th century, America's founding fathers were most probably not all that familiar with the concept of fail-safe apparatuses, which react to human error or system failures by stopping the entire mechanism so that the damage does not go beyond the immediate environs of the failing entity.

Nevertheless, in their infinite wisdom, the founders anticipated this modern day invention, gently but firmly weaving into the governmental cloth something that we today call gridlock, which, much like the mechanical system of automatic shutoffs, stops the flow of legislation in response to an overload of human error, or just plain stupidity.

In this Issue

Power to the Fringes.

Terrorism, Redux.

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

This brilliant, if somewhat crude, mechanism was on full display last week when the Senate failed to act on the immigration bill. The system shut down. If the system had continued to operate, the damage to the nation could have been terrible. But it didn't. It shut down. Three cheers for Madison, Hamilton, et al.

In our opinion, the activation of this fail-safe phenomenon is likely to become increasingly familiar on Capitol Hill. Why? Well, because governing a fabulously rich, technologically complex, commercial and military superpower, which is growing more culturally and spiritually diverse each day, is simply too complicated for a system that depends heavily on two loosely governed committees of 535 narcissists whose principle skill sets tend toward the superficial arts of self promotion and toadyism. So, as is the case with a rotting log creating a choke point in a river, the water simply flows around it.

This is a bad thing. We may lightly applaud the fact that gridlock prevented Congress from doing additional damage to America's already broken immigration system. But, by definition, when fail-safe systems activate it is a sign that something is very wrong with the machine itself.

Some 18 years ago, when the Berlin Wall fell and globalization began to change the world, Congress should have begun the process of changing with it, instituting substantial structural alterations designed to keep it relevant in the dangerous, complex, and whirlwind world of the 21st century.

Among others things, reformers should have restored some of the power to the Congressional leadership posts that was stripped during the post-Watergate reforms. This would have provided a few of the senior members with a modicum of disciplinary authority on the off chance that one of them might want to try to do the right thing once in a while. They should have tightened the ethical standards and stepped up enforcement to a very high level. This would have discouraged corrupt politicians from seeking a venue on Capitol Hill, thus raising the overall quality of the membership. This, in turn, would have

had a salutary effect on Congress's performance and, more importantly, on public trust in the institution. They could have made openness and disclosure the centerpiece of campaign finance reform. This would have discouraged corruption, which is legislatively inefficient, by allowing the public to easily ascertain who has been bought by whom.

But this wasn't done. In fact, nothing constructive was done. Unfortunately, no individual or group of individuals in either political party had the requisite vision to see the need for reform, much less the energy and charisma to implement it. But, as Walter Cronkite used to say, "That's the way it is." And our job today is not to lament what might have been but to attempt to determine how what actually has been is likely to impact the future.

As we said several weeks ago in an article entitled "Whither Congress?" one consequence of an atrophic Congress is accelerated growth in the power of the Executive Branch and the huge bureaucracy that serves it. In the case of the failure of the immigration bill, for example, it will be up to President Bush to use the laws that are already on the books to bring the government's policies into line with "the popular will," for lack of a better term. If this is done wisely, it will relegate Congress to the secondary role of a tiresome gadfly.

What we didn't say in the above-mentioned article, but which became apparent last week during the meltdown of the immigration bill, is that Congress is not only losing power to the Executive Branch, it is losing power to "the people," or more precisely to groups of people who, when acting together and using modern communication techniques, are capable of creating groundswells of public outrage that are large and noisy enough to have a direct impact on Congressional decision making. In other words, Congress is increasingly being led by "the people" rather than leading them.

This is a bad thing. On occasion, of course, a loud and angry public outcry can work to the benefit of the nation, as it did last week when conservative radio

talk show hosts and bloggers encouraged voters to “contact their Senator” and demand that he or she not support the hopelessly confused and jerry-rigged new immigration legislation. But, as a general rule, Congress should not be whipsawed by the day-to-day whims, or momentary passions if you will, of the American public, or by the immediate demands of any single, especially noisy interest group. Indeed, the nation’s founders were particularly concerned with designing a government in which the “will of the people” would be tempered by the application of deliberative good sense. Hamilton and Madison put it this way in *Federalist* Number 63.

Thus far I have considered the circumstances which point out the necessity of a well-constructed Senate only as they relate to the representatives of the people. To a people as little blinded by prejudice or corrupted by flattery as those whom I address, I shall not scruple to add, that such an institution may be sometimes necessary as a defense to the people against their own temporary errors and delusions. As the cool and deliberate sense of the community ought, in all governments, and actually will, in all free governments, ultimately prevail over the views of its rulers; so there are particular moments in public affairs when the people, stimulated by some irregular passion, or some illicit advantage, or misled by the artful misrepresentations of interested men, may call for measures which they themselves will afterwards be the most ready to lament and condemn. In these critical moments, how salutary will be the interference of some temperate and respectable body of citizens, in order to check the misguided career, and to suspend the blow meditated by the people against themselves, until reason, justice, and truth can regain their authority over the public mind? What bitter anguish would not the people of Athens have often escaped if their government had contained so provident a safeguard against the tyranny of their own passions? Popular liberty might then have escaped the indelible reproach of decreeing to the same citizens the hemlock on one day and statues on the next.

Unfortunately, in the opening days of the 21st century, it is becoming apparent that the nation’s increasingly corrupt, callow, and spineless Congress is growing progressively more incapable of performing the role of a “temperate and respectable body of citizens” called upon “to check the misguided career, and suspend the blow meditated by the people against themselves, until reason, justice, and truth can regain their authority over the public mind.”

As we indicated earlier, this assures that the future will be witness to more and more groups of Americans, “stimulated by some irregular passion, or some illicit advantage, or misled by the artful misrepresentations of interested men,” to call for measures which “they themselves will afterwards be the most ready to lament and condemn.” The danger is, of course, that the U.S. Congress will react to these demands by kissing the ring of the rabble rousers, rather than exercising the kind of wisdom and courage that the founding fathers expected of them during one of these “critical moments.”

The on-going campaign to force an immediate pullout of American troops from Iraq by moveon.org and several related, radical far-left groups is a case in point. So far, at least, Congress has resisted demands for a precipitous withdrawal, presumably aware that the nation’s military and economic security would be severely threatened if Iraq were to fall into the hands of radical Islam. But the majority party has not accompanied this resistance by counseling prudence to the rabble-rousers and by offering assurances to the rest of the public that it will act prudently in response to such demands. In fact, each of the Democratic Party’s candidates for the presidency has tacitly or directly endorsed the moveon.org position, even Hillary Clinton who resisted for as long as she could. As such, no one can be certain of the future course of Congress as regards this important issue, which is damaging to both the war effort and to the credibility of the government.

In the meantime, as Congress grows increasingly gridlocked, the Executive Branch of government, with its huge bureaucratic infrastructure, will compete for the shrinking power of Congress with the radical

fringes of both parties, who view Congressional weakness as an opportunity to promote dangerous and imprudent actions. Bet on the Executive Branch in the near term, the rabble over the longer term, and – referencing Lord Acton – that both will be doomed by corruption in the end, the Executive Branch first and then the rabble.

TERRORISM, REDUX.

We’ve never really been particularly big fans of Karl Rove, but we have to hand it to him this time. What he managed to pull off last week was spectacular, to put it mildly. The guy is good, really good. Not sure what we mean? Why, the terrorist bombings in Great Britain, of course. It all just reeks of Rove.

We haven’t checked in with any of the lefty bloggers to see if they’re as smart as we are, though we’re pretty sure that if they haven’t figured it out yet, they will soon enough. Honestly, it’s obvious what happened, too obvious. Who else but Rove could have orchestrated these “attacks,” if that’s the appropriate word?

How else does one explain it? The Brits had a series of “attacks” over a span of only a couple of days. But no one, except an “Asian” terrorist here or there, was hurt. No one was killed. And yet two major airports were shut down, an entire nation was put on high alert for an “imminent” terrorist strike, and the issue of Islamic terrorism once again became the Number One news item of the day and the Number One thought on the minds of most Westerners, at least those who weren’t waiting in line for iPhones.

The only other possible explanation for the attacks on Britain is that the Islamists, for all their brilliance in manipulating certain elements within the Western media, are actually quite stupid. Not that there’s ever a particularly good time for a terrorist attack. But the strikes last week showed a particularly poor sense of timing. It is unlikely that these attacks, feeble as they were, will prove as ill fated and as damaging to

the Islamists’ cause as the 9/11 attacks ultimately did. But they will, we think, do al Qaeda and its affiliates considerably more harm than good.

For starters, the Islamists have just gone and made a perfectly good enemy out of the new British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, a man who almost certainly would have made things at least a little easier for al Qaeda and its allies by further isolating the United States from the rest of the global community.

Yes, yes, we’ve read all about how Brown is hardly the anti-American most conservatives fear and is, in fact, quite an avid admirer of the United States and its place in the world. That’s all well and good, of course. But Brown is not Tony Blair. He is John Major to Blair’s Margaret Thatcher. He lacks his predecessor’s popularity, charisma, and public presence. And he is, therefore, far more likely than Blair to be forced to break with the Americans and with George Bush in order to keep peace in his increasingly restless center-left Labour Party.

Moreover, Brown has already demonstrated his willingness to embrace and elevate those who are, in fact, openly and unashamedly anti-American and who will presumably do their very best to see Britain divorced from its troublesome erstwhile colonies to rejoin its place among the civilized nations of the world. Consider, for example, Mark Malloch Brown, who late last week was elevated to the House of Lords and appointed by the new Prime Minister to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Malloch Brown will be an influential player in the construction of Prime Minister Brown’s foreign policy, the foreign minister with specific responsibility for Africa, Asia, and the United Nations.

For those of you who don’t know much about him, Malloch Brown has more than established his *bona fides* as an anti-American “internationalist.” He is, among other things, the former deputy to Kofi Annan at the United Nations, where he engaged in more than his fair share of yank-bashing, most famously scolding Americans for being “stingy,” in their contributions to the UN’s (incredibly ineffective) efforts to help

the victims of the Christmas 2005 tsunami. The inimitable Mark Steyn reminds us that he wrote rather poignantly about the former Deputy Secretary of the United Nations roughly a year ago, after Malloch Brown launched a “Trent Lott-esque attack on talk radio” and the dimwitted Americans who take pleasure in such wretched info-tainment. To wit:

The bit in the speech that got everyone’s attention was when he [Malloch Brown] argued that the reason the U.N. was so unpopular in America was that the moronic hayseeds in flyover country had fallen for the right-wing blowhards — or, as he put it, “much of the public discourse that reaches the U.S. heartland has been largely abandoned to its loudest detractors such as Rush Limbaugh and Fox News.” He didn’t, in fact, say “Limbaugh” but “Lim-bow,” as in “Daddy Wouldn’t Buy Me a Bow-Wow.” A chap as important as Mr. Malloch Brown can’t be expected to tune in a radio and actually listen to Rush in order to get his name correct: After all, he’s a lot busier than those dimwit yokels in the “heartland” . . .

The deputy secretary general’s fellow speakers at this meeting included George Soros, who happens to be Mr. Malloch Brown’s next-door neighbor and landlord. Mr. Malloch Brown earns \$125,000 a year, \$120,000 of which he gives to Mr. Soros as rent for his home, next to the gazillionaire’s own in Westchester County. When they entered into this relationship, Mr. Malloch Brown was head of the U.N. Development Program, which works with Mr. Soros on many multimillion-dollar projects. The deputy secretary general insists there’s nothing “improper” in his mixing of his professional and personal lives, and, indeed, by the ethical standards of the U.N. — which is to say, the Oil-for-Fraud program, the Child-Sex-for-Food program, etc. — there isn’t.

As Steyn points out, when Malloch Brown left the United Nations, he went on to become “vice-chair of Soros’ hedge fund company and ‘Open Society Institute.’” And now he’s a foreign policy big shot for Gordon Brown. Perfect. And Malloch Brown is hardly the only of Gordon Brown’s new ministers to believe that Iraq was a colossal mistake and that the UK is compounding that mistake by maintaining a close relationship with the international pariah George Bush. As the editors of *The Wall Street Journal* put it this morning, “On Thursday, his first full day in office, the Prime Minister sought to distance himself from just-retired Tony Blair’s unpopular commitment to the ‘global war on terror’ by unveiling a cabinet with prominent Blair critics.”

In any case, no one with any sense can doubt that the new Prime Minister’s intention was to move away from Tony Blair’s policy of largely unqualified support for the United States. At least it was until the Islamists went and screwed everything up. Now, it will be difficult for Brown to distance himself too greatly from Bush and the United States, at least for the time being. Any movement in that direction, no matter how small or unimportant or even how premeditated, will be seen as capitulation to the terrorists. And though Brown undoubtedly wants to differentiate himself from Blair as quickly as possible, he can ill-afford to appear weak and irresolute this early in his stay at Number 10 Downing.

On this side of the Atlantic, the Islamists’ attacks may prove equally ill timed. Just three days ago, the Bush presidency was left for dead, even by its most ardent supporters. In the wake of the Senate’s rejection of his pet immigration project — for the second time in six weeks — most observers had justifiably concluded that Bush was done, the lamest of lame ducks, unable even to rally his own party to one his most favored causes. The headline on last Friday’s column by John Podhoretz, a conservative stalwart and the son of proto-neocon Norman Podhoretz, read simply “Dubya’s End.”

And then along came the Islamists.

We don't want to get too carried away with the potential impact that the attacks in Britain will have on American society – especially since it is likely that a great many Americans are completely unaware of said attacks. But the resuscitation of the terrorist threat, which the strikes in Britain last week may portend, is probably the only thing that can salvage the Bush presidency at this late date. As unhappy as it may make his political opponents, the American public is all but certain to rally to Bush in the face of a reinvigorated domestic threat, if for no other reason than he's been through it before and speaks the language of war and deterrence rather than that of amity and reconciliation.

Looking back on the Bush presidency, it is undeniable that the periods in which he has been most popular, most effective, and most confident were those in which he and the nation were on the offensive against the Islamist threat. Today, Bush is dejected and beaten. But he is not yet broken. And as many times as he has been “misunderestimated” by his opponents before, it would be unsurprising to see him once again shake off his blues and reestablish himself as the warrior-president.

Additionally, the reemergence of the terrorist threat is likely to boost the currently flagging prospects of the GOP to retain the presidency in next year's election. Take the general perception of the Democratic Party as being weak on defense, add to it the more aggressively anti-war posture that most of the Democratic hopefuls have felt compelled to adopt, and then throw in Republican candidates like Rudy Giuliani and John McCain, and it's not too difficult to envision a scenario in which the Democrats' current lead in the polls quickly becomes a deficit. Al Qaeda and its fellow travelers have determined that Americans are soft and apt to quit the fight. But clearly they have miscalculated before. As we note

above and have discussed in this newsletter previously, 9/11 was an enormous strategic blunder for bin Laden and friends, waking the proverbial sleeping giant and forcing a reticent America to defend itself. A renewal of the terrorist threat today could have a similar effect, reanimating the warrior spirit and resuscitating the political prospects of those most likely to engage the threat head on.

Not that we think that the prospect of renewed terrorism should be viewed exclusively in political terms. For better than a decade now, we have written about of the threat posed by Islamic terrorism. And as recently as two weeks ago, we discussed the frightening prospect of a large-scale, even nuclear, terrorist strike. The revelation yesterday of the existence of a “secret U.S. law enforcement report, prepared for the Department of Homeland Security, [that] warns that al Qaeda is planning a terror ‘spectacular’ this summer,” confirms our fears. The terrorist threat is real and it is serious.

That said, the Islamists do themselves no favors with amateurish, low-level, ineffective attacks such as were conducted last week in Britain. Such attacks, which shock and anger but inflict little damage, are, in effect, political acts, acts that serve no purpose other than to alter the political atmosphere in the target countries – to the Islamists' detriment.

Last week, Gordon Brown was a budding anti-warrior and George Bush was a has-been. Today, Brown is a committed anti-terrorist and Bush is a potentially strengthened and reinvigorated commander-in-chief. And all the Islamists have to show for it is a burned up car, a couple of burned up terrorists, and a handful of operatives and sympathizers in custody. Needless to say, all of this is bad for the al Qaedaists and good for Britons and Americans. How bad and how good has yet to be determined, of course, but every little bit helps.

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.