

Mark L. Melcher Publisher
melcher@thepoliticalforum.com

Stephen R. Soukup Editor
soukup@thepoliticalforum.com

THEY SAID IT

Standing on the tiny deck of the Arabella in 1630 off the Massachusetts coast, John Winthrop said, "We will be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us, so that if we deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a byword throughout the world." Well, we have not dealt falsely with our God, even if He is temporarily suspended from the classroom.

When I was born my life expectancy was 10 years less than I have already lived – that's a cause of regret for some people in California, I know. Ninety percent of Americans at that time lived beneath what is considered the poverty line today, three-quarters lived in what is considered substandard housing. Today each of those figures is less than 10 percent....We have more doctors per thousand people than any nation in the world. We have more hospitals than any nation in the world....One-third of all the students in the world who are pursuing higher education are doing so in the United States. The percentage of our young Negro community that is going to college is greater than the percentage of whites in any other country in the world.

One-half of all the economic activity in the entire history of man has taken place in this republic. We have distributed our wealth more widely among our people than any society known to man....Ninety-five percent of all our families have an adequate daily intake of nutrients – and a part of the five percent that don't are trying to lose weight! Ninety-nine percent have gas or electric refrigeration, 92 percent have televisions, and an equal number have telephones...we also have more churches, more libraries, we support voluntarily more symphony orchestras, and opera companies, non-profit theaters, and publish more books than all the other nations of the world put together....Somehow America has bred a kindness into our people unmatched anywhere....

Ronald Reagan, "City Upon A Hill" speech, January 25, 1974.

DARE WE SAY THAT THINGS MIGHT BE LOOKING UP?

With the stock market setting new highs and the economy booming, it is natural that some folks are asking what could go wrong? We thought we'd take the contrarian approach this week and ask instead, what else could go right? And the answer, up with which we have come, is that public opinion about the war in Iraq could begin to swing in President Bush's favor this fall, and this could discombobulate the Democrats enough to put them on the defensive going into the 2008 election.

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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

Now we are, by no means, putting this forth as a certainty. We are simply doing a little positive scenario spinning in honor of the new record high on the Dow Industrials last week, and as a vehicle for discussing a few happenings in the nation's capital that strike us as both positive and interesting.

So how could this happy occurrence occur, you ask, especially given the President's low approval rating at the present, even among members of his own party? Well, the answer is that the Democrats could suffer a collective nervous breakdown in the next few weeks, lose the fight with the White House in September over the progress of "the surge" in Iraq, and, in the wake of this defeat, fall apart even further, leaving the public no choice but to conclude that while President Bush and his fellow Republicans are no great shakes, they are at least reasonably stable mentally and, God bless them, on America's side in the war against militant Islam.

Now at the heart of this scenario spinning is our belief that the dramatic gains that the Democrats made in last fall's elections were more of a reflection of the public's dissatisfaction with the Republicans than either a vote of confidence for the Democratic Party's leadership or an endorsement of its liberal agenda.

Democrats have never really understood this. They seem to think that their recent victory was a sign that Americans have finally come to their senses, like a runaway spouse who calls unexpectedly in the middle of night and wants to return home. They see themselves singing the old Buck Owens standard, "The Key's in the Mailbox, Come On In." But, whether they know it or not, the election wasn't about that. It was more like the girl who wanted to go to the dance so she accepted the invitation from least repulsive of the only two guys who asked her.

And guess what? Least repulsive has turned out to still be repulsive. The public has found that one group of sleazy, slick, greedy, pork-addled "servants of the people" is no better than the other one. In fact, in this case, the new group of sleazy, slick, greedy, pork-

addled servants of the people seems to be the more objectionable of the two. At least, that's what the polls indicate that the public believes.

It is not clear why this is the case. But we think style has a great deal to do with it, which is why we believe that times may be about to become a little more difficult for both the Democrats in Congress and the party's presidential hopefuls.

Style? What do we mean? Well, here we are in the middle of one of the greatest economic booms in the history of the nation. Money is abundant, unemployment is so low that millions of Mexicans are working at "jobs that Americans won't do," the stock market is bouncing around at all time high levels, and the nation is culturally, economically, and militarily the most powerful that the world has ever seen.

Yes, there are barbarians at the gate. But there have always been barbarians at the gate. And there always will be barbarians at the gate for they are proof of "the fall." Indeed, if Dublin Mayor John Philpot Curran was correct in 1790 when he noted that "the condition upon which God hath given liberty to man is eternal vigilance," then the presence of the barbarians at the gate helps to keep America free. They are an antidote to the lotus eaters among us, who, propped on beds of amaranth and moly, would surrender their freedom for temporary quietude.

Moreover, if we must have barbarians at the gate, these are not a bad bunch of barbarians to have. Yes, they are dangerous. Yes, they can kill a great many people and cause tremendous damage. But they do not have the capability of destroying Western civilization, as the Russians and the Chinese had during the Cold War, or, truth be told, still have today. In fact, if it came to a true "clash of civilizations" between the United States and militant Islam, the former could totally and completely destroy not only latter's ability to wage war but to feed and clothe itself. In fact, these barbarians are reminiscent of Blanche DuBois, who was dependent on the "kindness of strangers." The difference is that they are dependent on the humanitarianism of their enemy. As we've said

numerous times in these pages, if the barbarians go too far – setting off an atomic device in downtown New York, for example – this little “clash of civilizations” is likely to be over in a hurry, and it will make Lepanto look like a Sunday school picnic.

In any case, whether the gloom-and-doom Democrats know it or not, the fact is that freedom, democracy, and capitalism are spreading across the globe. Tyranny is on the defensive everywhere. In China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and even Iran, ordinary citizens are demanding more freedom and a right to participate in the government of their nation. As President Bush noted recently, there were only 45 democracies on earth at the beginning of the 1980s, today there are more than 120. Trade between nations is booming. Global prosperity is on the rise. Marxism is dying. Golden age? Pericles should have had it so good.

And how are the Democrats reacting to all of this? With a constant patter of doom, defeat, distress, and warnings of impending disaster, that’s how. Like Waylon Jennings’ “Rainy Day Woman,” they aren’t happy unless they “find something wrong and someone to blame.”

The economy is booming, the stock market is strong, but, in their opinion, it’s terrible because the rich are getting rich faster than “the poor” are. Bill Gates has a yacht and Joe Sixpack has but a camper. Shame on the nation; something must be done. Arthur Brooks, a professor of public administration at Syracuse explains in the *Wall Street Journal* that the “general view among liberals” of this circumstance is that it is “socially undesirable because it makes people miserable.”

Miserable? One wonders if they have ever read the words from Matthew, “Whatever is right, that shall ye receive.” Clearly, Mrs. Clinton hasn’t read and understood this famous parable. This wealthy woman who cheats on her taxes, steals the furniture from the White House on the way out the door, and takes dirty money from George Soros disdainfully talks of “trickle down economics without the trickle.” John Edwards, that self-appointed champion of

“the poor,” who recently built a 28,200 square foot mansion, wrings his hands and complains about “two Americas.” Barack, that Johnny Appleseed of class envy, routinely complains about the “income disparity” between CEO’s and the “average worker.”

One thinks of Lady Caroline’s observation in Saki’s *The Unbearable Bassington*, in response to Ada Spelverit’s condescending declaration that she has to “give an address to some charwomen.” “How painfully true it is,” Lady Caroline says, “that the poor have us always with them.”

There hasn’t been a terrorist attack on American soil since September 11, 2001, despite the incessant predictions from experts in the field that such an attack is inevitable. So, do the Democrats praise the men and women responsible for this success, for this so far perfect record? Of course not. They belittle the effort. John Edwards calls it a “bumper sticker” rather than a plan. The nation is under assault by a deadly enemy and the Democrats, seeking short-term political advantage from the problem, attempt to undermine public confidence in their government’s pledge to do all that is possible to protect them.

The war in Iraq is producing casualties. Imagine that? For Democrats, this is a sure sign of impending defeat. Hope lies only in retreat. America must accept its fate as a loser and pay the penance for its evils ways.

Global weather patterns are changing. No one knows for certain why, or what the result will be. Scientists disagree. But Democrats, like those primitive humans who formed religions around eclipses of the sun and the moon, now worship the god of global warming and talk gloomily of the coming apocalypse foretold by the fluctuations of that great and mystic icon, the thermometer. The end of the world is near, they say. Humanity has but ten years to act or it will be too late.

In the long run, this is a loser’s game in a land that was built on confidence, optimism, courage, and good-natured determination. It casts a pall on all that is good. It precludes the expression of joy on joyous occasions. Good news on the economy, on the war

in Iraq, on the fight against terrorism, in the health care field, even on the weather front, is met with grim warnings of forthcoming doom. Bad news is greeted with the kind of noisome smugness that is a mark of malevolence.

This is the antithesis of the mood projected by the two most masterful American politicians of recent times: Ronald Reagan, whose “City Upon A Hill” speech is quoted above, and Bill Clinton, who rode to the White House on an optimistic smile and a billing as “The Man from Hope.” In fact, it is political poison. And, as we said earlier, it may be starting to take its toll on both the mental health and the popularity of the Democrats.

Now, this is, admittedly, a subjective observation. But the ridiculous Senate slumber party that the Democrats staged last week as a protest against the war in Iraq indicated, to us at least, that the Democrat pessimism may be reaching the self-destructive stage. This was a public relations stunt. It was theatre. The Democrats admit this. It was designed specifically to bring public attention to the Democrats’ opposition to the war. So what qualities did the Democrats display on behalf of their commitment to peace? As each one stepped forth into the spotlight, a mosaic began to form that was reminiscent of the sign over Dante’s Hell-Gate – “Leave, ye that enter in, all hope behind.”

Never mind that Congress recently voted to fund “the surge” and tacitly agreed at the time that they would await the outcome of this new initiative. News from the front is beginning to improve slightly and Democrats seem to fear that if the troops aren’t withdrawn soon the war tide might turn in favor of the American effort. From their perspective, America must lose this war now, before it is too late. Any marked improvement in Iraq would be a political disaster for them.

A decisive battle will be joined in September when General Petraeus comes to town to defend America’s involvement in Iraq against those who claim that the war is lost. Democrats know that the outcome of this fight will not be determined by the facts on ground in

Iraq. It will be a public relations war, pure and simple. General Petraeus will portray the initiative as a success to date. Democrats will charge that it is a failure. Both sides will use the same facts in support of their contention. The pollsters will tell us who won.

Several months ago we would have bet on the Democrats. After all, when it comes to defending the war, President Bush and his fellow Republicans have proven to be exceedingly inept, tone deaf to the pride, patriotism, fears, concerns, hopes, dreams, and traditions that shape the attitudes of the average American when it comes to war and the wages of war.

But in the past few months, the Democrats have climbed way out on the limb of defeatism, competing with each for who can make the most convincing case for surrender. And while this may play well with the folks at moveon.org, our guess is that as ordinary Americans focus on the practical ramifications of such a move, more and more of them will view it as a radical and disgusting choice. Our belief is that Democrats are beginning to sense this. They are getting edgy as “the surge” moves forward, which makes them gloomy, which makes them edgier, which makes them gloomier, which historically has not been a winning trait among American politicians.

The White House, on the other hand, has sharpened up its act a little on the public relations front with the recent deployment of Frances Fragos Townsend, the photogenic, articulate, and exceedingly well informed White House Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism. In case you missed it, Ms. Townsend is a steel magnolia, if there ever was one. And while we don’t expect her to win the PR war single handedly, we do expect her to soften up the already befuddled Democrats in the days before the cavalry arrives in the form of General Petraeus, whom we expect to more than hold his own against the likes of Nancy, Harry, Jack, Hillary, John, and Barack.

We’ll see. In the meantime, be of good cheer, gentle reader. Enjoy the good times while they last. Let the Democrats wear the crape. It can get very heavy after a while.

CHENEY VS. IRAN? WE'LL SEE.

Over the weekend, America's liberals lived through what we can only assume to have been their worst nightmare: a Cheney presidency. For the few hours while President Bush underwent and recovered from his bi-annual colonoscopy, Vice President Cheney was, in effect, President Cheney, having had the powers of the office temporarily bestowed upon him. And since, in liberals' eyes, Cheney is the fount of all that is evil, the wicked puppet-master pulling the strings attached to the hapless and mindless George W. Bush, the very thought of a Cheney presidency – regardless of its brevity – almost certainly sent some of them into paroxysms of hysteria.

Conservative political observers, ourselves included, have noted over the years the prevalence on the left of the disorder known as “BDS” – Bush Derangement Syndrome – a condition which causes erstwhile normal, nominally reasonable people to fly into fits of rage, irrationality, and downright psychosis at even the mention of George Bush's name. Former President Jimmy Carter is the poster-boy for this condition, having been transformed by the Bush presidency from the peanut-loving, devoutly Christian, human-rights-promoting, house-building, affable elder statesman into a bitter, raging, freedom-denying, terrorist-loving, America-hating, blatant anti-Semite.

But as ubiquitous and disfiguring as BDS is, by our calculations, it is still rare and mild in comparison to “CNS,” Cheney Derangement Syndrome, a more potent and widespread mutation. If Bush's wickedness is bad, Cheney's is horrible. Comparisons of the Vice President to some of the most evil men in history are hardly relegated to the political fringes, as they usually are with Bush. Indeed, they are often made even by the blandest and most conventional liberals, including the *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristoff, who last week likened Cheney to Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

A few weeks back, Jonah Goldberg, editor-at-large of *National Review* and a syndicated columnist, declared that he is a member of a “pretty select group: the Dick Cheney Fan Club.” This club, he says, meets “in

phone booths, refrigerator boxes, and, at the annual convention, we take up three whole booths in the back of a nearby Arby's.” We too are members of this Club, though we've never been to any of the meetings. And we, like Goldberg, understand how rare a breed we are in American politics.

Cheney has been portrayed by his political opponents and their allies in the mainstream press as a sort of dark overlord, the terrestrial incarnation of Darth Vader. And for the most part, that portrayal has stuck. He entered office six years ago a respected “old, old Washington hand” (to quote the late ABC news anchor Peter Jennings), but he has since evolved into some terrible, evil beast whose very presence in the Bush administration is *de facto* evidence of its general nefariousness.

In other words, there is no question that Dick Cheney, likely the most powerful vice president in American history, is also one of the most despised. But why? This, we believe, is an extremely interesting question. More to the point, it's an extremely important question, the answer to which may well hold some rather crucial clues about what to expect from Cheney and his boss in the eighteen months they have remaining in office.

Two weeks ago, Peggy Noonan, the former presidential speechwriter and former George W. Bush supporter, called the President's rhetorical approach “ungracious.” Ms. Noonan, who has grown more and more emotional and less and less rational in her critiques of this administration, is upset that Bush “claims for himself virtues that the other side, by inference, lacks” one of the most troubling of which is the President's claim that he “makes his decisions ‘based on principle,’ unlike his critics, who are ever watchful of the polls.”

Though we sympathize with Ms. Noonan's unhappiness with such political rhetoric, we can't help but think that she is missing the point here. The fact of the matter is that the President does indeed make his decisions based on principle. And his opponents do make theirs based on the hints provided them by the polls. That is not a normative judgment. It is

merely a fact. We're not sure if Miss Noonan knows this or not, but the thing that distinguishes Bush from most politicians, be they opponents or allies, is that *he's not running for anything*, and they are. President Bush has a freedom that American politicians rarely enjoy in that he doesn't have to care about the polls and can therefore make decisions based exclusively on principle. Whether one agrees with those principles is another question. But in this sense and at this point in time, Bush is a member of a club even more exclusive than the aforementioned Dick Cheney fan club, a club comprised exclusively of political leaders who have no further political ambitions, a club whose only other member is none other than Dick Cheney.

If anything, the freedom provided to Cheney by this unique circumstance is even greater than that provided Bush. Bush's name is on the top line here, meaning that it is he who will be remembered by posterity. Cheney, by contrast, has only to worry about doing his job to the best of his ability and as he sees fit. It has been nearly two decades since Cheney last ran for office on his own, and unlike most politicians in Washington, he actually spent considerable time in the private sector. Cheney hasn't had to concern himself with poll numbers, approval ratings, or much of anything else related to "politics" in a great while. And he certainly doesn't have to concern himself with any political matters now, as he is the first two-term incumbent vice president in decades not to seek the presidency for himself.

Jonah Goldberg declared that his affection for Cheney springs from the fact that "at a time when everybody talks a big game about how they don't like people-pleasing politicians who live by the polls, Cheney is pretty much the only guy out there who walks the walk. He truly doesn't care what people think about him." Consider, for example, the following story, recounted in Stephen Hayes's new book, *Cheney: The Untold Story of America's Most Powerful and Controversial Vice President*, which details the Vice President's actions and reaction on September 11.

The Secret Service had told Cheney that another aircraft was rapidly approaching Washington, D.C. The combat air patrol had

been scrambled to patrol the area. We have a decision to make, Cheney told the president: Should we give the pilots an order authorizing them to shoot down civilian aircraft that could be used to conduct further attacks in Washington? Cheney told Bush that he supported such a directive. The president agreed.

Within minutes, Cheney was told that an unidentified aircraft was 80 miles outside of Washington. "We were all dividing 80 by 500 miles an hour to see what the windows were," Scooter Libby would later say. A military aide asked Cheney for authorization to take out the aircraft. Cheney gave it without hesitating.

The military aide seemed surprised that the answer came so quickly. He asked again, and Cheney once again gave the authorization. The military aide seemed to think that because Cheney had answered so quickly, he must have misunderstood the question. So he asked the vice president a third time. "I said yes," Cheney said, not angrily but with authority.

"He was very steady, very calm," says Josh Bolten, then deputy White House chief of staff. "He clearly had been through crises before and did not appear to be in shock like many of us."

Cheney says there wasn't time to consider the gravity of the order he had just communicated. It was "just bang, bang, bang," says Cheney, one life-or-death decision after another.

The entire room paused after Cheney had given the final order as the gravity of his order became clear. At 10:18 A.M., Bolten suggested that Cheney notify the president that he had communicated the "shoot-down" order. Shortly after Cheney hung up, the officials in the bunker were advised that a plane had crashed in Pennsylvania.

Everyone had the same question, says Rice. “Was it down because it had been shot down or had it crashed?” Rice and Cheney were both filled with “intense emotion,” she recalls, because they both made the same assumption. “His first thought, my first thought--we had exactly the same reaction--was it must have been shot down by the fighters. And you know, that’s a pretty heady moment, a pretty heavy burden.”

Both Rice and Cheney worked the phones in a desperate search for more information. “We couldn’t get an answer from the Pentagon,” says Rice. They kept trying. “You must know,” Rice insisted in one phone call to the Pentagon. “I mean, you must know!”

Cheney, too, was exasperated. We have to know whether we actually engaged and shot down a civilian aircraft, he said, incredulously. They did not. For several impossible minutes, Cheney believed that a pilot following his orders had brought down a plane full of civilians in rural Pennsylvania. Even then, he had no regrets.

Indeed, as Hayes recounts, despite Cheney’s sorrow and dismay at the possibility of having been responsible for bringing down a civilian airliner, he gave the very same order again only a few minutes later, when he received another (erroneous, as it turns out) report of a plane headed toward Washington.

It is hard to imagine such responsibility. It is also hard to imagine many other politicians in Washington who would be willing to make such a decision, fully aware of the political consequences of their actions. Certainly, it is difficult, to say the least, to imagine that, say, John Edwards or Barack Obama would be willing to stake his entire political future on that one, potentially fateful decision. But as Goldberg notes, Cheney is and always has been willing to “walk the walk,” an entirely uncommon trait among this country’s politicians.

What Vice President Cheney appears to understand is something that most other politicians don’t, namely that the United States is a republic, not a democracy, and that he is part of a team that was elected to do a job, not simply to please the people. Whether his decision not to seek the presidency is related to this understanding, we can’t say, though we suspect that it is. The Vice President undoubtedly grasps that political ambition would cloud his judgment and render him unable to do his job effectively. As it is, he is truly free to focus on that which he believes to be the “right” thing, as opposed to the democratically popular thing to do. The principal drawback to such an attitude, of course, is that when one is free to eschew the popular for the right, one’s popularity is bound to suffer.

In any case, what all of this suggests to us is that the Bush administration may not have finished its offensive campaigns against this nation’s enemies. The evidence that Iran is manipulating the situation in Iraq continues to mount. The mullahs are arming both Shiite and Sunni terrorists and actively engaging American forces, all of which makes it more likely that the President will eventually be forced to confront the problem. Though we have no inside information about the internal debates among administration officials, media reports consistently convey that Vice President Cheney is pushing the President hard on this matter. No surprise there.

If we had to bet, we would lay heavy odds on the likelihood of Vice President Cheney winning this argument and convincing his boss to act against the Mullahs. President Bush has declared over and over again that the Iranians will not be permitted to obtain nuclear weapons. And surely he has to know that the only way to ensure that they do not is to take action himself. We don’t mean to suggest that he will necessarily engage Iran militarily, though that threat will certainly be maintained and may well be realized.

Whatever the administration decides to do, moving against Iran (or even against erstwhile ally Pakistan) will take an uncommon amount of political courage.

And that is where Vice President Cheney comes in. For the past 20 years, conservative politicians have jockeyed endlessly to earn the label of “Reagan’s heir.” And though a variety of wannabes have worn the tag briefly, none has lived up to the legacy over time. We’d suggest that at least where the courage of one’s convictions is concerned, no one has come as close to Reagan as Dick Cheney. One may argue that Cheney has had an easier path, given that he did not have to face voters directly like Reagan did. And though that may be true, it is also largely beside the point.

The bottom line is that Dick Cheney remains steadfast in his belief that taking the war to the terrorists is the surest way to achieve victory. As a reward for his determination, Cheney has been called everything from delusional to evil. Yet he persists. And though the administration has falsely raised our expectations before, we believe that the force of Dick Cheney’s personality, the logic of his case, and the firmness of his convictions will eventually win the day. Any president would need the support of a strong second-in-command to engage a third major front in the war on terror, which is why we believe George Bush will rise to that challenge. The odds of the next president having a Vice President as confident and resolute as Dick Cheney are next to nil. Some people may hate Cheney for his beliefs, but we doubt that’s going to stop him.

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