

The Political Forum

*A review of social and political trends and events
impacting the world's financial markets*

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HEY BUDDY, GET THE BEER MAN OVER HERE!

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. . . He sweeps the forest oft; and sobbing sees
The glades, mild opening to the golden day,
Where, in kind contest, with his butting friends
He wont to struggle, or his loves enjoy.
Oft in the full-descending flood he tries
To lose the scent, and lave his burning sides;
-- Oft seeks the herd; the watchful herd, alarmed,
With selfish care avoid a brother's woe.
What shall he do? His once so vivid nerves,
So full of buoyant spirit, now no more
Inspire the course; but fainting breathless toil,
Sick, seizes on his heart: he stands at bay;
And puts his last weak refuge in despair.
The big round tears run down his dappled face;
He groans in anguish; while the growling pack,
Blood-happy, hang at his fair jutting chest,
And mark his beauteous checkered sides with gore. . .

The Stag Hunt - James Thomson

So far as I can tell, there are two kinds of Republicans today. The first kind, of which there seem to be surprisingly many, spend their days moaning about how "He's going to get out of it. I just know it. Oh, woe is me!"

These are the kind of people who never enjoy a ballgame. When their team is eleven runs ahead and the other side's pitcher is blowing up, they spend the seventh inning stretch wringing their hands over how their team is sure to fall apart in the last of the ninth. They just know it.

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The other kind of Republican, of which I am one, says, “What a day! Hey buddy, give us a couple bags of peanuts! And get the beer man over here! Yahoo! Can you believe they’re leaving that bum in there to pitch? Hey, where’s that beer man?” This crowd has been in a distinct minority during the past few years. But their numbers have been growing lately.

Now, I know I’m mixing my metaphors, but like the beleaguered deer in the above-quoted great 18th century poem by James Thomson, it looks to me like Bill is having trouble “losing the scent” of the “growling pack.” And from what I hear about Bill’s recent trip to Little Rock, a lot of his old friends there are, like the stag’s herd, “with selfish care,” avoiding a “brother’s woe.”

Don’t get me wrong, I clearly don’t think of Bill as a noble beast like Thomson’s “branching monarch.” But after all, stags aren’t what they used to be. Today they eat flower beds and fruit trees, and lurch insanely out of nowhere in front of speeding cars like some monster in one of those video games like *Doom* or *Quake*.

It remains to be seen whether Bill’s “beauteous checkered sides” will be marked with gore when this is over, but from a political standpoint, no matter whether Bill survives or “gets got,” as so many Republicans appear to want, I think Republicans should relax and enjoy the fact that he is on the run instead of in the glade with his “butting friends.” When he’s on the run, after all, he’s not raising taxes or dreaming up new programs on which to spend the old taxes.

Think back, brothers and sisters, to the spring of 1993, when First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton (then widely hailed as “one of the top legal minds in the nation,” and the other half of the “you buy one, you get the second one free” team), was kissed on the cheek by “Postage Stamp Danny” Rostenkowski in a symbolic joining of two, powerful liberal forces for the purpose of nationalizing the nation’s entire health care system. Columnist Mike Royko described it then as follows.

There was a frightening moment when it appeared that Dan Rostenkowski might spring from his chair and crawl across the hearing room to kiss the hem of Hillary Rodham Clinton’s skirt . . . But he wasn’t the only one . . . the congressmen were as giddy as a bunch of kids at a Chuck E Cheese birthday party. Many of them declared that her program was the most wonderful thing they had ever heard and would go down as one of the great historical events of our time. Oh, they might have to tinker with it a bit, but gosh, ain’t it great? And ain’t she great?

Those were the days when network anchors seriously discussed whether 1993 might be the first of 16 years of Clinton rule. First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, would, they speculated, serve the last eight years.

Those were the days when congressional debates weren’t over whether to raise taxes and government spending, but how much to do both. Those were the days when ultra liberals dominated Capitol Hill. Tom Foley (D., Wash.) was Speaker of the House, George Mitchell was Senate majority leader, “Danny” was chairman of the all-important Ways and Means Committee, and names like Sasser, Kennedy, Dodd, Moynihan, Waxman, Dingell, Biden and Dellums were in the headlines.

Today, conservatives dominate Capitol Hill. Newt Gingrich is Speaker. Trent Lott is Senate Majority Leader. Bill Archer runs Ways and Means. Names like Arme y, DeLay, Kasich, Boehner, Bliley, Burton, Hyde, Gramm, Helms, Faircloth and Shelby are the newsmakers. And the Democrats are desperately trying to keep both taxes and programs from being cut.

Today, Mrs. Clinton has been sidelined by an array of legal problems, abysmally low “approval” ratings, and the prospect of being asked embarrassing questions about her husband’s alleged dalliances. Today, she rarely appears before an adult audience or utters a political opinion in public.

Today, her husband is no longer the front man for her radical left-wing agenda. Today he’s gibbering about privatizing Social Security, a cornerstone of American liberalism. He’s taking credit for a reform package that has reduced welfare rolls by staggering amounts. And he’s single-handedly destroying the credibility of the radical feminist movement, of which Miss Hillary was once an icon.

This is what victory looks like, as I said in a piece late last year by that same title. Victory against an ideology as firmly entrenched as liberalism, backed by control of the executive branch, doesn’t come in the form of a rout, I said. It will come through trench warfare. It will be achieved one step at a time, as a result of nibbling here and nibbling there, scratching and clawing, and refusing to give up ground once gained.

I have discussed details of these nibblings in numerous pieces over the past year or so. But nowhere did I do it as well as Daniel Casse did in an article entitled “Defining the Democrats Down” in the August issue of one of my favorite magazines, *Commentary*. The following are a few lines from this terrific piece.

By any objective measure, the Clinton era has been calamitous for the Democratic party. Since the President took office in January 1993, the party has suffered a series of defeats at virtually every level of government and in every region of the country. At the time Bill Clinton was elected, 30 states had Democratic governors; today, the number is down to eighteen. If, six years ago, nearly 60% of legislators in statehouses across the country were Democrats, now only 52% are. The two largest cities in the U.S., Los Angeles and New York, have elected Republican mayors. And, most notably, in the midterm election of 1994, the Democrats lost control of both houses of Congress for the first time in four decades.

There are other signs of weakness. Since 1992, nearly 400 elected officials nationwide, including five Congressmen and two Senators, have switched party affiliation from Democratic to Republican. Voter allegiance has likewise been affected: two months after Clinton took office, 52% of respondents to a *New York Times* survey said they most closely identified with the Democratic party; this past May, only 44% of respondents gave the same answer.

The weakness of the party’s support may help explain why it has failed to nurture a new generation of national leaders even as a Democratic President has been occupying the White House. The Clinton cabinet is uniformly unimpressive, and there are no

promising legislators in either the House or Senate. The two most able Democratic governors, Lawton Chiles of Florida and Zell Miller of Georgia, are both stepping down this fall.

In the meantime, the spotlight is on Ken Starr. What's he got? What will be in the upcoming "report to Congress?"

As regular readers know, I have never been a fan of Starr's. In fact, I think anyone who has watched his actions closely would have to agree with my old friend, London *Sunday Telegraph* reporter Ambrose Evans-Pritchard that, contrary to the spin out of the Clinton White House, Starr has been timid and ineffectual for most of his tenure as independent counsel.

While reading Ambrose's words, it is worth remembering that he was researching and providing details of Bill's ethical, moral and legal transgressions when most American reporters, and virtually all of the big shot political pundits, were collectively scoffing at the very thought that Bill might have a "character" problem. Anyway, here's how Ambrose put it in a July 30 piece in the *Electronic Telegraph*.

In my own experience, Mr. Starr is a trimming, limp-wristed procrastinator with the zeal of a plump sheep, who works part-time on the job, craves approval and bears the imprint of the last person who sat on him. He panicked when his own lead prosecutor told him there was evidence of an FBI cover-up of the 1993 death of the White House aide Vincent Foster. Mr. Starr was not going to quarrel with the FBI. The case was shut down. His prosecutor resigned in disgust, and later accused the Office of the Independent Counsel of unethical behaviour.

The good news from the Republican standpoint is that Ambrose now thinks Starr may have suddenly grown a backbone. He puts it this way.

But after years of ineffectual dithering, Kenneth Starr has at last got the bit between his teeth. Something must have nettled him. Mutterings about his incompetence within the legal fraternity, perhaps, or more likely an arms-length White House smear campaign that saw a private investigator hired to watch his social life.

As a Republican, I hope Ambrose is right that Starr has changed. And I tend to think he is. Only I don't think this change of heart happened for the reasons Ambrose cites. I think it can be attributed to the fact that in the Monica Lewinsky case Starr finally found a smoking gun that is smoking so profusely that even he can't ignore it.

The word among Republicans on Capitol Hill is that Starr will be delivering an extremely comprehensive report on his investigation sometime in September. In fact, most Republicans seem to think that William Safire was correct in his Monday, July 27 *New York Times* column entitled "Grand Obstruction," in which he posited the idea that this report will connect the dots between all of the scandals that engulfed the White House since Bill and Hillary came into office. In doing so, Safire says, he will document "a pervasive pattern of the use of executive power to obstruct the administration of justice." In case you missed it, Safire put it this way.

Assume for unconventional argument's sake that a distinct pattern can be shown--both in the cast of characters and the technique of payoff employed--of possibly hushing up Webster Hubbell on Whitewater and possibly buying Monica Lewinsky's cooperation in giving a witness "talking points" to mislead a jury.

Assume that dots can be connected among the use of the office of White House counsel to transmit false information to a grand jury about the First Lady's involvement in Travelgate firings, the removal and concealment of Rose Law Firm files long under subpoena and the improper use of White House counsel to coordinate and influence the testimony of witnesses and avoid subpoenas in subsequent criminal investigations.

And assume that Independent Counsel has a witness tying a cover-up of bank fraud directly to President Clinton himself. That John Dean-like accuser might be Jim Guy Tucker, Clinton's successor as Arkansas Governor, who twice met privately with the President and has reportedly been turning state's evidence since his plea bargain.

It is possible, of course, that the prospect of such a report is nothing more than wishful thinking on the part of Safire and the Republican leadership. But I don't think so. I must admit that I too think it will be a blockbuster.

You see, my complaint against Starr has never been that he is not a good investigator. In fact, my complaint is that all he does is investigate. The problem, so far as I'm concerned, is that he has never had the gumption to do anything with the stuff he's finding out, beyond ferreting out a few crooked friends of the Clintons in Little Rock, which, with all due respect, couldn't have been all that difficult. I mean, who didn't know that the Clintons had crooked friends in Little Rock?

So . . . if Ken has finally worked up the gumption to pull the trigger, there is little question in my mind that the gun is loaded with a pretty substantial charge. In fact, the word on Capitol Hill is that the summary is likely to be some 300 pages long. And people who purport to know say that supporting evidence will fill a small truck.

Timing is "iffy," of course. But Republicans expect to get the report sometime next month. And from what I can gather, House Judiciary Committee Chairman Henry Hyde intends to have it read verbatim into the public record over a several day period. Since virtually every page will contain something newsworthy, and every other page something sensational, the expectation is that this "reading" will, to say the least, be followed closely by the media.

I continue to believe that there is a mea culpa speech in Bill's future, as Steve and I said last week. A lot of veteran Clinton-watchers don't agree. They say the White House will quickly return to the deny-deny-deny, smash-mouth tactics that have worked so well for so long. The official White House line last week provided no clues. It was stated in a classic, Clinton-era, "stop-the-presses" headline in last Saturday's *Washington Post*, as follows: "Clinton Pledges To Testify 'Truthfully.'" We'll see. Either way, the bottom line is, in my opinion, that Bill and his party are in a world of trouble.

As Steve and I said last week, the Republicans don't want to impeach him unless the Democrats join in. In other words, in the final analysis, it's up to the Democrats. I have zero confidence in my ability to predict what they will decide to do. Frankly, I have never understood why they didn't pull the plug on Bill before the 1996 election. As regular readers know, I thought for the longest time that they would, that they just couldn't be stupid enough to want a guy with Bill's legal, ethical and moral baggage to represent their party for another four years. But they did. And now I don't understand why so many are still sticking with him.

The whole thing reminds me of that scene in the movie *Home Alone II*, in which Macaulay Culkin, after having practically killed Joe Pesci and Daniel Stern with his diabolic traps, yells to them, "Hey! You guys give up? Have you had enough pain?" And Stern, covered with paint, bruised and battered, maniacally yells back, "Never!"

But, good for them, says I. Keep it up. Keep the bum in there pitching! And get that beer man over here! Yahoo! It just doesn't get any better than this!

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