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Government is competent when all who compose it work as trustees for the whole people. It can make constant progress when it keeps abreast of all the facts. It can obtain justified support and legitimate criticism when the people receive true information of all that government does.
 —President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Second Inaugural Address

"Brand Democrat" Screen Wallpaper, courtesy of Oliver Willis

<p>The Four Freedoms Freedom of Speech Freedom to Worship Freedom from Want Freedom from Fear</p> <p>FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT, DEMOCRAT.</p>  <p>since 1794</p>	<p>"If by a 'Liberal' they mean someone who looks ahead and not behind, someone who welcomes new ideas without rigid reactions, someone who cares about the welfare of the people -- their health, their housing, their schools, their jobs, their civil rights, and their civil liberties -- someone who believes we can break through the stalemate and suspicions that grip us in our policies abroad, if that is what they mean by a 'Liberal,' then I'm proud to say I'm a 'Liberal.'"</p> <p>JOHN F. KENNEDY, DEMOCRAT.</p>  <p>since 1794</p>	<p>Let it be our cause that we give this child a country that is coming together, not coming apart, a country of boundless hopes and endless dreams, a country once again lifts its people and inspires the world. Let that be our cause, our commitment, and our New Covenant.</p> <p>BILL CLINTON, DEMOCRAT.</p>  <p>since 1794</p>
<p>Ownership Society = Cutting Social Security This is <i>NOT</i> Democrat Math</p>  <p>Since 1794</p>	<p>Since When Did Borrowing \$2 Trillion Solve <i>Anything</i>? This is <i>NOT</i> Democrat Math</p>  <p>Since 1794</p>	<p>If the goal is to expand private investment, why not make it easier to open an IRA instead of cutting Social Security benefits? This is <i>NOT</i> Democrat Math</p>  <p>Since 1794</p>

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[Daily Topics & Commentary:](#)

Wednesday, March 30

The Ghoulies

Wednesday, March 30 (James Wolcott.com)—"Your heart goes out to them," said Margaret Carlson on this weekend's Capital Gang (CNN), that lifeboat for clueless pundits.

By "them," Carlson meant the parents of Terri Schiavo. Carlson (how the hell does she have a career?) had been so effusive in praise of them and so abusive in disparagement of Michael Schiavo that Robert Novak commended her after she paused for breath, which is like being kissed by a vampire who's removed his fangs.

Of course, it's easy for your heart to go out to people when it's untethered from your brain, and Carlson's brain has never been a wonder of science.

[More](#)

Dissent on Intelligence Is Critical, Report Says

Commission's Ideas Diverge From Planned Centralization

Wednesday, March 30 (Washington Post)—A presidential commission assigned to look into the intelligence failures leading up to the Iraq war will recommend a series of changes intended to encourage more dissent within the nation's spy agencies and better organize the government's multi-tentacled fight against terrorism, officials said yesterday.

In a report to be made public tomorrow, the officials said, the panel will propose more competitive analysis and information-sharing by intelligence agencies, improved tradecraft training, more "devil's advocacy" in the formation of national intelligence estimates and the appointment of an intelligence ombudsman to hear from analysts who believe their work has been compromised.

The report will also suggest the creation of a new national nonproliferation center to coordinate the fight against weapons of mass destruction, according to officials who have read the 700-page classified version of the report and declined to be identified because it has not been released. But unlike the trend toward greater centralization enshrined in a new intelligence law signed by President Bush, the report envisions the center as a facilitating body and urges the government to keep its specialists dispersed in various intelligence agencies. [More](#)

The ace up his sleeve

Wednesday, March 30 (CNN.com)—This past weekend, Republican Senator Chuck Grassley of Iowa, the influential chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, seemed to throw cold water on President Bush's hopes for major Social Security change. And recent polls have shown that the public is also cool to the idea of private accounts, arguably the central element of President Bush's Social Security plan.

But as the Social Security debate continues to unfold, do not underestimate President Bush's ability to still get his ideas enacted. Indeed, even without broad Congressional or public support, President Bush just may have an ace up his sleeve. How might he enact his private accounts idea without such support, you may ask? By executive order. [More](#)

Ed note: Outside of the actual human suffering, this would probably be the best thing ever. Real people with stories of how their retirement nest eggs dropping in value like stones. Why? Because the Bushies aren't smart enough to put together a good plan, they'll rush in with something politically motivated and laden with bonuses for donors.

8:59 am—This is Our Time to Lead, if We Choose To

To defeat the GOP, it's a matter of finding the courage of our convictions, asking questions, and giving the people more credit for intelligence than the White House is giving them now.

Ask people to remember, ask them to compare, then ask them to think. That's how simple it is. After 5 years of GOP rule, it's fair to say that this is the way they are. There's little to no chance they'll go against their nature to get more compassionate. There's a better chance that they'll only get more conservative.

Ask them the question whether or not they respect the rule of law. Listen to their double talk, then contrast that with their fascist behavior during the Schiavo debacle. Within 10 days, they changed federal law to suit their wishes and shopped among 4 courts to get the ruling they wanted. This came after 19 other courts said they had no case. They were on the verge of destroying the concept of spousal rights. All because the courts didn't give them the result they wanted.

It's very similar to their respect for the rules of Congress. When the House leadership bumped into a vote that wasn't going their way, they extended the vote. For up to 8 hours, and probably longer if that was what it was going to take to have their way. Ask people if that's the sign of a party that respects the rule of law.

Ask them to recall Bush's reaction when the world found out Russia was actively trying to fix the Ukrainian elections. His response? There was no response. An outside country trying to fix elections in a nascent democracy. There were days, under both democratic and republican administrations, when this would have caused a political and military alert. But these republicans see nothing wrong.

Then ask people to think whether this is a party that respects the law, or uses majority rule in the same way Stalin ran the Soviet Union.

And on to the War on Terror, where they learned how much of the law they can break. [Here's a snippet from a story in the 3/26/05 Washington Post:](#)

A military tribunal determined last fall that Murat Kurnaz, a German national seized in Pakistan in 2001, was a member of al Qaeda and an enemy combatant whom the government could detain indefinitely at the U.S. military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

The three military officers on the panel, whose identities are kept secret, said in papers filed in federal court that they reached their conclusion based largely on classified evidence that was too sensitive to release to the public.

In fact, that evidence, recently declassified and obtained by The Washington Post, shows that U.S. military intelligence and German law enforcement authorities had largely concluded there was no information that linked Kurnaz to al Qaeda, any other terrorist organization or terrorist activities.

Until Dems have the courage of their convictions to stand up against outright lawlessness like this, we can't expect people to take us seriously.

A major key to the success of GOP rhetoric is in its ability to get us focused on the blue-sky of what can be, while at the same time keeping our focus away on the real-world indicators of measuring our progress toward that goal. This is how they've managed to bamboozle us on economic and domestic issues.

Take tax cuts. The national media has ignored following up on the promises of the Bushies while going after the biggest tax cuts in history. Even discounting for rhetorical "inflation," we are nowhere near where we should be given the sheer amount of stimulus pumped into the economy. Bush promised 1 MILLION jobs would be created as part of the cuts. There's been no follow up on the claim. The economy limps upward, with prices being pressured up, and real wages on the decline. The average joe may have lower tax rates, but what good is that if you're making less money? They get to keep an extra \$50 per year? Get real!

Ask people if tax cuts have had the effect on the economy as promised, or as personally expected. Remind them who has benefited by these tax cuts and ask them whether that's acceptable. Remind them of the history of supply side tax cuts, and ask them to compare the ideology to the results.

Take truthfulness. The Bible is the bedrock of today's GOP. You'd think that approval ratings for a party who proclaim themselves to be the "home of the family," and who is "God's Own Party" would have found a way to use the peace of the Lord and his blessings in order to restore credibility and trustworthiness to politics.

Ask people what Jesus and the early Christians stood for. Ask them whether Tom DeLay represents Christian stewardship. Remind them that Jesus stood for uplifting the lowest among us; not the richest. Remind them that the Lord regards humility, not arrogance. Peace above war. Then ask them to compare this to what the GOP is doing now.

I have said before that this is America's opportunity to really experience life under movement conservatives. We toyed with their ideas in the 80's and 90's; but we now have 8 years of very robust conservative rule, a Reagan administration on steroids. And we are learning that talk does not equal action. Reactionary rhetoric does not make for good policy. Their ideas are being proven unworkable in the real world. Their financial policies are bankrupting the country (again), much more so than during the Reagan administration. Their politics are dividing the country. They are openly and arrogantly giving political payback to their supporters. They have informed the rest of the world that God is with them, and the rest of us can all go to hell. And that's after just 5 of 8 years.

Just think, 3 more years of George Bush to go.

Tuesday, March 29

12:44 pm—O Jesus, Please Find Something Worthwhile for this Man to Do....



Jesse Jackson and Mary Schiavo

'Cause I'm tired of the grandstanding. Since when does Jesse Jackson stand on ground soiled by Randall Terry?

The "F" Word

Tuesday, March 29 (Tristero)—On March 21, 2005 12:44 am, the extremists in charge of the US Government showed the world that when they don't like a law or a legally valid court decision - ANY law, ANY court decision, for ANY reason, no matter how carefully adjudicated - they are prepared to rip it up. There is a word for this.

The word is fascism.

As of early this morning, America can no longer maintain the slightest shadow of an illusion that it is a Republic with a flexible and somewhat benign, albeit hegemonic and imperialist, stance towards the world while enjoying a modicum of democratically established liberties for its citizens. Today, my fellow Americans, we woke up in a new United States, a fascist America in which a citizen's rights and liberties are inscribed not in a set of laws but are entirely subject to the whims of the extremists running the Federal legislative and executive branches. A fascist America which barely tries to disguise either its thirst for oil or its demands that all countries must kowtow to its leaders' demands.

Oh, c'mon! They can't DO that, they can't take away our rights without hearings, without extended open discussions, can they? We have laws! They can't just ignore them!

Well guess what? They just can ignore them and they just did. That's what the awful personal tragedy of the Schiavos mutated into: the perfect excuse for extremists to come out of the closet and swagger about, smirking, basking in the full extent of their fascist glory.

Nineteen judges examined the details of a heartwrenching medical case, numerous expert witnesses on all sides were called. The judgment was affirmed and unequivocal. No matter. In an entirely unprecedented move, and merely to demonstrate its overwhelming power, the extremists in this government told the American judiciary to take a hike. We're doing it our way from now on. [More](#)

The demise of the GOP revolution

Tuesday, March 29 (Seattle Times)—This week will go down in political history as the moment the conservative revolution died.

How can I say that? Conservatives control the entire federal government. If anything, they appear set to win even more power at the ballot box. But the premise of the revolution is dead and gone. Republicans have abandoned the last of the principles that swept them into power a decade ago.

They've so lost sight of why they are there that GOP Congressman Dave Reichert is now seen as a maverick for adhering to core conservative ideals. Reichert, of Auburn, was one of only five Republicans who voted not to interfere in the removal of Terri Schiavo's feeding tube. She's been in a vegetative state for 15 years. A pro-lifer, Reichert said he wasn't judging whether Schiavo lives or dies. He said it was none of Congress' business. "This issue is between the family members, their doctors and God," he said.

Is Dave Reichert really the only Republican left who understands his job is running the country, not our lives?

So much for the era of big government being over. It used to be that shrinking the government was the point of being a Republican. Reduce its physical size, but also how it meddles in personal affairs. Now national Republicans have become the stereotypical liberals they denigrate, using government power to advance pet causes regardless of local or private concerns.

To remind myself what this revolution was supposed to be about, I looked up the "Contract With America." That was the GOP pledge in 1994, when the party won Congress to end 40 years of Democratic rule. The contract vowed "the end of government that is too big, too intrusive, and too easy with the public's money."

A decade later government is as bloated and profligate as ever, with record deficits. With Schiavo, Congress has reached a new low for butting in where it doesn't belong. [More](#)

Monday, March 28

The Education of Paul Wolfowitz

Here in the West, poverty means a bad life. But poverty in the Third World means death.

Monday, March 28 (Fareed Zakharia.com)—Paul Wolfowitz's appointment might be a very good thing for the World Bank, but for a reason exactly the opposite to the one his supporters believe. The deputy Defense Secretary's champions are certain that he will take over the bank and give it a thorough overhaul. In fact, it might be the bank that will change Mr. Wolfowitz. At least that's the hope.

It is often said in Washington these days that conservatives are full of fresh ideas while liberals defend old orthodoxies. At least in the realm of fighting poverty, the opposite is true. On those few occasions when they think about the subject, conservatives recite a stale catechism of clichés based on virtually no research or experience. You've heard them often: foreign aid is a waste, all of it ends up in Swiss banks; poor countries should just free up their markets and they will grow; Africans don't want to work, etc.

If Wolfowitz is inclined toward these mantras, he should read Jeffrey Sachs's compelling new book, "The End of Poverty." Sachs, a distinguished economist who has spent the last three decades working with governments around the world, explains that none of these conventional wisdoms gets it right. Much foreign aid has been very well spent and led to landmark results. [More](#)

CONCORD COALITION SAYS THAT DEFICIT OUTLOOK JUSTIFIES RETURN TO "PAY-AS-YOU-GO" RULE FOR TAX CUTS AND SPENDING

Monday, March 28 (Concord Coalition.org)—As the House and Senate debate their respective versions of the Fiscal Year 2006 budget resolutions, The Concord Coalition today urged them to combat the threat of growing deficits by adopting strong enforcement mechanisms including a "pay-as-you-go" rule (PAYGO) for tax cuts and entitlement expansions.

"It is clear that the deficit is not going to go away on its own. Despite attempts to avoid the inevitable, at some point Congress and the President will need to either cut spending or raise revenues by more than is implied in these budget blueprints. Since elected leaders are loathe to make such decisions, it will help to have budget process measures in place that stiffen political spines. Tough spending caps for appropriations are a proven tool and should be part of the budget resolution. Standing alone, however, appropriations caps will not be enough. What's also needed is the reinstatement of PAYGO for entitlement expansions and tax cuts," said Concord Coalition Executive Director Robert Bixby.

"In a time of persistent or expanding deficits, such as we face now, the PAYGO rule is common sense. It does not, by itself, reduce the deficit but it promotes fiscal responsibility by requiring anyone who proposes a tax cut or entitlement expansion to answer the question: 'Can we afford it?' Given what's happened in recent years -- when large tax cuts were combined with large entitlement expansions -- forcing an answer to this simple question is perhaps the most important thing politicians can do immediately to stop digging the hole deeper. In contrast, failure to renew PAYGO would send an alarming signal that Washington policymakers are not yet taking our nation's deteriorating fiscal outlook seriously," Bixby said. [More](#)

Doubt Is Cast on Loan Papers

Plaintiffs say identical entries for 3 different Ameriquest borrowers bolster claims of fraud.

Monday, March 28 (LA Times)—Idanel Bonaparte's credit record had a few dings when she borrowed \$108,000 from Ameriquest Mortgage Co. last year to fix up her aging home. The divorced nurse had an offsetting advantage, though: a mutual fund account worth \$25,456.53.

Linda Hubbard, a widow working three jobs, refinanced her home with a \$211,000 loan from Ameriquest a month after Bonaparte. As she spread out the loan papers on her kitchen table recently, she expressed surprise to see that she had been credited with a 401(k) retirement fund. Its balance: \$25,456.53.

Romy Hodge, a disabled house cleaner, said she was scraping by on \$561 a month in disability income when Ameriquest refinanced her house with a \$75,000 loan. The documents she was handed at her loan closing, two months after Hubbard's, also showed a 401(k) account — totaling, once again, \$25,456.53.

Unlike the account balances, the stories of the three Tampa women don't match. Bonaparte said the mutual fund was hers, but Hubbard and Hodge said they had no such investment or anything like it. [More](#)

Some Creditors Make Illegal Demands on Active-Duty Soldiers

Monday, March 28 (New York Times)—...At Fort Hood, Tex., a soldier's wife was sued by a creditor trying to collect a debt owed by her and her husband, who was serving in Baghdad at the time. A local judge ruled against her, saying she had defaulted, even though specialists say the relief act forbids default judgments against soldiers serving overseas and protects their spouses as well.

—At Camp Pendleton, Calif., more than a dozen marines returned from Iraq to find that their cars and other possessions had been improperly sold to cover unpaid storage and towing fees. The law forbids such seizures without a court order.

—In northern Ohio, Wells Fargo served a young Army couple with foreclosure papers despite the wife's repeated efforts to negotiate new repayment terms with the bank. Wells Fargo said later that it had been unaware of the couple's military status. The foreclosure was dropped after a military lawyer intervened. [More](#)

With Bush Safely Re-elected, Rove Turns Intensity to Policy

Karl Rove is assuming a more expansive role, bringing the same intensity to the big issues in President Bush's second-term agenda that he brought to the president's re-election campaign.

Monday, March 28 (New York Times)—Jack Kemp was causing problems for President Bush's drive to overhaul Social Security, and it naturally fell to Karl Rove, Mr. Bush's strategist, enforcer and closet policy expert, to take him on.

Mr. Kemp, the 1996 Republican vice presidential nominee and a founder of a conservative advocacy group, was publicly attacking an idea floated by the White House to cut benefits in the retirement system and was rallying support for an alternative approach that, on paper, would be pain free. Mr. Kemp's statements exposed a split among Republicans and complicated the administration's efforts to prepare the public for possible benefit cuts.

After a ceremony several months ago in the White House East Room that Mr. Kemp attended, Mr. Rove sought him out, associates of the two men said. But their exchange was less a scolding by Mr. Rove, they said, than an assertive, detailed argument against Mr. Kemp's favored approach. Mr. Rove, they said, went through a point-by-point critique of the plan and left Mr. Kemp with the message that he considered it unworkable.

As Mr. Bush pushes doggedly ahead with his battle to add investment accounts to Social Security, he is betting heavily on Mr. Rove's well-chronicled political skills to build public support, hold Republicans together and overcome intense Democratic opposition. [More](#)

Ed note: So if you thought Terri Schiavo was intolerable, rest assured that politics, not policy is the goal of the Bush administration. Anything to keep our minds off the economy, the war, and everything else that the GOP has screwed up the last 5 years.

7:24 am—Lessons and Icons

The biggest lesson I learned this weekend on the Terri Schiavo situation was that she is in this situation due to a heart attack brought on by a potassium imbalance. This potassium imbalance was brought about due to complications with bulimia.

My girlfriend brought that to my attention, and posted it to [Crooks and Liars](#).

Instead of Terri Schiavo properly and responsibly being presented to millions of American teen and pre-teen girls as an icon for the mortal dangers of binging and purging, she has been manipulated by Movement Conservatives as a wedge between the loonier minority of the pro-life faction and the rest of humanity. Bulimia is a huge problem facing families because the child feels she is not thin enough. It has affected the famous as well as the unknown. Its affects haunt the body for decades. It can easily kill, and has killed scores of young women who, although beautiful and vibrant, felt inferior enough to voluntarily starve themselves.

Terri Schiavo, bless her soul, was tortured by bulimia through life. Her torturer is the same one that girls across this nation are struggling with EVEN AS YOU READ THESE WORDS. Instead of finding hope amidst the sadness, the combination of her parents, her husband, and the religious right have robbed us of being able to show bulimic girls the true intent of the condition. Death. We could have used Terri's life lessons as the tragic endgame of bulimia. We could have done so much.

Thanks Randall. Thanks Tom. And Denny, Jebbie, and most certainly Karl and George. Division instead of compassion. Political payback instead of moral responsibility. This is the America they want you to live in. At what point to we take our country back from them?

Friday, March 25

Native Americans Criticize Bush's Silence

Response to School Shooting Is Contrasted With President's Intervention in Schiavo Case

Friday, March 25 (Washington Post)—Native Americans across the country -- including tribal leaders, academics and rank-and-file tribe members -- voiced anger and frustration Thursday that President Bush has responded to the second-deadliest school shooting in U.S. history with silence.

Three days after 16-year-old Jeff Weise killed nine members of his Red Lake tribe before taking his own life, grief-stricken American Indians complained that the White House has offered little in the way of sympathy for the tribe situated in the uppermost region of Minnesota.

"From all over the world we are getting letters of condolence, the Red Cross has come, but the so-called Great White Father in Washington hasn't said or done a thing," said Clyde Bellecourt, a Chippewa Indian who is the founder and national director of the American Indian Movement here. "When people's children are murdered and others are in the hospital hanging on to life, he should be the first one to offer his condolences. . . . If this was a white community, I don't think he'd have any problem doing that." [More](#)

Ed. note: Remember, Bush's daddy sat silent throughout the LA riots following the Rodney King verdict. His seeming indifference to human suffering and injustice is not political, it's genetic.

Fake Cable Labeled Writer a Spy for Iraq

Friday, March 25 (Washington Post)—Someone has gone to a great deal of trouble to produce a document accusing journalist and activist William Arkin of serving as a spy for Saddam Hussein.

The Pentagon says the supposed Defense Intelligence Agency cable is a forgery. Arkin says it's "chilling" and is demanding an investigation. The NBC News military analyst says he became aware of the bogus document when a Washington Times reporter called about the spying allegation and sent him a copy.

"There are a lot of reasons, I guess, why people would want to do me harm," Arkin said yesterday. One, he said, is the recent publication of his book "Code Names: Deciphering U.S. Military Plans, Programs and Operations in the 9/11 World." Another, he noted, is a series of past scoops that embarrassed the Bush administration. [More](#)

1:43 pm—Great New Source of Facts on the Bankruptcy Bill

Jamming up people who can't pay their bills is easy picking, especially if you're not really going to think the problem through. That's why the credit card industry has pretty much had their way with the bankruptcy bill. There's lots of smoke being blown about on this bill, and even more on how to solve the problem. There's a great new portion of the Talking Points Memo blog that's devoted to the facts of the bill and fictions surrounding it.

Here's something that shocked me—if someone steals my identity and forces me into bankruptcy, according to the Bankruptcy Bill, I am still liable for those debts. Bankruptcy cannot discharge them. How stupid is that?

For more on the next piece of Bush's "Ownership Society" about to be forced down our throats, [click here](#)

The Era of Exploitation

By BOB HERBERT

Friday March 25 (New York Times)—Congress is in recess and the press has gone berserk over the Terri Schiavo case. So very little attention is being paid to pending budget proposals that are scandalously unfair, but that pretty accurately reflect the kind of country the U.S. has become.

President Bush believes in an "ownership" society, which means that except for the wealthy, you're on your own. The president's budget would cut funding for Medicaid, food stamps, education, transportation, health care for veterans, law enforcement, medical research and safety inspections for food and drugs. And, of course, it contains big new tax cuts for the wealthy.

These are the new American priorities. Republicans will tell you they were ratified in the last presidential election. We may be locked in a long and costly war, and federal deficits may be spiraling toward the moon, but the era of shared sacrifices is over. This is the era of entrenched exploitation. All sacrifices will be made by working people and the poor, and the vast bulk of the benefits will accrue to the rich. [More](#)

Thursday, March 24

4:37 pm—No Better Way to End the Working Day...

Than video from the freaks at Fox News! Today, we have 2 clips from the monkey show called "Hannity and Colmes." [In the first clip](#) we see Alan Colmes, who is actually showing life as a liberal, challenging Randall Terry (yes THAT Randall Terry, of the "lets assassinate abortion doctors and lead vigils in their front lawns" Terry's) about his pro-life past.

[In the second clip](#) there's a darling interview with Heide Law, who was one of Terri Schiavo's nurses. It's easy to see why [Crooks and Liars](#) chose to post this video clip. She's as eloquent as Charlie McCarthy—without the ventriloquist.

Asset Returns and Economic Growth: Full Draft

Thursday, March 24 (Brookings Papers on Economic Activity)—Abstract: We in America are probably facing a demographic transition—a slowdown in the rate of natural population increase—and possibly facing a slowdown in productivity growth as well. If these two factors do in fact push down the rate of economic growth in the future, is it still prudent to assume that the past performance of assets is an indication of future results?

We argue "no." Simple standard closed-economy growth models predict that growth slowdowns are likely to lower the marginal product of capital, and thus the long-run rate of return. Moreover, if you assume that current asset valuations represent rational expectations, simple arithmetic tells us that it is next to impossible for past rates of return to continue through a forthcoming growth slowdown. Only a large shift in the distribution of income toward capital or current account surpluses larger than those of nineteenth century Britain sustained for generations give promise for reconciling a slowdown in future economic growth with a continuation of historical asset returns. [More](#)

9:25 am—Best Quote Taken Out of Context (look 3/4 down)

By Ed Kilgore, writing in Talking Points Memo:

... For the same reason that you tend to have more corruption in Republican administrations: when you don't much care about the positive uses of government, and you don't have the political guts to cut it back as much as you would like, then government becomes little more than a vast patronage operation. And if chaos in services ensues, hey, it's just more proof that government's bad to begin with, right?

8:34 am—The Economic Statistic Never Mentioned These Days

Real earnings is a forgotten statistic for today's media. They romance the concepts of supply-side economics, analyze the hell out of trade and budget deficits, producer price indexes, monthly job creation numbers; but always seem to neglect real earnings.

Even though I'm not an economist (nor do I play one on TV), the stat seems to be important because it helps measure how much money the average person has in order to keep driving this consumer-driven economy. It helps measure a person's outlook on the economy, and is a great way to forecast future demand for goods and services.

[Check out the link and see how earnings have dropped .8% over the past year.](#) How can the consumer be asked to drive this economy in a situation where our employers don't want to pay us, credit card interest hamstrings us and prices continue to rise? We can't. We will stop spending. Depending on whether we come to a sudden and complete stop, or a gradual braking, the effects on our economy will be severe.

Another thing is to look at the average wage. America is a wealthy nation, but how few of us make more than \$526/week? How many Americans out there simply want to make \$526/week?

I love it when our economy steams along. It's limping now. The only thing that makes the gimpiness worse is this feeling by our media and current government that we're getting stronger. We are, but in no way close to the "emerging juggernaut" that the administration wants us to think. We're treading water. And at this pace we may not be able to do it for much longer.

Vibrant Cities Find One Thing Missing: Children

Thursday, March 24 (New York Times)—The Pearl District in the heart of this perpetually self-improving city seems to have everything in new urban design and comfort, from the Whole Foods store where fresh-buffed bell peppers are displayed like runway models to the converted lofts that face sidewalk gardens.

Everything except children.

Crime is down. New homes and businesses are sprouting everywhere. But in what may be Portland's trendiest and fastest-growing neighborhood, the number of school-age children grew by only three between the census counts in 1990 and 2000, according to demographers at Portland State University.

"The neighborhood would love to have more kids, that's probably the top of our wish list," said Joan Pendergast of the Pearl Neighborhood Association. "We don't want to be a one-dimensional place." [More](#)

India Alters Law on Drug Patents

Thursday, March 24 (New York Times)—India, a major source of inexpensive AIDS drugs, passed a new patent law yesterday that groups providing drugs to the world's poorest patients fear will choke off their supply of new treatments.

The new law, amending India's 1970 Patent Act, affects everything from electronics to software to medicines, and has been expected for years as a condition for India to join the World Trade Organization.

But because millions of poor people in India and elsewhere - including by some estimates half the AIDS patients in the Third World - rely on India's generic drug industry, lobbyists for multinational drug companies as well as activists fighting for cheap drugs had descended on New Delhi to try to influence the outcome. [More](#)

Tuesday, March 22

5:55 pm—The Noise Machine, at it's Smokiest

So the guy Hannity and Scarborough are interviewing had a GOP congressman write a letter to the Nobel Committee asking them to consider him for nomination. Even though he'd been reprimanded by the Florida Medical Board. But it gets better. The guy passed himself off to the eagle-eye production assistants at Fox as a nominee for a Nobel Prize. And the guy was weighing in on the Schavio case.

No, they don't have any shame. [Check it out.](#)

2:53 pm—So If I AM Going There, I Might As Well Add a Little Humour

From [The Daily Show](#)

2:27 pm—Text of US Federal Judge James Whittemore's Decision on Terri Schiavo

So I've given myself over to the dark side....

Read the decision [here](#)

11:34 am—Here's A Great Environmental Test

In the case of the EPA's new mercury rule, it should be tested by taking one half of Congress and having them drink water infused with mercury at the new PPM level. Have the other half of Congress drink water at the old level. Make the ruling 2 weeks after hearing feedback from the test.

Would the congressional GOP ever, ever choose to live in the same environment they are forcing the rest of us to? Hell no.

New EPA Mercury Rule Omits Conflicting Data

Study Called Stricter Limits Cost-Effective

Tuesday, March 22 (Washington Post)—When the Environmental Protection Agency unveiled a rule last week to limit mercury emissions from U.S. power plants, officials emphasized that the controls could not be more aggressive because the cost to industry already far exceeded the public health payoff.

What they did not reveal is that a Harvard University study paid for by the EPA, co-authored by an EPA scientist and peer-reviewed by two other EPA scientists had reached the opposite conclusion.

That analysis estimated health benefits 100 times as great as the EPA did, but top agency officials ordered the finding stripped from public documents, said a staff member who helped develop the rule. Acknowledging the Harvard study would have forced the agency to consider more stringent controls, said environmentalists and the study's author. [More](#)

8:11—Around the Horn on Paul Wolfowitz

A compendium of concepts and concerns about the nomination of one of Bush's major architects of failure, Paul Wolfowitz, to head the World Bank. Why is he an architect of failure? He's one of a few men, with no predecessors, that managed to underestimate the scope, cost, and requirements of the War in Iraq (I suppose it's a war, but I'm thinking we'd have beaten them down with an all-ROTC force). Anyway, on to the heart of the matter:

From the Jakarta Post, [Paul Wolfowitz as unqualified and more importantly uninterested in the job:](#)

First, the World Bank is an international organization whose core business is development. As an expert in defense and international security, the development community knows little about Wolfowitz's vision for international development. He may be a professional bureaucrat, but running an organization like the Bank is different with running the Pentagon.

It is debatable whether being an economist or a banker should be a strict requirement for a World Bank president. Senior U.S. politician Alan Metzer argued that the Bank does not need its leader to be a development expert. It already has a lot of such experts. What they need is someone that can be trusted to manage the huge sums of money handled by the Bank.

But economist Jeffrey Sachs has a different view. He says that Wolfowitz has never shown an interest, let alone a commitment, to the Millennium Development Goals or global poverty eradication. That is the reason, according to Mr. Sachs, why Wolfowitz is not qualified for the position.

Next up, the International Herald Tribune, with [Gerhardt Schroeder's story of acceptance:](#)

Chancellor Gerhard Schröder signaled on Monday that Germany would support Paul Wolfowitz's candidacy to head the World Bank, arguing that the world may be "positively surprised" by the U.S. deputy defense secretary's performance.

President George W. Bush last week put forward Wolfowitz - a principal architect of the Iraq war, which Schröder opposed strongly - as his choice to take over from the World Bank president, James Wolfensohn.

"The American president called me and made the proposal, and I told him that it would not fail because of Germany," Schröder said in an interview with n-tv television. "I even have the impression that we will be positively surprised."

And the hits keep on coming from the Sydney Morning Herald, [with Joseph Stiglitz in front](#):

Joseph Stiglitz, the former chief economist of the World Bank who is considered one of the most influential economic thinkers, has savagely attacked US plans to appoint Paul Wolfowitz as the organisation's next president.

"The World Bank will once again become a hate figure. This could bring street protests and violence across the developing world," the American Nobel laureate said in an interview with Britain's Channel 4.

He described President George Bush's determination to appoint his Deputy Defence Secretary to the important post as "either an act of provocation or an act so insensitive as to look like provocation". Dr Wolfowitz is widely regarded as the creator of the policy that led to the US war on Iraq.

His nomination also has triggered an outcry among the bank's staff, who have demanded the right to have a say in his confirmation. The staff association has met the bank's executives to voice its concerns after it was swamped with complaints from employees over Dr Wolfowitz's selection.

Now entering the batter's box is FT.com, [with a story on the Dutch and their hints that competition makes a better president](#):

"It is always elegant to have more than one candidate," Gerrit Zalm, Dutch finance minister, said on the margins of Sunday's European finance ministers meeting. "We now have to judge if he is a capable man."

Mr Wolfowitz has been invited to Brussels to meet the European Commission and discuss his vision for the World Bank, but a date has not been decided.

The nomination of the US deputy secretary of defence shocked many Europeans who know him only as a leading campaigner for the 2003 invasion of Iraq and an advocate of using US military power unilaterally.

Diplomats say the Europeans are unlikely to oppose Mr Wolfowitz at a time when they are seeking to heal rifts with the administration of President George W. Bush.

"I think there's an informal understanding that the proposal will come from the Americans now and we can agree on that," Karl-Heinz Grasser, the Austrian finance minister, said.

Will Wolfie make it? Who knows. But if he shows half the skill he showed during his first 4 years with the Bush administration, it will be much easier to discern Bushies from Americans.

Federal Judge Denies Request to Reinsert Schiavo's Feeding Tube

Tuesday, March 22 (New York Times)—A federal judge here today refused to order the reinsertion of a feeding tube for the brain-damaged Terri Schiavo, denying an emergency request from the woman's parents and despite the intervention of Congress and President Bush in the case.

Judge Dames D. Whittemore of Federal District Court said the 41-year-old woman's parents had not established a "substantial likelihood of success" at trial on the merits of their arguments.

The tube was disconnected on Friday on the orders of a state judge.

The judge said Ms. Schiavo's "life and liberty interests" had been protected by Florida courts, and despite "these difficult and time strained circumstances" the court was constrained "to apply the law to the issue before it." [More](#)

Monday, March 21

Your own private Schiavo

Monday, March 21 (Chicago Tribune)—Are you consoling yourself with the thought that the heartbreaking situation of Terri Schiavo is so rare that you are unlikely to ever be faced with a question of whether to prolong a loved one's life?

Don't be too consoled. It isn't just the young and brain-damaged who end up in the swirling questions of life-prolonging care; it can be your parents.

Presumably, most of us will be spared having the president of the United States weigh in. But be forewarned: Even if your family is in unanimous agreement and you have all the legal documents in hand and the situation seems sad but clear, when the phone call comes and you are on one end of the line and the life of someone you love is on the other, things look a lot less clear. [More](#)

11:30 am—Meanwhile, Back in Texas, If You Don't Pay They Can Kill You

From Texas, the home of insincere care about our fellow man comes this (thanks to Eschaton and Digby):

Hospitals can end life support

Decision hinges on patient's ability to pay, prognosis

Houston Chronicle, March 8, 2005— A patient's inability to pay for medical care combined with a prognosis that renders further care futile are two reasons a hospital might suggest cutting off life support, the chief medical officer at St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital said Monday.

Dr. David Pate's comments came as the family of Spiro Nikolouzos fights to keep St. Luke's from turning off the ventilator and artificial feedings keeping the 68-year-old grandfather alive.

St. Luke's notified Jannette Nikolouzos in a March 1 letter that it would withdraw life-sustaining care of her husband of 34 years in 10 days, which would be Friday. Mario Caballero, the attorney representing the family, said he is seeking a two-week extension, at minimum, to give the man more time to improve and to give his family more time to find an alternative facility. [More](#)

So, were Tom DeLay not in need of a PR lift, would Terri Schiavo's feeding tube been withdrawn a few days ago? Would she have been just another sop on the public dole? Would it have made perfect sense that her husband be able to make medical decisions on her behalf? Damn skippy on all 3 questions.

11:00 am—The Great American Songbook Just Lost a Wonderful Interpreter



Here's to the late Bobby Short, the epitome of song and style. I kicked myself a few years ago for missing his concert at a Chicago piano bar. I undersand he was to come to Chicago next month. He'll be missed. Greatly. Bobby's an Illinois product. [Here's a website](#) on his triumphs and achievements.

9:11 am—Here's Something on Health Courts, More to Come

Health Courts are an idea that brainiacs at AEI and and the Brookings Institute have mulled over. It's an idea for an "expert court" that would rule in cases of malpractice etc. But in an online debate at the Legal Affairs Debate Club website, Washington Monthly writer Stephanie Mencimer pretty much mincemeats the argument with this snippet:

In this country, we trust juries enough to let them kill someone in a criminal case, but somehow, when juries make decisions about money, especially insurance company money, they're attacked as irrational, unsophisticated, unwieldy, and slow. Lost in all the jury-bashing inherent in the health court proposal is basic American history: A lot of blood has been spilled in this country to secure the right to a jury trial in a civil case—a right guaranteed in the 7th Amendment. The Americans who fought the Revolution worked very hard to escape the British system and their "experts" on the bench. That's why the health courts are very likely unconstitutional.

More on the debate [here](#)

Wolfowitz Strives To Quell Criticism

World Bank Nominee Bolstering Image

Monday, March 21 (Washington Post)—He has telephoned Bono, the Irish rock star who champions the cause of Africa's poor. He has granted interviews to French newspapers, planned visits to European officials and praised his prospective staffers.

Deputy Defense Secretary Paul D. Wolfowitz, the man tapped by President Bush to become president of the World Bank, is energetically reaching out to his critics in the hope of persuading them that he would do a lot better at heading the bank than they might think. He appears to be making progress. But as the neoconservative hawk best known as the brains behind the war in Iraq, he has his job cut out for him.

Since the announcement Wednesday, Bush's choice of Wolfowitz has drawn opposition from many quarters, mostly focusing on the fear that the move marked a plan to use the World Bank's antipoverty aid to reward Washington's friends, punish its enemies and advance the Bush administration's ideological agenda, especially in the Middle East. The bank lends about \$20 billion a year to developing countries for projects ranging from roads to schools to HIV/AIDS programs.

"The world would view a bank directed by Mr. Wolfowitz as no more than an instrument of U.S. power and U.S. priorities," Britain's Financial Times wrote in an editorial, warning that the credibility of the bank's advice to poor countries would be undermined. [More](#)

Ed note: Beware Bushies wearing a smile and extending a hand. You'll get your teeth punched out, and your arm broken. Niceness is weakness with this bunch.

8:04 am—The Party of Small Government and the Sanctity of Marriage

Like many others, I've chosen not to speak of the Terri Schiavo case because it is a matter that is better handled by family. The husband has the rights to make the decision for the wife if she is unable to. It is a tenet of this marriage thing that GOP'ers are running around "trying" to defend.

The Schiavo case is undermining marriage. But the average person may not see it because the focus is Terri Schiavo. Someone should post the bill someplace, because I fear that the GOP has snuck something into it. It is the habit of this Congress as led by DeLay/Frist/Hastert. What that is, I'm sure undermines the rights of the spouse to make major medical decisions. Perhaps it transfers these rights to the state, or the doctor. Either way, it is a power grab intent on upsetting the legal rights of husband and wife.

Oh, hey! The bill is [here](#)

Friday, March 18

THE UNBRANDING

Friday, March 18 (The New Yorker)—Joseph Biden, the senior senator from Delaware, is the Democratic Party's main spokesman on international affairs; he is also a man who, on occasion, seems not to know, when sentences leave his mouth, where they are going or what they are meant to convey. Sometimes, when he thinks that he may shock or amuse his listener, he begins by stating, "I'm going to get in trouble if I say this," or, "This is a really outrageous thing to say, but . . ." And so when I asked Biden, as the ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and one of John Kerry's chief advisers on foreign policy during last year's Presidential campaign, what advice he gave Kerry on how to convince voters that he was tough, Biden laughed and said, "I wish I could tell you. I wish I could tell you." Then he told me. [More](#)

What the Mounting Costs of War Have Bought

Friday, March 18 (United for Peace.org)—Costs to U.S. Military
U.S. Military killed in Iraq: More than 1,500
Number of U.S. troops wounded: More than 11,200
Percentage of soldiers reporting low morale: 52% [More](#)

On Fox News, No Shortage of Opinion, Study Finds

Friday, March 18 (Washington Post)—In covering the Iraq war last year, 73 percent of the stories on Fox News included the opinions of the anchors and journalists reporting them, a new study says.

By contrast, 29 percent of the war reports on MSNBC and 2 percent of those on CNN included the journalists' own views.

These findings -- the figures were similar for coverage of other stories -- "seem to challenge" Fox's slogan of "we report, you decide," says the Project for Excellence in Journalism.

In a 617-page report, the group also found that "Fox is more deeply sourced than its rivals," while CNN is "the least transparent about its sources of the three cable channels, but more likely to present multiple points of view." [More](#)

Rapper Lil' Kim Convicted of Perjury

Hip-Hop Star Lil' Kim Convicted of Lying About Shooting Outside Radio Station

Friday, March 18 (ABC News)—Grammy-winning hip-hop star Lil' Kim, known for her revealing outfits and raunchy raps, has been convicted of lying to a federal grand jury about a shootout outside a radio station.

Lil' Kim was convicted of three counts of perjury and one of conspiracy, but acquitted of obstruction of justice. She could get 20 years a maximum of five years for each count when she is sentenced on June 24.

Lil' Kim and her assistant, who also was convicted, shook their heads as the verdicts were delivered, and supporters broke out in sobs. While many rappers have gone to prison, Lil' Kim, 29, would be the first big-name female to do time. [More](#)

Ed note: Could be good for street 'cred, but I wonder if she's deluding herself into thinking jail time is a good thing. She's no Martha Stewart.

The Ugly American Bank

By PAUL KRUGMAN

Friday, March 18 (New York Times)—You can say this about Paul Wolfowitz's qualifications to lead the World Bank: He has been closely associated with America's largest foreign aid and economic development project since the Marshall Plan.

I'm talking, of course, about reconstruction in Iraq. Unfortunately, what happened there is likely to make countries distrust any economic advice Mr. Wolfowitz might give.

Let's not focus on mismanagement. Instead, let's talk about ideology.

Before the Iraq war, Pentagon hawks shut the State Department out of planning. This excluded anyone with development experience. As a result, the administration went into Iraq determined to demonstrate the virtues of radical free-market economics, with nobody warning about the likely problems.

Journalists who spoke to Paul Bremer when he was running Iraq remarked on his passion when he spoke about privatizing state enterprises. They didn't note a comparable passion for a rapid democratization. [More](#)

Thursday, March 17

THE NEED TO RESTORE PAY-AS-YOU-GO BUDGET ENFORCEMENT FOR TAX CUTS AND ENTITLEMENTS

Thursday, March 17 (Center for Budget and Policy Priorities)—Growing concerns that large chronic budget deficits once again threaten our economic future are leading Members of Congress to consider whether to reinstate the Pay-As-You-Go rule (PAYGO). When the Senate budget resolution reaches the Senate floor the week of March 14, an amendment will be offered to restore the original PAYGO rule. The amendment would apply PAYGO to entitlements and tax cuts alike; both increases in entitlement programs and reductions in taxes would have to be paid for. The PAYGO rule could be bypassed only in instances in which 60 Senators voted to waive the rule.

In April 2004, four budget watchdog groups — the Concord Coalition, the Committee for Economic Development, the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities — issued a joint statement urging Congress to reinstate the original PAYGO rule. The four groups stated: "Our organizations strongly believe that PAYGO should be renewed in its original and successful form — applying it without exception to both entitlement expansions and tax cuts. This budget-wide constraint was an effective part of past bipartisan efforts to bring deficits under control. Renewing it would be the best first step to countering the current trend of digging an ever-deeper fiscal hole. In contrast, failure to renew PAYGO, or doing so in a weak form, would send an alarming signal that Washington policymakers are not yet taking our nation's deteriorating fiscal outlook seriously."^[1]

In recent weeks, Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan also reiterated his view that the Pay-As-You-Go rule should be reinstated in its original form. Chairman Greenspan made clear that despite his support for tax cuts, he favors adherence to a PAYGO rule that would cover both tax cuts and entitlement increases. [More](#)

Bolton and Wolfowitz—One's Worse than the Other

Thursday, March 17 (The Century Foundation)—A week after the administration nominated John Bolton to become ambassador to the UN, it has put forward Paul Wolfowitz for World Bank President. The signal heard around the world is that the Bush administration intends to continue to do what it pleases in global affairs. But that comes as no surprise: even apart from recent strides in the Middle East that have reinforced President Bush's already healthy sense of rectitude, the Administration was never going to correct mistakes that it could not admit to having made. While cordial appearances with foreign dignitaries may help the medicine go down, Bush's prescription for world affairs has not changed.

Bolton once said he did not "do carrots" as part of diplomacy and Bush feels the same way: indeed these two nominees feel more like a stick in the eye. But there are important differences between the two appointments, and critics would be wise to hold their fire against Wolfowitz and train it on the Bolton appointment instead. [More](#)

5:14 pm—Jon Stewart on Paul Wolfowitz, Former Hawk Turned Banker

Why is it that humor is so good at cutting to the point; much better than all the 3 and 4 syllable words in the world? [Enjoy](#)

Senate Votes to Restore \$14 Billion in Medicaid Cuts

Thursday, March 17 (New York Times)—The Senate voted this afternoon to restore some \$14 billion in Medicaid cuts that had been proposed for the next five years, setting up a confrontation between the two houses of Congress over tax and spending policy.

The 52-to-48 vote to restore money to Medicaid, a federal-state program for poor people, came on an amendment offered by Senator Gordon H. Smith, Republican of Oregon. His was one of a long string of amendments being deliberated on the \$2.6 trillion budget for the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1. Advertisement

The Senate action came as the House of Representatives was debating its own version of the budget. House Republican leaders, who have been arguing that the explosive growth of Medicaid must be reined in, had warned that passage of the Smith amendment would create a seemingly unbridgeable chasm between the chambers. House members were deliberating up to \$20 billion in Medicaid cuts this afternoon. [More](#)

Wednesday, March 16

3:41 pm—We Asked For It, We're Getting It—in Spades

"Some people say we ought to conserve more. They say we ought to conserve instead of producing this oil," said Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., "But we need to do everything. We have to conserve and produce where we can."

I don't know if you remember the first Bush Energy Plan, which called for drilling off the coast of Florida. Jebbie, George's brother, had to go hat-in-hand to Washington to make sure his brother didn't screw up and foul the beaches of our #1 tourist spot. I remembered it if not for the lunacy of spending all that money and drilling all of those holes in the ground. Clearly the money could be spent more efficiently on conservation programs and technology initiatives. But they don't have a Republican following, nor do they contribute as much to the GOP as oil and energy companies.

I've said it before and will say it again now. Up until the 2004 election, America has flirted with the Movement Conservative wing of the GOP. A second Bush administration is giving even the casual observer a bird's-eye view of what they're all about. I believe we won't really move past this destructive phase of American history until we the people see just how much damage these people can do to our finances, our retirement, our environment, and now our wildlife refuges.

We can let it get worse and reelect a GOP president in 2012. But by then, it will be even more apparent that no amount of doublespeak can hide the vicious, destructive, and financially irresponsible policies of today's Republican Party.

Who Gets It? Hillary

Wednesday, March 16 (New York Times)—If the Democratic Party wants to figure out how to win national elections again, it has an unexpected guide: Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Senator Clinton, much more than most in her party, understands how the national Democratic Party needs to rebrand itself. She gets it - perhaps that's what 17 years in socially conservative Arkansas does to you.

The first lesson Mrs. Clinton is demonstrating is the need to talk much more openly about God and prayer. That resonates in a country where a Pew poll found that 60 percent of Americans pray at least once a day.

"I've always been a praying person," Mrs. Clinton declared recently. Of course, this approach works in her case only because her religious faith is longstanding. It didn't work for Howard Dean when he described the Book of Job as his favorite book in the New Testament. With a candidate like him, you'd worry that more talk about religion would lead to comments about how much he treasures the Twelfth Commandment.

Democrats are usually more comfortable talking about sex than God. But that doesn't work in a country where 70 percent say that "presidents should have strong religious beliefs."

Then there's abortion. Mrs. Clinton took a hugely important step in January when she sought common ground and described abortion as a "sad, even tragic choice to many, many women." [More](#)

Senate Votes to Open Alaskan Oil Drilling

Sharply Divided Senate Votes to Open Oil Drilling in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

Wednesday, March 16 (ABC News.com)—Amid the backdrop of soaring oil and gasoline prices, a sharply divided Senate on Wednesday voted to open the ecologically rich Alaska wildlife refuge to oil drilling, delivering a major energy policy win for President Bush.

The Senate, by a 51-49 vote, rejected an attempt by Democrats and GOP moderates to remove a refuge drilling provision from next year's budget, preventing opponents from using a filibuster a tactic that has blocked repeated past attempts to open the Alaska refuge to oil companies. [More](#)

2 Years After Invasion, Poll Data Mixed

Doubts About War, Optimism for Iraqis

Wednesday, March 16 (Washington Post)—Two years after President Bush led the country to war in Iraq, Americans appear to be of two minds about the situation in the Middle East: A majority say they believe the Iraqis are better off today than they were before the conflict began -- but they also say the war was not worth fighting in the first place, according to a new Washington Post-ABC News poll.

The January elections in Iraq have helped to shift public opinion in a positive direction about the future of Iraq and the rest of the Middle East, with a clear majority of Americans (56 percent) saying they are now confident that Iraqi leaders can create a stable government -- a dramatic turnaround since just before the elections.

The poll also shows that more Americans believe the war has improved the chances of democracy spreading in the Middle East than believe it has diminished those prospects.

Despite the optimism about the future, the poll suggests there has been little change in the negative public opinion about the decision to go to war. Fifty-three percent of Americans said the war was not worth fighting, 57 percent said they disapprove of the president's handling of Iraq, and 70 percent said the number of U.S. casualties, including more than 1,500 deaths, is an unacceptable price. [More](#)

9:40 am—A Few Thoughts on Today's Press Conference

On Wolfowitz: Loyalty trumps expertise. Wolfowitz has no business running the World Bank, other than to be a Bush plant in the organization.

On Social Security Reform: Never seen a man stick to his talking points. Plus, his ability to say "I've never presented a plan," while he's crisscrossing the nation talking about one is amazing. If I tried that at work, I'd be called on the carpet for duplicity. But Bush? No. It's not that he and Rove are wondering when people will get wise to his tactic; it's when we as a people and a media refuse to accept it.

Monday, March 14

Bankruptcy, the American Morality Tale

Monday, March 14 (New York Times)—What could be more American than the idea of a second chance, a fresh start, Act Two? It is embedded in the culture, the notion that you can reinvent yourself in every way, by moving to a new city, buying a new car, getting a face lift - or by filing for bankruptcy.

For generations, Americans who found themselves drowning in debt have turned to the federal bankruptcy laws, which, as the Supreme Court wrote in 1915, are meant to give honest debtors a chance "to start afresh free from the obligations and responsibilities consequent upon business misfortunes." Advertisement

In other words, if you give up most of what you own (assuming you own anything at all), you can start all over again.

But that may be changing. Last week, the Senate passed a bill that its backers say will curb abuses and force those who can pay their debts to do so. Critics contend that Congress is, in effect, turning its back on the principle of a debtor's ability "to start afresh," and punishing some victims of calamity. [More](#)

Social Security not the only recent stalemate for Bush

Monday, March 14 (Chicago Sun-Times.com)—Running into heavy resistance to his Social Security overhaul, President Bush has started emphasizing other parts of his domestic agenda and is promoting his foreign policy goals of defeating terrorism and spreading democracy.

"These are amazing times," he tells audiences. Yet no matter which way he turns, he is finding a bumpy road.

Just short of two months into his second term, Bush still wields vast political clout. Still, polls show his approval ratings stuck at about 50 percent. [More](#)

GOP chairman sees Social Security approval

Monday, March 14 (Seattle Post-Intelligencer)—Congress will pass a Social Security bill, and Democrats who stand in the way will be considered obstructionists by voters, the head of the Republican Party said Monday in an Associated Press interview.

In the end, Congress will approve a measure that includes personal investment accounts, Ken Mehlman said. President Bush has been campaigning hard for the accounts in trips to many states.

"The reason I think we are going to get a bill is because the American public won't stand by and have Congress say, 'We know it's a problem that only gets worse every single day and yet we're going to do nothing,'" said Mehlman, chairman of the Republican National Committee. [More](#)

Ed note: Ha, ha, ha, ha!

5:06 pm—Here We Go With All the What-Not

["No rational basis exists for limiting marriage in this state to opposite-sex partners," wrote San Francisco Superior Court Judge Richard Kramer."](#)

And with those common-sense words, the next round of 21st Century segregation begins. If you don't already know by the sound of millions of Movement Conservatives going "Arrrrgh," the California courts said it's unconstitutional to discriminate against gays.

Now some of my friends on the right will say that the United States has crept closer to its own version of Armageddon, inviting the wrath of God. And no matter the calamity, they will find a way to blame it on the fact that America allows people to obey laws of equal protection. If the dollar takes a dump, putting our economy into the tank, it won't be the Bush Administration's fault to these people. It will be because of gays and lesbians that Bush ran up deficits of titanic and stupid sizes, ignored the trade deficit, and drove interest and mortgage rates through the roof.

If it's right to discriminate legally, then who's to say what they won't discriminate on? I'm sure more than a few Movement members would like to see women's rights curtailed; in the name of God and Country. Then we'd move on to races. This would be a trick; but Karl Rove is a relatively young man, and I'm sure he'd like the challenge of moving this nation back 150 years in the name of God and Country.

Friday, March 4

Is Grover Over?

Norquist's anti-tax jihad stumbles in the states.

Friday, March 4 (Washington Monthly)—If ever two men seemed to share one political soul, surely they were Grover Norquist and Mitch Daniels. From his perch as president of Americans for Tax Reform, Norquist was the architect of President Bush's strategy to cut taxes every year and has elicited signed promises from virtually every congressional Republican never to vote for a tax hike. Norquist once famously boasted that he hoped to "reduce [government] to the size where I can drag it into the bathroom and drown it in the bathtub." During Bush's first term, it was Daniels, the White House budget director, who began running the water. During his time in the White House, Daniels conceded nothing in arguing for the president's tax cuts, even going so far as suggesting that the president's trillion-dollar tax cut represented "our best chance of another unexpected surplus." So if the smile on Norquist's face seemed extra-wide on Election Day, even considering the Republicans' reinforced grip on Washington power, it might have had something to do with Daniels's election as governor of Indiana. Daniels was bringing Grover's jihad back to the Heartland.

Where he promptly dropped it. Daniels had campaigned touting citations from Norquist's ATR and other anti-tax groups. But eight short days after settling into the Indiana Statehouse, Daniels proposed a budget that sought to close a \$600 million budget gap by socking high-income Hoosiers with a 29-percent increase in income tax. Norquist quickly accused his old cohort of "betraying" taxpayers with his budget proposal. "This is the fastest any governor claiming to be a Reagan Republican has folded under the pressure of the big-spending interests," Norquist said. Daniels was stung. "Two years ago, Grover was giving me the Hero of the American Taxpayer Award," Daniels lamented to the Indianapolis Star. "I'm the same guy I was then."

[More](#)

ChoicePoint Execs Under Scrutiny for Stock Sales

Friday, March 4 (LA Times)—ChoicePoint today said that the securities regulators were investigating the sale of company stock by its two top executives before the public became aware that criminals had infiltrated its huge stockpile of consumer credit information.

The information broker also said it would no longer sell some reports in response to the concerns raised by the security breach involving the files of more than 145,000 consumers.

Although the decision will involve only a relatively small portion of its business, Alpharetta, Ga.-based ChoicePoint said it anticipated that revenues will fall by up to \$20 million. [More](#)

2:23 pm—Condoleeza Rice for President?

2:30 pm—Just Stopped Laughing

I understand by the radio segment I'm listening to that there's a movement afoot to draft Condi for President in 2008. Please. Stop.

Deficits and Deceit

By PAUL KRUGMAN

Friday, March 4 (New York Times)—Four years ago, Alan Greenspan urged Congress to cut taxes, asserting that the federal government was in imminent danger of paying off too much debt.

On Wednesday the Fed chairman warned Congress of the opposite fiscal danger: he asserted that there would be large budget deficits for the foreseeable future, leading to an unsustainable rise in federal debt. But he counseled against reversing the tax cuts, calling instead for cuts in Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid.

Does anyone still take Mr. Greenspan's pose as a nonpartisan font of wisdom seriously? [More](#)

Thursday, March 3

1:05 pm—If You See These Men, Turn them In



These are sketches of two men suspected of involvement in the murder of Judge Joan Lefkow's husband and mother. They were killed, execution-style, this past Monday. Authorities believe white supremacists have something to do with the crime. Read the Chicago Sun-Times story [here](#).

This hits home for me. The HR director of the company I work at was Michael Lefkow's sister. If you see them, please turn them in.

3/4 Update:

Check out this comparison. Both of them are standing on either side of Matt Hale. Find these guys. Turn them in.



New Poll Finds Bush Priorities Are Out of Step With Americans

Thursday, March 3 (New York Times)—Americans say President Bush does not share the priorities of most of the country on either domestic or foreign issues, are increasingly resistant to his proposal to revamp Social Security and say they are uneasy with Mr. Bush's ability to make the right decisions about the retirement program, according to the latest New York Times/CBS News poll.

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The poll underscores just how little headway Mr. Bush has made in his effort to build popular support as his proposal for overhauling Social Security struggles to gain footing in Congress. At the same time, there has been an increase in respondents who say that efforts to restore order in Iraq are going well, even as an overwhelming number of Americans say Mr. Bush has no clear plan for getting out of Iraq.

On Social Security, 51 percent said permitting individuals to invest part of their Social Security taxes in private accounts, the centerpiece of Mr. Bush's plan, was a bad idea, even as a majority said they agreed with Mr. Bush that the program would become insolvent near the middle of the century if nothing was done. The number who thought private accounts were a bad idea jumped to 69 percent if respondents were told that the private accounts would result in a reduction in guaranteed benefits. And 45 percent said Mr. Bush's private account plan would actually weaken the economic underpinnings of the nation's retirement system. [More](#)

8:39 am—So Hateful

Another brief reminder of what hate looks like at the beginning of the century. It was a lot easier to tell when the haters were all Southern white men in robes. Oh well. Just as viruses evolve, so does hate. [From the Scarborough Report.](#)

8:14 am—Always Good to See Ann Coulter Squirm....

And at the same time Alan Colmes is beginning to talk back to his handlers. [It makes for entertaining television.....](#)

DNC: RNC Jumps First, Asks Questions Later

RNC Issues False Attack Based on Novak's False Allegation

Thursday, March 4 (noticias.info)—The RNC today issued an attack release on Governor Dean on Social Security, one based on comments made by Robert Novak on Monday's CNN Inside Politics. The only problem: both the RNC and Novak got it wrong.

As was reported in the Cornell Daily Sun, Governor Dean repeated the findings of the Congressional Budget Office that after 2042 Social Security would be able to pay out approximately 80% of the earned benefits under the program.

"Dean pointed out that, while he would not endorse this, if Social Security were left alone for 30 years, its benefits would be reduced to 80 percent of what it is now. He acknowledged that while there were indeed problems with the program, turning to Wall Street was not the answer."

Wednesday, March 2

5:19 pm—The Ten Commandments

So is it so bad that the Ten Commandments sits outside a Texas courthouse? At the end of the day, no. The issue is political navel-gazing. It is filler, fat, tofu. There's no profit in getting behind either side. Nothing but an emotional rollercoaster awaits. So why get on. Life is too short.

America is a Christian nation. Way more than Europe, no offense intended. But at the same time we should celebrate that, we should remember to learn from the words in the Bible we believe in and stop trying to rub our religion in everyone else's face. There is a difference between spreading the word and jamming it down people's throats. One way you end up with people's respect, the other their animosity.

That probably works for level-headed people, but for this batch of Movement Conservatives, it's a disconnect. Why? Because as I said in an earlier post, this batch of people thinks that those who aren't with them are going to hell. So why listen? There's a certain simplicity to their thinking. One that makes me scratch my head in wonderment.

What I'd like to see is a set of ground rules that determine the use of religious icons in public places. We have building codes, why not have codes for this? I'm not for sending hordes of masons across the nation erecting statues of the Holy Trinity. But am I in favor of kreshes, Christmas trees, the tasteful use of biblical icons and passages? Yes. Would I be in favor of the same but applied to the other great religions? Yes.

Considering Abraham is the nexus between the three great religions, there's more we have in common with each other than some of us want to admit.

That's The Right Moment To Support The Palestinian Authority

The British Prime Minister Tony Blair, specially for *Kommersant*

Tuesday, March 2 (Kommersant)—The conflict between Israel and its Arabian neighbors is one of the most serious, destructive and continuous conflicts that we have to face. It endangers the security and well being of the Israeli and the Palestinian. They live in a constant fear of violence; they are facing severe economic difficulties. Their children don't know what it is like to go to school without feeling of fear and uncertainty.

Temporizing with terrorists is out of the question. I condemn the last Friday's suicide attack in Tel Aviv. This cynical action stresses the importance of Palestinian authority to organize a reliable security mechanism capable of resisting the thread of terrorism. I do support President Abbas's willingness to struggle with terrorists and put an end to violence. [More](#)

5:04 pm—What Thinking Drives This?

Why, oh why is Tom Delay, the Swift Boaters, and just about every Movement nut [embarassing themselves trying to slime the AARP?](#) The Christian dimension of Movement Conservatism makes me think that loyal GOP'ers see those that don't support them just as damned as those who aren't saved by Christ. The political observer in me sees the GOP use up and spit out those who choose to align with them for opportunistic reasons. The human being in me sees a group of people who are fast losing whatever credibility they've built up.

Sometimes I don't understand what these people understand as being a good public servant. To me, it's taking the moral lessons learned in church, and sprinkling in some hardball learned on the playground. But to the Movement, perhaps there can be no good public servants because there is no such thing as good government.

If the guy who showed up to fix your sink went on and on about how plumbing should be destroyed, how it serves no good; would you let him continue working? Or would you kick him out of your house and try to get him fired? When will we kick out the Republicans?

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