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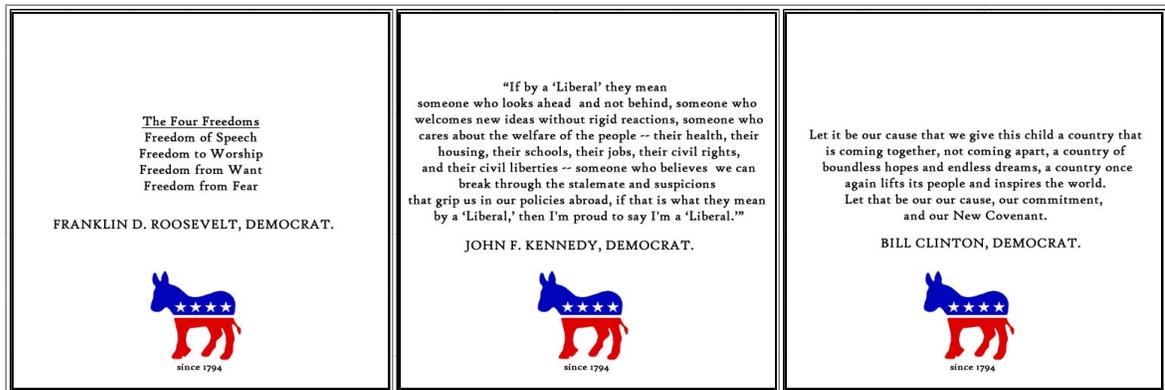
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This new understanding undermines the old admiration of worldly success as such. We are beginning to abandon our tolerance of the abuse of power by those who betray for profit the elementary decencies of life."

—from President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Second Inaugural Address

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Collective Interests

Bush Expected To Delay Major Tax Overhaul

Social Security, Budget Move to Center Stage

Tuesday, December 28 (Washington Post)—Wholesale changes to the tax code that just weeks ago were identified as a Bush administration goal by the end of 2005 are being pushed back for at least another year.

White House economists, Republican tax aides in Congress and outside economic advisers say key White House officials have determined that they

have their hands full with Bush's pledge to overhaul Social Security and a budget plan that will demand politically painful cuts to non-defense spending.

The president will soon name a panel to examine tax policy, but he will leave it to the Treasury Department to monitor the panel's work. It is widely expected that Treasury Secretary John W. Snow will ultimately recommend incremental changes to the tax code, not replacing it with a new system, such as a single flat income-tax rate or a national sales tax, according to these sources. [More](#)

Back by unpopular demand

Come next month, Bush's Inauguration Day approval ratings may be the worst of any president in modern-day history.

Tuesday, December 28 (Salon.com)—Republicans like to brag about the sweeping mandate that President Bush received on Election Day. But as he prepares for his second term, Bush approaches Inauguration Day with historically weak job-approval ratings, according to a series of new opinion polls. Unless there's a dramatic turnaround in public sentiment between now and Jan. 20, Bush will be sworn in to office with the lowest job-approval rating -- barely 50 percent -- of any president in the last 80 years, or since modern-day presidential polling began.

"It's striking how weak he is right now," says presidential historian Richard Shenkman, editor of George Mason University's History News Network. "You'd have to go back to Woodrow Wilson to find a president who was reelected in a position as weak as this one. There's been no euphoria around Bush's win."

Since his 3-percentage-point win over Sen. John Kerry, Bush has experienced a complete lack of bounce in the polls. In fact, in at least one national survey, Fox News' Opinion Dynamics poll, conducted Dec. 14-15, Bush's approval rating has fallen five points in the last month, to 48 percent. In other polls, including Washington Post-ABC, NBC/Wall Street Journal, Pew Research Center, Associated Press-Ipsos, Zogby, and Gallup, Bush's already soft approval numbers have flat-lined since the election. That phenomenon stands in sharp contrast to U.S. history, when presidents voted into office for a second term, even after close elections, routinely have received robust approval ratings. [More](#)

If you like Iraq, you'll love Iran

Kenneth Pollack says the Bush administration doesn't have a clue about what to do in Iran and doesn't have much time to get it right.

Tuesday, December 28 (Salon.com)—For critics of the invasion of Iraq, the name Kenneth Pollack conjures bad memories of the boneheaded intelligence that got us into the disastrous sand trap. In his 2002 book, "The Threatening Storm: The Case for Invading Iraq," Pollack, a former CIA analyst who had served as the National Security Council's director of Persian Gulf affairs under Bill Clinton, concluded that Saddam Hussein was in all likelihood developing a nuclear weapon. Bush administration hawks were quick to seize on his work as they built their case for invasion, but Pollack was far from a neocoon zealot. In his new book, "The Persian Puzzle: The Conflict Between Iran and America," Pollack arrives at a far more dovish conclusion. He argues that coordinated pressure from the United States and Europe is the best strategy to persuade Iran to abandon its nuclear program. [More](#)

One man's retirement math: Social Security wins

Monday, December 27 (Christian Science Monitor)—At the heart of President Bush's plan to sell Social Security private accounts is a simple notion: You're always better off investing your retirement money than letting the government do it.

By doing it yourself, you can stow some money in the stock market, and over the long run will get a better return on that investment than today's Social Security system offers.

The idea is broadly accepted. That's why the administration's plan to partially privatize the system sounds appealing to many. But that better return won't always happen.

Just ask Stanley Logue of San Diego.

For 45 years, the defense-industry analyst paid into the system until his retirement in 1994. But with all the recent hoopla over reform, Mr. Logue, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology graduate, decided to go back and check his own records. Would he have done better investing his money than the bureaucrats at the Social Security Administration? [More](#)

Jet Is an Open Secret in Terror War

Monday, December 27 (Washington Post)—The airplane is a Gulfstream V turbojet, the sort favored by CEOs and celebrities. But since 2001 it has been seen at military airports from Pakistan to Indonesia to Jordan, sometimes being boarded by hooded and handcuffed passengers.

The plane's owner of record, Premier Executive Transport Services Inc., lists directors and officers who appear to exist only on paper. And each one of those directors and officers has a recently issued Social Security number and an address consisting only of a post office box, according to an extensive search of state, federal and commercial records.

Bryan P. Dyess, Steven E. Kent, Timothy R. Sperling and Audrey M. Taylor are names without residential, work, telephone or corporate histories -- just the kind of "sterile identities," said current and former intelligence officials, that the CIA uses to conceal involvement in clandestine operations. In this case, the agency is flying captured terrorist suspects from one country to another for detention and interrogation. [More](#)

Death in the Afternoon

Posted by James Wolcott

Thursday, December 23 (JamesWolcott.com)—The catastrophic loss of life in the mess tent at Mosul powerfully concentrates the mind this day, but [William S. Lind](#) reminds us that it was made possible by the empty triumph in Fallujah, a city flattened by American firepower at large cost to its inhabitants and small cost to the insurgents.

"Not only did most of the insurgents leave Fallujah before our assault, they realized that if we had concentrated in Fallujah, we had left openings elsewhere. They took full advantage of those openings. It is perhaps time to ask which side has the better commanders?"

"Stalingrad is now seen as one of history's great defeats. But in fact, the Germans had largely won in Stalingrad on the tactical level, before they were outflanked and encircled operationally, then defeated strategically.

"If we look at Fallujah through that lens, the parallels become clearer. It is not certain we will ever fully control Fallujah, just as the Germans never took full control of Stalingrad. Nevertheless, we will claim a tactical victory. [More](#)

Ten more years?

Senior MPs warn British troops will be in Iraq for a decade, as Blair in Baghdad proclaims: 'We are not a nation of quitters'

Thursday, December 23 (The Independent UK)—Tony Blair flew into Iraq yesterday, promising democracy. But, outside the ring of security that escorted him, another day of gruesome violence was unfolding - including a rocket attack on a US base in Mosul that claimed at least 24 lives.

And, against a backdrop of continuing carnage, The Independent has learned a cross-party group of MPs has returned from Iraq convinced British troops may have to be deployed there for at least another 10 years.

Unlike the Prime Minister, the Commons Defence Select Committee was unable to visit Baghdad because the security situation was too dangerous.

One senior member of the committee said: "It will take 10 to 15 years at least [before troops can be fully withdrawn]. It is another Cyprus. The Iraqis just cannot cope with the security situation and won't be able to for years."

As Mr Blair was proclaiming Britain would stay the course, a bloody illustration of the dangers encountered by US and British troops was playing out in the northern city of Mosul. [More](#)

U.S. Cutting Food Aid Aimed at Self-Sufficiency

Thursday, December 23 (New York Times)— In one of the first signs of the effects of the ever tightening federal budget, in the past two months the Bush administration has reduced its contributions to global food aid programs aimed at helping millions of people climb out of poverty.

With the budget deficit growing and President Bush promising to reduce spending, the administration has told representatives of several charities that it was unable to honor some earlier promises and would have money to pay for food only in emergency crises like that in Darfur, in western Sudan. The cutbacks, estimated by some charities at up to \$100 million, come at a time when the number of hungry in the world is rising for the first time in years and all food programs are being stretched.

As a result, Save the Children, Catholic Relief Services and other charities have suspended or eliminated programs that were intended to help the poor feed themselves through improvements in farming, education and health. [More](#)

Students to Bear More of the Cost of College

Thursday, December 23 (New York Times)—College students in virtually every state will be required to shoulder more of the cost of their education under new federal rules that govern most of the nation's financial aid.

Because of the changes, which take effect next fall and are expected to save the government \$300 million in the 2005-6 academic year, at least 1.3 million students will receive smaller Pell Grants, the nation's primary scholarship for those of low income, according to two analyses of the new rules.

In addition, 89,000 students or so who would otherwise be getting some Pell Grant money will get none, the analyses found.

"Season's greetings from Uncle Sam," said Terry W. Hartle, senior vice president of the American Council on Education, which conducted one of the analyses and represents about 1,800 colleges and universities. "Your student aid stocking is going to be a little thinner next year." [More](#)

Details Cloud Support for Social Security Plan

Wednesday, December 22 (Washington Post)—President Bush has wide support for his argument that Social Security needs dramatic change to meet its obligations to future retirees, but there remains considerable skepticism about his plan to let people invest a portion of their contribution to the program in the stock market, according to a Washington Post-ABC News poll.

Since his Nov. 2 reelection victory, Bush has frequently said the results were an endorsement by voters of the most dramatic revision of the retirement program since its inception nearly 70 years ago. But the survey shows that his efforts to educate the public about the idea and convince them of the merits are at best incomplete. [More](#)

Bush Plans a Media Blitz on Social Security

Wednesday, December 22 (Reuters)— President Bush will spearhead an election-style public relations campaign early next year to try to convince Americans that Social Security is in urgent need of change but will keep dollar and cent details deliberately vague, analysts and officials say.

With Bush's political capital riding on a successful overhaul of the popular retirement program, the White House and its allies plan to bombard the public with presidential speeches, television and radio ads, newspaper op-ed articles and grass-roots rallies between now and early 2005.

"It's going to be a battle royal, very much like an election campaign but over an issue rather than a candidate," said Stephen Moore, executive director of Club for Growth, a Republican group that hopes to spend \$15 million on a media campaign backing the White House.

"This is about winning, and Bush can't afford to lose." [More](#)

Oversight Is Lacking, F.D.A. Scientists Say

Friday, December 17 (New York Times)—About two-thirds of Food and Drug Administration scientists are less than fully confident in the agency's monitoring of the safety of prescription drugs now being sold, according to an internal survey.

Also, more than one-third of those scientists have some doubts about the process for approving new drugs, the survey found.

Complete results of the survey, conducted by the Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General, were released only after an advocacy group filed a Freedom of Information Act request. The release comes in the wake of safety concerns forcing removal from the market of Vioxx, an arthritis drug, and Congressional testimony by an agency scientist that the F.D.A. mishandled safety concerns about other drugs [More](#)

The Democrats' Rove Envy

By E. J. Dionne Jr.

Thursday, December 16 (Washington Post)—Last weekend offered important public glimpses of the Rove Envy that runs deep in Democratic ranks. In an unusual speech before a gathering of state Democratic leaders in Florida, outgoing Democratic Party Chairman Terry McAuliffe went out of his way to praise the Bush campaign.

"They were smart," McAuliffe said. "They came into our neighborhoods. They came into Democratic areas with very specific targeted messages to take Democratic voters away from us."

McAuliffe was much taken with the Republicans' use of consumer marketing techniques to target voters, suggesting that the GOP is at least one technological revolution ahead of the Democrats in figuring out how to turn out loyalists and persuade the persuadable. While Democrats used old-fashioned mobilization techniques -- think of them as Turnout 1.0 -- Republicans were already at Turnout 2.0.

The Republicans, McAuliffe said, "were much more sophisticated in their message delivery," going after a "very specific, targeted niche," which "is what we now need to do as a party."

Howard Dean and McAuliffe don't agree on much. But they do agree on Rove Envy and the need for new approaches. [More](#)

Charter Students Fare No Better, Study Says

Survey Gives Edge to Public School Students

Thursday, December 16 (Washington Post)—Charter school students across the country are performing no better in math and reading than their peers at regular public schools and by some measures are doing worse, according to a report released yesterday by an independent, congressionally mandated research group.

The survey by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which describes itself as "the nation's report card," showed that 58 percent of fourth-grade students in charter schools performed at a basic level in reading, compared with 62 percent in traditional public schools. When the results were adjusted for race, students at the traditional public schools in the survey still did slightly better, but the margin was deemed "statistically insignificant." Low-income students at regular public schools generally outperformed their charter school counterparts. [More](#)

Presidential Medals of Failure



Thursday, December 16 (Washington Post)—This is the question I asked myself as, one by one, the pictures of the latest Presidential Medal of Freedom awardees flashed by on my computer screen. First came George Tenet, the former CIA director and the man who had assured President Bush that it was a "slam-dunk" that Saddam Hussein's Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. Then came L. Paul Bremer, the former viceroy of Iraq, who disbanded the Iraqi army and ousted Baathists from government jobs, therefore contributing mightily to the current chaos in that country. Finally came retired Gen. Tommy Franks, the architect of the plan whereby the United States sent too few troops to Iraq.

One by one these images flicked by me, each man wearing the royal-blue velvet ribbon with the ornate medal -- one failure after another, each now on the lecture circuit, telling insurance agents and other good people what really happened when they were in office, but withholding such wisdom from the American people until, for even more money, their book deals are negotiated. (Franks has already completed this stage of his life. His book, "American Soldier," was a bestseller.)

I braced myself. Could Bernard Kerik be next? Would we skip the entire process of maladministration, misjudgments in office and sycophantic admiration of the current president and go straight to the celebrated failure? After all, what seems to matter most to this president is not performance -- certainly not excellence -- but a matey kind of loyalty and obsequiousness, of which Kerik had plenty. [More](#)

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Daily Topics & Commentary:

Monday, December 27

3:31 pm—John Snow as Kingmaker?

Remember the heady days of Peter Lynch and Fidelity's Magellan fund? Fortunes were made and lost on his stock picks. Books were written on how he chooses companies to invest in and how to follow their successful management formulas.

Lynch was a kingmaker.

Now, imagine, in a market under a privatized Social Security, The United States Treasury is the biggest investor ever, managing \$1.5 trillion dollars. Imagine the influence over individual stocks and markets \$1.5 trillion can have.

Even if Bush takes 2% of current funds and invests them, that's \$30 billion (at least I'm pretty sure). More importantly, a move by the Treasury would carry the same imprimatur of safety to the market in general as our Treasury bonds do for foreign investors. That alone can bump a stock up more than a few points. Say the government moves half of that into international funds. Imagine the ripple effect that could be felt worldwide. It could punish some currencies and save others, as the move would clearly be seen as the seal of approval from the United States Treasury department. Same for a move into small-cap stocks or a move into any sector. Fortunes could be made on the companies and funds this money moves into; not to mention the windfall in management fees.

Could this be part of a thriving market? Perhaps. A very big red flag for corporate greed? Oh hell yes. A risk that should be associated with Social Security? I say no, but you decide for yourself.

Wednesday, December 22

4:40 pm— Yes, I'll Reiterate it Again

From NewDonkey.com:

"For all these reasons, I think there's a growing consensus among Democrats today that (a) mobilization of partisans and ideologues is not enough; we need a persuasion strategy as well; (b) we're the out-party now, and no longer have any excuse for behaving as the Party of Government; (c) you just cannot win a presidential election without a clear, overarching message, defined as a theme or two that explain what you propose to do to organize public resources to address the needs and interests of the American people at home and abroad; and (d) that message must, for the foreseeable future, address the perceived weakness and incoherence of Democrats on national security issues; the perceived elitism and relativism of Democrats in terms of their understanding of the direction of American society and culture; and the perceived obsession of Democrats with a program-heavy, values-lite approach to economic and other domestic issues."

Whether you think the DNC is the anti-Christ or not, the man has a point. Democrats, we need to shift our thinking away from how bad Republicans are to how great we can make America. We have to accept the fact there are other Dems out there and stop seeing our individual solutions as the "only way." Dennis Kucinich would never win the presidency, and would have made a mess of the mess we already have. By the same token so would Joe "I'm so bipartisan I'm Republican" Lieberman.

We will find the new ideas in the states, the cities and the counties. There are Democrats doing fantastic things that the DC elite have yet to think about. The trick to making them work is for Democrats to overcome our predilection for whining and crying whenever someone else has an idea. The 2004 election showed we can work together. One of the tricks is to learn to do things differently.

[Comment\(0\)](#) | [Trackback \(0\)](#)

1:19 pm—Pick Your Poison

I was listening to NPR this morning. I don't know what burns me up more. Listening to the FDA say that drugs imported from Canada are unsafe and will cost more than their domestic counterparts, or hearing Bush's words from last October's debate when he said "perhaps the report coming from the FDA in December will make me change my mind."

So this is the new question. Clearly the FDA has what may be a criminal relationship with the pharmaceutical lobbies. Now that I think about it, I recall battles that Clinton's FDA chairman had with the organization over tobacco. So I'd have to add the tobacco lobbies as well. And let's not forget about the Bushies; they need big Pharma's money, and they need to quash anything that looks like independent thought from bureaucrats.

Can you imagine yourself a big Pharma lobbyist? Or big tobacco? Awhile back, a friend of mine was intent on getting me an interview at the pharmaceutical he sold for. But I couldn't bring myself to say yes. The idea of it made me feel dirty. Kind of the same feeling when I told another friend I'd love the relatively easy money of a porn website, but I knew I wouldn't be able to look at myself in the mirror.

But I digress.

The bond between money and bureaucrat must be broken. And yes, I'm implying that people at the FDA are being bought by pharma and tobacco. I don't see much else when I hear bureaucrats spout the same talking points as lobbyists. Arrests and criminal penalties are one thing. They generate headlines, but used judiciously, they can do more to protect a system of corruption than root it out.

Should the top 10 bureaucrats be appointed? Not really. Elected? Just as bad as appointing them. Right now, the only thing I see working is a Nixonian "Saturday Night Massacre."

But I need to calm down. Perhaps I'll think clearer later.

Tuesday, December 21

3:34 pm—Lots of Changes Going On Here.

We've added an RSS feed. I've just got to figure out how to make it work correctly. Sorry I haven't posted much lately, but as you may know I work for a catalog company. We are in the midst of shipping 3 projects, all running behind because of a 4th, by December 27.

Wouldn't it be nice if people who made lots and lots of money could plan just a little bit better?

But the checks don't bounce, and I've got bills to feed.

Anyway, over the Christmas holiday I hope to upload some of our better interviews onto the radio stream. Carl plans to restart interviews in January. And I'd like to take a stab at podcasting. It sounds really cool, even though I need to figure out what it is. Even though I complain, technology comes to me pretty easy.

So I need to solve RSS first and podcasting next. Any help y'all would have would really help me out. The problem I'm having with RSS is that I created and maintain the site in GoLive, whereas the rest of the blogging world seems to use blogger.com, or some other "solution in a box." I need to figure out how to get entries to go to the feed site. Right now I get a "404 Not Found" warning.

On podcasting, I'm at step 1. What the hell is it? Is it going to cost a lot of \$\$ to podcast?

Lastly, we've applied to become a member of the Media Bloggers Association. They're a bunch of good guys, from what I can tell. Some of this rush to embrace technology is an effort to make ourselves look as presentable as possible by matching services with their member blogs. Other things you'll probably see is a decline in the number of .pdf's for you to download. I'm investigating fair use and copyright law and all that there stuff. The pdf's are convenient, especially in these days where the White House and news outlets manipulate the news by scrubbing things from their websites after the stories are published.

But they may be highly illegal. I'll look it over and keep you abreast of my findings.

Friday, December 17

1:29 pm—A Few Points from Today's Krugman

As usual, [Paul Krugman column in today's Times](#) hits it on the head. This time, on Social Security "reform."

As the Bush administration tries to persuade America to convert Social Security into a giant 401(k), we can learn a lot from other countries that have already gone down that road...Decades of conservative marketing have convinced Americans that government programs always create bloated bureaucracies, while the private sector is always lean and efficient. But when it comes to retirement security, the opposite is true. More than 99 percent of Social Security's revenues go toward benefits, and less than 1 percent for overhead. In Chile's system, management fees are around 20 times as high. And that's a typical number for privatized systems.

These fees cut sharply into the returns individuals can expect on their accounts. In Britain, which has had a privatized system since the days of Margaret Thatcher, alarm over the large fees charged by some investment companies eventually led government regulators to impose a "charge cap." Even so, fees continue to take a large bite out of British retirement savings.

Hopefully after the holidays the media can get back to work on reporting the facts on both sides on Social Security.

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Thursday, December 16

10:35 am—A Plan for Middle East Peace

by Carl Nyberg

1. Israel returns to 1967 borders.
2. A unified Jerusalem will be part of the territory of both Israel and Palestine. Both will be free to make it their capital. Security will be provided by the United Nations for fifteen years. After ten years the governments of Israel and Palestine will pay for the cost of the security force in proportion to the size of their national economies.
3. Israel will dismantle all portions of the wall not inside the 1967 borders.
4. The Palestinian government will recognize the borders of Israel.
5. Israel will renounce claims on land beyond the 1967 borders.
6. To qualify for Israeli residence individuals must accept the peace agreement. Individuals who do not accept the peace agreement will be resettled outside the region. Jews that oppose the peace agreement shall not be allowed to travel to Israel. Jews that lie about supporting the peace agreement and go to Israel and speak or act against the peace agreement shall be imprisoned in Siberia for no less than ten years.
7. To qualify for Palestinian residence individuals must accept the peace agreement. Palestinians that do not accept the peace agreement shall not be allowed to travel to Palestine. Palestinians that lie about supporting the peace agreement and go to Palestine and speak or act against the peace agreement shall be imprisoned in Siberia for no less than ten years.
8. Supporting or organizing Israeli political parties that fail to recognize the agreement shall be grounds for deportation. Same with lobbying political parties to oppose the peace agreement.
9. Voicing support for Palestinian organizations or parties that fail to recognize the agreement shall be grounds for deportation. Same with lobbying political parties to oppose the peace agreement.
10. Israel will fully declare its WMD programs including nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. It will declare all weapons manufactured and used. Israel will dispose of all weapons that violate international agreements on nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.
11. Iran and all Arab governments must embrace the peace agreement. They must legally implement it, but they will also make the case to their people that the peace agreement is good and Israel has a right to exist.
12. The governments of the region aided by the international community shall foster commerce between Israel and Arab states.
13. Iran must prove to the IAEA that it is not in violation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty.
14. Media in Europe, the United States, Israel, Arab countries and Iran need to make a better effort to see the perspective of both sides of the conflict. UNESCO will create a body to catalogue and explain how the media has been biased in the past.
15. Individuals that have lost property shall be compensated at fair market value. However, individuals deported for opposing the peace agreement shall receive no compensation. Their property will be liquidated and the proceeds used to support implementation of the peace agreement.
16. Palestinians shall have the same right to buy land in Israel that Israelis have to buy land in Palestine.
17. Refugees will be offered "buy out" packages by the Israeli government to settle in other countries. Refugees that decline the "buy out" packages

will gradually return to Palestine. About five percent of the refugees per year will return contingent on the Palestinian infrastructure and economy being able to absorb them.

18. Religious leaders of all faiths will renounce claims that religious texts confer a legal or political right to any of the land in Israel or Palestine. Religious leaders that fail to comply will be barred from Israel and Palestine. Religious leadership will cease to recognize these people as religious leaders.

19. Political leaders in Israel and Palestine will renounce claims that their people were the greater victims in the conflict. Making such statements, even privately, shall disqualify an individual from receiving any money from the governments or holding government jobs, including unpaid positions.

20. Everyone who was involved in violence, oppression, inflammatory speech, etc. shall participate in an internationally supervised truth and reconciliation commission. Failure to make complete and truthful statements shall be grounds for barring an individual from Israel and Palestine for 20 years to life. The commission shall have subpoena power recognized by all United Nations members. It will investigate the role played by governments and media in other countries too. It will document people and businesses that profited from the conflict.

21. Security for the Palestinian state shall be provided exclusively by a United Nations police force for five years. If Palestine is unable to assume responsibilities for day-to-day security after five years, this mandate may be extended. Palestinians will turn in all firearms, explosives, mortars, grenade launchers, rockets, etc. After five years of true peace personal firearms will be returned.

22. The peace agreement shall include a regional disarmament agreement. It will address weapons, military forces and support for non-state actors.

23. All states in the region shall implement an agreed set of political, civil and economic rights. The agreement shall create an organization for monitoring these rights and a court capable of overruling nation-states that are failing to meet obligations in these areas.

24. For the greater good this agreement abridges rights of self-expression and movement. It does not abridge these rights lightly, but allowing the conflict to continue abridges rights too. This agreement shall supercede rights conferred by either the constitutions of Israel or Palestine or the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

25. This agreement shall be imposed by the UN Security Council. Should Israel and the Palestinian authority find it unacceptable they have 90 days to negotiate an alternative agreement. This 90 day limit shall be eligible for two 90-day extensions by mutual agreement and the a contribution of one billion dollars (per extension) to a UN fund that will be used to implement the final peace agreement.

26. Parties that have contributed to Israeli and Palestinian causes in the last twenty years shall contribute an equivalent amount to implementing the peace agreement. Failure to contribute will bar the individuals blocking the contributions from travel to the United States, Russia, EU, Israel, Palestine, Arab countries or Iran. The individuals can remain in their home country if that country chooses to allow them to stay.

27. Deportation will be to countries that have been paid to accept the individuals in exchange for compensation. The low bidder receives the deportees. Deportees will not be eligible to leave for ten years.

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Wednesday, December 15

4:34 pm—Marching Orders

From Josh Marshall:

...The Social Security "crisis" is manufactured; there is no crisis. To the extent there are long-term financing problems, the president's plan will gravely worsen them. The problem we face isn't over Social Security, which continues to run up huge surpluses (just as it was intended to under the early-80s reform), but that our non-Social Security budget continues to run massive structural deficits. Or rather, it has returned to running massive structural deficits after getting into the black in the late 1990s through the combined exertions of a Democratic president and a Republican congress. Social Security isn't the problem, but rather George W. Bush's reckless fiscal policy.

In any case, as I say, the whole thing is lies. This isn't about the program's problems but about its success. That's why the president and his allies want to phase it out. It's not about financing but about ideology....

...One thing that Democrats must understand is that they cannot win this battle legislatively. At one level what I mean by that is simply the math we can all see. The president has comfortable majorities in both chambers and in his first term (when he was a minority president and had smaller majorities) he commanded historic levels of party discipline. If he can hold those caucuses together, he can pass this and sign it and that's it. Doesn't matter what Democrats do...

...So point one is party unity. The Democrats don't just need to keep their caucuses overwhelmingly together on this issue. They need to avoid even a single defection in the House or the Senate. From what I hear from knowledgeable sources this is already pretty close to doable in the House; and probably no more than three or perhaps four are even in play in the Senate.

Such unity has the obvious advantage of giving Republicans less breathing room in putting together majority votes in both houses. But it does much more than that. Making the elimination of Social Security a strictly Republican gambit raises the political stakes dramatically. Many Republicans will be far more cautious without bipartisan cover. Democrats must deny them even the thinnest of fig leaves. Making it a strictly Republican affair will also provide valuable clarity in the coming election, rather than the muddled picture created by Democratic defections on the 2001 tax bill....

This is the time for Democrats to fight for America. Not just the poor, or the elderly. But for people who are well-to-do now, but may very well be poor once they lose a job, or endure a vicious divorce, or suffer medical expenses that exhaust their life savings. Democrats must fight for the safety net, as it has the potential to help ALL Americans who may need it.

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Tuesday, December 14

3:37 pm—No Fault Cultural Suicide....

Let's start with bits from the New York Times article:

When Bill Cosby spoke out publicly in May against dysfunction and irresponsibility in black families, he identified one pervasive symptom: "boys attacking other boys because the boys are studying and they say, 'You're acting white.'" This idea isn't new; it was first proposed formally in the mid-80's by John Ogbu, a Nigerian professor of anthropology at the University of California at Berkeley, and it has since become almost a truism: when smart black kids try hard and do well, they are picked on by their less successful peers for "acting white."

So where does the idea of the burden of "acting white" come from? One explanation the authors offer will make sense to anyone who has ever seen a John Hughes movie: there's an "oppositional peer culture" in every high school -- the stoners and the jocks making fun of the nerds and the student-government types. When white burnouts give wedgies to white A students, the authors argue, it is seen as inevitable, but when the same dynamic is observed among black students, it is pathologized as a racial neurosis.

More insidiously, the authors say, the idea that failing black kids pull down successful black kids can be used as an excuse by administrators to conceal or justify discrimination in the public-education system. The one school where the researchers did find anxiety about "acting white" was the one in which black students were drastically underrepresented in the gifted-and-talented classes. And significantly, at this particular school, the notion of the burden of "acting white" was most pervasive not among the black students interviewed by the researchers, but among their teachers and administrators, who told researchers that blacks are "averse to success" and "don't place a high value on education."

I wholeheartedly, overwhelmingly, and emphatically disagree. "Actin' white" is not a myth, it's a reality. It's a subtext of gossip on the playgrounds as much as it is the office watercooler. It happened to me and I've seen it happen to others.

At a certain level, I don't really care about what white kids do to each other. White kids (especially men) grow into adults who can get away with substandard performance and make a good living at it. Black kids have to be more motivated and productive just to keep pace with their slogging white counterparts. Like it or not, it's reality. I can be outstanding and only make as much as the guy on the other side of my floor that really needs to be charged for the air he breathes, he's so worthless.

Sorry if I offended any politically correct types.

On another level, that's one of the dangers of cultural homogeneity. Everyone must act the same, must be the same. If this attitude carries across too many generations, the culture's ability to grow and survive diminishes. Think a Amish but secular and with better clothing.

I tire of academicians, and African-American ones especially, that come up with "no-fault" explanations to the problems facing black people. We as a people must work harder and be smarter, because we are the ones under the microscope. We're the ones who unwittingly prompt women to cinch up their pocketbooks, the ones who aren't expected to do as well as the rest. We must address that head-on with more than "no-fault" pablum. We must vaporize the low expectations, and steamroll the stereotypes through good old capitalistic success. No one's going to do it for us.

Lastly, for you affirmative action naysayers. I hear you winding up even as I type this. Remember what I said above, it's easier for an underperforming white male to make \$50-75k/year for 30 years doing just enough to get by. When African-Americans can do that in the numbers white males have in the workforce, perhaps I'll reconsider.

[Comment\(0\)](#) | [Trackback \(0\)](#)

3:31 pm—Juan Cole's On to Something....

What should be done with blogs whose intent is to manipulate and distribute false information? How about information created by parties with vested interests? [Juan Cole focuses on the problem here:](#)

...The phenomenon of blog trolling, and frankly of blog agents provocateurs secretly working for a particular group or goal and deliberately attempting to spread disinformation, is likely to grow in importance. It is a technique made for the well-funded Neoconservatives, for instance, and I have my suspicions about one or two sites out there already...

Should there be some voluntary self-policing set up by the blogosphere? Could there be a loose set of "media credentials" that readers could measure bloggers by? How can the sphere police itself in a way that can make itself apparent to the casual reader? Registration? Or perhaps a prominently placed line telling readers that the blogger's words are their own, and are not paid for or influenced by an outside party?

[Comment\(0\)](#) | [Trackback \(0\)](#)

11:41 am—I'm Giving it a Try!

Over at [Political Animal](#), Kevin Drum advocates coming up with a version of the evilly deceptive but effective "Harry and Louise" ads to help Democrats derail Social Security "reform."

I'm going to get busy thinking of a script, and posting it on his blog. I invite my readers to try their hands at it as well.

Monday, December 13

10:00 am—Vetting? We Don't Need Any Stinking Vetting....

Wow. Is Bernard Kerik the crookedest public servant ever, or the crookedest that got caught? I'm sure the Bushies are angry at Giuliani for talking him up; but it's the Bushies that have that big organization called the Federal Government that should have done a much better job vetting him.

Check out this link fest on Kerik's corruption:

[News finds Kerik in cash conflict](#)

Bernard Kerik speaks at stately New Jersey home.

Former New York City Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik accepted thousands of dollars in cash and gifts without making proper public disclosures, a Daily News investigation has revealed.

Kerik failed to report the gifts on financial disclosure forms he was required to file with the city as head of the both the NYPD and, before that, the Department of Correction.

[THE NOMINEE'S PAST](#)

While serving as New York City correction commissioner in the late 1990's, Bernard B. Kerik spoke to the city's Trade Waste Commission on behalf of a close friend who was helping a company suspected of mob connections try to get a license from the city, according to a former commission executive.

The conversation was part of a web of relationships Mr. Kerik developed with officials of a New Jersey construction company long suspected by New York authorities of connections to organized crime. The company, Interstate Industrial Corporation, hired Mr. Kerik's close friend Lawrence Ray, the best man at Mr. Kerik's wedding, to help with its licensing problems. Mr. Ray said yesterday that he gave Mr. Kerik more than \$7,000 in cash and other gifts while Mr. Kerik was commissioner of correction and the police. The gifts were first reported in The Daily News yesterday.

[Politics And Punishment On Rikers Island](#)

In late 2002 word began to emerge that New York City Correction Department employees were working on Republican political campaigns -- often while on-duty. Now, in the WNYC news documentary: Politics and Punishment on Rikers Island, Andrea Bernstein takes a close look how and why jail supervisors organized hundreds of their employees as campaign foot soldiers -- in apparent violation of city law.

[Kerik's Surveillance Activity in Saudi Arabia Is Disputed Cabinet Pick Is Accused of Carrying Out Hospital Chief's Agenda](#)

The autobiography of Bernard B. Kerik, President Bush's nominee to head the Department of Homeland Security, recounts a difficult time 20 years ago when he was expelled from Saudi Arabia amid a power struggle involving the head of a hospital complex where Kerik helped command a security staff.

In the book, Kerik described his discomfort at having to investigate employees' private lives, but said it was necessary because of the Saudis' laws prohibiting drinking and mingling of the sexes in public. "It was challenging, negotiating such a closed, rigid system and trying to find justice in laws that, to an American, were unjust," he wrote. He was expelled from Saudi Arabia in 1984, the book said, after he had a physical altercation with a Saudi secret police official who was interrogating him.

Since he was nominated last week to be homeland security secretary, however, nine former employees of the hospital have said that Kerik and his colleagues were carrying out the private agenda of the hospital's administrator, Nizar Feteih, and that the surveillance was intended to control people's private affairs. Feteih became embroiled in a scandal that centered in part on his use of the institution's security staff to track the private lives of several women with whom he was romantically involved, and men who came in contact with them, the ex-employees said.

[Withdrawn](#)

It's hard to know what was the last straw. Ever since President Bush announced on Dec. 3 that Bernard Kerik was his choice to replace Tom Ridge as Secretary of Homeland Security, official circles in Washington and New York have been buzzing with stories about Kerik's potential liabilities. A hard-charging former New York City police commissioner, Kerik made many enemies and seemed to be dogged by minor scandals. He was a rags-to-riches story whose climb may have been a little too precipitous; in any case, his tangled

personal life caught up with him.

On Friday night, Kerik abruptly informed the White House that he was withdrawing from the nominating process, citing potential problems with the immigration and tax status of a former nanny. "I am convinced that, for personal reasons, moving forward would not be in the best interests of your administration, the Department of Homeland Security or the American people," Kerik said in a letter to President Bush.

But there may have been other issues at play. Kerik, who recently made millions in the private sector, once filed for personal bankruptcy as a New York cop. And just five years ago he was in financial trouble over a condominium he owned in New Jersey. More serious trouble than anyone realized: NEWSWEEK has discovered that a New Jersey judge in 1998 had issued an arrest warrant as part of a convoluted series of lawsuits relating to unpaid bills on his condo. The magazine faxed documents, including the arrest warrant, over to the White House around 6:00 p.m. Friday, asking for comment. Neither Kerik nor the White House had any immediate response. At 8:30 p.m., Kerik had submitted his letter to the president.

Inside the Kerik mess

In the 48 hours before his withdrawal as nominee for the nation's top security post, Bernard Kerik and his lawyer scrambled to keep damaging assertions about his past out of the public spotlight.

A week after President George W. Bush announced the former city police commissioner as his choice for Homeland Security secretary, an array of charges and questions about Kerik's past were coming to a boil, threatening his crafted image as an American legend and portending a rougher Senate confirmation process than first predicted.

On Thursday, the day before he took his name from contention, Kerik, 49, was forced to testify in a civil lawsuit about an alleged affair with a subordinate.

Wow, that's a lot of bad stuff. Did Gonzales miss it? Or did he think he'd slide it past the Senate?

[Comment\(0\)](#) | [Trackback \(0\)](#)

Friday, December 10

5:42 pm—THIS is What Caught My Eye

Earlier, I posted about the firing of Clark Kent Ervin above in "Collective Interests." It's no big surprise that he's out because he did his job and showed weaknesses in the TSA security system. As an African-American Texas Republican, I imagine he saw himself needing to do a great job, since he's one of a few black republicans anywhere on earth.

What caught my eye lay at the bottom of the story. Check THIS out:

"I think this was a voice that was a little too critical and made the administration a little too uncomfortable," said Danielle Brian, executive director of the Project on Government Oversight, a nonprofit government watchdog group. Among the investigations being conducted by Ervin was what he called an illegal contract with the Boeing company for the installation of explosive detection machines at airports. "At least \$49 million, almost \$50 million, in excessive profit was paid to Boeing," according to Ervin.

Ervin also investigated the half-million-dollar awards reception held at a Washington hotel for airport screeners from the Transportation Security Administration. "It was rather lavish, no question," said Ervin.

But what bothered Ervin even more was that the executives at the TSA also rewarded themselves — in cash. "About 88 senior executives were given cash awards," said Ervin. "That's about 76 percent of the senior executives there."

???

[Comment\(0\)](#) | [Trackback \(0\)](#)

5:30 pm—Democrat Direction: Unions

What are the first 3 words that come to your mind when you hear the word "union?" I'm willing to bet my lunch money (\$8 on a good day, \$6 usually) that none of the words were complimentary.

Unions as we know them today may have to die a silent death before they can begin to restore their long lost position as agents of positive social change. There are unions out there fighting to remain relevant. But is it too little too late? I hope not.

Have unions lost their way? Do unions truly stand for retraining, flexibility, education, and world-class skills for their membership? In this world of mass layoffs of white and blue collar workers, the Wal-Mart-ization of wages and benefits, and where corporate financiers see pension funds as liabilities to sell off instead of investments in human beings, are unions clearly seen as agents for positive social change?

Answer the question for yourself. If you find yourself making excuses for unions at any time, perhaps the need is there for a heavy dose of self-reform.

Unfortunately, unions may have botched their chance at redemption. But there is hope. Check out this blog:

Unite to Win

Here is a union that is trying to stay in the game. They have a very impressive mission. I hope they make it. Read the blog. It's fascinating, as even union members are very skeptical about whether this is a genuine effort, or more window dressing. I hope they are serious and are successful.

[Comment\(0\)](#) | [Trackback \(0\)](#)

9:29 am—The Following Are Examples of Ideas Gone Awry

Movement Conservatives truly will never cease to amaze me. I believe they will always send a chill up my spine, but for all the wrong reasons. It's difficult to come up with words that truly express what's wrenching through me right now, so I'll just pass the info along. Hopefully I'll be better in an hour or so.

The first, thanks to Oliver Willis, revisits the idea that homosexuality is evil. Alabama Congressman Gary Allen feels that the government shouldn't support positive depictions of homosexuality as a lifestyle. He is meeting with President Bush (again) next week to go over some of his new ideas. [From the Guardian UK:](#)

What should we do with US classics like *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* or *The Color Purple*? "Dig a hole," Gerald Allen recommends, "and dump them in it." Don't laugh. Gerald Allen's book-burying opinions are not a joke.

Earlier this week, Allen got a call from Washington. He will be meeting with President Bush on Monday. I asked him if this was his first invitation to the White House. "Oh no," he laughs. "It's my fifth meeting with Mr Bush."

Bush is interested in Allen's opinions because Allen is an elected Republican representative in the Alabama state legislature. He is Bush's base. Last week, Bush's base introduced a bill that would ban the use of state funds to purchase any books or other materials that "promote homosexuality". Allen does not want taxpayers' money to support "positive depictions of homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle". That's why Tennessee Williams and Alice Walker have got to go.

What strikes me, other than the hate, is that his bill would allow public funding of negative depictions of gay lifestyles. But Allen is an old hand at finding ways to divide the country. His last "good" idea was to [burn books with positive gay characters and settings](#). Here's the golden nugget in the center of this pile:

If the bill became law, public school textbooks could not present homosexuality as a genetic trait and public libraries couldn't offer books with gay or bisexual characters.

At this pace, he'll be Fuhrer--er--President of the Movement in no time.

The next example of how Movement Conservatism is poisoning this country comes from Cary, NC:

These few lines from the article speak volumes:

Students at one of the area's largest Christian schools are reading a controversial booklet that critics say whitewashes Southern slavery with its view that slaves lived "a life of plenty, of simple pleasures."

Leaders at Cary Christian School say they are not condoning slavery by using "Southern Slavery, As It Was," a booklet that attempts to provide a biblical justification for slavery and asserts that slaves weren't treated as badly as people think.

Here are a few snippets from the book:

* "To say the least, it is strange that the thing the Bible condemns (slave-trading) brings very little opprobrium upon the North, yet that which the Bible allows (slave-ownership) has brought down all manner of condemnation upon the South." (page 22)

* "As we have already mentioned, the 'peculiar institution' of slavery was not perfect or sinless, but the reality was a far cry from the horrific descriptions given to us in modern histories." (page 22)

* "Slavery as it existed in the South was not an adversarial relationship with pervasive racial animosity. Because of its dominantly patriarchal character, it was a relationship based upon mutual affection and confidence." (page 24)

* "There has never been a multi-racial society which has existed with such mutual intimacy and harmony in the history of the world." (page 24)

* "Slave life was to them a life of plenty, of simple pleasures, of food, clothes, and good medical care." (page 25)

* "But many Southern blacks supported the South because of long established bonds of affection and trust that had been forged over generations with their white masters and friends." (page 27)

* "Nearly every slave in the South enjoyed a higher standard of living than the poor whites of the South -- and had a much easier existence." (page 30)

Remember, Movement Conservatism is based on the pro-Jim Crow attitudes and thinking of 50's and 60's Dixiecrats. These Democrats, once expunged from the party, move to the GOP. They combined with anti-government Republicans and the worst of evangelical Christians in the 80's. The Movement doesn't like slavery. In order to get around history, they invent their own. In fact, the head of the Cary school teaching these lies says this:

He (Principal Larry Stephenson) said the booklet is used because it is hard to find writings that are both sympathetic to the South and explore what the Bible says about slavery.

What leaves me wondering about the future of our republic is parents that willingly let these men lie to their children.

[Comment\(0\)](#) | [Trackback \(0\)](#)

Thursday, December 9 (testing new fonts)

5:18 pm--Now About New Ideas

Some people feel that new ideas and solutions are only valid if they come from certain people, organizations or from the top of the correct mountain. Ideas from any other source is heresy.

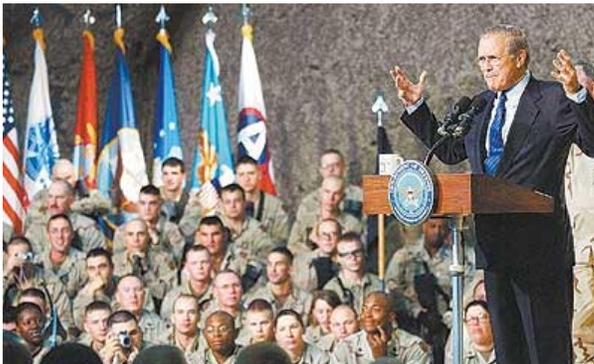
This is the short-sighted thinking that has led to Democrats current status as a party on the outside looking in. While not totally enamored by the "Peace at all costs" crowd in our party, I must admit the Iraq war has seen all of their talking points fulfilled. In spades. Ideas come from all around you, even from those opposed to you. The smart man figures out how to integrate the best parts of the idea into his plan.

What prompted this? [Something I read at NDOL](#), the DLC's website. For some it's a great source of fodder for new ideas. For others, its GOP-lite. For me, it's just another source for a brainstorm.

Sometimes I notice that those who complain where the idea came from have no new ones of their own.

[Comment\(0\)](#) | [Trackback \(0\)](#)

5:10 pm--It's Too Easy With These People....



DONALD RUMSFELD, Dec. 8, 2004: "As you know, you go to war with the army you have, not the army you might want or wish to have at a later time. Since the Iraq conflict began, the army has been pressing ahead to produce the armour necessary at a rate that they believe -- it's a greatly expanded rate from what existed previously -- but a rate that they believe is the rate that is all that can be accomplished at this moment."

Armor Holdings Could Boost Humvee Armor Output 22% (Update2)

Thursday, December 9 (Bloomberg)—Armor Holdings Inc., the sole supplier of protective plates for the Humvee military vehicles used in Iraq, said it could increase output by as much as 22 percent per month with no investment and is awaiting an order from the Army.

U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said yesterday the Army was working as fast as it can and supply is dictated by "a matter of physics, not a matter of money."

Jacksonville, Florida-based Armor Holdings last month told the Army it could add armor to as many as 550 of the trucks a month, up from 450 vehicles now, Robert Mecredy, president of the company's aerospace and defense group said in a telephone interview today.

"We're prepared to build 50 to 100 vehicles more per month," Mecredy said in the interview. "I've told the customer that and I stand ready to do that."
[More](#)

Wednesday, December 8

11:09 am--Democrat Directions: Abortion

Abortion is a horrible thing. It leaves no person involved untouched. Words like pain, heartache, shame, guilt, and darkness accompany it. It is no triumph, no victorious rallying point. It is a nadir from which a person makes a pledge to move their life away from.

Democrats need to remember this when talking about abortion "rights." We must frame the issue to confront the complexity of the decision.

When abortion is brought up, there should be no fists waved in triumph, no speeches embracing it as a bright and shining product of the women's rights movement. Instead, heads should bow, and the message should be of how we as a people can help American women as well as women worldwide avoid this terrible option.

For women who are interested in having the child, but giving it up for adoption, we should speak of reconstructing the foster care and adoption system. For the well-being of the American people, we should never be afraid to speak of contraception, or widening the availability of RU-486. For parents, we should ask, no, *require* them to live up to their undeniable responsibility to explain sex to children in a frank manner. This should not be a talk, rather it should be an ongoing conversation throughout a child's journey into the teenage years. We should look reality in the eye and tell the nation that sex has never gone anywhere since the beginning of time. It is here to stay. Therefore, a responsible people should address it with policies and programs rooted in maturity.

Abortion unequivocally must, and absolutely has to be something available for women that absolutely, positively feel that it is their only choice. But we, as a caring people must do a finer job at making sure women more options to avoid unwanted pregnancies, as well as ways to ensure that out-of-wedlock pregnancies that come to term result in children that become productive citizens.

This is how we can move the republic forward.

[Comment\(0\)](#) | [Trackback \(0\)](#)

Monday, December 6

11:19 am—Schools and Sex Education

Following up on a couple of posts below on abstinence-only programs, as well as a [story in yesterday's Washington Post](#), I have come to a conclusion. Schools should get OUT of the business of sex education. It's a losing proposition. No matter how good a program is on comprehensive sex education, a single bookish parent can derail a successful program. As we have seen in previous posts, the lies spread in abstinence-only programs popular with conservatives do much more harm than good.

So schools should get out of the business. A 6-year trial period is enough time to collect results and get an accurate fix without too much spin. If everyone else who complains about the system is able to achieve 10% decreases in the rates of teen pregnancy rates and STD infection, then take the onus off the schools to teach sex ed.

Take the money and put it toward test preparation, or toward music and art education. There's plenty of avenues that children can hear about sex. Based on the outrages I hear, parents are more than willing to step up and teach their kids about sex. Let's call them on it. Conservatives and the church are more than ready to step up. Let's see what their world looks like after 6 years.

If these people and groups that do more complaining than helping cannot achieve better, they should leave the schools to do the job no one else wants to. Screed complete.

[Comment\(0\)](#) | [Trackback \(0\)](#)

Friday, December 3

4:19 pm—Sorry, One More Topical Point....

Barry Bonds should be banned from baseball, and his records expunged. Bonds never wanted to be likeable, and has achieved this desire in spades. Odds are, this standoffishness will help make the decision to banish him easier than it already seems to be

The steroid scandal is reaching across the spectrum of professional sports. Will this scandal bring down Sammy Sosa as well? Perhaps. If anything Sosa has a lot of goodwill resonating everywhere save for Chicago.

4:06 pm—My Final Mini-Tirade of the Day

Wow, I've been prolific today. I've been chained to my cube printing color proofs and doing page revisions. So I've had time to click print, read and bubble. Anyway....

Last night on the bus ride home I read the entire .pdf attachment on the lies being spread in the abstinence-only programs being taught in schools.

I was pissed. You really, REALLY ought to [read the report](#). It's like the government is paying people to teach flat-earth theories.

Another thing that hit me like a stick was the rampant disregard for scientific and medical evidence. Condoms fail 31% of the time. A person can catch AIDS by just making contact with the afflicted person's skin. Not having sex can ensure one is never depressed or suicidal.

Here's a good accompanying story that appeared in [The Gadflyer](#). Just like supply-side economics and charter schools, abstinence only programs are not working. But given the drivel they are trying to teach kids, is that a surprise?

3:56 pm—Words to the Wise

[From NewDonkey.com:](#)

It may be time for Democrats to make a collective decision to spend a few shekels on the product development side of the political biz along with all the hundreds of millions they spend on marketing. That's even more important given the fact that Democrats have for too long lived off the ideas and messages developed during the Clinton administration--many of them still relevant, but now beginning to recede a bit in the rear-view mirror. Without control of the White House or either branch of Congress, where, specifically, is the Democratic institutional capacity for creating, refining, and messaging good and politically salient policy ideas? Academics? MeetUps? The new breed of talking-points distribution organizations that sprang up in 2004? Yeah, all of these can be sources of something to say, but in a party capable of raising a spending close to a billion dollars, there ought to be a little spare change under the sofa for real-live think tanks like those who have served the GOP so well over the years. We've got a few good ones, including our own Progressive Policy Institute, which gave the Clinton administration many of its best ideas, but they are pretty small operations compared not only to their conservative rivals, but to the vast array of Democratic groups focused on everything other than policy content.

So: whether you're someone who squeezed \$100 out of the family budget this year to try to beat George Bush, or someone with serious jack to burn, give a thought going forward to making at least a small investment in the intellectual side of progressive politics, before the well runs dry and all we are marketing is that we are not Republicans.

Give to a liberal think-tank. Ideas move the electorate and increase the republic. Unless your intent is to lie your way into office. And nobody would ever, ever do th—*D'OH!*

1:46 pm—Only the Shadow Knows for Sure

While tossing out a stack of old Chicago Tribunes, I briefly saw the headline of a story written just before the election: "3 Years After 9/11, Why Have There Been No Terrorist Attacks?"

That stewed around in my mind for awhile, and then I saw this on the blog "The Talent Show:"

["We'll Never Be at Green Alert"](#)

In the crazy way that my mind works, it came to me that the biggest challenge for Movement Conservatives is in the following slogan:

"How We Gonna Keep Them Scared if America Continues to Stay Safe?"

No matter the reason, a vigilant domestic and international intelligence apparatus, infighting or miscommunicating among Al Qaeda leadership, or just blind luck, the longer the US goes without a terrorist attack, the harder it will be for Movement Conservatives to use fear of terrorism to keep people in "line."

So how do we keep the people terrified enough to vote Republican? There's only so far you can go with gays and lesbians; as unless they're willing to create evidence they are terrorists in drag/butch.

Keep an eye on the news, as I'm sure you will. Where will the next big manufactured enemy come from?

10:45 am—One Nation, Under God, Indivisi--D'OH!

[Gay Americans see trouble ahead](#)
Reuters/MSNBC
Updated: 6:01 p.m. ET Dec. 2, 2004

OVERLAND PARK, Kan. - Here in America's heartland, LeAnne, a stay-at-home mom, has taken down the colorful gay-pride windsock that once flew from her front stoop.

Elsewhere in Kansas, a public school administrator has fresh worries about being fired despite 19 years of tenure.

And a veteran fundraiser for a religious charity in Missouri fears a backlash if anyone found out she was raising two children with another woman.

This is life in Middle America a month after the Nov. 2 presidential election, when millions supporting "moral values" turned out to ban same-sex unions in 11 states and back a president who made opposition to gay marriage part of his platform.

Gay Americans say they are hurt, bewildered and confused about what they see as a powerful outpouring of anti-gay sentiment. Some are reacting by renewing efforts to change public sentiment while others are retreating.

"It has been a severe blow to many people. There has been a lot of grief and heartache," said the Rev. Jay McNell, whose Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church in Overland Park, Kansas ignited controversy when it recently ordained a lesbian elder.

"It reminds me of the civil-rights days when we saw discrimination against African-Americans," he said.

Just to reiterate, hate is not an American value. Who was the last guy to blame all his nation's problems on? Yeah, THAT guy.

9:59 am—The Daily Scream

[Read this from Gary Aldrich](#), a former prosecutor; now a very vocal opponent of the medical marijuana movement. At first glance, it never ceases to amaze me that now they're fully ensconced in Washington, the party of state's rights is now the party of federal activism. But when state's rights collide with the rest of party ideology, the quote below gives you a good idea of how Movement Conservatives carve up and eat their own ideals:

Pushing to legalize marijuana is the best evidence of the remarkable, deadly selfishness of your average, self-centered Liberal. They know the above facts better than most because many of their close friends have become addicts, and their lives were destroyed.

Yet selfish, self-centered Liberals don't care about any of that - they just want their marijuana, cocaine, or whatever designer drug is in fashion. What they won't admit is that many cannot enjoy their sexual activities without using the drugs - this is the dirty little secret that nobody wants to talk about. The effects of marijuana and cocaine are often more powerful than Viagra. The Liberal guy pushes drug use because everyone knows drugs sweep away a woman's natural reluctance to behave like a barnyard goat.

I know I've structured this as a "gotcha" to conservatives. But admit it, that quote is precious, isn't it? I had to figure out some way to use it!

But what's with the "barnyard goat" thing? Perhaps I don't want to know....

9:27 am—Say No More....

[On the nomination of Carlos Guterriez to Commerce Secretary:](#)

Many people had indicated an interest in being commerce secretary, but White House officials said they sought out Gutierrez instead of the other way around. The officials said Bush had met Gutierrez on a few occasions over the past few years and had always been impressed with him. They met two weeks ago at the White House and Bush made the decision early last week at his Texas ranch, the officials said. Gutierrez informed his board on Friday, but word did not leak.

Bush aides said that in addition to Gutierrez's inspiring immigrant's story, they see his background in sales as a crucial credential, since Bush has used his economic team primarily to promote the White House agenda rather than to make policy. Officials familiar with the search process said that, Gutierrez notwithstanding, the White House has found it harder to attract a top-flight team because some candidates are unwilling to give up lucrative posts to come to Washington to be White House cheerleaders.

One economist, who was rumored to be up for a position on the Council of Economic Advisers, said he could not take a job that has been steadily pushed to the sidelines over the past two years. "You can't be attracted to a job where you'd be out of the loop," he said.

A top White House official disputed that, saying: "The idea we can't recruit people to serve because they don't want to be cheerleaders is absolutely wrong."

Somehow, I never saw the Commerce Secretary's role as "salesman." Trade ambassador, perhaps, but salesman?

Once again, I implore you to say your prayers at night. Our country will need them.

7:55 am—Can We Really Trust Anything These People Say?

Gregory Mankiw, one of Bush's chief economic whitewashers, the man who said exporting jobs overseas is good, [on Social Security:](#)

"The benefits now scheduled for future generations under current law are not sustainable given the projected path of payroll tax revenue," he added. "They are empty promises."

And so begins, in my opinion, the "Great Unraveling" of Social Security. With all due respects to Paul Krugman, of course.

On the surface, can we really believe anything the Bush administration says, short of confirming what day today is? This is the bunch that brought the promises of supply-side economics to fruition, only to see it fail in the real world. This is the bunch that promised tax cuts would create 5 million jobs, the spendthrifts that still get people to think that domestic spending is the second highest line item in the US Budget, while they run up the deficit on tax cuts. These are the people that said we would be greeted in Baghdad by cheering throngs and hailed as liberators.

These people lie with intent. Not little white political lies, but big dark ones that the Christian Coalition would never let a Democrat get away with.

At another level, Mankiw's statement is the reality of their failed policies coming home to roost. Now I'm not one that thinks Social Security is on a free-fall to insolvency. We need to make some fixes to it, but is the danger that great? No. I'll look up some information on how the program can and must be fixed. But overhauled? No. In this case "reform" is a Trojan Horse for "destroy."

Mankiw's words are the tip of the political phalanx that is out to dismantle the first, greatest, and most successful safety net a DEMOCRAT ever implemented. Social Security reform is how Movement Conservatives intend to leave a legacy as large as FDR's. It's politics over economics, payback over the needs of the people. Movement Conservatives are looking for a legacy, and they misguidedly believe that they can find it in dismantling Social Security.

Wednesday December 1

1:23 pm--There Goes Josh Marshall...

Saying things I wish I'd said again. :-)

A few days ago I said that the Democrats have to be or act like a true party of opposition. I mean I hope to explore in the coming weeks and months, in this case, for what we're discussing on the site I'm referring to how opposition can enable reformism. Before 1994 and, to a lesser degree, before 2000, Democrats simply weren't in a position to adopt a genuine reform agenda because they were too implicated in the institutional corruption, the money chase, that is modern Washington. They could want change in some abstract way and they push for it margins. But their way of doing business on the in Washington generally was inseparable from it, how they ran Congress; it was how they raised their money to win elections; their friends (and that means personal professional friends) who'd already into the lobbying sector made their money from it; many or most of them expected eventually to do same.

And I know this paints with a broad brush; and in some it may paint an ungenerous picture. But it is in most respects accurate.

For some years after 1994 congressional Democrats understandably acted as though they were the natural majority just temporarily displaced. So all those tendencies remained. And, as I noted above, to a lesser degree, they persisted through 2000 because holding the White House created parallel dynamics.

But now none of those are true. And the Democrats' exclusion not just from power but from the money and lobbying game is far greater than that which the Republicans faced when they were in the minority.

There are two reasons for this: one structural and one political.

[Read the rest of the post](#), its marvelous.

12:55 pm--Wow, I Couldn't Have Said it Better My--HEY I Did Say Something Like This!

From [NewDonkey.com](#):

Southern Democrats stand alone in their willingness to project a message and agenda that unites their people, as my experience in Birmingham confirmed. Even the most conservative Alabama Democrats are extraordinarily proud of their party's civil rights and equal opportunity heritage. And African-Americans in this state are extraordinarily pragmatic about the need for a broad party message that appeals to white moderate and moderately conservative voters. They also tend to share the culturally conservative views that seem so alien to a blue-state-dominated national party.

What you really learn by spending time with southern Democrats is the importance of projecting a party message that unites people across racial, class, and cultural lines, instead of competing with Republicans in an effort to build a coalition of selfish interest and identity groups. The more the GOP abandons its heritage as a party of national unity, the more this common ground is open to Democrats.

The Democratic Party is at a crossroads. [I'll quote from my post on November 4th, 2004](#):

Movement Conservatism is steadily looking to purify their party by adding religious idealogues and excising moderate-thinking "heretics." The Democratic Party must be the party that truly believes in freedom of religion. We have atheists, and agnostics, as well as Jews, Muslims and Gentiles. The Democratic Party must be an example of how these people can live together.

The renewal of the party will not come from Washington DC. We don't need to waste our time trying to be GOP-lite. We need to rely upon our principles and convictions, which will shortly prove us to be the party of American values. Democrats need to get reform, or get rid of the political elite of our party. They have lost too many Federal elections. We need not be like the Bush Administration and reward failure. We need to embrace the best ideas circulating in the states and apply as many of them to the federal level. We need to embrace the messages of the Progressives in our midst. We even need to learn some of the lessons that the Greens have been trying to teach us.

But we must do this in order to rebuild OUR party, not someone else's. "Since 1794" must not change to "1794 to 2005."

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