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Quote of the Moment:

"The level of the work force in general is so high (in Canada) that the training program you need for people, even for people who have not worked in a Toyota plant before, is minimal compared to what you have to go through in the Southeastern United States,"

—Gary Feldchun, president, Canadian Automotive Parts Manufacturers Association on why Toyota chose to locate a new multi-million dollar auto plant in Ontario

"According to GM CEO Rick Wagoner, about \$1,500 of the cost of each vehicle the automaker produces in the U.S. goes for employee health care costs. By comparison, employee health care costs in Canada amount to only \$120 per vehicle."

—Randolph Holhut, OpEdNews.com on Toyota's reasoning

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**Daily Topics & Commentary:**

Wednesday, July 28

4:44 pm—What do Today's Democrats Believe?

That's a good question, as we've rode our triumphs for a bit too long. Not that our successes haven't been great, as witnessed by the Bush administration's great failure to dismantle Social Security. The successes of liberal politics have been as great and laudatory as the failures on the conservative side. People making a decent, not excessive, wage can buoy and propel an economy. We learned this with FDR and Clinton. I could go on, but the point I'm trying to make here and in previous posts is that we need to take stock in what we feel is right and transform those feelings and gut instincts into a plan for the future. We need a new story to tell, a new vision to rally the people.

But what are the elements that make up that story? What is included in the vision?

How about a belief in security? Security cannot be based on fear. We are living through a moment in history when our fears are being exploited against us. We are being asked to sacrifice more of what we shouldn't. All because it's easier to believe in the bogey man in the darkness of ignorance. Security should be based in knowledge rooted in the free exchange of information that can only come from curiosity about what's around us.

Security should also be personal. Financial and individual security. Government should be the source of financial security only to that point where we, as individuals, cannot overcome the temporary vagaries that occur in life. And as we adapt and grow out of personal trial, we must take the responsibility to again step out on our own and fend for ourselves. Government should only provide individual security only to that point where public order can be maintained. Our streets must stay safe, and criminals must be incarcerated. No matter the race, creed, or color. That doesn't mean we perpetuate the cycle of crime and misery by neglecting these people. Rather, we should be practical in our approach to incarcerated criminals and put them to work while in prison, and prepare them for real jobs once they get out.

One of the things that distinguishes liberals from conservatives is that we don't look to the future fearing what we may lose. Conservatives have an entire media kingdom focusing them on the fear of losing something in whatever new that comes around. Liberals see the future as something good, something we can build upon, something we can leave our mark on in a positive way. The optimism we embrace builds legacies. Negativism builds nothing. The two Bushes, Reagan, Nixon have not left us with much to look back on with pride. Indeed, if the rusting economic hulk of the Soviet Union had collapsed during the Carter administration, Ronald Reagan would have been the president of the NRA instead of Charlton Heston. But timing is everything, as they say.

I've got more, but work has kicked my butt today, and I'm going for a drink. See ya.

1:51 pm—The Looming Iraqi Civil War

So, we see the political machinery moving to it's new goal—making sure the GOP has it's best foot forward in time for the 2006 elections

U.S., Iraqi Officials Discuss Steps to Speed Troop Withdrawals
Statements Suggest Heightened Immediacy for Move

Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld met with Iraqi Prime Minister Ibrahim Jafari and the top U.S. commander in Iraq Wednesday and discussed specific steps to speed preparations for the withdrawal of some of the 135,000 U.S. troops in Iraq beginning as early as next spring.

The tone of statements by Rumsfeld and Jafari, as well as the commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, Gen. George Casey, suggested a heightened determination and immediacy to planning for the U.S. troop reduction, despite the continuation of lethal daily attacks by insurgents in Iraq.

"The great desire of the Iraqi people is to see the coalition forces be on their way out as they take more responsibility," Jafari said at a press conference with Rumsfeld following their noon meeting in Baghdad. "We have not limited to a certain schedule, but we confirm and we desire speed in that regard."

This will require "picking up the pace of training Iraqi forces" as well as carefully synchronizing the U.S. withdrawal as Iraqi forces take charge of different parts of the country, Jafari said.

Casey also voiced confidence before meeting with Jafari that the United States will be able to begin reducing its force levels in Iraq next spring or summer.

Now I hate being in Iraq as much as the next guy. But pulling out of Iraq without a counterbalance of NATO or (hopefully not) UN peacekeepers will certainly doom Iraq to civil war. Without Americans to kill, they'll pick up the pace of killing each other. The locus will move to establishing political control through violence from dislodging the American occupiers. No disrespect to the Iraqi Security Force,

but are they ready to handle the insurgents?

And in a peculiar way, if we leave Iraq at a time they clearly (at least to anyone who doesn't live in Washington DC and is a Republican) need a stable and well-trained security force, then aren't we bowing to the terrorists? Couldn't we be leaving a people at the time when a couple more years of help, along with a REAL effort to train and equip their men, mean the difference between a rocky transition and all-out internal war? But, hey who am I to think such things....

What Does the Safety Net Accomplish?

Wednesday, July 28 (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities)—This series of reports examines the research on the impacts and accomplishments of government programs that assist low-income families and individuals. Each report includes state-by-state data on the number of the people assisted by the program. Additional reports in this series will be forthcoming.

- Public benefit programs cut the number of poor Americans nearly in half, from 58 million to 31 million.
- Medicaid has been shown to reduce infant mortality and child deaths and to increase the likelihood that low-income women receive preventive screening for breast cancer and cervical cancer.
- While 40 years ago hunger and malnutrition were not uncommon in some poor areas of the country, the federal Food Stamp Program and other nutrition assistance programs such as WIC and the school meals programs have made severe hunger rare in America today.
- By increasing the rewards of low-wage employment, the Earned Income Tax Credit has substantially raised the proportion of single mothers who work, while lifting 2.7 million children out of poverty (in 2002).
- Nearly three million people with severe mental impairments receive help from the Supplemental Security Income program, which enables many of them to live independently.

[More](#)

Prosecutor in CIA Leak Case Casting A Wide Net

White House Effort To Discredit Critic Examined in Detail

Wednesday, July 28 (Washington Post)—The special prosecutor in the CIA leak probe has interviewed a wider range of administration officials than was previously known, part of an effort to determine whether anyone broke laws during a White House effort two years ago to discredit allegations that President Bush used faulty intelligence to justify the Iraq war, according to several officials familiar with the case.

Prosecutors have questioned former CIA director George J. Tenet and deputy director John E. McLaughlin, former CIA spokesman Bill Harlow, State Department officials, and even a stranger who approached columnist Robert D. Novak on the street.

In doing so, special prosecutor Patrick J. Fitzgerald has asked not only about how CIA operative Valerie Plame's name was leaked but also how the administration went about shifting responsibility from the White House to the CIA for having included 16 words in the 2003 State of the Union address about Iraqi efforts to acquire uranium from Africa, an assertion that was later disputed.

Most of the questioning of CIA and State Department officials took place in 2004, the sources said.

It remains unclear whether Fitzgerald uncovered any wrongdoing in this or any other portion of his nearly 18-month investigation. All that is known at this point are the names of some people he has interviewed, what questions he has asked and whom he has focused on. [More](#)

1:15 pm—They Came Again, In the Same Old Way (Part 3)

Haven't we been here before? Check this out, from the [Times](#):

Skirmish Over a Query About Roberts's Faith

Congressional Republicans warned Democrats on Monday not to make Judge John G. Roberts's Roman Catholic faith an issue in his confirmation hearings for a seat on the Supreme Court, reviving a politically potent theme from previous battles over judicial appointees.

The subject came up after reports about a meeting on Friday at which Senator Richard J. Durbin, Democrat of Illinois, is said to have asked Judge Roberts whether he had thought about potential conflicts between the imperatives of their shared Catholic faith and of the civil law.

OK, now compare that to this, from [Tapped](#):

Pryor's nomination has been controversial from the get-go. He has called the Supreme Court's Roe vs. Wade decision an abomination resulting in the, quote, "slaughter of millions of innocent unborn children." He's supported laws making consenting homosexual conduct a crime, and he supported the erection of a giant monument to the Ten Commandments in the Alabama Supreme Court building. But today Pandora's box opened wide at the Senate Judiciary Committee, with all but one Republican member in attendance, in effect accusing Democrats of opposing the nominee because he's Catholic.

The seed of the controversy was planted in June at the confirmation hearing when committee chairman Orrin Hatch, over the Democrats' objections [emphasis added], asked the nominee his religion. 'Roman Catholic' was the answer. The this week an ad ran in newspapers in Maine and Rhode Island picturing a giant courthouse door with a sign on it that reads: Catholics need not apply. Below the picture is text that reads: Some in the US Senate are attacking Bill Pryor for having deeply held Catholic beliefs to prevent him from becoming a federal judge. The ad was paid for by the Committee for Justice, an organization for which President Bush's father and nephew have raised money.

The charge in the ad sent a jolt of fury through the committee's Democrats, especially its four Catholics, starting with the ranking Democrat, Patrick Leahy of Vermont.

Senator PATRICK LEAHY (Democrat, Vermont): This smear is a lie. It depends upon the silence of others to survive.

TOTENBERG: But Pryor's mentor, Alabama Republican Jeff Sessions, wasn't buying.

Senator JEFF SESSIONS (Republican, Alabama): The ranking member protests that he is not anti-Catholic and he's offended that anyone suggested that he is. Well, let me tell you, the doctrine that abortion is not justified for rape and incest is Catholic doctrine. It is a position of the pope and it's a position of the Catholic Church in unity. So are we saying that if you believe in that principle, you can't be a federal judge? Is that what we're saying? And are we not saying then good Catholics need not apply?

Senator RICHARD DURBIN (Democrat, Illinois): This is disgusting.

For the last person out there who still believes Washington Republicans don't strategize everything, please let this be your wake-up call. Hell, they even strategize bowel movements. Anything to keep the attention off Roberts' record and on the supposed inadequacies of the Democratic Party. Or off Karl Rove and on the Dems. Basically anything to keep the spotlight off Karl Rove.

Panel: Bush Was Unready for Postwar Iraq

Wednesday, July 28 (New York Times)—An independent panel headed by two former U.S. national security advisers said Wednesday that chaos in Iraq was due in part to inadequate postwar planning.

Planning for reconstruction should match the serious planning that goes into making war, said the panel headed by Samuel Berger and Brent Scowcroft. Berger was national security adviser to Democratic President Clinton. Scowcroft held the same post under Republican Presidents Ford and George H.W. Bush but has been critical of the current president's Iraq and Mideast policies.

"A dramatic military victory has been overshadowed by chaos and bloodshed in the streets of Baghdad, difficulty in establishing security or providing essential services, and a deadly insurgency," the report said.

"The costs, human, military and economic, are high and continue to mount," said the report, which was sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations, an independent foreign policy group.

Two years after a stunning three-week march on Baghdad, U.S. and Iraqi military forces have been unable to secure and rebuild the country, and reconstruction has fallen victim to a lack of security, the report said.

The White House has reacted to similar criticism in the past by saying there was significant postwar planning. [More](#)

Tuesday, July 27

BETTER PAID AND BETTER TRAINED WORKERS EQUALS MORE PRODUCTIVITY

A simple formula that seems to elude Republicans

Tuesday, July 27 (OpEdNews.com)—Republicans seem to love the slash-and-burn style of modern capitalism. However, it is not an economic model that is sustainable and there are a few smart business out there who reject it and profit from that decision. Those who complain that spending money on public education and health care is a drain on the economy might want to consider this story from Canada.

Earlier this month, the Canadian Press reported that Toyota decided to build a new \$800 million auto assembly plant in Woodstock, Ontario. It will employ 1,300 people.

Toyota passed up hundreds of millions of dollars in subsidies and tax breaks from several American states to build in Canada.

Why? Toyota believes that workers in Ontario are easier and cheaper to train than their American counterparts. They also won't have to worry about health insurance costs because of Canada's

taxpayer-funded single-payer health care system. "The level of the workforce in general is so high that the training program you need for people, even for people who have not worked in a Toyota plant before, is minimal compared to what you have to go through in the southeastern United States," Gerry Fedchun, president of the Canadian Auto Parts Manufacturers' Association, told the CP. [More](#)

The American Dream in Denmark

Tuesday, July 27 (Collective Bellaciao)—In honor of Independence Day, let us consider the American Dream, the idea that through intelligence and hard work you can move up from the social class your parents. It still exists . . . in Scandinavia and Canada. From the Ottawa Citizen:

"Turns out, the American dream is playing out more strikingly north of the 49th parallel, says Canadian economist Miles Corak, editor of a recent book exploring generational mobility in Europe and North America." and: "The U.S. dream is probably more relevant here than it is the U.S.," Corak said.

Among rich countries studied, Corak said, Canada ranked with Denmark, Norway and Finland at the top of the pack in terms of intergenerational mobility. The U.S., the United Kingdom and France are the least mobile."

It must pain the 'wingers to think that their cherished mythology of the infinite possibilities of American upward mobility now only exists in lands controlled by gay commies. The article gives the specifics ". . . one-fifth of the income advantage is inherited across generations in Canada. In the U.S. and the U.K., almost one-half is inherited.

Corak also cites U.S. research showing that almost one-half of children born to low-income parents become low-income adults, which means they fall in the bottom 25 per cent of income distribution. In the U.K, the tally is 40 per cent.

Children in high-income families, about four in 10, tend to become high-income adults in the U.S. and U.K., he said. By contrast, there is significantly more movement between generations in Canada. Corak says studies show that for every 100 people born at the bottom rung, one-third end up at the bottom, and almost one-fifth end up at the top. For every 100 people born at the top in Canada, only one-third remain at the top."

The death of the American Dream in America has been rather quietly noted in the American press. It is entirely a matter of tax policy and government investment in access to education. Jon Talton of the Arizona Republic gets it:

"In magisterial work for the New York Times, reporter David Cay Johnston has documented the rise of the hyper-rich, the top 0.1 percent of income earners. These 145,000 people are leaving everyone else far behind, even those who would be considered wealthy. From 1980 to 2002, the latest year where data are available, the share of total income earned by the hyper-rich more than doubled. That earned by the bottom 90 percent of taxpayers declined. [More](#)

Thursday, July 21

REVENUE COLLECTIONS IN 2005

WHAT DOES THE RECENT INCREASE IN REVENUES SIGNIFY?

Thursday, July 12 (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities)—Strong tax collections through June have led the Congressional Budget Office to reduce its deficit estimate for 2005 to about \$325 billion and the Office of Management and Budget to reduce its deficit estimate to \$333 billion.

The trimming of the deficit is certainly a positive development. But this development does not lead to the conclusion that "the tax cuts are working," as some now are claiming. Furthermore, the reduction in this year's deficit from a very large one to a large one has little bearing on the nation's shaky long-term fiscal foundation....Many of the factors behind the increase in revenues in 2005 are temporary. The expiration of a business tax cut at the end of 2004 is leading to an increase in tax collections of about \$50 billion this year, according to past estimates by the Joint Committee on Taxation. In this case, the increase in revenue stems from the termination of a tax cut, not from a tax cut's effect in spurring the economy. [More](#)

Plame's Identity Marked As Secret

Memo Central to Probe Of Leak Was Written By State Dept. Analyst

Thursday, July 21 (Washington Post)—A classified State Department memorandum central to a federal leak investigation contained information about CIA officer Valerie Plame in a paragraph marked "(S)" for secret, a clear indication that any Bush administration official who read it should have been aware the information was classified, according to current and former government officials.

Plame -- who is referred to by her married name, Valerie Wilson, in the memo -- is mentioned in the second paragraph of the three-page document, which was written on June 10, 2003, by an analyst in the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR), according to a source who described the memo to The Washington Post.

The paragraph identifying her as the wife of former ambassador Joseph C. Wilson IV was clearly marked to show that it contained classified material at the "secret" level, two sources said. The CIA classifies as "secret" the names of officers whose identities are covert, according to former senior agency officials.

Anyone reading that paragraph should have been aware that it contained secret information, though that designation was not specifically attached to Plame's name and did not describe her status as covert, the sources said. It is a federal crime, punishable by up to 10 years in prison, for a federal official to knowingly disclose the identity of a covert CIA official if the person knows the government is trying to keep it secret. [More](#)

4:05 pm--Somebody Get Me a Hanky....

From the Chicago Sun-Times:

British Muslims: We can't stop extremism

LONDON -- Britain's Muslim leaders demanded a judicial inquiry Wednesday into what motivated the four "homegrown" suicide bombers who targeted London, as Prime Minister Tony Blair proposed an international conference on rooting out Islamic extremism.

Muslim leaders warned that the Muslim community alone could not eliminate extremism and called for an independent judicial probe into what may have motivated the bombers.

Please. Somebody help me. One of the reasons that terrorists are running rampant is because good people are allowing it to happen. I'm not specifically "blaming the victim," but I'm finding it hard to believe that the family, friends, and fellow mosque-goers of the 4 British bombers had no idea who their sons, friends, and church mates were friendly with. If these people come forward, as well as other worldwide, then I wonder what the impact on Islamic terrorism would be. When good people say nothing, horrible things happen.

3:59 pm--The Keys to Karl's Kingdom

The GOP talking points on SC Justice nominee John Roberts (thanks to Swing State Project). [Get 'em here.](#)

Wednesday, July 20

How Costco Became the Anti-Wal-Mart

Wednesday, July 20 (New York Times)—In Sinegal, the chief executive of Costco Wholesale, the nation's fifth-largest retailer, had all the enthusiasm of an 8-year-old in a candy store as he tore open the container of one of his favorite new products: granola snack mix. "You got to try this; it's delicious," he said. "And just \$9.99 for 38 ounces."

Some 60 feet away, inside Costco's cavernous warehouse store here in the company's hometown, Mr. Sinegal became positively exuberant about the 87-inch-long Natuzzi brown leather sofas. "This is just \$799.99," he said. "It's terrific quality. Most other places you'd have to pay \$1,500, even \$2,000."

But the pièce de résistance, the item he most wanted to crow about, was Costco's private-label pinpoint cotton dress shirts. "Look, these are just \$12.99," he said, while lifting a crisp blue button-down. "At Nordstrom or Macy's, this is a \$45, \$50 shirt."

Combining high quality with stunningly low prices, the shirts appeal to upscale customers - and epitomize why some retail analysts say Mr. Sinegal just might be America's shrewdest merchant since Sam Walton.

But not everyone is happy with Costco's business strategy. Some Wall Street analysts assert that Mr. Sinegal is overly generous not only to Costco's customers but to its workers as well. [More](#)

Ed note: It is a given that America has had a consumer-driven economy for the past 15-20 years. Economic growth and expanded market share can be found quicker and more efficiently domestically than overseas. The money employers pay their people gets reinvested in the economy. People have bills to pay, homes to fix, cars to gas up, and things to buy. So in this mad rush to pay us third-world wages for first-world work, American business is basically undercutting their potential universe for income and profit growth. In no way do I advocate paying more than you need to, or throwing money at employees that do much of nothing (the only people that can actually fail spectacularly and get paid well are CEO's). Leaner raises and the constant fear of being laid off for reasons completely out of your control mean people don't spend as much. The shops and businesses where they used to spend money lose sales and, in turn these businesses have less to spend with their vendors. It's no leap of imagination when I say a consumer economy cannot sustain itself with stagnant or negative wage growth. And as more and more of us become shareholders, through 401k and other investments, we become ever more dependent on this consumer economy that our bosses are determined to negotiate away. Right now, quarterly reports are the worst enemy of economic recovery, next to the Bush Tax Cuts. We as a society will soon realize this. Hopefully when we do, it's not on the first day of an economic depression.

As All Washington Gussed, Bush Zeroed In on His Choice

Wednesday, July 20 (New York Times)—It was only at 12:35 p.m. on Tuesday that President Bush stepped out of a White House lunch for Prime Minister John Howard of Australia, called Judge John

G. Roberts of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit and offered him a place in history on the Supreme Court.

Judge Roberts immediately accepted, and moments later Mr. Bush stepped back into the lunch with big news for Mr. Howard and his wife, Janette, as well as the president's wife, Laura Bush. "I just offered the job to a great, smart 50-year-old lawyer who has agreed to serve on the bench," Mr. Bush said, according to his press secretary, Scott McClellan.

Mr. Bush had spent three days of the previous week in interviews with five Supreme Court finalists, including Judge Roberts, Mr. McClellan said. But with Judge Roberts, said Dan Bartlett, the White House counselor, "the credentials just jumped off the page."

The president and Judge Roberts spoke in the sitting room of the White House residence for an hour on Thursday, Mr. Bartlett said, and the president asked him a number of personal questions about his upbringing in small-town Indiana. Mr. Bartlett would not say if the two talked about Judge Roberts's positions on abortion and other divisive issues before the court. [More](#)

Monday, July 18

Study cites seeds of terror in Iraq

War radicalized most, probes find

Monday, July 18 (Boston.com)—New investigations by the Saudi Arabian government and an Israeli think tank -- both of which painstakingly analyzed the backgrounds and motivations of hundreds of foreigners entering Iraq to fight the United States -- have found that the vast majority of these foreign fighters are not former terrorists and became radicalized by the war itself.

The studies, which together constitute the most detailed picture available of foreign fighters, cast serious doubt on President Bush's claim that those responsible for some of the worst violence are terrorists who seized on the opportunity to make Iraq the "central front" in a battle against the United States.

"The terrorists know that the outcome [in Iraq] will leave them emboldened or defeated," Bush said in his nationally televised address on the war at Fort Bragg in North Carolina last month. "So they are waging a campaign of murder and destruction." The US military is fighting the terrorists in Iraq, he repeated this month, "so we do not have to face them here at home." However, interrogations of nearly 300 Saudis captured while trying to sneak into Iraq and case studies of more than three dozen others who blew themselves up in suicide attacks show that most were heeding the calls from clerics and activists to drive infidels out of Arab land, according to a study by Saudi investigator Nawaf Obaid, a US-trained analyst who was commissioned by the Saudi government and given access to Saudi officials and intelligence. [More](#)

12:26 pm—My Iraq Prognostication, Update

Last year I predicted that given the way concentrated power was abused by Saddam and the Baa'th Party, modern Iraq would end up as 3 states with a weak federal government. And hopefully this would occur without too much bloodshed. [Check out this link from Time Magazine.](#)

Weekend of slaughter propels Iraq towards all-out civil war

Monday, July 18 (Times UK Online)—Mariam Ghassan, a three-month-old girl, is treated for injuries after one of the Baghdad bombs.

IRAQ is slipping into all-out civil war, a Shia leader declared yesterday, as a devastating onslaught of suicide bombers slaughtered more than 150 people, most of them Shias, around the capital at the weekend.

One bomber killed almost 100 people when he blew up a fuel tanker south of Baghdad, an attack aimed at snapping Shia patience and triggering the full-blown sectarian war that al-Qaeda has been trying to foment for almost two years.

Iraq's security forces have been overwhelmed by the scale of the suicide bombings — 11 on Friday alone and many more over the weekend — ordered by the Jordanian terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.

"What is truly happening, and what shall happen, is clear: a war against the Shias," Sheikh Jalal al-Din al-Saghir, a prominent Shia cleric and MP, told the Iraqi parliament. [More](#)

Thursday, July 14

Wilson's Iraq Assertions Hold Up Under Fire From Rove Backers

Thursday, July 14 (Bloomberg)—Two-year old assertions by former ambassador Joseph Wilson regarding Iraq and uranium, which lie at the heart of the controversy over who at the White House identified a covert U.S. operative, have held up in the face of attacks by supporters of presidential adviser Karl Rove.

Rove is a subject of a special prosecutor's investigation into how the name of the agent, who is Wilson's wife, was leaked to journalists. There has been no evidence made public that Rove identified the agent to reporters. Rove's allies are arguing that he was in fact trying to steer journalists away from taking too seriously Wilson's criticism of President George W. Bush's reasons for going to war in Iraq in 2003.

The agent, Valerie Plame, was publicly identified July 14, 2003, a week after Wilson wrote an article for the New York Times about an investigative trip he took in 2002 at the behest of the Central Intelligence Agency. Wilson wrote that the administration's claim that Saddam Hussein's regime tried to buy uranium in Africa for nuclear weapons was wrong.

The main points of Wilson's article have largely been substantiated by a Senate committee as well as U.S. and United Nations weapons inspectors. A day after Wilson's piece was published, the White House acknowledged that a claim Bush made in his January 2003 state of the union address that Iraq tried to buy "significant quantities of uranium from Africa" could not be verified and shouldn't have been included in the speech.

While the administration was justified at the time in being concerned that Hussein was trying to build nuclear weapons, "on the specifics of this I think Joe Wilson was right," said Michael O'Hanlon, a scholar of foreign policy studies at the Brookings Institution in Washington. [More](#)

Tuesday, July 12

Few Wealthy Farmers Owe Estate Taxes, Report Says

Tuesday, July 12 (New York Times)—The number of farms on which estate tax is owed when the owners die has fallen by 82 percent since 2000, to just 300 farms, as Congress has more than double the threshold at which the tax applies, the Congressional Budget Office said in a report released last week. All but 27 farmers left enough liquid assets to pay taxes owed, the budget office found, although it hinted that the actual number might be zero. The study examined how much in cash, stocks and bonds these farmers left to pay estate taxes, but the report noted that no data existed on how much life insurance the farmers had put into trusts. Virtually all wealthy farmers own life insurance in trusts, say estate tax lawyers who specialize in working with farmers.

These findings come as the Senate is poised to vote this month on repeal of the estate tax. Advocates of repeal have begun showing commercials criticizing senators who oppose repeal, like Maria Cantwell, Democrat of Washington. Many of the criticisms focus on a supposed threat to family farms.

The estate tax raised an estimated \$23.4 billion last year. Repeal would shift part of the burden of taxes off the fortunes left by the richest 1 percent of Americans, some of whose fortunes were never taxed, onto the general population. The lost revenue could be made up in three ways: through higher income taxes; reduced government services; or more borrowing, which would pass the burden of current government spending to future generations.

President Bush, the American Farm Bureau Federation and the National Cattlemen's Beef Association have asserted that the estate tax is destroying family farms. None, however, have cited a case of farm lost to estate taxes, although in June 2001 Mr. Bush said he had talked to such farmers.

The number of farms subject to the estate tax, always a minority, has fallen because Mr. Bush persuaded Congress to raise the threshold for estate taxes to \$1.5 million, double that for married couples, for last year and this year. With simple planning, couples with children can shield several million more dollars from the tax.

In 2000, when the threshold was \$675,000, taxes were owed by 1,659 farm estates, the study found. Had the current threshold been in effect, only 300 farms would have owed any tax.

Next year, when the threshold rises to \$2 million per person, just 123 farms will be subject to the estate tax, the study found. And in 2009, when it rises to \$3.5 million, only 65 of the nation's 2.2 million farms will be affected, the study said. [More](#)

Study: 'Morning After' Pill Availability Does Not Change Behavior

No Change in Use of Other Forms of Birth Control, No Increase in Unprotected Sex

Tuesday, July 12 (Washington Post)—Making the morning-after pill available without a prescription in Britain did not lead women there to rely on it rather than other birth control methods or to an increase in unprotected sex, a new study has found.

The three-year study of more than 20,000 women found that over-the-counter availability had little real-world effect at all. Roughly the same percentage of women used it before and after it became more easily available in January 2001 -- about 8 percent annually.

The researchers concluded that as a result, fears that non-prescription emergency contraception would change contraceptive practices for the worse were unfounded, as were hopes that it would reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies.

The study was published on the online version of the British journal BMJ (formerly the British Medical Journal).

The question of whether emergency contraception should be available without a prescription has become a hot-button and political issue in the United States, with social conservatives arguing that it will encourage sexual promiscuity and reproductive rights advocates saying it will enable women to better protect themselves against unintended pregnancies.

In 2003, a Food and Drug Administration advisory panel voted 23-4 to recommend making the Plan B brand of emergency contraceptive available without prescription, but the agency rejected the proposal last May. The makers of Plan B, Barr Laboratories, revised the application and resubmitted it, but the agency missed its January deadline for acting on it.

The issue has now been raised in the Senate confirmation of Lester Crawford, nominated by President Bush to become permanent FDA commissioner. Sens. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.) and Patty Murray (D-Wash.) have accused the administration of politicizing the Plan B application and have placed a hold on Crawford's nomination until the FDA makes a decision.

The authors of the new study, conducted by researchers at the Imperial College Faculty of Medicine in London and funded by the British Office of National Statistics, wrote that their work had "important policy implications."

They concluded that women prefer obtaining emergency contraception over-the-counter rather than from a physician, that the cost (\$40 U.S.) appears to be a barrier for some women, and that the proportion of women using emergency contraception -- and those using it more than once a year -- did not increase following the policy change.

"Given the apparent absence of negative consequences, and the fact that many women clearly prefer to buy [emergency contraception] over the counter, our study supports the case for lifting the ban on over-the-counter sales in the United States and other countries," the authors, led by professor of primary care Azeem Majeed, wrote.

The study found that the concerns of American social conservatives regarding Plan B were unwarranted, but it did not support the argument of many advocates of the switch, either.

The advocates have said that non-prescription emergency contraception would lead to a reduction in unwanted pregnancies and possibly a reduction in abortions. Because the usage of emergency contraception did not increase, however, the researchers concluded that easier availability is "unlikely to have affected unwanted pregnancies." [More](#)

Ed. note: [click here for an abstract and link to the pdf of the study](#)

Impeachment idea entering the mainstream

Tuesday, July 12 (Vermont Guardian)—Not only did Pres. George Bush's recent televised address about Iraq fail to bolster his approval rating, in a Zogby poll taken after the speech, 42 percent said they would favor impeachment if the president misled the nation about his reasons for going to war.

Half of those contacted don't hold that view, but supporters of impeachment outweigh opponents in some parts of the country. Among those living in the Western states, 52 percent favor Congress using the impeachment mechanism while 41 percent are opposed, according to Zogby.

In Eastern states, 49 percent are in favor and 45 percent are opposed. In the South, meanwhile, impeachment is opposed by three in five voters and supported by just 34 percent; in the Central/Great Lakes region, 52 percent are opposed, with 38 percent in favor. [More](#)

Stonewalled In The West Wing

This column was written by David Corn.

Tuesday, July 12 (CBS News.com)—I advise all students of political speech to read the transcript of the press briefing conducted by White House press secretary Scott McClellan today. It was a smorgasbord of stonewalling. He entered the White House press room at 1:00 p.m., his eyes darting about, and started off by reading a statement from President Bush on the tenth anniversary of the massacre at Srebrenica. Then the subject changed. Rather abruptly. Reporter after reporter asked McClellan about Karl Rove and the news -- broken by Michael Isikoff of Newsweek -- of a July 11, 2003, e-mail written by Time's Matt Cooper that noted that Cooper had spoken to Rove on "double super secret background" and that Rove had told him that former Ambassador Joseph Wilson's "wife... apparently works at the agency on wmd issues." The e-mail is proof that Rove leaked to a reporter information revealing the CIA employment of Valerie Plame (a.k.a. Valerie Wilson).

This puts Rove and the White House in a pickle. Rove's lawyer, Robert Luskin, says that Rove did not mention Valerie Wilson's name to Cooper. But this is a rather thin defense. (I explain why here, and also note why George W. Bush, if he takes his own rhetoric seriously, has no choice but to dismiss Rove.) But legal and criminal difficulties aside, the e-mail is undeniable evidence that Rove leaked national security information to a journalist to discredit a critic (Joseph Wilson). How does that square with White House policy as it has been previously stated? Well, it doesn't. And the journalists in the White House press room knew that. Many had a list of previous McClellan statements at the ready. I was there, and I had a list, too. Here are some of the past White House statements I had collected. [More](#)

Monday, July 11

3:44 pm—The Difference Between Yanks and Euros These Days

In light of the London bombing, it will be tempting to put our rhetorical arm around Europe and say "that's OK, we've been through it, and we can help you through." Since Americans have notoriously short memories, let me remind you that sentiment like that will only help to reinforce the feeling that you are an idiot. In the 70's and 80's Europe was rocked by terrorist violence. Remember these names: [Baader Meinhof](#), [Red Army Faction](#), [Direct Action](#), and the granddaddy of all of them, the [Irish Republican Army](#). IRA attacks alone killed as many people as the bombing did last week. And that's over decades of time. That doesn't minimize the pain, but it will give you an insight as to why Europe is or is not acting the way you feel they should or shouldn't be acting.

Terrorism is not new to Europe.

Boy president in a failed world?

Monday, July 11 (Asia Times Online)—On Thursday morning, with the London bombings monopolizing the TV set, I watched our president take that long, outdoor, photo-op walk from the Group of Eight (G8) summit meeting to the microphones to make a statement to reporters. Exploding subways, a blistered bus, the dead, wounded, dazed and distraught just then staggering through our on-screen morning, and there he was. He had his normal, slightly bowlegged walk, his arms held just out from his side in a fashion that brings the otherwise unusable word "akimbo" to mind. It's a walk - the walk to the podium at the White House press conference, to the presidential helicopter, to the Rose Garden microphone - that is now his well-practiced signature move. For some people, a tone of voice or a facial expression can tell you everything you need to know; that's how the president's walk acts for him. And nothing puts spine in that walk the way the "war on terror" does. Each horror is like a shot of adrenalin.

As he approached the microphones on Thursday, while ambulances and police cars rushed through the streets of London, everything about him radiated a single word: resolve. It was a word that came to mind even before he used it making his brief statement, and then turned, no less resolutely, to walk away just as the word "Iraq" came out of the mouth of some reporter as part of an unfinished question. This was definitely our war (on terror) president back in the saddle.

He said nothing to surprise. He offered "heartfelt condolences to the people of London, people who lost lives"; he spoke of defending Americans against heightened dangers ("I have been in contact with our Homeland Security folks. I instructed them to be in touch with local and state officials about the facts of what took place here and in London, and to be extra vigilant, as our folks start heading to work."); he extolled the strength of resolve of the other G8 leaders by comparing it to his own ("I was most impressed by the resolve of all the leaders in the room. Their resolve is as strong as my resolve."); and he presented for the umpteenth time his Manichaean vision of a world of good and evil in which he and his administration are unhesitatingly the representatives of all goodness. ("The contrast couldn't be clearer between the intentions and the hearts of those of us who care deeply about human rights and human liberty, and those who kill - those who have got such evil in their heart that they will take the lives of innocent folks.")

There's something so confoundingly dream-like about all this, so fantastic, even absurd, especially set against the background of the murder of random people taking public transportation in one of the globe's great cities. As reality grows ever darker, our president never ventures far from his scripted version of a fictional world that is nowhere to be seen. [More](#)

Friday, July 8

11:55 am—On the Bombing...

I'm going to reject the general opinion that London was attacked strictly because of Britain's involvement in Iraq. The terrorists were going to strike anyway. Al Qaeda and its various chapters won't liquidate upon the withdrawal of foreign troops from Iraq. Anyone who believes such, is fooling themselves.

The terrorists may have attacked because that was the operation that finally succeeded. There were reports this morning that since 9/11, MI-5 had successfully foiled a half-dozen terrorist attacks. That a lot over a long period of time. It's not productive to think that terrorists in Europe have been waiting for just the right time to strike. That's stuff for movies. They've been planning and trying to execute plots since, if not before 9/11. Al Qaeda has kept trying to follow-up on 9/11, but in other countries. They have been successful in Indonesia, Spain, and now London.

This time the terrorists have made the mistake. Tony Blair was an aggressive point man on third world debt, and rethinking the way to implement aid to developing countries. The things he was working can go a very long way toward lifting the poverty and oppression that can turn countries into terrorist states. He brings a message of hope to the poor of Africa, and a set of economic choices for African governments that are rumored not to be based in the austere policies of the World Bank. Al Qaeda, Al Qaeda in Europe, or whatever they're calling themselves these days can make no claim like this. They have no plan to help the poor outside of the enforcement of Muslim law to its original and fullest meaning.

One of the obvious ways to separate popular and tacit support for Al Qaeda is to show it for what it is, a group of power-mad and bloodthirsty sociopaths. An attack on Britain the day before her leader announces record aid to poor peoples around the world is one way. An example at a horrible price, but this is what terrorists do.

G8 leaders agree \$50bn aid boost

Friday, July 8 (BBC News)—Prime Minister Tony Blair says the G8 has agreed a \$50bn (£28.8bn) boost to aid for developing countries.

Mr Blair said there was a commitment to find an end date for farm subsidies and a will to make a success of the Hong Kong trade round later this year. On climate change, he said an agreement had always been unlikely, but crucially the US had accepted that global warming was an issue. NGOs are critical of the deal, calling it a "vastly disappointing result". "The people have roared but the G8 he whispered," said Kumi Naidoo, chair of the Global Call to Action against Poverty.

'Progress'

But Live 8 organiser Bob Geldof spoke of a "great day". "Never before have so many people forced a change of policy onto a global agenda. If anyone had said eight weeks ago will we get a doubling aid, will we get a deal on debt, people would have said 'no'," Mr Geldof said. He added that he gave the G8 summit "10 out of 10 on aid, eight out of 10 on debt".

Irish rock star and fellow anti-poverty campaigner Bono, praised the agreement to give universal access to Aids drugs. "600,000 Africans, mostly children, will remember this G8 summit at Gleneagles because they will be around to remember this summit, and they wouldn't have otherwise," said Bono. [More](#)

Complacency may have countered years of vigilance

Friday, July 8 (Financial Times)—Ever since the US attacks on September 11 2001, police and security services have geared themselves up both financially and by increasing manpower for the possibility of a big terrorist attack on the UK, and in particular in London.

But the timing of Thursday's seemingly co-ordinated attacks on the capital's transport system appears to have exploited a weak link in the chain of intelligence and a fatal lapse in security. [More](#)

Thursday, July 7

8:29 am—London Terrorist Attack, As Told By Witnesses and Those in the Area.

[Click here for the link to witness accounts on BBC News](#)

Wednesday, July 6

What Went Wrong in Iraq

Wednesday, July 6 (Foreign Affairs)—Summary: Although the early U.S. blunders in the occupation of Iraq are well known, their consequences are just now becoming clear. The Bush administration was never willing to commit the resources necessary to secure the country and did not make the most of the resources it had. U.S. officials did get a number of things right, but they never understood or even listened to the country they were seeking to rebuild. As a result, the democratic future of Iraq now hangs in the balance.

BLUNDERING IN BAGHDAD

With the transfer of power to a new interim Iraqi government on June 28, the political phase of U.S. occupation came to an abrupt end. The transfer marked an urgently needed, and in some ways hopeful new departure for Iraq. But it did not erase, or even much ease at first, the most pressing problems confronting that beleaguered country: endemic violence, a shattered state, a nonfunctioning economy and a decimated society. Some of these problems may have been inevitable consequences of the war to topple Saddam Hussein. But Iraq today falls far short of what the Bush administration promised. As a result of a long chain of U.S. miscalculations, the coalition occupation has left Iraq in far worse shape than it need have and has diminished the long-term prospects of democracy there. Iraqis, Americans, and other foreigners continue to be killed. What went wrong?

Many of the original miscalculations made by the Bush administration are well known. But the early blunders have had diffuse, profound, and lasting consequences—some of which are only now becoming clear. The first and foremost of these errors concerned security: the Bush administration was never willing to commit anything like the forces necessary to ensure order in postwar Iraq. From the beginning, military experts warned Washington that the task would require, as Army Chief of Staff Eric Shinseki told Congress in February 2003, "hundreds of thousands" of troops. For the United States to deploy forces in Iraq at the same ratio to population as NATO had in Bosnia would have required half a million troops. Yet the coalition force level never reached even a third of that figure. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and his senior civilian deputies rejected every call for a much larger commitment and made it very clear, despite their disingenuous promises to give the military "everything" asked for, that such requests would not be welcome. No officer missed the lesson of General Shinseki, whom the Pentagon rewarded for his public candor by announcing his replacement a year early, making him a lame-duck leader long before his term expired. Officers and soldiers in Iraq were forced to keep their complaints about insufficient manpower and equipment private, even as top political officials in the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) insisted publicly that greater military action was necessary to secure the country.

In truth, around 300,000 troops might have been enough to make Iraq largely secure after the war. But doing so would also have required different kinds of troops, with different rules of engagement. The coalition should have deployed vastly more military police and other troops trained for urban patrols, crowd control, civil reconstruction, and peace maintenance and enforcement. Tens of thousands of soldiers with sophisticated monitoring equipment should have been posted along the borders with Syria and Iran to intercept the flows of foreign terrorists, Iranian intelligence agents, money, and weapons. [More](#)

Insurance Policy

Wednesday, July 6 (New America Foundation)—Nearly a year ago, voters following the presidential race heard a stirring call for social reform: "The times in which we work and live are changing dramatically. The workers of our parents' generation typically had one job, one skill, one career. ... And most of those workers were men. Today, workers change jobs, even careers, many times during their lives, and ... two-thirds of all moms also work outside the home." As a result, "many of our most fundamental systems—the tax code, health coverage, pension plans, worker training—were created for the world of yesterday, not tomorrow." These systems must now be transformed, the speaker concluded, so that "all citizens are equipped, prepared, and thus truly free" in the twenty-first century.

The orator was not John Kerry or John Edwards. It was George W. Bush, accepting the Republican nomination. And Bush was not calling for universal health insurance or expanded pension coverage the seemingly obvious ways to repair "systems" built for the "world of yesterday." He was introducing his proposals for an "ownership society," the centerpiece of which, then and now, is overhauling Social Security to shift risks and costs onto the very workers most disadvantaged by the social and economic shifts of the last generation.

The contradiction is no accident. Bush and his allies recognize that the major domestic challenge of the twenty-first century is to give workers economic security in a transformed world. Just listen to conservative message guru Frank Luntz: "Every day, more Americans are concerned about their personal job security and their individual financial situation." Even as the president's drive to overhaul Social Security sinks into the political abyss, Bush has denounced critics of the effort for denying younger workers "the same sense of security that previous generations had when it came time for them to retire."

Yet, across the board, current Republican plans to tackle rising insecurity—from private accounts in Social Security to medical savings accounts to tax reform—promise one thing and do another. They promise to protect workers and their families against economic risk. What they will do is shift more risk onto Americans' already burdened shoulders. The conservative response to rising insecurity is equivalent to tossing a lead weight to a drowning man on the assumption that, now, he will really have an incentive to swim. It gets the problem right but the policies all wrong. [More](#)

11:42 am—Yep, We've Been Here Before. Soon, All Hell Will Break Loose...

Saw this at the [LA Times website](#):

Bush Denounces Early Frenzy Over Court Vacancy

COPENHAGEN -- President Bush, weighing in on behalf of Atty. Gen. Alberto Gonzales, a personal friend, today denounced activists on both the left and right who are trying to influence his choice of a Supreme Court nominee.

In remarks to reporters in Denmark on his way to a global summit in Scotland, Bush said he had just begun reviewing top candidates for the Supreme Court seat to be vacated by retiring Justice Sandra Day O'Connor.

Bush said he resented that some groups were already attacking Gonzales, who is said to be on the president's short list. He urged the Senate to join him in resisting pressure from outside organizations during the confirmation process.

"I hope the United States Senate conducts themselves in a way that brings dignity to the process, and that the senators don't listen to the special interest groups, particularly those on the extremes that are trying to exploit this opportunity for not only...what they think is right, but also for their own fundraising capabilities," Bush said.

Bush did not identify the organizations he had in mind, but his admonition came in response to a question about criticism of Gonzales as a potential nominee.

In recent days, a number of conservative activists have signaled in advance their opposition to Gonzales because they regarded him as too moderate on key issues such as abortion. They include representatives of Focus on the Family and Judicial Confirmation Network, both of which are conservative advocacy organizations.

Bush urged the Senate to "not let these groups, these money-raising groups, these special interest groups, these groups outside the process, dictate the rhetoric, the tone" of the confirmation debate.

The Washington Groundhog Day begins again, this time for the Supreme Court. Bush has now officially mentioned the need for selection process for the next member of the Supremes to be non-ideologically motivated, and called for resisting the influence of special interests. This will be the last time you hear anything on this, unless the Bushies need to trot it out in case it gets exceptionally messy. It's like the throwaway lines the administration used during the runup to Iraq, the recent discussion on judicial independence, and Social Security Reform. If they end up making 100 statements or the rancor of the judicial selection process, they'll make 97 that do nothing to tone things down. The remaining 3 will be used as cover to demonstrate their commitment to a dignified process. It's not genuine, it's simply setting up a number of rhetorical backstops for use later. It's great politics, but horrible public policy.

Tuesday, July 5

War? What war?

As the Iraq nightmare deepens, Fox News and its cable competitors wallow in shark attacks and Natalee Holloway. If you don't cover a war, does it exist?

Tuesday, July 5 (Salon.com)—Almost four years ago, the American right launched a great moral crusade. Sept. 11 had changed everything forever, the war party and its supporters repeated. The apostles of the New Righteousness used the smoldering ruins of the World Trade Center to anathematize anyone who failed to embrace the cause. To dissent, even to analyze, was to dishonor the dead virtually to commit high treason. Those few who tried to stop King George's Crusade from marching to Jerusalem (or Baghdad, in this millennium-later iteration) were swept away like the black protesters in Birmingham, Ala., in 1963, hosed off the streets not with water but with the saintly blood of the 9/11 victims. Pundits railed against an elitist "Fifth Column" and compared dissenters to Neville Chamberlain-like "appeasers." In one of the great failures of the opposition in American history, the Democrats and the mainstream media joined the angry mob. A few mumbled some pathetic caveats as they waved their pitchforks, but their bleats were drowned out as the patriotic horde swept on to Infinite Justice.

Beyond the calls to war and vengeance, Americans were told that this was a transforming moment, an epiphany. It was a Great Awakening, not just a political but a spiritual watershed. Pious writers insisted that after 9/11, irony was dead. Analysts from across the political spectrum argued that the terror attacks, like a vast memento mori, were a manifestation of death and evil that would forever change our superficial, sensation-addled culture. The astute New York Times columnist Frank Rich criticized the media for its petty pre-9/11 obsessions with such ephemera as shark attacks and tawdry murder cases. In the dark months after the attacks, the left and right agreed that the new era should, must, be one of dignity and gravitas. For conservatives, those qualities were in the service of anger; for liberals, of analysis -- but there was no disagreement about the need for transformation.

Today, the issue of how to comport ourselves in the wake of 9/11 is moot: It has been almost four years since the attacks, and most Americans -- without forgetting the tragedy or disrespecting the dead -- have gotten over it. But our current situation raises almost identical issues, of morality, personal conscience and the responsibility of the media. [More](#)

United Church of Christ backs same-sex marriage

Tuesday, July 5 (Atlanta Journal-Constitution)—The United Church of Christ became the first mainline Christian denomination to endorse gay marriage Monday when its 25th biennial General Synod decisively approved an "equal marriage rights for all" resolution.

The vote set off a celebration in the Georgia World Congress Center. Gay couples hugged one another. Some wiped away tears. A group of UCC delegates joined hands afterward and sang, "Amen." But other delegates rushed from the hall warning of schism within the 1.6 million member denomination.

The Rev. John H. Thomas, the president of the UCC, drew a link between the vote and the historical significance of another event on Monday.

"On this July Fourth, the General Synod of the United Church of Christ has acted courageously to declare freedom," said Thomas, who was re-elected to another term. He announced June 28 that he supported the resolution.

The vote affirms equal marriage rights for couples regardless of gender and says that the government should not interfere with same-sex couples who want to marry. It calls on denomination officers to press local, state and national legislators to support equal marriage rights.

Many mainline denominations, including the Presbyterian Church USA, the United Methodist Church and the Episcopal Church, also are wrestling with the issue.

Some members fear the issue could tear denominations apart much like slavery did in the 19th century.

Spain joined Belgium and the Netherlands last week in legalizing gay marriage. In Canada, the House of Commons has approved gay marriage and the Senate is expected to follow suit this month.

The Rev. Andrew Young, former mayor of Atlanta and a member of the United Church of Christ, was honored by the denomination at the convention. He had endorsed the resolution, and in remarks after receiving his award he praised the UCC's activist tradition. The UCC, which helped inspire the Boston Tea Party, says it was the first denomination to ordain a black pastor (1785) and a woman (1853).

"What seemed controversial back then seems so automatic today," Young said before the vote. "We wonder why it was a struggle at all. There's no education without controversy and there's no resurrection without crucifixion." [More](#)

10:17 am—Filibuster Blues

Liberals are worried about keeping our word on judicial filibusters, given the vacancy on the Supreme Court. I say nobody is expecting Dems to not offer opposition to whoever Bush appoints, because we know they'll be another rabid conservative monkey wrapped in a \$2000 suit. So don't worry about the coming charges of being "obstructionist," as they were coming anyway. If Democrats haven't learned that anything less than total surrender to the Bushies is obstruction, then we need to replace them in the next election.

10:06 am— A Surefire Solution for Judicial Ideological Imbalance

There's a lot of kvetching going on about replacing Sandra Day O'Connor as the new member of the Supremes. Dems are feeling woozy about the no-filibuster agreement. Movement conservatives are trying hard not to start gloating too early.

This is the conservative's nomination, and they know it. The amount of strife it will put the country through is immaterial to them, because in their worldview, people hate them anyway. What matters is that we get a justice that will overturn Roe v. Wade, let teenagers be put to death, make God for evangelical Protestants the religion of the kingdom, and allow prayers to this god in schools. God will really need to bless America then.

We worry—and we should worry a lot about the hacks that the Bush administration has seeded throughout the legal landscape. From the GOP'er point of view, the next Democratic president will try to rebalance the landscape by filling vacancies with evil liberals. By law, we are stuck with both types until they retire. But I believe we need something different. A solution that will not allow a president to so taint the judicial landscape with his or her own point of view, good or bad.

We should introduce legislation to define a lifelong term as a total of 20 years. Given the average age of the entry-level federal judge, 20 years on the federal bench would be a lifetime. It's an intriguing idea, one that really needs to be examined; especially given the distrust both sides have of judicial nominees. Ideological appointees would "time-out" of the system, leaving them a finite amount of time to do their work or damage, depending on your point of view. Or, given the incendiary nature of idealogues on a time limit, they just might slip up and make themselves evident to all, making it more likely their bad decisions would get overturned on appeal.

I'll come back to that in the near future.