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Yes it needs a little punctuation help. But the message is clear. Movement conservatives want to claim piety, while they mock the needs of the least among us.

Quote of the Moment(updated 5/25):

"...In the more ill-considered comments coming from the conservative end of the US Supreme Court, one hears language that calls not only the New Deal into question but the entire establishment of American national sovereignty. In 1995, for example, in a case involving term limits, Justice Clarence Thomas wrote that "the ultimate source of the Constitution's authority is the consent of the people of each individual state, not the consent of the Nation as a whole," as if (Justice John) Marshall had never lived, (John C.) Calhoun had never died, and the Civil war had never been fought. ...For Thomas is not suggesting that Americans ought to have a debate between different ways of achieving national greatness. He is instead calling the idea of nationhood itself into question, no matter how many years were given--nor how many lives were taken--in establishing its ability to act in the name of all"

—Alan Wolfe, "[Return to Greatness](#)"

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**Daily Topics & Commentary:**

Tuesday, May 31

4:26 pm—The Good Old Gilded Age? Part 3

Here's another look at the age George W. Bush and Karl Rove talk about when they say "the good old days." In this installment, something they should be very comfortable with—machine politics:

Entering the Gilded Age: Machine Politics
"What's the Constitution among friends?" -- George Washington Plunkitt

President Ulysses S. Grant's administration (1868-1876) had been ineffectual and aimless, characterized by little other than corruption and scandal. The rise of big business overwhelmed what little government regulation existed. As it entered the Gilded Age, the country found itself dominated by machine politics, so called because the system and the party, rather than individuals, held power. Candidates were not elected for their stands on issues, their personalities, or their characters, but because they were backed by a "machine" that controlled voter loyalty by distributing political benefits such as offices and jobs. Such machines dominated the political scene in virtually every region of the US during the years after the Civil War.

Unregulated big business, often in bed with the political machines, exploited workers and customers alike. In the 1869 Credit Mobilier scandal, railroad insiders hired themselves on government money to build a railway at a fee far higher than it actually cost to build the railway. When they thought they might get caught, they bribed members of Congress. Companies battled to build monopolies, so as to gain complete control of a market and thus complete control of prices. Profit, and the search for profit, ruled the day.

With its focus finally shifting away from Reconstruction, the nation looked upon the corruption with dismay. Much of Gilded Age politics revolved around the effort of the government to find some system with which to regulate the expanding economy and big business, as well as an effort to regulate its own abuses. The battle against corruption, while perhaps the defining political issue of the Gilded Age, was not the only issue. Considerable debate raged over tariffs, Indian policy, and gold vs. silver coinage. Concern remained over the fate of Southern Blacks, whether that concern constituted a desire to maintain black independence or to limit it to the greatest degree possible. The Republicans, who for the most part called the industrial northern states home, pushed for strong tariffs to protect the prices of manufacturers. Meanwhile, debtors (often Southern Democrats) supported the coinage of silver currency to create inflation, making their debts easier to pay off. Much of the Gilded Age was actually a period of deflation, due to a stable money supply but an increasing population and market. Although often corrupt, politics during the Gilded Age did not turn off the common individual: %70 voting turnout was common in northern cities, much higher than voter turnout today. [More](#)

Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley had nothing on these guys. For the Bushies, the modern Republican machine has one thing that the Gilded Age machines didn't—enforceable religious dogma. Imagine how powerful Boss Tweed could have been had he managed to coopt the Catholic Church into openly advocating him as the Christian public servant, and his machine as the party of God?

Ombudsmen Rebuff Move by Public Broadcasting

Monday, May 31 (Hands Off Public Broadcasting.com)— An association of news ombudsmen has rejected an attempt by two ombudsmen from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to join their organization as full-fledged members, questioning their independence.

The Organization of News Ombudsmen, which represents nearly a hundred print and broadcast ombudsmen from around the world, more than half of them in the United States, voted at its annual conference here last week to change its bylaws to allow full membership only to those who work for news organizations. The corporation, a quasi-governmental organization, provides some federal funds for National Public Radio and the Public Broadcasting System; it does not itself gather or produce news.

The change allows for the corporation's ombudsmen - and others in allied fields but who are not part of a news organization - to become associate members. As such, they are denied voting privileges and the stamp of legitimacy as independent ombudsmen that full membership would suggest.

"We want members who are responsive to readers, not to governments or lobby groups," said Jeffrey A. Dvorkin, who was president of the ombudsmen's organization until last week when his term ended and is the ombudsman for NPR. "I was worried about the political nature of the appointment and I was worried about the precedent."

The move is a rebuff to Kenneth Y. Tomlinson, chairman of the corporation, who decided that the corporation should have two ombudsmen as a way to bring balance to what he sees as a liberal bias in public programming and an anti-Israeli bias in NPR's Middle East coverage. (A survey by the corporation itself has shown that viewers and listeners do not share those perceptions.) [More](#)

"Fair and balanced" -- the McCarthy way

CPB head Kenneth Tomlinson, who is leading a jihad against "liberal bias" in public broadcasting, and one of his two new ombudsmen both worked for the late Fulton Lewis, a reactionary radio personality associated with Sen. Joe McCarthy.

Tuesday, May 31 (Salon.com)— As the debate over fairness and balance in public broadcasting rages on, there's a curious historical connection to be found between two men at the forefront of the current conservative crusade and a famous radio broadcaster from 50 years ago. How the three crossed paths -- and the way they practiced journalism -- put some of the debate into sharper focus.

A main figure in the roiling controversy is Kenneth Tomlinson, the head of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, who insists that public radio and television suffer from a liberal bias and that actions -- such as adding conservative-leaning programs to the lineup -- must be taken to counterbalance it. Tomlinson recently singled out the weekly news program "Now," once hosted by liberal Bill Moyers, as the cause for his concern about bias.

Tomlinson's conviction is so strong he once suggested to the CPB board that Fox News anchor Brit Hume be invited to "talk to public broadcasting officials about how to create balanced news programming," according to a report broadcast May 20 on National Public Radio.

Tomlinson's charge of liberal bias runs counter to two nationwide polls conducted by the CPB in 2002 and 2003, which found little concern among Americans about bias in public broadcasting. The CPB is a federally funded agency that serves as an umbrella organization for public radio and television. Created by Congress, its purpose is both to help raise money and awareness for public broadcasting and to protect it from political pressure. But now the CPB itself has become the source of such pressure.

Tomlinson's attempt to push back the so-called liberal media is not surprising given his journalistic past -- which is where Fulton Lewis Jr., the broadcaster with the intriguing, albeit distant, connection to the ongoing debate, comes in. A prominent radio broadcaster in the '40s, '50s and '60s, Lewis was known for his complete lack of objectivity. At his commercial peak he was heard on more than 500 radio stations and boasted a weekly audience of 16 million listeners. An erstwhile Rush Limbaugh, Lewis was the master of the partisan smear who rarely strayed from GOP talking points. In 1948, New York Herald Tribune radio columnist John Crosby suggested that Lewis "ought to be recognized as a campaigner, not as a commentator, and his national air time be paid for and so listed by the Republican National Committee." [More](#)

Bush's Political Capital Spent, Voices in Both Parties Suggest

Poll Numbers Sag as Setbacks Mount at Home and Abroad

Tuesday, May 31 (Washington Post)—Two days after winning reelection last fall, President Bush declared that he had earned plenty of "political capital, and now I intend to spend it." Six months later, according to Republicans and Democrats alike, his bank account has been significantly drained.

In the past week alone, the Republican-led House defied his veto threat and passed legislation promoting stem cell research; Senate Democrats blocked confirmation, at least temporarily, of his choice for U.N. ambassador; and a rump group of GOP senators abandoned the president in his battle to win floor votes for all of his judicial nominees.

With his approval ratings in public opinion polls at the lowest level of his presidency, Bush has been stymied so far in his campaign to restructure Social Security. On the international front, violence has surged again in Iraq in recent weeks, dispelling much of the optimism generated by the purple-stained-finger elections back in January, while allies such as Egypt and Uzbekistan have complicated his campaign to spread democracy.

The series of setbacks on the domestic front could signal that the president has weakened leverage over his party, a situation that could embolden the opposition, according to analysts and politicians from both sides. Bush faces the potential of a summer of discontent when his capacity to muscle political Washington into following his lead seems to have diminished and few easy victories appear on the horizon. [More](#)

Too Few, Yet Too Many

By PAUL KRUGMAN

Tuesday, May 31 (New York Times)—One of the more bizarre aspects of the Iraq war has been President Bush's repeated insistence that his generals tell him they have enough troops. Even more bizarrely, it may be true - I mean, that his generals tell him that they have enough troops, not that they actually have enough. An article in yesterday's Baltimore Sun explains why.

The article tells the tale of John Riggs, a former Army commander, who "publicly contradicted Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld by arguing that the Army was overstretched in Iraq and Afghanistan" - then abruptly found himself forced into retirement at a reduced rank, which normally only happens as a result of a major scandal.

The truth, of course, is that there aren't nearly enough troops. "Basically, we've got all the toys, but not enough boys," a Marine major in Anbar Province told The Los Angeles Times.

Yet it's also true, in a different sense, that we have too many troops in Iraq.

Back in September 2003 a report by the Congressional Budget Office concluded that the size of the U.S. force in Iraq would have to start shrinking rapidly in the spring of 2004 if the Army wanted to "maintain training and readiness levels, limit family separation and involuntary mobilization, and retain high-quality personnel."

Let me put that in plainer English: our all-volunteer military is based on an implicit promise that those who serve their country in times of danger will also be able to get on with their lives. Full-time soldiers expect to spend enough time at home base to keep their marriages alive and see their children growing up. Reservists expect to be called up infrequently enough,

and for short enough tours of duty, that they can hold on to their civilian jobs. [More](#)

Friday, May 27

F.D.A. Gets Reports of Blindness Tied to Male Impotence Drugs

Friday, May 27 (New York Times)—The Food and Drug Administration said today that it had received reports of partial vision loss among 38 men taking Viagra, the impotence drug, and among four men taking Cialis, a newer competitor.

Whether the popular drugs can actually cause blindness is unclear, but the Food and Drug Administration said it had suggested changes in the drugs' labeling as a precaution.

Pfizer Inc., the maker of Viagra, is in talks with the agency to list vision loss among the drug's side effects, while the makers of Cialis, Eli Lilly & Company and the Icos Corporation., have already added such a warning.

"We're not able to specifically say that these 38 cases are a result of the patients' taking Viagra, because they may have other predisposing conditions," said Suzanne Trevino, a spokeswoman for the F.D.A.

The type of blindness reported, a disorder known as non-arteritic anterior ischemic optic neuropathy, or NAION, is in fact common among people over 50 who have conditions like diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure and high cholesterol - factors that also contribute to erectile dysfunction.

"With that said, we are taking this seriously and are working with the company to make sure that doctors and patients are aware of it," Ms. Trevino said. [More](#)

Ed note: is it that the drug aggravates their predisposition to blindness, or is it that one of their ways of getting over a 4-hour erection isn't working as planned?

Running Out of Bubbles

By PAUL KRUGMAN

Friday, May 27 (New York Times)—I've never fully accepted that view. But looking at the housing market, I'm starting to reconsider.

In July 2001, Paul McCulley, an economist at Pimco, the giant bond fund, predicted that the Federal Reserve would simply replace one bubble with another. "There is room," he wrote, "for the Fed to create a bubble in housing prices, if necessary, to sustain American hedonism. And I think the Fed has the will to do so, even though political correctness would demand that Mr. Greenspan deny any such thing."

As Mr. McCulley predicted, interest rate cuts led to soaring home prices, which led in turn not just to a construction boom but to high consumer spending, because homeowners used mortgage refinancing to go deeper into debt. All of this created jobs to make up for those lost when the stock bubble burst.

Now the question is what can replace the housing bubble.

Nobody thought the economy could rely forever on home buying and refinancing. But the hope was that by the time the housing boom petered out, it would no longer be needed.

But although the housing boom has lasted longer than anyone could have imagined, the economy would still be in big trouble if it came to an end. That is, if the hectic pace of home construction were to cool, and consumers were to stop borrowing against their houses, the economy would slow down sharply. If housing prices actually started falling, we'd be looking at a very nasty scene, in which both construction and consumer spending would plunge, pushing the economy right back into recession.

That's why it's so ominous to see signs that America's housing market, like the stock market at the end of the last decade, is approaching the final, feverish stages of a speculative bubble.

[More](#)

2:16 pm—The Good Old Gilded Age? Part 2

A case can be made that the pro-business, pre-New Deal policies of the Bush administration are leading the country back to the days of the late 1800s-early 1900s. Little to no oversight of business. Monopolies. No labor protections of freedoms. No social safety net. Unmitigated capitalism in full effect.

Back then, George Pullman had ideas on how to reforge the relationship between owner and employee. He turned his ideas into reality in his company town of Pullman, IL. From the Illinois Labor History Nuseum, comes a little tale called "[The Parable of Pullman.](#)"

The Parable of Pullman

In 1894 the model town of Pullman became the storm center for one of the classic labor struggles in American social history. What began as a revolt of the Pullman Shops employees against wage cuts and oppressive company practices, escalated into a national railway workers' boycott directed against the handling of trains carrying Pullman cars. It was followed by federal intervention with almost half the U.S. Army at the service of the employers.

The use of army troops brought about a bitter dispute pitting the Governor of Illinois and the Mayor of Chicago against President Grover Cleveland, who had ordered the troops sent in. And that led to the eventual defeat of Cleveland in his bid for renomination by the Democratic Party two years later. In the process of this epic tragedy, people were killed, the American Railway Union was destroyed, the Pullman workers were forced back to work on the company's terms, and George Pullman became a reviled caricature of the hard-hearted and unjust corporate Tycoon—all in order to keep labor in its place.

Recipe for Disaster

A "recession," as we would call it now, gripped the nation's economy beginning in 1893. Orders for Pullman cars fell off and management began a program of lay-offs and wage cuts. The cuts, applied not to managerial employees but only to the hourly workers, averaged 25 percent. Since Pullman wages were close to the subsistence level, it was a recipe for disaster. The situation was all the more desperate for the workers who lived in the town, because the company refused to lower the rents. Even more galling, the company made sure it collected the rents—right out of the pay! The company's control of the town (and the people in it) was close to absolute. Even the Green Stone Church was the company's property. Its use was rented out for religious services for a fee. Pullman expected the church building to earn the usual six percent return on investment. Indeed, George Pullman, expected the church building to be rented by various denominations, their services to operate much like the shifts in his shops.

A Money Machine

Everything he put his hand to made money. In 1880 he commenced building the shops and the town on 4,300 acres of land (about six square miles) which he had bought for 800,000 dollars. By 1892 it was valued at 5 million.

Some 12,000 people lived in the town, which ran according to Pullman's rules. No liquor could be sold except at the Florence Hotel, where workers hardly ventured. There were numerous regulations designed to reinforce the town's image of industrious decorum. In 1885 the illustrious Prof. Richard Ely wrote in Harper's Weekly that the power exercised by Bismarck (the unifier of Germany), was "utterly insignificant when compared with the ruling authority of the Pullman Palace Car Company in Pullman."

Declared one Pullman employee:

"We are born in a Pullman house, fed from the Pullman shops, taught in the Pullman school, catechized in the Pullman Church, and when we die we shall go to the Pullman Hell."

The Rev. William H. Carwardine, the Methodist minister in Pullman, characterized the town as a "civilized relic of European serfdom."

Is this an equitable model for the future of American labor? Everyone says "no," but if labor unions continue to stagnate and not reform themselves, if the Wal-Mart and Microsoft mindset of the employment contract continue to prevail, the American worker will go from one of the most admired on the planet to just another interchangeable, low-wage monkey.

Thursday, May 26

1:52 pm—The Good Old Gilded Age? Part 1

What happens to those that can't afford the new Republican Society? A friend of mine and I were talking about Social Security, and he asked one of the best unasked questions out there: what did we do before Social Security?

I told him more people died earlier. The population had a lower average life. Families were put upon to financially provide for ill or sick relatives. Children's lives were much harder. No 5-day work week, no child labor laws, no wage minimums. Then it occurred to me. Let's look at life in the Gilded Age, before the crash of 1929, and the rise of the New Deal. It is becoming clear that these are the times the Bush administration would like to lead us back to. Monopolies, laissez-faire economics, and the days when the barons of industry ruled. The pressure to break labor unions, the behind-the-scenes war on government regulation and oversight, the blind eye to all but the worst corporate crime, the K Street Project. This is a president more in tune with George Pullman than George Washington.

To move to a modern Gilded Age requires a step back for individual rights, income and class equities, consumer protection, labor rights, environmental protections, and a shredding of the societal safety net. Are we willing to give these things up in order to read about a handful of ultra-rich men and new tales of 21st century Rockefellers, JP Morgans, and Pierponts in the year 2025?

So I went looking on the internet for information about life during the Gilded Age. I didn't look for examples of how the rich live. That's too easy, and it wouldn't be a good representation of how the majority of Americans would live in Bush's New Gilded Age. I went looking for stories and articles on the lives of the poor and middle class during this time. Over the next few days, I'll post about life during this time. Perhaps the stories won't be that bad. Perhaps monkeys will fly out of my butt as well.

The first place I came to was an online book called "[How the Other Half Lives](#)," by Jacob Riis. In a chapter on children, called "[Waifs of the City's Slums](#)," here's a snippet on children in New York City tenement life:

1. FIRST among these barriers is the Foundling Asylum. It stands at the very outset of the waste of life that goes on in a population of nearly two millions of people; powerless to prevent it, though it gather in the outcasts by night and by day. In a score of years an army of twenty-five thousand of these forlorn little waifs have cried out from the streets of New York in arraignment of a Christian civilization under the blessings of which the instinct of motherhood even was smothered by poverty and want. Only the poor abandon their children. The stories of richly-dressed foundlings that are dished up in the newspapers at intervals are pure fiction. Not one instance of even a well-dressed infant having been picked up in the streets is on record. They come in rags, a newspaper often the only wrap, semi-occasionally one in a clean slip with some evidence of loving care; a little slip of paper pinned on, perhaps, with some such message as this I once read, in a woman's trembling hand: "Take care of Johnny, for God's sake. I cannot." But even that is the rarest of all happenings.

2. The city divides with the Sisters of Charity the task of gathering them in. The real foundlings, the children of the gutter that are picked up by the police, are the city's wards. In midwinter, when the poor shiver in their homes, and in the dog-days when the fierce heat and foul air of the tenements smother their babies by thousands, they are found, sometimes three and four in a night, in hallways, in areas and on the doorsteps of the rich, with whose comfort in luxurious homes the wretched mother somehow connects her own misery. Perhaps, as the drowning man clutches at a straw, she hopes that these happier hearts may have love to spare even for her little one. In this she is mistaken. Unauthorized babies especially are not popular in the abodes of the wealthy. It never happens outside of the story-books that a baby so deserted finds home and friends at once. Its career, though rather more official, is less romantic, and generally brief. After a night spent at Police Headquarters it travels up to the Infants' Hospital on Randall's Island in the morning, fitted out with a number and a bottle, that seldom see much wear before they are laid aside for a fresh recruit. Few outcast babies survive their desertion long. Murder is the true name of the mother's crime in eight cases out of ten. Of 508 babies received at the Randall's Island Hospital last year 333 died, 65.55 per cent. But of the 508 only 170 were picked up in the streets, and among these the mortality was much greater, probably nearer ninety per cent., if the truth were told. The rest were born in the hospitals. The high mortality among the foundlings is not to be marvelled at. The wonder is, rather, that any survive. The stormier the night, the more certain is the police nursery to echo with the feeble cries of abandoned babes. Often they come half dead from exposure. One live baby came in a little pine coffin which a policeman found an inhuman wretch trying to bury in an up-town lot. But many do not live to be officially registered as a charge upon the county. Seventy-two dead babies were picked up in the streets last year. Some of them were doubtless put out by poor parents to save funeral expenses. In hard times the number of dead and live foundlings always increases very noticeably. But whether travelling by way of the Morgue or the Infants' Hospital, the little army of waifs meets, reunited soon, in the trench in the Potter's Field where, if no medical student is in need of a subject, they are laid in squads of a dozen.

3. Most of the foundlings come from the East Side, where they are left by young mothers without wedding-rings or other name than their own to bestow upon the baby, returning from the island hospital to face an unpitying world with the evidence of their shame. Not infrequently they wear the bed-tick regimentals of the Public Charities, and thus their origin is easily enough traced. Oftener no ray of light penetrates the gloom, and no effort is made to probe the mystery of sin and sorrow. This also is the policy pursued in the great Foundling Asylum of the Sisters of Charity in Sixty-eighth Street, known all over the world as Sister Irene's Asylum. Years ago the crib that now stands just inside the street door, under the great main portal, was placed outside at night; but it filled up too rapidly. The babies took to coming in little squads instead of in single file, and in self-defence the sisters were forced to take the cradle in. Now the mother must bring her child inside and put it in the crib where she is seen by the sister on guard. No effort is made to question her, or discover the child's antecedents, but she is asked to stay and nurse her own and another baby. If she refuses, she is allowed to depart unhindered. If willing, she enters at once into the great family of the good Sister who in twenty-one years has gathered as many thousand homeless babies into her fold. One was brought in when I was last in the asylum, in the middle of July, that received in its crib the number 20715. The death-rate is of course lowered a good deal where exposure of the child is prevented. Among the eleven hundred infants in the asylum it was something over nineteen per cent. last year; but among those actually received in the twelvemonth nearer twice that figure. Even the nineteen per cent., remarkably low for a Foundling Asylum, was equal to the startling death-rate of Gotham Court in the cholera scourge.

One of the first things to strike me about this was the despair. Then the realization that this could be a parallel to life in an America without choice for women combined with a successful effort to end legal contraception. These are things right up the alley of the religious right, and orthodox Catholics. There's a lot more really horrible stuff there. Stuff that makes you feel proud to have the advantages you do today. But read this, and I'll put up more over the next few days.

'Watch Those Guys'

By E. J. Dionne Jr.

Thursday, May 26 (Washington Post)—No one was more relieved last night by the deal that avoided the end of Senate's right to filibuster judicial nominees than Arlen Specter.

The senior Republican senator from Pennsylvania began his political life revering John F. Kennedy and proudly declared himself a "Kennedy Democrat." The foundation of his career was the idea of checks and balances.

In the late 1960s, Specter decided that party loyalty could ask too much. Despite his Democratic leanings, he accepted the Republican nomination for district attorney in Philadelphia. He was running against a Democratic machine that was, as Specter once put it, "highly suspect if not demonstrably corrupt."

Along with Tom Gola, a legendary basketball star whom the Republicans ran for city comptroller, Specter argued that the citizens of Philadelphia desperately needed the minority party to have some power to curb the abuses of the majority.

Their brilliant slogan, one of my favorites: "We need these guys to watch those guys."

There could be no better argument for preserving judicial filibusters. That's why a substantial group of Republicans led by Sen. John McCain joined with moderate Democrats last night in a compromise that will keep the right to filibuster alive. [More](#)

The Liberal Project Now

Liberals need to remember their &Mac222;rst principles, rebuild a majority, and connect to a new generation.

Thursday, May 26 (The American Prospect)—Liberalism is at greater risk now than at any time in recent American history. The risk is of political marginality, even irrelevance. And the reason is not just a shift in partisan control of the federal government. There has been a radical change in the relationship of ideology and power in America. Only by renewing both the principled commitments to liberal ideals and the practical basis of liberal politics does liberalism have any chance of recovery.

Fifty years ago, the absence of ideological divisions was widely thought to be one of the distinguishing features of American politics. Now our politics is rife with ideological con&Mac223;ict, as conservatives take their crusade to remake America deeper into liberal terrain. The issue is no longer, as it was in the earlier stages of conservatism's revival, merely a reversal of Great Society programs and the activism of the Warren Court. What's now under attack are such basic constitutional principles as church-state separation and an independent judiciary and such fundamental elements of modern liberalism as progressive taxation and Social Security.

The Democrats' loss of both Congress and the presidency is the immediate source of jeopardy to liberal principles and policies, but the revolution of contemporary Republicanism is the reason the switch in partisan control has had so great an impact. The Republicans have made themselves into a far more conservative party than they used to be, not just during the Eisenhower years but even during the 1980s. Under George W. Bush, the party has become more closely identi&Mac222;ed with its conservative religious base and more consistently devoted to dismantling the constitutional and &Mac222;scal underpinnings of liberal government. [More](#)

Raw Deal

Forget the spin: Bush and Frist got almost everything they wanted.

Thursday, May 26 (The American Prospect)—The Washington press loves the myth that polarization is what ails American politics and that bipartisan moderation will save the day. The high drama of the "nuclear option" averted by brave moderates fits the script perfectly.

Republican Senate leader Bill Frist, wanting court nominees to sail through Senate confirmation on a simple majority vote, threatened to scrap the filibuster by rigging the Senate rules. Just hours before this nuclear option was to be exercised, 14 moderates of both parties, after marathon negotiations, fashioned a compromise in which three controversial nominees get an immediate floor vote, and the filibuster is preserved, sort of.

Initial press accounts offered hosannas to moderation. Several reports painted Frist as isolated and humiliated, and right-wing groups furious. The only problem is that this happy spin is almost totally wrong.

Consider what actually happened.

By threatening what amounted to a parliamentary coup d'etat, Frist got nearly everything he wanted. A Senate rules change requires a two-thirds vote. Frist's so called nuclear option would have had the leadership rule that the filibuster can be scrapped for judicial nominees; then a simple majority of 51 senators would have upheld the parliamentary ruling. End of

filibuster. [More](#)

15 Years on the Bottom Rung

Thursday, May 26 (New York Times)—In the dark before dawn, when Madison Avenue was all but deserted and its pricey boutiques were still locked up tight, several Mexicans slipped quietly into 3 Guys, a restaurant that the Zagat guide once called "the most expensive coffee shop in New York."

For the next 10 hours they would fry eggs, grill burgers, pour coffee and wash dishes for a stream of customers from the Upper East Side of Manhattan. By 7:35 a.m., Eliot Spitzer, attorney general of New York, was holding a power breakfast back near the polished granite counter. In the same burgundy booth a few hours later, Michael A. Wiener, co-founder of the multibillion-dollar Infinity Broadcasting, grabbed a bite with his wife, Zena. Just the day before, Uma Thurman slipped in for a quiet lunch with her children, but the paparazzi found her and she left.

More Mexicans filed in to begin their shifts throughout the morning, and by the time John Zannikos, one of the restaurant's three Greek owners, drove in from the North Jersey suburbs to work the lunch crowd, Madison Avenue was buzzing. So was 3 Guys. "You got to wait a little bit," Mr. Zannikos said to a pride of elegant women who had spent the morning at the Whitney Museum of American Art, across Madison Avenue at 75th Street. For an illiterate immigrant who came to New York years ago with nothing but \$100 in his pocket and a willingness to work etched on his heart, could any words have been sweeter to say?

With its wealthy clientele, middle-class owners and low-income work force, 3 Guys is a template of the class divisions in America. But it is also the setting for two starkly different tales about breaching those divides.

The familiar story is Mr. Zannikos's. For him, the restaurant - don't dare call it a diner - with its \$20 salads and elegant décor represents the American promise of upward mobility, one that has been fulfilled countless times for generations of hard-working immigrants.

But for Juan Manuel Peralta, a 34-year-old illegal immigrant who worked there for five years until he was fired last May, and for many of the other illegal Mexican immigrants in the back, restaurant work today is more like a dead end. They are finding the American dream of moving up far more elusive than it was for Mr. Zannikos. Despite his efforts to help them, they risk becoming stuck in a permanent underclass of the poor, the unskilled and the uneducated. [More](#)

Wednesday, May 25

Devil We Know

Wednesday, May 25 (The New Republic)—It may take a while to sort out all the details, but we do know some of what happened last week in Andijon, Uzbekistan: Government soldiers shot and killed hundreds of unarmed protesters, who had assembled after rebels freed 2,000 prisoners from a local jail. "They shot us like rabbits," an Uzbeki told Reuters, "and chased and finished us off like dogs in side streets and alleys."

We also know that the Bush administration's immediate response was grotesque. "We are concerned about the outbreak of violence," White House spokesbot Scott McClellan said, "particularly by some members of a terrorist organization that were freed from prison." It was three days before the administration shifted the balance of its criticism to Uzbekistan's government, saying that the slaying of innocents was "deeply disturbing."

The roots of the crisis are not complicated. Uzbekistan's dictator, Islam Karimov, does not tolerate dissent. A former communist apparatchik turned pro-Western kleptocrat, Karimov has tortured and killed his way to the top of the heap of the world's human rights abusers. His medieval regime notoriously suffocates prisoners with chlorine-filled gas masks and has boiled at least two opponents in cauldrons of water. He has used a real but exaggerated threat from an Al Qaeda-affiliated terrorist organization, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), as a cudgel to destroy all opposition. [More](#)

False Prophets

Wednesday, May 25 (New Donkey)—Surely there is no subject on which more words are currently being said with less real meaning than that of the intersection of religion and politics in America. And that is why you ought to read a recent New Republic piece by the indispensable Alan Wolfe, who cuts through the fog like a search-light.

In the format of a review of Jim Wallis' much-discussed God's Politics, along with a collection of case studies of religio-political cooperative ventures, Wolfe pens a long, eloquent and often angry essay about the growing willingness of evangelical Christian leaders to reject the liberal principles of tolerance, pluralism and church-state separation that made the growth of their own tradition possible in the first place.

In other words, suggests Wolfe, they've traded their birthright for a mess of pottage:

They have rendered under Caesar what is Caesar's: themselves, as it happens, and all the political power that comes with them. They dwell not in the house of the Lord, but in the House of Representatives. Their prayer breakfasts are strategy sessions, their churches are auxiliaries of political parties, their pastors are political bosses. Their God must be great: look at the clout of his constituency.

In plunging into illiberal politics, says Wolfe, conservative evangelicals have willfully forgotten that America's liberal traditions, especially those expressed in the First Amendment towards which they so often express contempt, have been essential to their ability to grow and develop in the past, and may become so again in the future.

[More](#)

Dean says Dems won't take black voters for granted

Wednesday, May 25 (Chicago Sun Times)—Black voters are upset with the Democratic Party for coming around just weeks before elections seeking their votes, party chairman Howard Dean said Tuesday in an interview with the Associated Press.

Taking black voters for granted is a long-standing problem for the party that dates to the 1960s, said Dean, who promised changes in strategy.

"African-Americans are annoyed with the Democratic Party because we ask them for their votes four weeks before the election instead of being in the community now, and that's a mistake I'm trying to fix," he said. ". . . We can't go out and say could you vote for us because we were so helpful during the civil rights era." [More](#)

"A democracy can die of too many lies"

Television journalist Bill Moyers blasts flag-wearing phonies, reporters who parrot the government line, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting's "dangerous" campaign to silence dissenting voices.

Wednesday, May 25 (Salon.com)—can't imagine better company on this beautiful Sunday morning in St. Louis. You're church for me today, and there's no congregation in the country where I would be more likely to find more kindred souls than are gathered here.

There are so many different vocations and callings in this room -- so many different interests and aspirations of people who want to reform the media or produce for the media -- that only a presiding bishop like Bob McChesney with his great ecumenical heart could bring us together for a weekend like this.

What joins us all under Bob's embracing welcome is our commitment to public media. Pat Aufderheide got it right, I think, in the recent issue of In These Times when she wrote: "This is a moment when public media outlets can make a powerful case for themselves. Public radio, public TV, cable access, public DBS channels, media arts centers, youth media projects, nonprofit Internet news services ... low-power radio and webcasting are all part of a nearly-invisible feature of today's media map: the public media sector. They exist not to make a profit, not to push an ideology, not to serve customers, but to create a public -- a group of people who can talk productively with those who don't share their views, and defend the interests of the people who have to live with the consequences of corporate and governmental power."

She gives examples of the possibilities. "Look at what happened," she said, "when thousands of people who watched Stanley Nelson's 'The Murder of Emmett Till' on their public television channels joined a postcard campaign that re-opened the murder case after more than half a century. Look at NPR's courageous coverage of the Iraq war, an expensive endeavor that wins no points from this Administration. Look at Chicago Access Network's Community Forum, where nonprofits throughout the region can showcase their issues and find volunteers."

For all our flaws, Pat argues that the public media are a very important resource in a noisy and polluted information environment.

You can also take wings reading Jason Miller's May 4 article on Z Net about the mainstream media. While it is true that much of it is corrupted by the influence of government and corporate interests, Miller writes, there are still men and women in the mainstream who practice a high degree of journalistic integrity and who do challenge us with their stories and analysis. But the real hope lies within the internet with its two billion or more web sites providing a wealth of information drawn from almost unlimited resources that span the globe ... If knowledge is power, one's capacity to increase that power increases exponentially through navigation of the Internet for news and information."

Surely this is one issue that unites us as we leave here today. The fight to preserve the web from corporate gatekeepers joins media reformers, producers and educators -- and it's a

fight that has only just begun.

I want to tell you about another fight we're in today. The story I've come to share with you goes to the core of our belief that the quality of democracy and the quality of journalism are deeply entwined. I can tell this story because I've been living it. It's been in the news this week, including reports of more attacks on a single journalist -- yours truly -- by the right-wing media and their allies at the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

As some of you know, CPB was established almost 40 years ago to set broad policy for public broadcasting and to be a firewall between political influence and program content. What some on this board are now doing today, led by its chairman, Kenneth Tomlinson, is too important, too disturbing and, yes, even too dangerous for a gathering like this not to address.

We're seeing unfold a contemporary example of the age-old ambition of power and ideology to squelch and punish journalists who tell the stories that make princes and priests uncomfortable.

Let me assure you that I take in stride attacks by the radical right-wingers who have not given up demonizing me although I retired over six months ago. They've been after me for years now and I suspect they will be stomping on my grave to make sure I don't come back from the dead. I should remind them, however, that one of our boys pulled it off some 2,000 years ago -- after the Pharisees, Sadducees and Caesar's surrogates thought they had shut him up for good. Of course I won't be expecting that kind of miracle, but I should put my detractors on notice: They might just compel me out of the rocking chair and back into the anchor chair. [More](#)

Editor's note: This is an address given by Bill Moyers at the National Conference for Media Reform in St. Louis, Mo., on Sunday, May 15.

My right-wing degree

How I learned to convert liberal campuses into conservative havens at Morton Blackwell's Leadership Institute, alma mater of Karl Rove, Ralph Reed, Jeff Gannon and two Miss Americas.

Wednesday, May 25 (Salon.com)— One recent Sunday, at Morton Blackwell's Leadership Institute, a dozen students meet for the second and final day of training in grass-roots youth politics. All are earnest, idealistic and as right wing as you can get. They take careful notes as instructor Paul Gourley teaches them how to rig a campus mock election.

It's nothing illegal -- no ballot stuffing necessary, even at the most liberal colleges. First you find a nonpartisan campus group to sponsor the election, so you can't be accused of cheating. Next, volunteer to organize the thing. College students are lazy, and they'll probably let you. Always keep in mind that a rigged mock election is all about location, location, location.

"Can anyone tell me," asks Gourley, a veteran mock electioneer, "why you don't want the polling place in the cafeteria?"

Stephen, a shy antiabortion activist sitting toward the rear of the class, raises his hand: "Because you want to suppress the vote?"

"Stephen has the right answer!" Gourley exclaims, tossing Stephen his prize, a copy of Robert Bork's "Slouching Toward Gomorrah."

The students, strait-laced kids from good colleges, seem unconvinced. The lesson -- that with sufficient organization, the act of voting becomes less a basic right than a tactical maneuver -- doesn't sit easy with some students at first. Gourley, a charismatic senior from South Dakota and the treasurer of the College Republican National Committee, assures them: "This is not anti-democracy. This is not shady. Just put [the polling place] somewhere where you might have to put a little bit of effort into voting." The rest, Gourley explains, is just a matter of turnout.

When the state or national candidate you're backing wins by a suitably large margin, as he or she surely will, have the nonpartisan group that sponsored the election sign off on your prewritten celebratory press release and send it statewide. Reporters will almost certainly ignore it, but after a dozen similar victories, they'll start dashing off articles about the youth phenomenon behind your candidate's campaign -- or better yet, just start plagiarizing your press releases. [More](#)

Tuesday, May 24

Guidant Didn't Disclose a Flaw in Defibrillator for 3 Years

Tuesday, May 24 (New York Times)—A medical device maker, the Guidant Corporation, did not tell doctors or patients for three years that a unit implanted in an estimated 24,000 people that is designed to shock a faltering heart contains a flaw that has caused a small number of those units to short-circuit and malfunction.

The matter has come to light after the death of a 21-year-old college student from Minnesota, Joshua Oukrop, with a genetic heart disease. Guidant acknowledges that his device, known as a defibrillator, short-circuited. The young man was in Moab, Utah, on a spring break bicycling trip in March with his girlfriend when he complained of fatigue. He then fell to the ground and died of cardiac arrest.

Guidant subsequently told his doctors that it was aware of 25 other cases in which the defibrillator, a Ventak Prizm 2 Model 1861, had been affected by the same flaw. Guidant said it had changed its manufacturing processes three years ago to fix the problem. The physicians say that had they known earlier, they would have replaced the unit in their patient because he was at high risk of sudden death. His death is the only one known.

A defibrillator is surgically implanted in the chest under the skin. It sends out an electrical charge to try to shock a chaotically beating heart back into normal rhythm.

In interviews in recent days, a top Guidant executive, Dr. Joseph M. Smith, said that the company had not seen a compelling reason to issue an alert to physicians about the defibrillators because the failure rate was very low and replacing the devices might pose greater patient risks.

But late yesterday, when told that The New York Times was preparing an article about the device, the company issued an advisory to doctors about it. Guidant is recommending that the unit not be replaced because of the electrical problem.

The episode highlights an important issue: Doctors and patients are not always told when a medical device maker has data indicating that its product has a flaw that, while rare, poses potential dangers. Also, companies are not required to report immediately all safety modifications to the Food and Drug Administration. [More](#)

Monday, May 23

4:12 pm—I Have Been A Role Model for Thousands. Unfortunately, I've Buggered a Few Along the Way

Future former Spokane Mayor Jim West [spills his guts](#) about everything he's done right, takes the OJ pledge to ultimately be found innocent, and how he's mentored what must be thousands of young people over the years. Unfortunately, he didn't apologize for being a gay, anti-gay hypocrite—but, what the hey....

Thanks to [Crooks & Liars](#), your home for video blogs

Tillman family blasts Army's report on how he died

Monday, May 23 (Chicago Sun Times)—The family of former professional football Pat Tillman says the Army disrespected his memory by lying in its investigation of his death in Afghanistan last year.

In interviews with the Washington Post, the Army Ranger's mother and father said they believe the military and the government created a heroic tale about how their son died to foster a patriotic response across the country. [More](#)

America Wants Security

By PAUL KRUGMAN

Monday, May 23 (New York Times)—The news here isn't that some politicians wrap their deference to corporate interests in the flag. The news, instead, is that Maryland's State Legislature passed a pro-worker bill in the first place. In fact, the bill passed by a veto-proof majority in the Maryland Senate, and fell just short of that margin in the House.

After November's election, the victors claimed a mandate to unravel the welfare state. But the national election was about who would best defend us from gay married terrorists. At the state level, where elections were fought on bread-and-butter issues, voters sent a message that they wanted a stronger, not weaker, social safety net.

I'm not just talking about the shift in partisan alignment, in which Democrats made modest gains in state legislatures, and achieved a few startling successes. I'm also talking about

specific issues, like the lopsided votes in both Florida and Nevada for constitutional amendments raising the minimum wage.

Since the election, high-profile right-wing initiatives, at both the federal and state level, have run into a stone wall of public disapproval. President Bush's privatization road show seems increasingly pathetic. In California, the conservative agenda of Arnold Schwarzenegger, including an attempt to partially privatize state pensions, has led to demonstrations by nurses, teachers, police officers and firefighters - and to a crash in his approval ratings.

There's a very good reason voters, when given a chance to make a clear choice, increasingly support a stronger, not a weaker, social safety net: they need that net more than ever. Over the past 25 years the lives of working Americans have become ever less secure. Jobs come without health insurance; 401(k)'s vanish; corporations default on their pension obligations; workers lose their jobs more often, and unemployment lasts much longer than it used to. [More](#)

Dean, Feisty and Unbowed, Stands By Words on DeLay

Monday, May 23 (New York Times)—Howard Dean, the Democratic National Committee chairman, said Sunday that Tom DeLay, the House majority leader, was likely to go to jail over ethical transgressions and called on him to step down pending the outcome of inquiries into his actions.

Dr. Dean offered a blistering review of the Republican Party - "I hate what the Republicans are doing to this country, I really do," he said - and used Mr. DeLay as an example of the "abuse of power" that he said now permeated Washington.

"This gentleman is not an ethical person, and he ought not to be leading Congress, period," Dr. Dean said on "Meet the Press" on NBC. "And it is endemic of what happens in Congress when one party controls everything."

It was the first national television interview Dr. Dean has granted since he was elected chairman in February, and the appearance is part of the party's orchestrated effort to raise his profile. Reinforcing an impression suggested by his often freewheeling remarks on a 100-day nationwide tour he made when he started the job, Dr. Dean left little doubt on Sunday that he is a different party leader than his predecessors or his counterpart in the Republican Party, Ken Mehlman.

He offered bruising attacks on Mr. DeLay, President Bush and Rush Limbaugh, among others, and freely expressed his opinion on almost every issue he was questioned about. "I'm proudly willing to say anything," Dr. Dean said as he sidestepped a question about whom he viewed as the front-runner to win his party's presidential nomination in 2008. And he repeatedly declined to back off any of the more noteworthy statements he made during his tour, including his suggestion last week in Massachusetts that Mr. DeLay was going to jail and his mocking mention of Mr. Limbaugh's addiction to painkillers in an effort to portray him as a hypocrite. [More](#)

Ed note: [here's a little bit of video](#), courtesy of [Crooks & Liars](#)

7:57 am—Hopefully, a Dem Roundup Like This Wouldn't be So...Sad

From Armchair Subversive:

- Republican anti-abortion activist Howard Scott Heldreth is a convicted child rapist in Florida.
- Republican County Commissioner David Swartz pleaded guilty to molesting two girls under the age of 11 and was sentenced to 8 years in prison.
- Republican judge Mark Pazuhanych pleaded no contest to fondling a 10-year old girl and was sentenced to 10 years probation.
- Republican anti-abortion activist Nicholas Morency pleaded guilty to possessing child pornography on his computer and offering a bounty to anybody who murders an abortion doctor.
- Republican legislator Edison Mislal Aldarondo was sentenced to 10 years in prison for raping his daughter between the ages of 9 and 17.

And unfortunately, many, [many more](#)

Friday, May 20

4:50 pm—Sorry Atrios, but I Couldn't Have Said it Any Better Myself

[From Eschaton:](#)

Brad Speak, You Listen

Three simple points on the increasingly irrelevant Social Security debate which our great and mighty and ethical press corps needs to understand before they should write about it:

It is a clown show, an episode of stupidity of a jaw-dropping magnitude:

1. The administration's Social Security gurus shove Bush out there with talking points saying that we need to act now to pass the Bush plan, because starting in 2017 Social Security will start taking resources away from the rest of the government and that's a very bad thing--and then they roll out a plan in which Social Security starts taking resources away from the rest of the government in 2011.
2. The administration's Social Security gurus shove Bush out there with talking points saying that passing the Bush plan is essential because if we don't the Social Security trust fund balance will hit zero in 2041, and big benefit cuts will then be necessary--and then they roll out a plan in which the Social Security trust fund balance hits zero in 2030.
3. The administration's Social Security gurus shove Bush out there with talking points about the importance of restoring actuarial balance to Social Security--and then they roll out a plan which closes less than a third of the 75-year funding gap (and refuse to specify the plan in sufficient detail to allow anyone to do a longer-run analysis).

Remember that the next time you read a story about "reforming" Social Security.

No Way Out:

How Prime-Age Workers Get Trapped in Minimum Wage Jobs

Friday, May 20 (Center for Economic and Policy Research)—Executive Summary Most minimum wage workers are adults making significant contributions to the total family income. In the early 2000s, less than one-in-five workers earning the minimum wage was under the age of 20 and half were between the ages of 25 and 54.

Moving into a job that pays more than the minimum wage is critical for families who want to achieve an above-poverty lifestyle. Even if a worker is employed full-time, full-year at the minimum wage, she earns just \$10,300, putting her below the poverty threshold of \$13,020 for a one-parent, one-child family. Further, most workers employed at or near the minimum wage are not offered (or cannot afford) health insurance from their employer, leaving them with a high probability of being uninsured.

This report finds that prime-age workers in minimum wage jobs are likely to "get stuck" at those jobs. Over a third of prime-age adults in minimum wage jobs remain in minimum wage jobs three years later. Not all adults in minimum wage jobs have the same chance of moving into a job paying more than the minimum wage.

The probability of moving out of a minimum wage job is higher for men, native-born citizens, those with union jobs, and those that change industry and/or occupation. The probability of staying in a minimum wage job was greater in the early and mid-1990s, as compared to the late 1990s and early 2000s. The low unemployment and strong wage growth of the late 1990s meant that many more were able to move up the job ladder, compared to periods of higher unemployment.

The minimum wage was established as a floor for wages. It is unfortunate that this floor has eroded so much that a worker with one child will be nearly \$3,000 below the poverty line if she works at minimum wage full-time, full-year. Minimum wage jobs are now something to be escaped. Unfortunately, once in a minimum wage job, few adults are able to "escape" this low-wage work, especially if they are female, non-native, or not lucky enough to have a union job. [More](#)

The Physics of Space Security

(This is an excerpt from the introduction to The Physics of Space Security: A Reference Manual, a report published by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (AAAS). The report was written as part of the AAAS "Reconsidering the Rules of Space" project.)

Friday, May 20 (Union of Concerned Scientists)—In the nearly fifty years since the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, there has been a steady growth in the number of states that have launched satellites into orbit. Growing even faster is the number of countries that have deployed satellites launched by others. Currently, satellites serve a multitude of civilian and military functions, from facilitating communications and weather forecasting to providing highly accurate navigational information, and many nations envision making future investments in satellites for such uses.

In the U.S. military, there is also a growing interest in broadening the military uses of space to include basing weapons in space, as well as in developing means to attack the satellites of other nations and to protect U.S. satellites from attack. While space has long been home to military systems such as observation, communication, and navigation satellites, these new missions would be a departure from long-held norms. There are currently no known weapons stationed in space that are explicitly designed to apply force. Nor are there any known deployed systems designed explicitly to destroy satellites, either from the ground or from space.

This shift in U.S. military thinking is evident from planning documents released in recent years that envision a restructuring of military commands and the development and deployment of anti-satellite weapons and space-based weapons. These new systems are meant to fulfill four general missions:

- * defending U.S. satellites and ensuring U.S. freedom to operate in space
- * denying adversaries the ability to use space assets
- * intercepting ballistic missiles using space-based interceptors
- * attacking targets on the ground or in the air using space-based weapons

The first two missions reflect the military importance of current U.S. space-based systems. This utility has led to a desire to protect these systems and to deny similar capabilities to potential adversaries, as well as to concern that potential adversaries would seek to disrupt U.S. satellites in a conflict. The third mission is an ongoing interest of many missile defense proponents and is leading toward the deployment of prototype weapons in space as part of a space "testbed." The fourth mission, which has attracted considerable public attention and concern, currently appears to be of less interest to the U.S. military than the other missions. [More](#)

Bush Continues Social Security Campaign

Polls Show President's Roadshow Failing to Drive Up Support for His Plan

Friday, May 20 (Washington Post)— The obligatory campaign-style signs were hung behind the stage, the familiar hand-selected "conversation participants" seated next to him. The friendly, invitation-only audience cheered with appropriate enthusiasm. And when President Bush took the microphone, he spun out more or less the same speech he has given dozens of times before.

On the 78th day of a 60-day roadshow, the president's nationwide Social Security tour, even to some of his own aides, has the feel of a past-its-prime Broadway production that has been held over while other, newer shows steal the spotlight.

On Capitol Hill, they are talking about filibusters, on Embassy Row about the civilian massacre in Uzbekistan, at the Pentagon about the latest surge in violence in Iraq. But Bush keeps plugging on, pounding home a practiced message on Social Security that polls show so far has not sold the country.

"I'm just beginning this debate," Bush said in an appearance at the Milwaukee Art Museum, his 32nd Social Security event this year. "I'm going to spend whatever time it takes to continue traveling this country and make it absolutely clear to the people, we've got a problem." [More](#)

Thursday, May 19

5:01 pm—Why It Doesn't Matter to Republicans

After reading the first few lines of [this from MSNBC](#), I wondered—almost aloud, "why don't the plummeting approval ratings for George Bush and the Congress matter to Republicans? A few simple answers.

First and foremost, they don't believe that people are smart enough to remember the bad things in November. And why should they, since they used fear, smoke and mirrors to reelect Bush. I'm sure they have a plan that will hatch around the fall or early winter to go on a strict image renewal program. While at the same time they'll find a new pet issue, some feel immigration, to divide the electorate and retain their hold on Congress.

Next, they feel they have victim status. That everyone is against them only makes them dig in all the more.

Aligned with victim status is Christian persecution status. "They hate us because we are Christian and trying to save the soul of this nation. Since we'll never find consolation in the hearts and minds of sinners, let us do the right thing and console ourselves in the coming thankfulness of God." Or something along those lines.

I honestly do not feel they are sweating the filibuster vote, Terri Schiavo, Tom DeLay, the deficit, or any of the other nails that would have long ago sealed the coffin of any other living political party. They have God to pray to, and crooked politics to trust. Who could ask for anything more?

Jury Finds N.C. Agency Allowed Racially Hostile Work Environment

Thursday, May 19 (Washington Post)—North Carolina's Transportation Department allowed a racially hostile workplace but will not have to pay damages to black workers who sued after a white co-worker hung a noose in a maintenance shop, a federal jury decided Wednesday.

Seven black workers alleged in the civil rights suit that white supervisors did nothing about the situation even after learning of the noose. They said the rope remained on display for 35 days in 2002 beginning Feb. 1, the start of Black History Month.

Ed note: "What, no sense of humor?"

Wednesday, May 18

Life of the Party

Iowa Gov. Tom Vilsack says he's not interested in running the country, but he has plenty of ideas for how Democrats can win it back and restore the "American promise."

Wednesday, May 18 (Salon.com (subscription))—Iowans like their governor just fine, thanks, but they don't particularly care for the idea that he might run for president. Tom Vilsack was on the shortlist of contenders to be John Kerry's running mate, and he was briefly a candidate for the chairmanship of the Democratic National Committee. But Iowans seem to have a hard time getting their minds around one of their own as a national political leader. An Iowa poll taken earlier this year has 55 percent of the state's population saying it would be a "bad idea" for Vilsack to run for the White House.

Poll numbers like that didn't stop Bill Clinton -- a few months before he announced his candidacy in 1991, a plurality of Arkansas residents said he shouldn't -- and they aren't likely to stop Tom Vilsack, either. Iowa's first Democratic governor in 30 years won't say whether he's running in 2008, but he won't deny it, either. He says he's concentrating on the current legislative term in Des Moines and on helping Democrats win governors races across the country in 2006. But in the next breath, he begins articulating the sort of centrist political approach -- strong on national security, big on values, a lot of talk about the "American promise" -- that is music to the ears of those who believe that the road to the White House runs right up the middle.

Ask Vilsack whether Kerry lost in 2004 because he didn't do enough to distinguish himself from George W. Bush, and whether the Democrats might benefit from a leader more in the Howard Dean mold, and the mild-mannered governor begins to bristle: "That's not where the country is," he says.

Vilsack believes the country can be found in the heartland, but he doesn't mean just geographically. Americans are worried about change, he says, and they need leaders who understand their worries, who can relate to them and reassure them that there's still reason to believe in the idea that each generation of Americans will have it better than the one before.

Vilsack recently spoke with Salon by telephone from his office in Des Moines. [More](#)

LET'S NOT TALK ABOUT SEX.

Prayer Center

Wednesday, May 18 (The New Republic (subscription))—It's 8 a.m. on a Tuesday, and Jim Wallis already looks tired. Rising from his cluttered desk in the rundown offices in the Northwest Washington, D.C., neighborhood where he has worked for the past quarter-century, the evangelical activist moves slowly. His voice is deep and drowsy, and there's a droop to his faded blue eyes that no amount of sleep seems likely to relieve.

Not that Wallis has time for sleep. Since January, he has been feverishly amassing frequent-flier miles promoting his new book, *God's Politics*, which slaps both liberals and conservatives for allowing Christianity to become a political tool serving the "pro-rich, pro-war, and only pro-American" agenda of the far right. In addition to the usual booksignings, Wallis has been spreading his gospel at churches coast-to-coast, in scores of op-eds and news stories, and on every political chat-fest from "The O'Reilly Factor" to the "Daily Show."

More privately, he is providing politicospiritual counsel to an electorally shell-shocked Democratic Party understandably charmed by his contention that the right's myopic obsession with abortion and gay rights is nothing short of "bad theology." And, all the while, Wallis keeps one eye on his day jobs as editor of *Sojourners*, the liberal Christian magazine he co-founded in 1971; president of Call to Renewal, the anti-poverty coalition he formed in 1995; visiting lecturer at Harvard, where he teaches a course on "Faith, Politics, and Society"; and father of two young boys, ages two and six. A man half Wallis's 56 years would be tempted to plead for a less punishing schedule, but the veteran activist embraces the current whirlwind as the providential opportunity of a lifetime.

Since his student days in the civil rights and antiwar movements, Wallis has been struggling to mobilize Christians against social problems traditionally identified as concerns of the political left, such as poverty and racism. But, in U.S. religious circles, such issues have long taken a backseat--especially in the political arena--to matters of personal morality like abortion and gay rights. Even Wallis admits that, despite years of sustained effort by *Sojourners* and *Call to Renewal*, the crusade to expand Americans' faith-based agenda has had limited success. "We'd be doing stuff, and I'd keep thinking, 'This is gonna really break through,'" he recalls. "But, the truth is, it has felt like a monologue of the religious right when it comes to values and politics and faith." Wallis harrumphs with disgust--his energy level rising along with his irritation--at how the left simply "handed over religion and values," a move he regards as "the biggest mistake progressives have made in decades." He marvels, "So then the right says, 'Thank you very much. Now we'll define religion in totally partisan ways. It will be a wedge and a weapon to divide and conquer for our partisan agenda.'"

But, according to Wallis, all that is about to change. Thanks to the prominent role "moral values" voters ostensibly played in reelecting George W. Bush, all of America is buzzing about the political power of religion. The mainstream press is suddenly fascinated by Christian culture, while panicked Democrats have vowed to shed their image as out-of-touch with--if not downright hostile to--people of faith. In turn, believers of all stripes are rushing to seize the moment. Even as the right wields its new electoral clout against gay marriage and judicial activism, members of what could loosely be termed the religious non-right are speaking out in an effort to change the public perception of what it means to be a Christian--and, more specifically, what it means to vote like one. [More](#)

Lefkow rips attacks on judges

Wednesday, May 18 (Chicago Sun-times)—U.S. District Judge Joan Humphrey Lefkow -- whose husband and mother were murdered in her Chicago home -- asked the Senate on Wednesday to condemn harsh remarks about the judiciary by commentators such as evangelist Pat Robertson and members of Congress, saying their words could spark more violence.

"Fostering disrespect for judges can only encourage those that are on the edge, or on the fringe, to exact revenge on a judge who displeases them," Lefkow told the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Lefkow's husband and mother were shot to death in the basement of the judge's home in February. Bart Ross, a 57-year-old unemployed electrician from Chicago, committed suicide in suburban Milwaukee in March after leaving a note confessing to the murders. He had been angered when Lefkow dismissed a malpractice suit he had filed, authorities said.

The judge also was the target of a murder plot by white supremacist Matthew Hale. A federal jury convicted Hale in April 2004 of soliciting her murder, and he was sentenced last month to 40 years in prison. She was never attacked.

Congress should "publicly and persistently repudiate gratuitous attacks on the judiciary" that have occurred in the days since after the Terri Schiavo case, Lefkow told the hearing on courthouse security.

After the death of Schiavo, a brain-damaged Florida woman whose parents unsuccessfully sought to have her feeding tube reinserted despite her husband's wishes, some Republican members of Congress lashed out at judges involved in the case.

At the time, Sen. Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania said, "The actions on the part of the Florida court and the U.S. Supreme Court are unconscionable."

"This loss happened because our legal system did not protect the people who need protection most, and that will change," House Majority Leader Tom DeLay said. "The time will come for the men responsible for this to answer for their behavior."

Referring to a different decision, Sen. John Cornyn of Texas said he wondered whether frustration against perceived political decisions by judges "builds up and builds up to the point where some people engage in violence, certainly without any justification."

Robertson, founder of the Christian Coalition and head of the Christian Broadcasting Network, appeared on ABC's "This Week" earlier this month and criticized the federal courts. "Over 100 years, I think the gradual erosion of the consensus that's held our country together is probably more serious than a few bearded terrorists who fly into buildings," he said.

Lefkow said that kind of "harsh rhetoric is truly dangerous." [More](#)



Villaraigosa Landslide

* Voter Discontent Helps Propel Challenger to a Historic Victory

Wednesday, May 18 (LA Times)—Antonio Villaraigosa romped past incumbent James K. Hahn to make history Tuesday, winning election as the first Latino mayor of Los Angeles since the city's pioneer days.

Riding a huge wave of voter discontent, the challenger avenged his 2001 loss to Hahn, who possessed an iconic family name but never connected strongly with voters during a rocky four-year term.

Villaraigosa's landslide represented a crowning symbol of Latinos' growing clout in California, after decades of population gains that failed to produce a commensurate rise in political power. L.A.'s last Latino mayor, Cristobal Aguilar, left office in 1872, when the now-sprawling metropolis was a frontier outpost of barely 6,000 people. The runoff contest also produced a striking parallel with the city's last breakthrough election in 1973, when Tom Bradley won a rematch against incumbent Sam Yorty to become the first black mayor of Los Angeles. That race also marked the last time a mayor was turned out of City Hall.

Shortly before midnight, a beaming Villaraigosa greeted chanting supporters to claim victory and restate his campaign's theme of unity.

"It doesn't matter whether you grew up on the Eastside or the Westside, whether you're from South Los Angeles or Sylmar," he said. "It doesn't matter whether you go to work in a fancy car or on a bus, or whether you worship in a cathedral or a synagogue or a mosque. We are all Angelenos, and we all have a difference to make." [More](#)

A Likely Script for The 'Nuclear Option'

Wednesday, May 18 (Washington Post)—The "nuclear option" will have a long fuse.

If all goes as planned, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) will rise after several days of debate beginning today over one of President Bush's judicial nominees and call for an end to Democrats' delaying tactics. The presiding officer will then rule in his favor.

Democrats will protest the ruling and ask for a vote to overturn it. The Republican leader will seek to table that appeal. If Frist and the GOP majority prevail, a long tradition of filibustering will be narrowed and a new precedent will be set allowing the Republicans to force a vote on a nomination with a simple majority instead of three-fifths of the Senate.

Republicans hold 55 of the seats in the chamber, and until now they have needed 60 votes to end debate and force a vote. But Republicans believe they have figured out how to use the chamber's rules so that only a simple majority -- 51 votes -- is required to force an up-or-down vote.

To get there, Republicans will have to evade a requirement that they have a two-thirds vote -- 67 of 100 senators -- to change the chamber's rules. Republicans will argue that they are attempting to set a precedent, not change the Senate rules, to disallow the use of filibusters as a delaying tactic on judicial nominations. And by doing so, they say, they are returning to a more traditional concept of majority rule. [More](#)

Briton Denies Having Rights to Buy Iraqi Oil

Lawmaker Challenges U.S. Case for War

Wednesday, May 18 (Washington Post)—A British lawmaker forcefully denied allegations in a Senate hearing yesterday that he received rights to purchase millions of barrels of Iraqi oil at a discount from Saddam Hussein's government, and he delivered a fiery attack on three decades of U.S. policy toward Iraq.

George Galloway, a formidable debater recently ousted from the British Labor Party after attacking Prime Minister Tony Blair for supporting the war in Iraq, used his appearance before the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations as a forum to challenge the veracity of the Bush administration's case for going to war.

He also unleashed a personal attack against panel Chairman Norm Coleman (R-Minn.), calling his investigation the "mother of all smoke screens" designed to "divert attention from the crimes that you supported" by endorsing President Bush's decision to invade Iraq.

"Senator, I am not now nor have I ever been an oil trader and neither has anyone on my behalf," said Galloway, dispensing with the deference traditionally reserved for Senate leaders. "I have never seen a barrel of oil, owned one, bought one, sold one, and neither has anybody on my behalf." [More](#)

Ed note: [more on this with thanks to Crooks & Liars \(Real Audio necessary for playback\).](#)

Tuesday, May 17

U.S. Producer Prices Rose in April

Tuesday, May 17 (New York Times)—U.S. producer prices moved up a steep 0.6 percent last month, above analysts' expectations, as energy, tobacco and vehicle prices all shot higher, a government report showed on Tuesday.

Stripping out volatile food and energy costs, the Labor Department's producer price index, a gauge of prices received by farms, factories and refineries, rose 0.3 percent.

Wall Street economists had forecast a 0.4 percent rise in April producer prices, and a 0.2 percent gain excluding food and energy costs. The higher-than-expected increases were likely to keep inflation worries alive in financial markets. [More](#)

Monday, May 16

12:48 pm—Take Us Home, Kevin

Yes, I know the following quote from [Kevin Drum](#) is taken out of context. He's talking about income mobility, and I'm talking about one of the better summation of the political/economic times I've read lately. So sue me.

"What this faux optimism masks is the astonishing real-life pessimism of modern conservatism. Among advanced economies, the United States is by far the richest, youngest, and fastest growing country in the world. By far. And yet, we're supposed to believe that an increase in Social Security costs from 4% of GDP to 6% over the next 50 years is cause for panic. We're supposed to believe national healthcare would bankrupt us — never mind that our current dysfunctional system is the most expensive and most unfair on the planet. We're supposed to believe that broader unionization would ruin American industry, home of the highest profits and most highly paid executives in the world. We're supposed to believe that the nation's millionaires, having already had their tax rates slashed by a third over the past two decades, are still being bled to the bone by federal taxes."

I would say to add fear and greed to the pessimism Kevin talks about. Many on the right are simply scared of things. Scared of what's new, of what is untested, of new situations, of trying new solutions. The pessimism that Kevin speaks of is a by-product of that fear. Since we're not safe, from Russia, or big government coming to take us in the night, or Osama bin Laden, or terrorists, or federal judges, or gays, no matter how good life seems to be, there's reason to be fearful. And for that reason things will never be that good. Which is why there is the need to be greedy, because you never know when something you fear will affect your life. You need to have more, to worry about spending \$8 more per year for better schools, or \$1 per year for better homeland security. Because you never know whether that \$9 will have made the difference.

This kind of thinking makes my head hurt. But I had my first experience with it years ago, and it sticks with me unto this day. I have a friend who is a GOP'er leaning between disgust for all political parties, or Libertarian. He ran a small home building company, and seemed to be doing well, despite the ever-present threat posed by OSHA. During a discussion on how much it would really take to reform something that I've forgotten, I broke it down. Fixing the problem would take an extra \$.80 per taxpayer. "What's wrong with that," I asked, "is it so bad you'll miss eighty cents a year?" My friend's response was quick and fervent: "Hell yes, give my my eighty cents!" And I knew he wasn't kidding. When he came to visit me in Chicago, he was so obsessed and fearful of crime, he chose to carry his handgun in a waist holster. At the time I lived in a safe neighborhood on the North Side, and we went to party on the Gold Coast and in Lincoln Park. Our chance of being exposed to crime requiring the use of a firearm were exactly nil. He had a better chance of getting arrested for carrying a concealed weapon. I love him like a brother, but BOY he needed to lighten up.

Friday, May 13

Now Here is a Brave Straight Ally in Texas

Friday, May 13 (Pam's House Blend)—"I have been a member of this august body for three decades, and today is one of the all-time low points. We are going in the wrong direction, in the direction of hate and fear and discrimination. Members, we all know what this is about, this is the politics of divisiveness at its worst, a wedge issue that is meant to divide. Members, this issue is a distraction from the real things we need to be working on. At the end of this session, this Legislature, this Leadership will not be able to deliver the people of Texas, fundamental and fair answers to the pressing issues of our day.

Let's look at what this amendment does not do: It does not give one Texas citizen meaningful tax relief. It does not reform or fully fund our education system. It does not restore one child to CHIP, who was cut from health insurance last session. It does not put one dime into raising Texas' Third World access to health care. It does not do one thing to care for or protect one elderly person or one child in this state. In fact, it does not even do anything to protect one marriage.

Members, this bill is about hate and fear and discrimination. I know something about hate and fear and discrimination. When I was a small girl, white folks used to talk about "protecting the institution of marriage" as well. What they meant was if people of my color tried to marry people of Mr. Chisum's color, you'd often find the people of my color hanging from a tree. That's what the white folks did back then to "protect marriage." Fifty years ago, white folks thought inter-racial marriages were a "threat to the institution of marriage..."

[More](#)

1:44 pm—Friday Video Show

Thanks to Crooks and Liars, a few clips on the news of the day. First up is a diatribe from Phyllis Schlafly, the doyenne of the movement conservatives. Phyllis, appearing at this week's gala celebration of Tom DeLay, is caught blathering on about how liberals are going after George Bush through Tom Delay. She also compliments Tom as an upstanding young man (which DeLay would be next to Schlafly), because he has the courage to speak out against those damn libberal judges. [I present Mrs. Schlafly.](#)

Next up is former Brigadier General Janis Karpinsky. Appearing on Nightline, she reiterates what we all know, but for some reason the rest of the press needs to figure out: that the Army set her up as the scapegoat, and Rummy knew everything about Abu Ghraib. It would be nice if she [keeps this ruckus up for a few years](#)

Lastly (courtesy of Crooks & Liars), [we have Jon Stewart on Senator Voinovich's comments on John Bolton; and Florida's law to allow citizens to shoot each other legally.](#)

Enjoy!

Vote 'Wrong,' Go to Hell?

By Amy Sullivan

Friday, May 13 (LA Times)—As a young Baptist trapped in a pew for several hours every Sunday, I spent a lot of time reading the Bible. The dog-eared pages in my brown leather, gold-embossed copy were the historical books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles; the Gospels were also favorites. To be perfectly honest, I usually sped through Leviticus and may have skipped directly from Nahum to Zephaniah, so it's possible that my scriptural education was not quite comprehensive. Even so, I'm fairly certain that there is no verse that reads, "Thou shalt not vote Democratic."

Maybe my Bible was just a different translation from the one used by Pastor Chan Chandler. Chandler was the minister of East Waynesville Baptist Church in North Carolina who told

members of his flock that if they voted for John Kerry, they needed to repent their sin or resign from the church.

Calling himself "merely the spokesperson" for "the most high," Chandler charged that Kerry was an unbeliever.

That was last fall; a week ago a number of congregants who supported Kerry were officially voted out of the church in a deacon's meeting. (Chandler now insists that these "actions were not politically motivated," an argument no doubt intended for the IRS, which could take away the church's tax-exempt status.)

The New Republican Standard Version of the Bible has been gaining popularity among evangelicals and Catholics. Just a few weeks ago, conservative political and religious leaders lined up on their so-called "Justice Sunday" to charge that those who oppose the ideologically extreme judicial nominees whom they support cannot be true people of faith.

[More](#)

The New Insecurity Families are Slipping Off the Economic Ladder

Friday, May 13 (New America Foundation)—In a 1938 address on the third anniversary of the Social Security Act, Franklin Roosevelt declared, "There is still today a frontier that remains unconquered an America unclaimed. This is the great, the nationwide frontier of insecurity, of human want and fear. This is the frontier the America we have set ourselves to reclaim." And reclaim it FDR and his fellow thinkers did.

In the three decades after Roosevelt's words were spoken, the great "frontier of insecurity" shrank dramatically. A massively expanded Social Security program, the GI bill, disability insurance, Medicare and Medicaid all expressed a commitment to protect Americans against what Roosevelt had once called the "hazards and vicissitudes" of modern industrial life.

Corporate America also got into the act. Employers constructed vast structures of security from guaranteed private pensions to generous health and life insurance that shielded millions from uncertainty and fear.

If the debate over Social Security suggests anything, it is that today's "pioneers" are moving sharply in the other direction. Those government programs of shared insurance are under sustained, and sometimes successful, assault. Those elaborate corporate systems of social protection are in steady decline. The political consensus that once helped pushed back the boundaries of insecurity has come undone, leaving Americans exposed to the vagaries of a harsh 21st century capitalism. [More](#)

Always Low Wages. Always.

By PAUL KRUGMAN

Friday, May 13 (New York Times)—Last week Standard and Poor's, a bond rating agency, downgraded both Ford and General Motors bonds to junk status. That is, it sees a significant risk that the companies won't be able to pay their debts.

Don't cry for the bondholders, but do cry for the workers.

Standard and Poor's downgraded GM and Ford sooner rather than later because it believes that the public is losing interest in S.U.V.'s. But the companies were vulnerable because they still pay decent wages and offer good benefits, in an age when taking care of employees has gone out of style. In particular, they are weighed down by health care costs for current and retired workers, which run to about \$1,500 per vehicle at G.M.

So the downgrade was a reminder of how far we have come from the days when hard-working Americans could count on a reasonable degree of economic security.

In 1968, when General Motors was a widely emulated icon of American business, many of its workers were lifetime employees. On average, they earned about \$29,000 a year in today's dollars, a solidly middle-class income at the time. They also had generous health and retirement benefits.

Since then, America has grown much richer, but American workers have become far less secure.

Today, Wal-Mart is America's largest corporation. Like G.M. in its prime, it has become a widely emulated business icon. But there the resemblance ends.

The average full-time Wal-Mart employee is paid only about \$17,000 a year. The company's health care plan covers fewer than half of its workers.

True, not everyone is badly paid. In 1968, the head of General Motors received about \$4 million in today's dollars - and that was considered extravagant. But last year Scott Lee Jr., Wal-Mart's chief executive, was paid \$17.5 million. That is, every two weeks Mr. Lee was paid about as much as his average employee will earn in a lifetime.

Not that many of them will actually spend a lifetime at Wal-Mart: more than 40 percent of the company's workers leave every year.

I'm not trying either to romanticize the General Motors of yore or to portray Wal-Mart as the root of all evil. GM was, and Wal-Mart is, a product of its time. And there's no easy way to reverse the changes.

What should be clear, however, is that the public safety net F.D.R. and L.B.J. created is more important than ever, now that workers in the world's richest nation can no longer count on the private sector to provide them with economic security. [More](#)

Thursday, May 12

4:40 pm—Two More Examples of the Men Behind the Movement

(Thanks to Kevin Drum) Does anyone know the Bible passages that pertain to people who profess godliness in public, but in private are dark and evil men? Read on, and you'll catch up to where I am. [The first, from Nation magazine:](#)

Dr. Hager's Family Values

Late last October Dr. W. David Hager, a prominent obstetrician-gynecologist and Bush Administration appointee to the Advisory Committee for Reproductive Health Drugs in the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), took to the pulpit as the featured speaker at a morning service. He stood in the campus chapel at Asbury College, a small evangelical Christian school nestled among picturesque horse farms in the small town of Wilmore in Kentucky's bluegrass region. Hager is an Asburian nabob; his elderly father is a past president of the college, and Hager himself currently sits on his alma mater's board of trustees. Even the school's administrative building, Hager Hall, bears the family name.

That day, a mostly friendly audience of 1,500 students and faculty packed into the seats in front of him. With the autumn sunlight streaming through the stained-glass windows, Hager opened his Bible to the Old Testament Book of Ezekiel and looked out into the audience. "I want to share with you some information about how...God has called me to stand in the gap," he declared. "Not only for others, but regarding ethical and moral issues in our country."

For Hager, those moral and ethical issues all appear to revolve around sex: In both his medical practice and his advisory role at the FDA, his ardent evangelical piety anchors his staunch opposition to emergency contraception, abortion and premarital sex. Through his six books—which include such titles as *Stress and the Woman's Body* and *As Jesus Cared for Women*, self-help tomes that interweave syrupy Christian spirituality with paternalistic advice on women's health and relationships—he has established himself as a leading conservative Christian voice on women's health and sexuality....

...Back at Asbury, Hager cast himself as a victim of religious persecution in his sermon. "You see...there is a war going on in this country," he said gravely. "And I'm not speaking about the war in Iraq. It's a war being waged against Christians, particularly evangelical Christians. It wasn't my scientific record that came under scrutiny [at the FDA]. It was my faith.... By making myself available, God has used me to stand in the breach... Just as he has used me, he can use you."

Up on the dais, several men seated behind Hager nodded solemnly in agreement. But out in the audience, Linda Carruth Davis—co-author with Hager of *Stress and the Woman's Body*, and, more saliently, his former wife of thirty-two years—was enraged. "It was the most disgusting thing I've ever heard," she recalled months later, through clenched teeth.

According to Davis, Hager's public moralizing on sexual matters clashed with his deplorable treatment of her during their marriage. Davis alleges that between 1995 and their divorce in 2002, Hager repeatedly sodomized her without her consent. Several sources on and off the record confirmed that she had told them it was the sexual and emotional abuse within their marriage that eventually forced her out. "I probably wouldn't have objected so much, or felt it was so abusive if he had just wanted normal [vaginal] sex all the time," she explained to me. "But it was the painful, invasive, totally nonconsensual nature of the [anal] sex that was so horrible."

Not once during the uproar over Hager's FDA appointment did any reporter solicit the opinion of the woman now known as Linda Davis—she remarried in November 2002 to James Davis, a Methodist minister, and relocated to southern Georgia—on her husband's record, even though she contributed to much of his self-help work in the Christian arena (she remains a religious and political conservative). She intermittently thought of telling her story but refrained, she says, out of respect for her adult children. It was Hager's sermon at Asbury last October that finally changed her mind. Davis was there to hear her middle son give a vocal performance; she was prepared to hear her ex-husband inveigh against secular liberals, but she was shocked to hear him speak about their divorce when he took to the pulpit.

The second, about the "celebrated" John Bolton, [from Larry Flynt's RawStory:](#)

...The controversial Hustler Magazine publisher Larry Flynt has waded into the conflict surrounding the nomination of Bush hawk John Bolton to a UN post by revealing Bolton's divorce records and unanswered questions about his sexual past, RAW STORY has learned.

The following release was issued early this afternoon. RAW STORY will provide more details as they become available.

The records show that Bolton's wife left him during a trip to Vienna in two weeks in 1982 and never returned. The records further show that she took most of the couple's furniture. The records do not disclose details about Flynt's claims. Bolton's ex-wife was not present at the time of the testimony. RAW STORY has an outstanding call to the State Department but does not anticipate any response.

###

From Mr. Flynt's release:

Corroborated allegations that Mr. Bolton's first wife, Christina Bolton, was forced to engage in group sex have not been refuted by the State Department despite inquiries posed by Hustler magazine publisher Larry Flynt concerning the allegations. Mr. Flynt has obtained information from numerous sources that Mr. Bolton participated in paid visits to Plato's Retreat, the popular swingers club that operated in New York City in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

"The first Mrs. Bolton's conduct raises the presumption that she fled out of fear for her safety or, at a minimum, it demonstrates that Mr. Bolton's established inability to communicate or work respectfully with others extended to his intimate family relations," said Mr. Flynt. "The court records alone provide sufficient basis for further investigation of nominee Bolton by the Senate." These court records are enclosed here as an attachment. Mr. Flynt continued, "The U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations must be free of any potential source of disrepute or blackmail."

We have anti-gay GOP congressmen caught on tape soliciting men for sex. We have anti-gay GOP mayors that have been implicated in child sex abuse rumors, and then found soliciting for teen gay sex online. We have GOP Senate candidates who, unsatisfied with having one of the most beautiful women on the planet as their wife, has to try to make her have group sex. We have a gay male hooker complete with website, and a dubiously issued press pass working mysteriously late in a White House that openly doesn't like gay people. We have the head of the Alabama State Education Board deeply involved in embezzling funds. We have Tom DeLay. And more. We have example after example of Republican--no Movement Conservative figures that profess their goodness as an extension of God. But when they leave the pulpit or the podium, they are darker and more sinister than anything we have seen yet. How long will we let ourselves be ruled by liars?

Thieves should be prosecuted. Wife-beaters as well. If you force your wife to have sex with other men against her will, there's a special place in hell for you. Democrat or Republican. But there's an even more "special" place for movement conservatives that preach piety and practice whatever word you can come up with for the above. And if the above is untrue, then I'm all for taking the reporters, the editors, and their false witnesses out back and kicking their collective asses.

These people sicken me.

WWII comments blasted

Thursday, May 12 (Newsday)—Was World War II worth it?

In the inflammatory world view of Pat Buchanan, the short answer is no. The war that stopped the Nazis' global campaign and the mechanistic extermination of European Jewry was actually not worth the effort.

The commentator yesterday offered equally provocative answers to other questions: Why destroy Hitler? And why venerate FDR and Churchill?

On the radio and Internet, Buchanan framed his positions as amplification of remarks made over the weekend by President George W. Bush that the pact ending the war brought on a Stalinist domination that was "one of the greatest wrongs of history."

But Buchanan's comments on the Don Imus radio show and in an essay posted on the Web site of his organization, The American Cause, went much further. He suggested that because Germans voted Hitler in, they did not need to be liberated, and that Britain and France drew Germany into the wider conflict.

More

Ed. note—Here's a link to a column written by Buchanan on the same topic. Remember kids, the GOP almost elected him as their candidate for president back in 1988. We usually give politicians a free pass for comments made "in their youth." Buchanan is still a respected figure among the media as well as with movement conservatives. But this clearly indicates the problem with his thinking, and is yet another peek into the peculiar world movement conservatives live in.

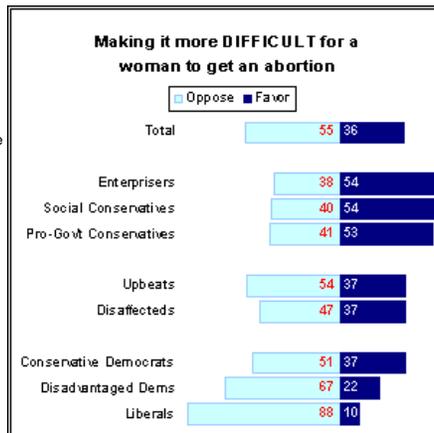
10:54 am—More From the Pew Report

I've been looking at the recent Pew Poll on the 2004 elections. Here's a section that caught my eye last night on the bus:

Abortion Divides Most Groups

Abortion remains a contentious issue, with nearly all groups in the typology divided to some extent. Overall, 55% oppose making it more difficult for a woman to obtain an abortion, while 36% disagree. By roughly a five-to-four margin, each of the three GOP-leaning groups favors greater restrictions on abortion.

Pluralities or majorities of all other groups oppose making abortions more difficult to obtain. But sizable minorities of Conservative Democrats, Upbeats, and Disaffecteds (37% each) support tougher restrictions on abortion.



If we begin with the idea that no one supports abortion, it's easier to begin to wrap one's mind around this. Nobody wants a woman to be put in the position of having to make that choice in the first place.

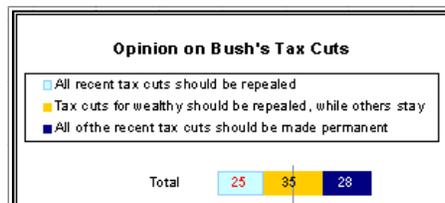
What I'd be interested in finding out is, of these Enterprisers, and Social and Pro-Government Conservatives, how many would be in favor of increased restrictions in a nation where the effort to curtail abortions is rooted in programs that help avoid unwanted pregnancies? How much of this conservative support is rooted in a desire to moralize America by ending pre-marital sex between consenting adults?

Another section that spoke to me was this:

Taxes and Budget

On tax policy, Enterprisers stand alone in their view - shared by 82% in this group - that all of the tax cuts from President Bush's first term be made permanent. By contrast, only about half as many Social Conservatives (42%) and even fewer Pro-Government Conservatives (27%) support making all of the tax cuts permanent.

By about a two-to-one margin, most of the electorate would give higher priority to reducing the federal budget deficit than to cutting taxes. That margin holds roughly true across all groups with a few exceptions: Liberals, who choose deficit cutting over tax cutting by an overwhelming margin (83% to 14%); Disaffecteds, who opt for deficit cutting by a relatively small margin



(47%-42%); and Enterprisers who, alone among typology groups, give tax cuts priority over deficit reduction, by a margin of 50% to 43%.

However, majorities in all the groups, except Liberals, agree that while reducing the federal budget deficit is an important priority, it should not be the top priority for the president and Congress to deal with this year.

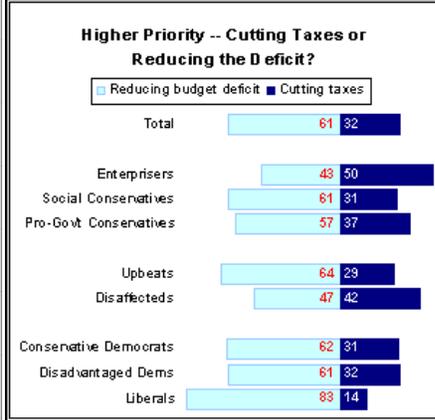
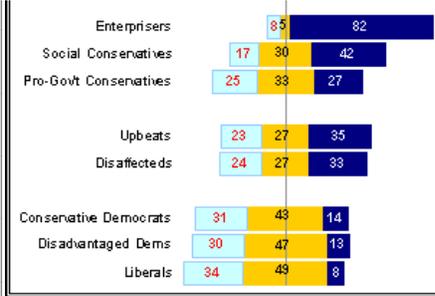
Even among Liberals, just half (50%) rate deficit reduction a top priority. Enterprisers are least likely to deem red ink curtailment a top priority—23% of the group does so, compared with 59% who call it an important but lower priority. Across the other groups, the percentages rating deficit reduction a top priority range from slightly less than a third among Social Conservatives and Upbeats, to about four-in-ten (41% to 45%) among Disadvantaged Democrats, Conservative Democrats, Disaffecteds, and Pro-Government Conservatives.

A similar pattern is seen with regard to opinions about ways to reduce the budget deficit. A majority of the public (54%) supports cutting domestic spending to reduce the deficit; about a third each favor cuts in military spending (35%) or raising taxes (31%).

At one extreme, 81% of Enterprisers favor cutting spending on domestic programs to reduce the deficit. They are joined in that view by 60% or more among Social Conservatives and Upbeats. Disadvantaged Democrats are the most reluctant to cut domestic spending, with only 29% in favor. Still, nearly half (48%) of Liberals, as well as the same proportion of Conservative Democrats, also support cuts in domestic spending to reduce the deficit.

Where the Liberals differ most from other groups on budget issues is in their willingness to cut defense and military spending to reduce the deficit (65% favor such cuts). By contrast, among all other groups, support for military and defense cuts ranges from a low of 16% among Enterprisers and Social Conservatives to 41% among Disadvantaged Democrats.

In addition, a far higher percentage of Liberals than those in other groups would raise taxes to reduce the deficit. More than half of Liberals (56%) support raising taxes to meet the goal of deficit reduction - no more than about a third in any other group agree (Upbeats 34%). At the low end, just 12% of Enterprisers favor raising taxes for this purpose.



	Cut		
	domestic spending	defense spending	Raise taxes
	%	%	%
Total	54	35	31
Enterprisers	81	16	12
Social Conservatives	63	16	27
Pro-Gov't Conservatives	53	19	32
Upbeats	61	31	34
Disaffecteds	44	33	19
Conservative Democrats	48	29	25
Disadvantaged Democrats	29	41	23
Liberals	48	65	56

Percent within each group that would favor each as a means of reducing the federal budget deficit.

I had to read this section twice (no jokes, please). Unless my eyes were playing tricks on me, according to Pew, the people have the political will to inject sanity back into our fiscal decision making process. They also understand how the Bush tax cuts are hamstringing our ability to react to problems that face us.

Wednesday, May 11

5:17 pm—The Bush Tax Cuts, Part 2

It's late, and I hear a CTA bus calling my name. But I found this from the Tax Policy Center on the Bush tax cuts. I read through a little bit and wanted to provide a little commentary. But as I stated earlier, it's late. So here's a snippet, [and a link to the pdf...](#)

We find that, by any reasonable measure, making the tax cuts permanent would be unaffordable. Likewise, by any reasonable measure, the tax cuts are regressive. When the requisite spending cuts or other tax increases needed to pay for the tax cuts are included, the net effect will be to transfer resources away from low-income households and toward high-income households. The result will make most households worse off, even if the tax cuts generate economic growth (which itself becomes increasingly less likely the longer the tax cuts are not offset by other policy changes, as discussed further below).

In general, policies that would otherwise be fiscally irresponsible and regressive could potentially be justified if they provided a strong boost to the economy. In the case of the tax cuts, however, other policies could have given the economy a larger short-term boost — while also being more fiscally responsible and more progressive. Also, making the tax cuts permanent is likely to have a zero or negative effect on long-term economic growth because the beneficial incentive effects from the tax cuts are modest and are offset by the adverse effect from failing to pay for the tax cuts immediately through spending reductions or other tax increases.

There's more to come on this topic. Good evening....

FIXING SOCIAL SECURITY CHANGES DO NEED TO BE MADE, BUT THE CHOICES AREN'T HARD NOR THE MEASURES PAINFUL

By Robert M. Ball, former Commissioner of Social Security

Wednesday, May 11 (New Century Foundation)—President George W. Bush has said that the administration's first task in the Social Security reform debate is to demonstrate to the American people that Social Security has a big financial problem—a crisis requiring action now. In trying to make this case, those speaking for the administration have done everything they can think of to make the long-range shortfall in Social Security seem as big as possible. They have greatly exaggerated the problem in three different ways.

The first is to present the drop in the workers-to-beneficiary ratio as very large and unplanned for. They point out that in 1950 there were 16 workers paying into the system for each beneficiary taking out, and that the ratio has gone way down so that now the ratio is only 3.3 workers to each beneficiary and in the long run it will be only 2 to 1 or even 1.9 to 1. They ignore the fact that in 1950 only about 15 percent of the elderly were eligible for benefits and that it was expected by all who were acquainted with the program that the ratio would, of course, change dramatically as a greater proportion of the elderly became beneficiaries.

Instead, the impression is left that the program was sound only when 16 paid in for every one taking out. Thus, of course, when the ratio changed to 3.3 to 1, the program became "unsustainable." What in fact happened is that when just about all the elderly first became eligible for Social Security benefits, about 1975, the ratio was 3.3 contributors to each beneficiary and the ratio has stayed that way for the past 30 years. As the baby boom reaches retirement age, as the administration says, the ratio is expected to drop for the long run to 2.0 or 1.9 workers to each retiree. But that is the size of the problem—a drop from 3.3 to 2 workers pre retiree. The much used 16 to 1 figure is simply a reflection of the immaturity of the

system back in 1950 when very few of the elderly had worked under the program long enough to be eligible for benefits. [More](#)

1:16 pm—Good Week to be a Blogger, If You Have the Free Time

I'm looking at the first page of the [Pew Research Center's analysis of the 2004 elections](#). Since I'm slammed for time this week, I'll try to post on things that catch my eye from the report as I go.

Here on the first page, is the first thing to catch my eye about the "new" members of the GOP:

The value gaps for the GOP are, perhaps surprisingly, greatest with respect to the role of government. The Republicans' bigger tent now includes more lower-income voters than it once did, and many of these voters favor an activist government to help working class people.

Right away, I feel Karl Rove taking a bow, and I'm looking forward to finding out whether Pew took a look at the religious/moral component of these people. Do they feel the GOP will turn away from decades of being the party of the rich and address their needs because they feel the party is on their side on moral issues? Or do they really feel that this party is interested in representing the poor and working-class?

You probably know my answer. The GOP will cater to the needs of the poor and working-class to the extent they can be used to disguise tax cuts that benefit the rich more than these people. They will continue to preach "rugged-individualism" while at the same time removing the tools to make the goal a reality for them. Looking back at their track record, and we have the Reagan, Bush 41, and Bush 43 to look at; there has been no great effort to address income inequality, workplace standards, adult and continuing education, child care or other programs intended to offer the poor and working-class non-welfare based solutions to helping them achieve. The GOP has offered tax cuts overwhelmingly tilted to the rich.

And with that, it's off to a meeting.....

7:49 am—The Choices are Becoming Stark, and Soon Our Greed Will Really Begin to Show

I'm listening to a story on NPR on Medicaid cuts. What stuck in my head was something the governor of Tennessee said about balancing tax cuts versus massive cuts to Medicaid. He was speaking in response to a local minister who called the level of cuts and their obvious effects on the poor and children "immoral," the governor responded by calling tax increases "immoral" as well.

Look at the rhetoric versus the reality of what we'd be asked to pay. Expand your horizons from Medicaid and include the deficit, homeland security, Social Security, infrastructure repairs, education, and other sorely underfunded programs. Are we as individuals being asked to pay hundreds or thousands of dollars for additional funding? No. We're talking about \$5 here and \$10 there for each program ANNUALLY. In total, we may be asked to sacrifice an extra \$200-300/year in taxes—no, let's go \$500 on the top end. That's the outlay for those of us who have more money than we can spend. For those of us who labor for \$10-15/hour, our contribution will not be nearly as great.

With that framework, let's return to Tennessee. Medicaid is the sole source of health care funding for way too many poor people. One of the examples focused on a woman who made \$300/week and qualified for Medicaid. Under the proposed Medicaid cuts, she'd have spend down to \$86 per week in order to qualify. Let's look closer. A woman who makes \$15,600 per year in today's health care economy now has to make \$4472 per year in order to qualify for Medicare.

All because it would be, in the words of the Tennessee governor, "immoral" to raise taxes?

Our greed is beginning to show. The party that invokes the name of Jesus to quash it's enemies are sorely deaf to his words on compassion and sacrifice for the common good. If the goal is to create a society where private charity takes on the challenge of raising money to care for the poor, then despite the hoary rhetoric, the GOP has not proposed anything to prepare the way for that shift.

Is that because they haven't gotten around to it yet, or because they have no intention to focus on the need of the poor? A nation is more than so-called God-fearing, self-reliant people of means. Ignoring those that don't fit the definition is probably good politics, but not good citizenship.

Monday, May 9

4:56 pm—The Bush Tax Cuts, Part 1

For some strange reason, I'm fascinated with following up on politicians. I do it for all, ones I like as well as ones I don't. It helps build respect for politicians I thought I didn't like, and properly helps me lose respect for those I liked—but for all the wrong reasons.

So I'd like to follow up on the Bush tax cuts. Perhaps this will be a useless venture, as it pretty much looks like we're wasting trillions of dollars waiting for the rich and corporations to lead us out of economic stagnation. Month after month of mixed news, that all lead towards slow growth.

Lets recall the major premise of the Bush tax cuts: large tax cuts to the rich and corporations would lead to explosive economic growth. Since taxes shackle innovation and entrepreneurship, lower taxes would lead small businesses to add workers, rich people to startup new businesses, and corporations to divert money once used for taxes to research and development, opening new offices and plants, etc.

Let's look at how the White House would characterize it, [from a January 7, 2003 press release](#):

Taking Action to Strengthen America's Economy

On January 7, 2003, President Bush announced a growth and jobs plan to strengthen the American economy, and he called on Congress to act swiftly to pass it.

- The President's economic plan has three main goals:
- Encourage consumer spending that will continue to boost the economic recovery and create jobs.
- Promote investment by individuals and businesses that will lead to economic growth and job creation.
- Deliver critical help to unemployed citizens.

The President's new proposal would:

- Speed up the 2001 tax cuts to increase the pace of the recovery and job creation.
- Encourage job-creating investment in America's businesses by ending the double taxation of dividends and giving small businesses incentives to grow.
- Provide help for unemployed Americans, including extending unemployment benefits and creating new re-employment accounts to help displaced workers get back on the job.

Who benefits under the President's plan?

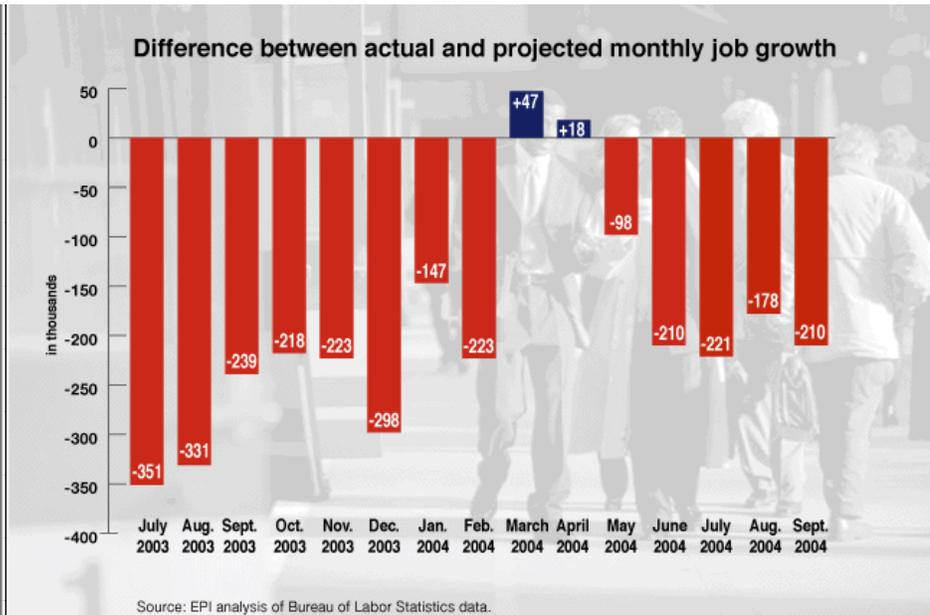
- Everyone who pays taxes—especially middle-income Americans—as tax rate reductions passed by Congress in 2001 are made effective immediately. Middle-income families will receive additional relief from accelerated reduction of the marriage penalty, a faster increase in the child tax credit, and immediate implementation of the new, lower 10 percent tax bracket.
- Everyone who invests in the stock market and receives dividend income—especially seniors—will benefit from elimination of the double taxation on dividends. About half of all dividend income goes to America's seniors, who often rely on those checks for a steady source of retirement income.
- Every small business owner who purchases equipment to grow and expand will get assistance through an increase in the expensing limits from \$25,000 to \$75,000.
- Every worker who has lost his or her job and qualifies for unemployment benefits will get more help, and many will qualify for new, more flexible Personal Re-employment Accounts, which provide a bonus if they find work quickly.

We'll look at a few of these claims. First the easy one—jobs.

"The spring has now sprung," he declared as our conversation started. "I am confident that this economic recovery will now be sustained and will produce loads of new jobs. Everything we know about economics indicates that the sort of economic growth expected for next year, 3.8 to 4 per cent, will translate into two million new jobs from the third quarter of this year to the third quarter of next year. That's an average of about 200,000 new jobs a month."

That was Treasury Secretary John Snow, back in 2003, [boasting of how many jobs the Bush tax cuts would create](#).

According to [JobWatch.org](#), based on information from the Bureau of Labor Statistics:



Granted, this is through September 2004, but if you've been awake and alive for the past few months, you'll know that we've had one good month since then.

I'll look at other aspects of the tax cuts and compare them to today's reality as the week progresses.

Bush Gets Tough Queries From Youths in Holland

Monday, May 9 (LA Times)—At home, President Bush regularly travels the nation for "conversations" with hand-picked audiences who routinely shower him and his policies with praise. But abroad on Sunday, some youths in Holland had a rare, unscripted opportunity to ask questions that some Americans might want to pose if given the chance.

Based on the questions asked in the first half-hour, before reporters were ushered from the room, this group of students might not have passed muster at a typical White House event.

After all, other than the occasional news conference, the president is rarely put on the spot about his domestic agenda.

"I have a question ... concerning the terrorism," said the first student to be called on, a young woman. "And you made many laws after 9/11, many — many laws and many measures. And I'm wondering, will there be a time when you drop those laws and when you decrease the measures?"

"Look," Bush replied, "a free society such as ours, obviously, must balance the government's most important duty, which is to protect the American people from harm, with the civil liberties of our citizens. And every law we passed that was aimed to protect us in this new era of threats from abroad and the willingness for people to kill without mercy has been scrutinized and, of course, balanced by our Constitution." [More](#)

Missing white female alert

Why won't the media cover missing minority women?

By Douglas MacKinnon, press secretary to former U.S. Sen. Bob Dole from 1998 to 2003

Monday, May 9 (Chicago Tribune (subscription))—Note to the news media—with an emphasis on the cable networks: Enough is enough.

Your continual focus on, and reporting of, missing, young, attractive white women not only demeans your profession but is a televised slap in the face to minority mothers and parents the nation over who search for their own missing children with little or no assistance or notice from anyone.

The latest missing woman to dominate the airtime of the cable networks was Jennifer Wilbanks, from Duluth, Ga. Like Dru Sjojin, Chandra Levy and Elizabeth Smart all before her, Wilbanks is young, white and attractive. Wilbanks, as it turned out, ran away of her own volition from her impending marriage. As a Maryland police official told me after Wilbanks turned up in New Mexico, "the media's non-stop focus on the possible abduction of Wilbanks forced the local officials and police departments to spend thousands of dollars they would not otherwise have spent."

Define racism. One could certainly make the argument that the cable networks that continually focus on these missing white women, to the virtual exclusion of minority women, are practicing a form of racism. The racism in this case, however, while predicated on color, does not concern itself with the color of one's skin. Rather, it is based on the color of money, ratings points and competition. Would an African-American woman who went missing days before her wedding receive the same (or any) coverage as that of Wilbanks? Not likely. [More](#)

Increasingly Embattled, DeLay Scales Back Usual Power Plays

Monday, May 9 (Washington Post)—In the euphemism favored on Capitol Hill, House Majority Leader Tom DeLay is "not staff driven." Translation: He is used to doing what he wants.

It happens all the time, DeLay friends and advisers say. An aide will suggest that the leader soften his tone, or back off just a bit from some inflammatory position. As often as not, the Texas Republican will respond with a snort, suggesting that the adviser is more worried about how a decision will play inside the Beltway than how it will be perceived -- if it is noticed at all -- by the rest of the country.

For a full decade, the 58-year-old DeLay's career has prospered because he was usually right in this calculation, say legislators from both parties who have watched him in action.

DeLay could be himself -- a partisan with a zeal for ideological combat, a taste for high living and intense religious conviction -- in ways that made him exceptionally powerful in Congress but not especially recognizable to the public beyond.

Suddenly, the old Texas brio that carried him through years of smaller controversies is on the wane. [More](#)

Friday, May 6

Evolution Isn't a Natural Selection Here

* Kansas looks again at whether teachers should be allowed to present non-scientific theories.

Friday, May 6 (LA Times)—In this rural swath of northern Kansas, where the grass rolls thick and green to the horizon, a white cross dominates the landscape.

Kathy Martin, a member of the state board of education, and her family built it on their farm this spring, gathering weathered chunks of limestone from the horse pasture and laying them on a hillside.

The cross is a proud expression of Martin's faith. And as hearings challenging the role of evolution in the state's school science curriculum began Thursday, that cross left little doubt about where she stood in the debate.

"Evolution is a great theory, but it is flawed," said Martin, 59, a retired science and elementary school teacher who is presiding over the hearings. "There are alternatives. Children need to hear them.... We can't ignore that our nation is based on Christianity — not science."

The hearings in Topeka, scheduled to last several days, are focusing on two proposals. The first recommends that students continue to be taught the theory of evolution because it is key to understanding biology. The other proposes that Kansas alter the definition of science, not limiting it to theories based on natural explanations. [More](#)

Ed note: Here's a great blog covering the hearings

Powell Aide to Discuss Bolton

Meanwhile, Armitage Endorses U.N. Ambassador Nominee

Friday, May 6 (Washington Post)—The Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff prepared to interview former secretary of state Colin L. Powell's chief of staff today as bipartisan harmony on the committee became increasingly frayed over Democratic requests for documents, interviews and other materials related to John R. Bolton's nomination as U.N. ambassador.

Democrats view Larry Wilkerson, a longtime Powell aide who has been publicly critical of Bolton, as an important guide to Powell's thinking and actions about key incidents being investigated by the committee, a Democratic aide said. Alone among living former Republican secretaries of state, Powell has pointedly refused to endorse Bolton and privately told some senators he had concerns about Bolton's judgment.

In a boost for Bolton, however, Powell's closest friend, former deputy secretary of state Richard L. Armitage, endorsed Bolton in a statement to the Associated Press. "John Bolton is eminently qualified," Armitage told a reporter as he entered an event at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "He's one of the smartest guys in Washington."

Asked if Bolton was a good choice, Armitage replied, "It was the president's choice and I support my president."

Armitage had many testy battles with Bolton during President Bush's first term, and his positive remarks surprised Bolton's supporters. Many of the former State Department officials who have emerged to criticize Bolton are close associates of Armitage. [More](#)

A Serious Drug Problem

By PAUL KRUGMAN

Friday, May 6 (New York Times)—There was a brief flurry of outrage when Congress passed the 2003 Medicare bill. The news media reported on the scandalous vote in the House of Representatives: Republican leaders violated parliamentary procedure, twisted arms and perhaps engaged in bribery to persuade skeptical lawmakers to change their votes in a session literally held in the dead of night.

Later, the media reported on another scandal: it turned out that the administration had deceived Congress about the bill's likely cost.

But the real scandal is what's in the legislation. It's an object lesson in how special interests hold America's health care system hostage.

The new Medicare law subsidizes private health plans, which have repeatedly failed to deliver promised cost savings. It creates an unnecessary layer of middlemen by requiring that the drug benefit be administered by private insurers. The biggest giveaway is to Big Pharma: the law specifically prohibits Medicare from using its purchasing power to negotiate lower drug prices. [More](#)

Thursday, May 5

DLC | New Dem Dispatch

Leading the GOP Into the Wilderness

Thursday, May 5 (New Democrats Online)—More than 100 days into this congressional session, and into George W. Bush's second term, a federal government controlled entirely by Republicans is wandering off into a wilderness of political extremism and policy negligence that's becoming alarming to anyone worried about the future of the country.

The House of Representatives, controlled by Republicans as though it were a private country club, is focused on ramming through interest-group favored legislation remote from the real challenges facing America. House GOPers are openly bickering over strategy and tactics with their Senate colleagues and with the White House. Meanwhile, the Senate is on the brink of a nasty and pointless fight over the alleged "right" of the president to get every federal judge he wants, which is likely to paralyze Senate action on its real business for much of the session. And the president himself remains obsessed with barnstorming around the country to promote an ill-defined but fundamentally irresponsible Social Security privatization scheme that is steadily losing support every day he talks about it.

With all due respect to House Speaker Dennis Hastert, House Republicans are now publicly identified to an irreversible degree with the man who has actually led them from the day Newt Gingrich stepped down, Tom DeLay of Texas. DeLay's ethics recidivism and blunt advocacy of the crudest sort of alliances between legislators and lobbyists is bad enough. But his chronic habit of treating any and all criticism as just another front in an apocalyptic partisan, ideological, cultural, and religious war is damaging to our entire political system. [More](#)

The Christian Complex

By George F. Will

Thursday, May 5 (Washington Post)—The state of America's political discourse is such that the president has felt it necessary to declare that unbelievers can be good Americans. In last week's prime-time news conference, he said: "If you choose not to worship, you're equally as patriotic as somebody who does worship."

So Mark Twain, Oliver Wendell Holmes and a long, luminous list of other skeptics can be spared the posthumous ignominy of being stricken from the rolls of exemplary Americans. And almost 30 million living Americans welcomed that presidential benediction.

According to the American Religious Identification Survey, Americans who answer "none" when asked to identify their religion numbered 29.4 million in 2001, more than double the 14.3 million in 1990. If unbelievers had their own state -- the state of None -- its population would be more than twice that of New England's six states, and None would be the nation's second-largest state:

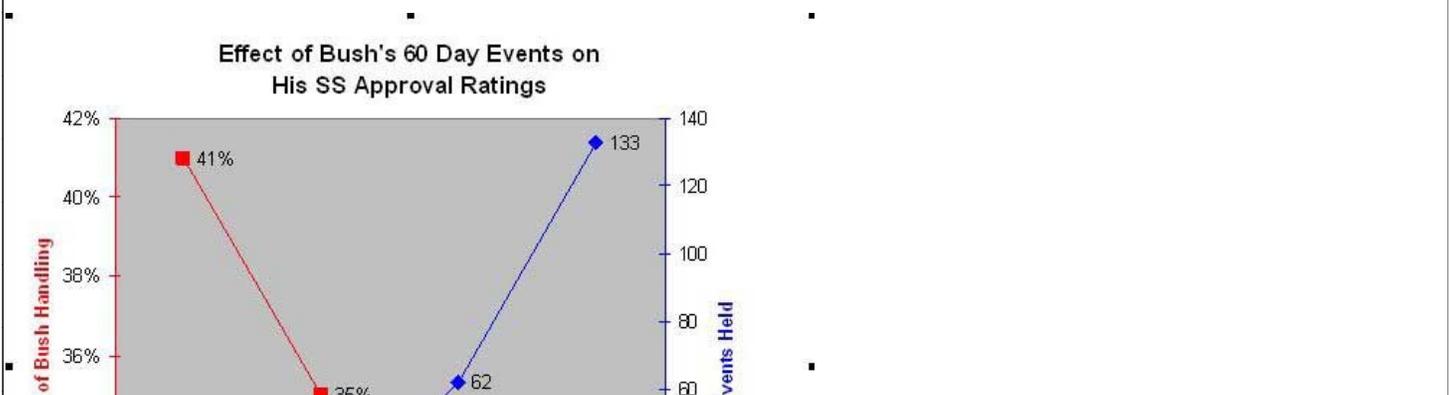
California, 34.5 million.

None, 29.4 million.

Texas, 21.3 million.

The president, whose political instincts, at least, are no longer so underestimated by his despisers, may have hoped his remarks about unbelievers would undo some of the damage done by the Terri Schiavo case. During that Florida controversy, he made a late-night flight from his Texas ranch to Washington to dramatize his signing of imprudent legislation that his party was primarily responsible for passing. He and his party seemed to have subcontracted governance to certain especially fervid religious supporters. [More](#)

4:50 pm—What Part of "No" Don't You Understand, George Bush?





Thanks to the Center for American Progress. It's like he's the obnoxious homeless guy who never leaves you alone, never taking no for an answer. It's not courage of convictions, it's obnoxious. But with the last press conference, he's moving forward, barnstorming the country. Talking with audiences hand-picked for reliability, while everyone else says "no!"

Wednesday, May 4

Open Letter to Progressive Policymakers

On Clear Lines on Progressive Savings Accounts

Wednesday, May 4 (Center for American Progress)—With the public overwhelmingly rejecting the White House's efforts to partially privatize Social Security through the diversion of payroll taxes into private accounts, there is already a growing conservative effort to use new rhetoric and designs to blur the distinctions between harmful privatization options and the types of progressive savings options outside of Social Security that are deserving of progressive support.

One way the lines are blurred is by the emphasis on partial privatization proposals that, while sharing virtually all of the same flaws as "carve-out" privatization proposals in terms of injecting unnecessary risk and undermining Social Security's progressive guaranteed benefit, are nonetheless defined as "add-on" accounts. Indeed, even President Bush on at least one occasion has sought to describe partial privatization accounts as an "add-on." Since the phrase add-on has also been used to describe proposals like President Clinton's USA Account and the Universal 401K,* which are completely outside of Social Security and targeted to middle-income and moderate-income families, it is clear that simply using this term does little to define the nature or acceptability of such a proposal. [More](#)

Tuesday, May 3

Florida Won't Appeal Abortion for 13-Year-Old

Tuesday, May 3 (New York Times)—A judge ruled that a 13-year-old girl at the center of an abortion fight with the state may terminate her pregnancy, and Gov. Jeb Bush said Tuesday that the state will not appeal further.

Juvenile Judge Ronald Alvarez ruled Monday that the teen, who has been in state custody for four years, would not be physically or emotionally harmed by the procedure. Last week, Alvarez blocked the girl's abortion until a psychological evaluation was completed.

"He ruled that she is competent, that she has made a decision and that she has a right to act on that decision," said Howard Simon, executive director of the Florida American Civil Liberties Union, which represented the girl. [More](#)

Time to Leave the Table

By E. J. Dionne Jr.

Tuesday, May 3 (Washington Post)—There is a name for those who continue to sit at a gambling table even after they learn that the game is fixed. They are called fools.

Now that President Bush has proposed Social Security benefit cuts through "progressive indexing," his critics are said to have an obligation to negotiate in good faith to achieve a solution. There are just two problems with that sentence: The words "good faith" and "solution."

Bush's "plan" is still not a plan, just a few ideas. If the president is serious, let him first persuade members of his own party to agree to a detailed proposal so everyone knows what the trade-offs are. If what he has in mind is a good idea, Republicans will be eager to sign on. And if Bush can't get Republicans to go along, might that say something about the merits of his suggestions?

Opponents of Bush's cut-and-privatize project -- they include not only Democrats but also skeptical Republicans -- do have a responsibility. Their task is to subject half-baked concepts to the criticism they deserve and insist that they be fully baked before serious discussions can begin. Social Security, the most successful government program in our history, should not be overturned lightly.

That the president is fixing the Social Security reform game should be obvious. The most basic corruption of the process is the way the Republican congressional leadership has transformed the bargaining that once took place between the House and the Senate. [More](#)

Italian Press Accuse Berlusconi of Changing Calipari Report

Tuesday, May 3 (Zaman)—The Italian press has claimed that Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi has altered a report investigating the death of Italian secret service agent Nicola Calipari, who was killed by US soldiers in Iraq in order not to endanger Washington-Rome relations. [More](#)

12:54 pm—Proud Parents of Ugly Babies

The Washington Post's Howard Kurtz, [droning on about the pride of journalism](#):

Ethics Pressure Squeezes a Few Out the Door

Has journalism become an ethical cesspool, or just been forced to adopt greater standards of cleanliness?

In the past month alone, four reporters for major newspapers have been ousted, and a columnist was suspended, for ethical missteps. The drip-drip-drip of disclosures about sloppiness, fabrication and plagiarism have further eroded the media's reputation, leading to a one-strike-and-you're-out policy at many outlets.

"There are people in important jobs, well respected by their colleagues and readers, who've made mistakes like this, but they made the mistakes 30 years ago and didn't get their careers destroyed," says New York Times ombudsman Dan Okrent. In today's climate, he says, "we're hypersensitive because we have to be hypersensitive."

Julia Wallace, editor of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, says of such cases: "My gut is that we are more aggressive about pursuing them and more aggressive about talking about them openly." Wallace recalls how the Chicago Sun-Times editorial page editor was bounced in 1995 for plagiarizing from The Washington Post -- and quietly given a top circulation job. (The executive, Mark Hornung, resigned last year in a Sun-Times circulation scandal.)

Media bosses are getting tougher on wayward staffers not just because of a greater sense of professionalism, but because outsiders -- led by bloggers and other critics -- have stepped up the pressure. In the Internet age, there's no rug under which to sweep these problems.

"Because we are self-policing so much better, it makes it seem like there's a tremendous cascade of ethical violations," says Thomas Kunkel, dean of the University of Maryland's journalism school. "There used to be a lot more in the way of shenanigans and monkey business that we either didn't know about or, if it was caught, it was winked at. There was a boys-will-be-boys quality about it -- they were mostly boys -- and they would get a slap on the wrist at best..."

That's all fine and dandy Howard. What the average person who pays attention to politics and current events would like is to hear and read better questions. No more gimmies, no more uninformed and unprepared reporters. We want questions that make politicians work hard and stretch to avoid answering. We want to see and read about how they twisted in the wind trying not to tell the truth during a good interview. We want questions that show the reporter is objective and well-informed, not just well-connected.

I'm not advocating an adversarial press corps. Just one that does its homework, and is unafraid to show it through it's questioning of our leaders. Readers of the sports pages do not suffer with such bland and uninformed reporting. They've got writers that are well-versed in their craft, and don't hold back on their questioning and analysis of coaches, athletes, owners, and management.

Not so their brethren that write for the first section of the paper. Some of them have given up on objectivity, or analysis. They've made "balance" the reason they pass along talking points in whole or part. On the left or the right.

So Howard, I'm glad newsrooms are policing their own. How about sending their reporters back to J-school while you're at it?

Monday, May 2

Papers reveal commitment to war

Secret documents indicate Blair support for military action a year before invasion took place

Monday, May 2 (Guardian UK)—Secret documents revealed yesterday show that, almost a year before the Iraq invasion, Tony Blair was privately preparing to commit Britain to war and topple Saddam, despite warnings from his closest advisers that it was unjustified.

The documents show how Mr Blair was told how Britain and the US could "create the conditions" for an invasion, partly, in the words of Jack Straw to "work up" an ultimatum to Saddam Hussein even though in the foreign secretary's own words, "the case was thin".

They also show how Mr Blair was planning to justify regime change as an objective, despite warnings from Lord Goldsmith, the attorney general, that the "desire for regime change was not a legal base for military action".

In his legal advice on March 7 2003, released by the government last week, the attorney repeated his view that "regime change cannot be the objective of military action".

In a classified document published by the Sunday Times, headed Iraq: Conditions for Military Action, Whitehall officials noted on July 19 2002: "When the prime minister discussed Iraq with President Bush at Crawford [the Bush ranch in Texas] in April he said that the UK would support military action to bring about regime change".

The officials said "certain conditions" should be met and that efforts should be made to "shape public opinion". Before and after his Texas meeting, Mr Blair insisted to MPs that no decision had been taken on military action. [More](#)

SECRET AND STRICTLY PERSONAL - UK EYES ONLY

DAVID MANNING
From: Matthew Rycroft
Date: 23 July 2002
S 195 /02

Monday, May 2 (The Times UK)—cc: Defence Secretary, Foreign Secretary, Attorney-General, Sir Richard Wilson, John Scarlett, Francis Richards, CDS, C, Jonathan Powell, Sally Morgan, Alastair Campbell

IRAQ: PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING, 23 JULY

Copy addressees and you met the Prime Minister on 23 July to discuss Iraq.

This record is extremely sensitive. No further copies should be made. It should be shown only to those with a genuine need to know its contents.

John Scarlett summarised the intelligence and latest JIC assessment. Saddam's regime was tough and based on extreme fear. The only way to overthrow it was likely to be by massive military action. Saddam was worried and expected an attack, probably by air and land, but he was not convinced that it would be immediate or overwhelming. His regime expected their neighbours to line up with the US. Saddam knew that regular army morale was poor. Real support for Saddam among the public was probably narrowly based.

C reported on his recent talks in Washington. There was a perceptible shift in attitude. Military action was now seen as inevitable. Bush wanted to remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD. But the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy. [More](#)

6:05 pm—What Would Jesus Say...

To this ([click here to download or play the .wmv file](#)) exchange on the Sunday, May 1 edition of "This Week with George Stephanopoulos":

STEPHANOPOULOS: If the party chooses a moderate like John McCain or Rudy Giuliani, do you think religious conservatives will split off and form a third-party movement?

ROBERTSON: I don't think so. Rudy's a very good friend of mine, and he did a super job running the City of New York. And I think he'd make a good president. I like him a lot. Although he doesn't share all of my particular points of view on social issues, he's a very dedicated Catholic. And he's a great guy.

McCain I'd vote against under any circumstance.

And on Bill Frist...

ROBERTSON: Bill is a wonderfully compassionate human being. He is humanitarian. He goes on medical missions. He's a delightful person. I just don't see him as a future president. I think he's said he didn't want to run for president. Maybe I'm putting words in his mouth.

STEPHANOPOULOS: I think he's looking at it.

Which Robertson knows, of course.

And for Robertson's comments on who should serve in Cabinet, his comments about Islam, along with his attack on Justice Ginburg, see below the fold.

STEPHANOPOULOS: You know, President Bush at that press conference also said that he believes you're equally American, whether you're Christian, Muslim or Jew. And I wonder if you fully accept that. Because in the past, you've said that you believe that only Christians and Jews are qualified to serve in the government.

Is that still your belief?

ROBERTSON: Well, Thomas Jefferson, who was the author of the Declaration of Independence, said he wouldn't have any atheists in his cabinet because atheists wouldn't swear an oath to God. That was Jefferson.

And we have never had any Muslims in the Cabinet. I didn't say, "serve in government." I said, "in my Cabinet, if I were elected president." And I think a president has the right to take people who share his point of view. And I would think that would be...

STEPHANOPOULOS: But wait a second. Let me just talk here. Because in your book, "The New World Order," you wrote, "How dare you maintain that those who believe in Judeo-Christian values are better qualified to govern America than Hindus and Muslims? My simple answer is, "Yes, they are."

Does that mean Hindu and Muslim judges?

ROBERTSON: Right now, I think people who feel that they should be in jihad against America (inaudible) the Islamic people saying they divide the world into two spheres: Dar al-Islam and Dar al-Harb. The Dar al-Islam are those submitted to Islam. Dar al-Harb are those who are at the land of war. And they have said in the Qur'an there's a war against all the infidels. Do you want somebody like that sitting as a judge? I wouldn't.

STEPHANOPOULOS: So I take it then, the answer to the question is that you believe only Christians and Jews are qualified to serve in the federal judiciary?

ROBERTSON: I'm not sure I'd make such a broad sweeping statement. But I just feel that those who share the philosophy of the founders of this nation, who assent to the principles of the Declaration of Independence, who assent to the principles that underlie the Constitution: Such people are the ones that should be judges. And the thing that I'm opposed to about judges is the fact that this is a living document that can be manipulated at the will of five out of nine judges, nonelected judges. It's a tyranny of an oligarchy that I'm concerned about.

STEPHANOPOULOS: You said also that you believe Democrats appoint judges who don't share our Christian values and will dismantle Christian culture. So do you believe that Justice Breyer and Justice Ginsburg, who were appointed by President Clinton, they're trying to dismantle Christian culture?

ROBERTSON: Justice Ginsburg served as a general counsel to the American Civil Liberties Union, ACLU. That was founded, as you probably know, by three members of Communist International. Their leader said that he wanted to be a Communist in order to make this...

STEPHANOPOULOS: He's a Communist?

ROBERTSON: He was. He said -- it's in my book that he said it. He made a declaration. He said, "I want to make America a worker state. Breed communists."

STEPHANOPOULOS: But I was asking about Justice Ginsburg. And you now seem to be trying to equate her with these Communists.

ROBERTSON: Well, she was the general counsel for this organization whose purpose right now is to rid religion from the public square (inaudible)down here in our university in a debate. She's a very pleasant lady but that's what she said was her avowed goal: to take all religion from the public square. That's their initiative. And Justice Ginsburg served as their general counsel.

I'm thinking Robertson, by evidenced by his stature and importance to Movement Conservatives, speaks for a good portion of them with the above words. When is someone going to call him on this hatred? When will the "Man of God" get religion?

Republican Chairman Exerts Pressure on PBS, Alleging Biases

Monday, May 2 (New York Times)—The Republican chairman of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting is aggressively pressing public television to correct what he and other conservatives consider liberal bias, prompting some public broadcasting leaders - including the chief executive of PBS - to object that his actions pose a threat to editorial independence.

Without the knowledge of his board, the chairman, Kenneth Y. Tomlinson, contracted last year with an outside consultant to keep track of the guests' political leanings on one program, "Now With Bill Moyers."

In late March, on the recommendation of administration officials, Mr. Tomlinson hired the director of the White House Office of Global Communications as a senior staff member, corporation officials said. While she was still on the White House staff, she helped draft guidelines governing the work of two ombudsmen whom the corporation recently appointed to review the content of public radio and television broadcasts.

Mr. Tomlinson also encouraged corporation and public broadcasting officials to broadcast "The Journal Editorial Report," whose host, Paul Gigot, is editor of the conservative editorial page of The Wall Street Journal. And while a search firm has been retained to find a successor for Kathleen A. Cox, the corporation's president and chief executive, whose contract was not renewed last month, Mr. Tomlinson has made clear to the board that his choice is Patricia Harrison, a former co-chairwoman of the Republican National Committee who is now an assistant secretary of state. [More](#)

11:04 am—The Death of the American Dreams

Is the American Dream really the next good Horatio Alger story? Or is it the simple three-part dream of a well-stocked college fund, a safe retirement for your parents, and for yourself as well?

For that matter, when was the last time you heard a good Horatio Alger story? Whatever happened to the entrepreneur? The bold overachiever was a perfect story for GOP politics. But when they finally gripped the three levers of American government, the symbol that Republicans used to gain power ceded importance to the CEO.

But I digress.

I believe the latter tri-part story is the dream most Americans have for themselves and their families. Not that they've given up on pursuing entrepreneurial opportunity. We'd all love to quit our jobs and start our own business. But in these days when you don't know if you're going to have a job in 90 days, it's much more difficult to prepare yourself and your family for the trials of the new business startup.

Now Bush's Social Security "reform" idea, ever short-sighted and ill-structured, is taking aim at two of the 3 dreams Americans have for their lives. If you're in your teens, and this Social Security idea is enacted into law, say goodbye to a more secure retirement for your parents, and for yourself as well. The main problem with the idea is that, of all the ideas that the party that's supposedly the best at pinching pennies, coming up with new ways to manage money has resigned it's creative energy to benefit cuts. But did we really expect anything else from them?

How short-sighted is Bush's new idea? The GOP trumpets the efficiency of market returns, but purposely chooses not to invest a penny of Social Security funds in that same market. They claim to want to reform the welfare orientation of the program, but now wants to doom the future of the program by making it something that we pay even more into, and get even less. All because they can't come up with a better idea than "cut!"

How ill-structured is it? One of the most explored methods of helping to shore up Social Security is to raise the ceiling on income subject to Social Security tax. Right now it \$90,000. If we raise it to \$125,000, we can't find all the money necessary to fix the problem, but it's a good start. Add to this 2 or 3 other solutions, like investing Social Security funds in the market, and you'll have the system shored up.

But not the Bushies. Instead of asking the rich to sacrifice a few percentage points on hundreds of thousands if not millions of dollars of income, the administration chooses to fix Social Security on the backs of the middle class. The very people who work hard to fight for their share of the American Dreams. For more info on how Bush's solution will adversely affect the middle class, [check out this link](#).

The other interesting thing about how the Bushies structured their "reform" was in it's impact on future generations. If passed as is, this program will soon be perceived as another government handout to poor people. It may take a few decades, but I guarantee you'll hear future Republicans scandalize Social Security as "another waste of money, another black hole for those who can't take care of themselves." This is the Dickensian world their policies are bringing back.

A Gut Punch to the Middle

By PAUL KRUGMAN

Monday, May 2 (New York Times)—By now, every journalist should know that you have to carefully check out any scheme coming from the White House. You can't just accept the administration's version of what it's doing. Remember, these are the people who named a big giveaway to logging interests "Healthy Forests."

Sure enough, a close look at President Bush's proposal for "progressive price indexing" of Social Security puts the lie to claims that it's a plan to increase benefits for the poor and cut them for the wealthy. In fact, it's a plan to slash middle-class benefits; the wealthy would barely feel a thing.

Under current law, low-wage workers receive Social Security benefits equal to 49 percent of their wages before retirement. Under the Bush scheme, that wouldn't change. So benefits for the poor would be maintained, not increased.

The administration and its apologists emphasize the fact that under the Bush plan, workers earning higher wages would face cuts, and they talk as if that makes it a plan that takes from the rich and gives to the poor. But the rich wouldn't feel any pain, because people with high incomes don't depend on Social Security benefits.

Cut an average worker's benefits, and you're imposing real hardship. Cut or even eliminate Dick Cheney's benefits, and only his accountants will notice.

I asked Jason Furman of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities to calculate the benefit cuts under the Bush scheme as a percentage of pre-retirement income. That's a way to see who would really bear the burden of the proposed cuts. It turns out that the middle class would face severe cuts, but the wealthy would not. [More](#)

Ambitious political agenda hitting snags

Monday, May 2 (Seattle Times)—The day after he won a second term in November, President Bush offered his view of the new political landscape.

"When you win, there is a feeling that the people have spoken and embraced your point of view," he said, "and that's what I intend to tell the Congress: that I made it clear what I intend to do as president ... and the people made it clear what they wanted, now let's work together."

Six months ago, this comment was widely viewed as more than just a postgame boast. Among campaign strategists and academics, there was ample speculation that Bush's victory, combined with incremental gains in the Republican congressional majority, signaled something fundamental: a partisan and ideological realignment that would reshape politics over the long haul.

Over the weekend, as the president reached the 100-day mark of his second term, the main question facing Bush and his party was whether they misread the November elections. With the president's poll numbers down and the Republican majority ensnared in ethical controversy, things look much less like a once-a-generation realignment.

Instead, some political analysts believe it is just as likely that Washington is witnessing a happens-all-the-time phenomenon: the mistaken assumption by politicians that an election won on narrow grounds is a mandate for something broad.

In Bush's case this includes restructuring Social Security and the tax code and installing a group of judges he was unable to seat in his first term. [More](#)

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