

Favorable legacy still within reach

It is not too late for President Bush to carve out a positive legacy before he leaves office in January 2009. It can be accomplished

by simply getting out from under the shadow of Vice President Dick Cheney. It seems Mr. Cheney has the president's ear almost exclusively.

The president's poll numbers are down and have been for a long time. He's a nice guy, you can't help but like him. But when he speaks, those aren't his words, those are the words of the second in command.

We believe that feeling prevails within his administration. It would be interesting to witness the debate and arm wrestling that goes on when his cabinet meets behind those closed doors. But indications are Mr. Cheney, with an unusual hold on the president, generally gets the nod.

How unfortunate for Mr. Bush. He is so isolated from so many good things that could make his final year and a half sparkle. Instead, he has adopted the Cheney gloom and doom posture. When he steps before the television cameras, he has that defiant look before he even says anything. Look closely at Dick Cheney when he is before the cameras, and note it is rare that he can look you in the eye. He spends his time talking while glancing downward.

Iraq is a controversial issue, and at this time it is, unfortunately, defining Mr. Bush's presidency. And it shouldn't be. We can't turn back the clock, but we have always been of the opinion it was Dick Cheney's hold on President Bush that tipped the scales in favor of the invasion. He's tough and he's persuasive. But that doesn't make Mr. Cheney right.

Mr. Bush needs to put on a new face. Carry a new message. Stand up to his vice president. Take to heart what others, within the Republican Party, are trying to tell him. He has to become the enthusiastic, smiling, confident leader he was when he moved into the White House.

There is no need in House Speaker Nancy Pelosi grabbing the headlines on her questionable trip to the Middle East. The president has to learn how to upstage those in lesser roles who are doing that very thing to him. And to do it with a new look and a new message. No more Cheney cloning. It has never caught on and never will. It has done nothing but turn a potentially great leader into a puppet.

It's time for George W. Bush to be George W. Bush. And when history is written, Mr. President, it will be you, not number two who historians will write about.

There is still time to improve your poll numbers, Mr. President, to carve out a legacy that will point to solid leadership and accomplishment.

You can do it. We're all pulling for you.

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—Tom Dreiling

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White Easter didn't seem quite right

For awhile there, I thought Spring was on its way. Tulips blooming, sleeveless tops appearing, grass growing, flip-flops flapping, furnace not running, except at night. Jim even brought home some tomato plants to set out. It was all too good to be true.

Snow flurries saw to that. I can only remember one other Easter when there was snow on the ground. Still, chilly — yes. But, snow — no. No spring outfit for Easter Sunday this year. Had to keep winter stuff on the rack.

—ob—

I did try something new for Easter dinner. Actually, supper, at our house. Corned beef and cabbage. The verdict is — we

Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



like it.

You can buy a nice sized corned beef roast with the flavoring packet sealed inside. Cover with water, bring to a boil, then low heat for a couple hours. I added a quartered head of cabbage at this point and cooked another hour. Perfect.

Corned beef has a unique flavor and

then, there's the cabbage. Fortunately, we both love cooked cabbage. Perhaps, it's an acquired taste.

Most people have a definite opinion about it. They either love it or hate it. No middle ground.

—ob—

One of the dangers of writing this column from the comfort of my recliner is the tendency to get too comfortable. I'm not sure, but I think I just took a little power nap.

Yup, it's 15 minutes later than the last time I checked the clock. I definitely dozed off. Could be part of the reason it takes about three hours to write a piece that takes two minutes to read.

Ready to leave Iraq? Don't kid yourself

“Iraqis do not support an indefinite occupation and neither does America.” —George W. Bush

American politicians have mastered the art of the sleight-of-hand: what you see and hear cannot always be believed. A classic example of the government's deceptive mastery can be seen in the current debate over withdrawing American troops from Iraq.

CNN recently reported that nearly 60 percent of Americans polled want to see U.S. troops leave Iraq either immediately or within a year. And to the average onlooker, the Senate and the House of Representatives, by making a concerted effort to establish a timetable for withdrawal, seem to be listening.

The U.S. Senate has added language to a \$121 billion war spending bill that would have troops withdrawn by March 2008. And the House of Representatives has ordered the President to bring the combat troops home from Iraq next year, which amounts to fewer than half of the roughly 140,000 troops in Iraq.

But as has been happening a lot lately, Americans are once again being sold a bill of goods. At the same time that politicians push for withdrawal, long-term military bases are being established throughout Iraq. Reportedly, both houses of Congress voted last year to declare that the U.S. would not maintain permanent military bases, but this language disappeared from the final legislation.

John Pike, director of GlobalSecurity.org, has identified approximately a dozen of these so-called “enduring bases” in Iraq, with more recent estimates hovering around 15. “Note the terminology ‘enduring bases,’” David R. Francis points out in *The Christian Science Monitor*. “That’s Pentagon-speak for long-term encampments — not necessarily permanent, but not just a tent on a wood platform either. It all suggests a planned

My Point of View

John Whitehead



indefinite stay on Iraqi soil that will cost U.S. taxpayers for years to come.”

And who will man these “enduring bases”? The remaining non-combat troops, of course.

Under both proposed measures, these so-called “non-combat” troops would remain in Iraq for the purposes of training Iraqi security forces and protecting American diplomats and assets. The Pentagon’s “Go Long” strategy reportedly envisions 50,000 to 60,000 troops — including one-tenth of the U.S. Army — remaining in Iraq for years to come.

From descriptions of these bases, they will resemble mini-cities, custom-built “to make U.S. warriors feel right at home,” most of them reportedly built by companies like Halliburton at taxpayer expense.

Describing al-Asad, a U.S. military base in Iraq, journalist Phebe Marr notes, “The 17,000 troops and workers come and go in a kind of bustling American town, with a Burger King, Pizza Hut and a car dealership, stop signs, traffic regulations and young bikers clogging the roads.” And at the Balad Air Base, “The concrete goes on forever, vanishing into the noonday glare, 2 million cubic feet of it, a mile-long slab that’s now the home of up to 120 U.S. helicopters, a ‘heli-park’ as good as any back in the States.”

Another major U.S. military base called “embassy complex” is being built in the Iraqi Green Zone. According to one re-

port, “There, \$1 billion is being spent on a 100-acre installation, comparable to the size of Vatican City, with a Marine barracks, 300 homes, 21 other buildings, and its own electrical, water, and sewage systems.”

It certainly doesn't sound like we're planning to be out of Iraq anytime soon, does it? Despite the rhetoric in Washington, we seem to be settling in for the long haul as an occupying force. Many believe the U.S. government's real intent is to make a permanent American footprint in the heart of the oil-rich region. And the facts seem to support this idea.

But whether combat or non-combat troops remain behind, the sad truth is that more American soldiers will die. The insurgents, who seem to grow stronger every day, are not going away. And I would almost guarantee that they don't consider the non-combat troops to be off-limits.

In the end, it's the American people who are being played for fools. We're being fed half-truths and double talk from Democrats and Republicans alike about what's being done with our money and our troops. And that's unacceptable when numerous American lives and billions of taxpayer dollars are on the line.

People forget that we're dealing with politicians, and all politicians lie. It's like the old joke: How do you know when a politician is lying? The punch line, of course, is: When his lips are moving.

Mark Twain may have been jesting in part when he said that “there is no distinctly native American criminal class except Congress.” But it's no joke that the President and Congress are playing games with us.

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Don't forget Friday is Thumbs Up day in The Telegram; also, how about sharing your thoughts in a letter?

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