

commentary

from other pens...

Democrats promise nonstop campaign

By Will Lester Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Democrats say they need to start an election winning streak after seeing power slip away over the past six years. National party Chairman Terry McAuliffe poured dozens of staffers, poll watchers and money for phone banks into a special Pennsylvania Senate election earlier this week. Republicans note the Democratic effort failed. “We’re in full campaign mode, and we won’t stop until we see a Democrat win the White House in 2004,” McAuliffe said. He’s pledging help from the national party this year in governors’ races in Virginia and New Jersey and for mayors’ races in New York and Los Angeles. Victories could provide Democrats with momentum for the midterm elections for Congress and three dozen governorships in 2002. Republicans say the Democrats’ aggressive, nonstop campaign approach in both state and local races is more noise than substance. The Republicans prefer to keep their future plans to themselves, provide financial help as needed and build local campaign operations. McAuliffe insists the involvement of the Democratic National Committee at all levels will be far higher than in the past. The Republican leadership is watching the Democrats’ effort with a of curiosity and skepticism.

“We’ve heard a lot of talk and posturing coming out of Washington in recent weeks,” national Republican Chairman Jim Gilmore said, “but we know hard work at the grass-roots level and good candidates spell victory at the polls, and they proved that in Pennsylvania.”

Democrats targeted the state Senate campaign in a heavily Republican district that Democratic presidential candidate Al Gore won in November. Polling had suggested the Democrat in the race, attorney Melissa Maxman, was within striking distance of Republican Ted Erickson, executive director of Delaware County.

Erickson beat Maxman on Tuesday by 60 percent to 40 percent. McAuliffe said even unsuccessful efforts like this build up the party. “The (national) Democratic Party will be involved in races all over the country,” he said. McAuliffe has pledged training for local party aides, national staff help for local and state elections and modernization of state party computer technology and extensive financial help. Gilmore said the GOP was taking a different tack.

“Our approach has been to rely on people within the community itself, those running in the races, as opposed to sending in shock troops,” he said, noting the national GOP provides financial help when needed. “We will certainly watch the Democrats swooping down on races.”

The difference in the styles of the two appears matched to their tasks. Gilmore wants to hold the Republican advantage nationally and in many states, while building and diversifying the party base. McAuliffe must chip away at the Republicans’ edge while stoking the energy and frustration Democrats felt after the disputed presidential election.

At the local level, Democrats say they have been pleased with the help they’re getting from the national party.

Florida Democratic chairman Bob Poe said he “has talked more with the national party in the last six weeks than in the previous six years.”

State Republicans say their national party helps when needed, including with national staffers and expertise, but often leaves local elections in the hands of locals. New Jersey GOP Chairman Chuck Haytaian said the national GOP will provide whatever help is needed. In past elections, “if we needed bells and whistles, we got them,” he said.

In Pennsylvania, GOP officials weren’t impressed. “Based on the results, we’re encouraging the Democrats to do this at every turn,” said David James, executive director of the Pennsylvania Republicans. “We had a good chuckle.”

EDITOR’S NOTE — Will Lester covers polling and politics for The Associated Press.

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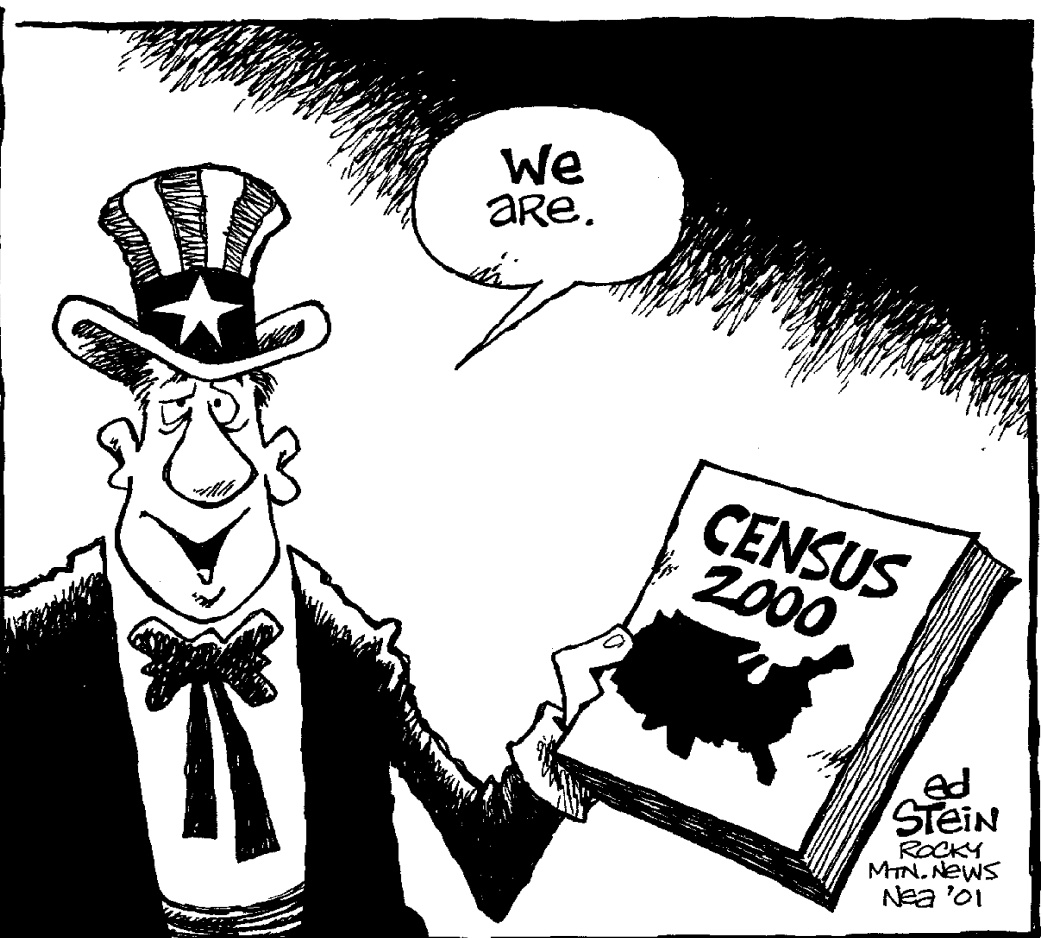
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What about those plans we keep putting off?

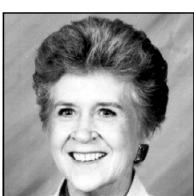
I don’t know about you, but I plan to plan my funeral before I die.

I’ve had it on my list of things to do for a long time, but it keeps getting put on the back burner. I suppose that’s because I, like most people, think that it isn’t a “priority item.” We think we have plenty of time.

A lot of our lives are spent ignoring the fact that death can actually happen to us personally. We make old people out to be comic figures until one day we awake to realize that we are now “one of them” - a senior citizen, an OLD PERSON.

That usually happens when some clerk (who my father would have called “Not wet behind the ears”) calls us “Ma’am” or “Sir” or gives us the senior discount without even asking us!

Then a friend or loved one dies, and we realize that a wonderful person is gone and the world hardly skipped a beat. Life goes on, history keeps



lorna g. t.

• commentary

being written (and often later, revised), and before long when that person is mentioned, someone will say, “WHO?” At those times, we might begin to contemplate our mortality, but we still can’t visualize the world without us in it.

We have a need to feed our egos, to feel convinced that we are important, that what we do wouldn’t get done if we didn’t do it, that what we do truly matters to the world. And we ignore the One whose plan keeps the world from spinning off its axis and whirling into space.

A system of legalized bribery



joan ryan

• commentary

peddling is completely legal under our current regulations.

If the American public had any doubt about the connection between special interest contributions and our politicians’ biased decisions, it surely was wiped away in the aftermath of former President Clinton’s pardon decisions.

Among those pardoned, including the now-infamous Marc Rich, more than a few had ponied up some serious contributions to Clinton’s party or his wife’s U.S. Senate campaign or to his presidential library.

Clinton’s pardons were only the latest and boldest examples of what goes on every day in Washington. “What Clinton did, that’s bribery,” McCain said, smiling. “We Republicans practice extortion.” In fact, they all practice extortion, hitting up one corporation after another for donations.

I remember at the Democratic National Convention last summer watching this corporate-political dance with naive amazement. Companies that had legislation pending before Congress paid for the

We are important to God; we can be part of his plan. But we also are a mere specks in His universe, and He can accomplish His design without us. Paul, in Romans, says, “not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think.” Our worth is in the love, the strength and the plan of God. The meager accomplishments we have in the world are only worthwhile when magnified by His goodness.

We often think of a person’s worth being reflected in the crowd, or lack of it, at the person’s funeral. In God’s eyes, every person is equally important, and many of his loved ones die alone and without a memorial service, their loving hearts unheralded.

A friend of mine, who imparts a lot of love and wisdom to my life, once put the whole thing in perspective for me. He said, “No matter how successful you are, ultimately, your funeral’s size will be decided by the weather.”

Think about it.

mountains of prawns and rivers of margaritas at parties in honor of the very politicians who would be voting on the legislation. And this, too, is now perfectly legal.

If we don’t change the system, rich people will always have a megaphone and poor people a muzzle. If we don’t change the system, politicians — or at least many of them — will always be making decisions in their donors’ best interests instead of ours.

“I’m worried about young Americans being motivated to vote, to serve, to run for public office, be a part of the political system,” McCain said. “I learned on the campaign trail that young Americans are eager to serve their communities, their neighborhood, their friends. But they do not want to be involved in the political process when they see that they are not represented, and it’s not a system that they can admire.”

The answer is not to throw up our hands and sigh, “That’s politics.” The truth is that we hold the ultimate power over our elected officials, yet too many of us do not use it.

It’s time to send a clear message to Washington that, OK, we might not have thick enough wallets to gain access to the halls of Capitol Hill, but the voting booth is open to all.

Joan Ryan is a columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle. Send comments to her e-mail at joanryan@sfgate.com.

To prevent a crash, beef up the tax cut

By Donald Lambro

Guest columnist

WASHINGTON — Last week’s deep plunge in the Dow sent political tremors through the ranks of Republicans, many of whom now say that President Bush’s tax cuts need to be beefed up if they are to provide any stimulus to this year’s sluggish economy.

Even before the Dow’s fall to below 10,000 on March 14, there were signs of fear and insecurity among GOP leaders that the U.S. economy is tanking and that Bush’s gradually phased-in, six-year tax-cut plan will offer virtually no stimulus this year (a mere \$5.6 billion in a \$10 trillion economy) to halt its decline.

Republican leaders who spearheaded Bush’s tax-cut plan through the House earlier this month had been talking up the need for a stronger first-year stimulus, but they kept to the White House message and stood behind the plan that is now before the Senate. But all that changed last week, when a panicked Wall Street went into a steep slide and new indicators showed the economy growing weaker.

That’s when House Majority Leader Dick Arney, an economics professor by trade, decided to act. The economy is in a dangerous state, he told his colleagues, and the president’s \$1.6 trillion plan needs to be dramatically enlarged, perhaps to \$2 trillion. It was time to go public with his concerns, so he sounded the alarm.

In a memorandum to his House colleagues, Arney delivered a surprisingly blunt reappraisal of the president’s plan, which he had helped push through the House with high hopes. Now he says that Bush’s plan is “a good start. But his plan was drafted in 1999, when the economy was much stronger.”

While the president continues to characterize the economy as “sputtering,” Arney has a much stronger description: “an economic emergency.” And he thinks that the Bush plan is too timid in the short-term to deal with it.

The stock market’s sharp decline “again shows us that we must consider a much larger tax cut. Today, circumstances have fundamentally changed,” he said in his memo.

Bush may still be saying that the size and structure of his plan are “just right,” but Arney — in a break with the White House line — no longer believes that. He is telling his party that it should not tie itself to the president’s tax-cut numbers or the timing of the cuts.

“We should no longer be restricted by a proposal or a tax-cut number that was not designed for the situation we face today,” the House Republican leader said.

Arney’s break with the administration about what is needed to revive the economy is the latest in a series of doubts expressed by Bush’s GOP allies in Congress and even his economic adviser in the White House.

House Speaker Dennis Hastert and Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott are similarly fearful that the U.S. economy is being pulled down by panic on Wall Street and the rapid deterioration of major global economies from Japan to Europe. They believe that stronger medicine is needed to boost business investment. Both are calling for making a cut in the tax on capital gains part of the tax plan.

But when I asked Karl Rove, the president’s top political adviser, about that, he threw cold water on any kind of capital-gains tax cuts. Capital gains rates “have already been reduced. The president thinks

that the first priority is to get the income-tax rates down,” Rove told me.

Even White House economic adviser Larry Lindsey, the architect of Bush’s tax-cut plan, confessed to me recently that he wished “the tax cut was larger in the first year.” When I asked him if he believed that the Bush plan as passed by the House would turn the economy around this year, his ominous response was “I have no opinion.”

The White House is describing the tax-cut plan as “the economic recovery plan,” and its across-the-board income-tax cuts will certainly strengthen the economy over the next six years, with most of the cuts occurring in the final two or three years. But most economists do not think it will do much this year, as layoffs mount, the technology sector implodes, Americans watch their 401(k) and mutual funds shrink, and consumer confidence plummets.

“This piece of the tax cuts doesn’t pump a lot of money into the economy immediately. It’s not a tax cut that is designed, as it were, to pull our economy out of a recession. It’s designed to be a significant benefit to build consumer confidence,” Martin Regalia, chief economist at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, told me.

Regalia thinks the current tax-cut plan will have a long-term “salutary effect on the market psychology we’re seeing.” But, like Larry Lindsey, he thinks that “it would be better to have this tax cut more front-loaded than back-loaded, which would have more of a jump-start impact on the economy.”

That’s what Arney thinks, too. This is not a time for “timidity” in tax-cut policy, he told his colleagues. If Republicans do not act more boldly to get this economy back on track sooner, “the public won’t forgive them” in next year’s elections, he said.