

commentary

from other pens...

Bush education stand differs from image

By Will Lester *Associated Press Writer*

WASHINGTON — Democrats are trying to paint President Bush as a corporate Republican who doesn't care about ordinary people. But Bush's most potent weapon in avoiding such labeling is his stand on education, political analysts say.

The education issue, which once was firmly Democratic, was one of the strongest issues during Bush's presidential campaign. And GOP strategists predict it will remain so for some time.

"If you asked me during the campaign, I'd have said 'Wait until the campaign is over and see whether it sticks.' It's now stuck," said Matthew Dowd, a pollster at the Republican National Committee.

In the polls that came out after the president's first 100 days in office, Bush got generally good marks, though people were critical of his stance on the environment and weren't convinced he cares about ordinary people.

On education, it was a different matter. Bush got strong marks in polls that measured him on the issue. In the bipartisan Battleground Poll, Bush was rated 12 points higher than Democrats in Congress, 49-37, in public confidence about his views on education.

That's a dramatic turnaround from 1993 when the same poll showed then-President Bill Clinton ranked 44 points ahead of the Republicans in Congress on the education issue.

"It was a lot easier when Republicans wanted to cut education and close down the (Education) Department," said Democratic pollster Mark Mellman. "The real question is whether Bush is willing to provide the funds to improve the schools."

The education issue has helped Republicans change the debate over social issues, said pollster Ed Goetas, a partner in the Battleground Poll. "Now it's our solutions versus Democratic solutions instead of the question of whether we care," said Goetas.

Bush's progress on education has left Democrats a difficult job in making the case that the president is "just not for us" — the slogan of their aggressive new ad campaign focusing on unpopular Republican positions on the environment and health care.

"Democrats have never been behind on education in a decade. And this is one of the few issues where Bush has coattails," says Democratic pollster Celinda Lake, Goetas' partner in the Battleground Poll.

She maintains that Bush's popularity on the education issue deflates the argument the president is not on the side of the middle class and "is critical to Bush's strategy of getting women voters and suburban voters for whom education is the top issue."

The president's education plan is moving briskly through Congress, lightened by the defeat of a controversial proposal to add school vouchers, which would have let low-income students in poorly performing schools use federal funds for private school tuition.

Republican national Chairman Jim Gilmore said the GOP's progress on education "demonstrates the desire of the Republican Party to be broad-based in governing. Education is a vehicle towards that."

Democrats see Bush stealing an issue they have long felt was their own, much as Clinton did to the Republicans on welfare and crime. They say his education initiatives are more fluff than substance and predict his performance will fall short.

"Bush and the Republicans have yet to put dollars down on their photo-ops and sound bites," says Terry McAuliffe, Democratic Party chairman.

The Republican strength on education is temporary, insisted Jenny Backus, spokeswoman for the Democratic National Committee, and she predicts Democrats will reclaim it.

"It's going to be like pixie dust. And then there's nothing there," she said.

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



Easter time for more than new dresses, egg hunts

I don't know about you, but I'm beginning to feel human again.

By that, I mean less like an Eskimo.

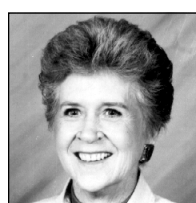
This was a long winter, the greening of the lawns and field is welcome, and I'm looking forward to a long summer.

Easter celebrations have come and gone, hardly noticed by even many Christian families. Oh, maybe they celebrated with egg hunts and chocolate bunnies. They might even have dressed in finery for their semi-annual trip to church. But too many gave little more thought to Easter than that.

Many fewer were in attendance on Palm Sunday than on Easter Sunday, although we like that day too.

Whenever we can have a good time, we're willing to participate. But don't ask the average person to spend any time thinking about what Jesus went through to get to the resurrection morning. And more than that, don't ask for any self-inspection or periods of meditation with God.

There just isn't time in our busy lives. And who wants to be sad and morbid, or worse yet, feel responsible for the injuries we ourselves inflict on



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Christ?

Attention at Holy Week services is disappointing at most Christian churches. Until you make the whole experience part of your thinking, you really don't have much to celebrate at Easter. You can't fully understand all Christ did for you until you emotionally make it a part of your being. Then Easter will have new meaning for you.

Christians are called resurrection people. Yet, we more and more live as though there is nothing different about us. We want to fit in; we overload our schedules; we make everything more important than thanking and praising God.

Easter is just the day we show off our new clothes, instead of rejoicing that Jesus gives us the offer of eternal life.

Preaching? Yes, I guess I am. I am sad that so

many are missing the point. They live as though church is just another club meeting which can be missed whenever something more "exciting" comes up. You can regularly miss and/or fail to participate without threat of expulsion.

But what can be more exciting than knowing that you will live forever in a much better world than this one?

You can't take this world's goods with you; in fact, your love of worldly possessions may keep you from making the final destination. Christianity is a family, and your attendance at "family reunions" is expected.

The unconcerned attitude most of us have is heart-breaking to watch. The lack of enthusiasm even in worship services is sad.

We live like there is no tomorrow, and that might become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Maybe there won't be. Probably not, if we rely on getting justice. Gratefully, our God is a God of mercy instead of justice.

Yes, it's spring again. My feeling human seemed good when I began this column. Now I'm not so sure being human is such a good thing.

Wireless could be new tracking system

Here's a scary thought.

As our society shifts from traditional land-line telephones to mobile telephones, computers track our every move by keeping tabs on our phones.

When the government — or the gas company, for that matter — wants to know where we are, where we have been, and what we were up to, it checks the phone logs.

Your cellular phone is in constant contact with the telephone company's computer, telling where it is. If anyone started keeping tabs on these signals, they could track half the people in the country today. The rest of us by tomorrow.

The day is not far off when everyone will just carry their phone with them, day and night.

Unless, of course, people start to switch them off just to baffle the government.

It could come to that.

It's always been hard for the government to track us. There's not much record of the average American's travel, especially by car.

Of course, credit card purchases leave a trail.



steve haynes

• along the sappa

And if you're on public transportation, your name likely has been recorded. Under new security regulations, airlines are required to verify your identity. Amtrak even has to take your name before letting you travel on its trains, supposedly so it knows who was on board in a crash.

And your phone could be telling about your travels today. Tomorrow, it will be tracking you right down to the lot and block you are parked on.

The government is pushing hard to make phone companies come up with a way to triangulate any phone user as part of improvements to 911 emergency systems.

Phones will be required to give a precise loca-

tion using either tower triangulation or satellite global positioning. The idea is to allow a police dispatcher to know the exact location of emergency calls, but the effect will be to make it possible to know where people go day in and day out, even if the user avoids giving other clues away.

You might just say that it's no big deal, since you're not out breaking the law and have nothing to worry about. You might even be right.

But what if the government just takes a shine to you? Would you want them tracking you?

Technology is a wonderful thing, but you have to wonder how deeply the government's hand ought to be involved in shaping it.

No one has to carry a cell phone, of course. It's purely voluntary. But half the world has one, and soon we all will.

No one has to let the computers track them. You could just turn your phone off. But then, you wouldn't get any calls.

Big brother, it seems, isn't just watching us. He is listening — and tracking — too.

Another study, dose of guilt for parents

During my early years of mothering, I kept a cartoon taped to the wall by my desk at home. A worried-looking woman and her sullen young son are in a psychiatrist's office.

"Simply imagine he's not your child," the psychiatrist happily advises her. "Everybody knows how to raise other people's children!"

I love that cartoon. It captures the astounding clarity with which we are able to assess, analyze and solve the problems of our neighbors and friends. Drop the bum. Demand a raise. Give the kid more discipline. Just snap out of it.

Our clarity is borne not only of incredible intuition and vast experience but also, and perhaps most importantly, of not having the foggiest idea of the complexities of anyone else's particular situation.

I thought of the cartoon when I heard pundits citing the latest study about day care as a means of, once again, slathering working mothers with great stinking slops of guilt. (Not that I take these things personally.)

The study found that children in full-time day care were almost three times as likely to be aggressive as those cared for by mothers at home. Six percent of stay-at-home kids were aggressive, compared with 17 percent of full-time day care kids.

Of course, this means that 83 percent of children in full-time day care were no more aggressive than those with stay-at-home moms.

But it doesn't matter how you spin the results. These kinds of studies aren't telling mothers anything they don't already know.

"We know child care in this country is third-rate," said Sylvia Ann Hewlett, the founder and chairman of the National Parenting Association. "So, of course, we know it's not wonderful for kids."

Yet, instead of calling for higher-quality day care, critics of working mothers — from Dr. Laura on up the conservative food chain — say women



joan ryan

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should stay home no matter what because children are better off when there's a loving parent around them 24 hours a day.

They don't mention that children are also better off when their parents can afford to live in neighborhoods where crack dealers don't hang out on the corners. And that they're better off when they don't go to crummy schools where exasperated teachers leave before Thanksgiving, when their parents can buy fresh vegetables and meat for dinner, when the family isn't stressed because a broken muffler means deciding which monthly bill doesn't get paid.

This is what the pundits gloss over in solving our problems for us. Seventy to 80 percent of mothers work out of economic necessity. They want their children to live in decent neighborhoods with decent schools. They want them to eat healthy food and drive in safe cars and take a piano lesson or two.

More times than not, mothers are working to lift their children above the economic and social risks of poverty. Yet it is day care — not the quality of it but the concept itself — that is still the monster under the bed threatening to ruin our children's lives.

"One of the saddest things about the study is that it didn't figure in the quality of day care," Hewlett said. "So we can't use it for what we really need, which is to improve quality. If you did this kind of study in a country like Sweden, you wouldn't get these results. The study doesn't show that childcare itself is a bad thing. It shows how lousy child care is in the United States."

When the average salary of a childcare worker is \$11,000 a year and the turnover rate is 50 percent, day care centers are obviously not an ideal environment. But instead of calling for improvements, we tell mothers that their children's lives will be fine if only they would stay home.

Solutions are so clear when one's view is uncluttered by reality.

Joan Ryan is a columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle. Send comments to her in care of this newspaper or send her e-mail at joanryan@sfgate.com.

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