

# commentary

from other pens...

## McCain camp veterans say GOP switch unlikely

By Will Lester

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Around the country, organizers in Sen. John McCain's failed presidential bid say they feel it's unlikely he would leave the Republican Party to run in 2004 as an independent.

Political speculation went into overdrive last weekend about McCain, who sparked intense excitement among Republicans, independents and some Democrats during the 2000 campaign. McCain had an extended visit at his Arizona home with Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle, a Democrat, at the same time as news reports that some supporters were talking informally about a possible McCain run as an independent.

Some analysts still predict it's more of a question of when McCain will do that, rather than if he will. But close friends and advisers from around the country aren't convinced.

"I just don't think there's a chance John will switch parties," said Deb Gullett, an Arizona Republican lawmaker who was a longtime McCain staff member. "He's spent his career trying to broaden the base of the Republican Party. I just don't buy it. He's totally ingrained in the party." McCain said last weekend he has no intention of leaving the party and running for president as an independent. Close advisers say their speculative discussions of his future plans were blown out of proportion by the media, which had just feasted that week on the defection of Vermont Sen. James Jeffords from the GOP.

The flurry of interest about McCain struck a nerve, however. "When I heard it on the radio I was thrilled," said Maureen Barrows, a McCain campaign organizer from Exeter, N.H. "I thought ... this is too good to be true."

Barrows drives around with her "McCain for President" bumper sticker and frequently gets a honk of appreciation from passing motorists. McCain won the New Hampshire primary last year before ultimately losing the GOP nomination to George W. Bush.

When a trailer featuring McCain talking about gun safety was shown at a Washington movie theater before "Pearl Harbor," the audience broke into scattered applause and someone shouted: "McCain for President."

In Washington state, McCain supporter Ralph Monroe fielded calls from many Republicans over the weekend about the talk of McCain and the presidential race.

"We had a number of calls to our home," said Monroe, a businessman and former state co-chair with his wife for McCain. "They trust John McCain and realize he's trying to move the GOP to the middle." Monroe said he believes McCain will remain the Republican Party's power broker, but noted: "I think John McCain has a very dedicated group of followers, and wherever he wants to go, they will follow."

In Michigan, state Sen. John Schwarz said he thinks the recent McCain activity has been about pulling the GOP back toward the center, not a prelude to an independent run.

"He has his pulse on where the majority of people are more than the party does right now," said Schwarz, who was a co-chairman of McCain's Michigan campaign. "The party would be well served to swing the turret more toward the middle."

While McCain supporters said they don't anticipate anything as dramatic as an independent presidential candidacy, former New Hampshire McCain chairman Peter Spalding said it's impossible to rule it out. "It's so dependent on what type of position President Bush is in a couple of years from now and what happens in the midterm elections," he said.

An independent run for president just isn't a good fit, say longtime friends like Hank Brown, a former U.S. senator from Colorado who now serves as president of the University of Northern Colorado.

"I know John McCain well and I think it doesn't fit who he is," Brown said. "I think it's speculation by those who don't know John McCain."

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

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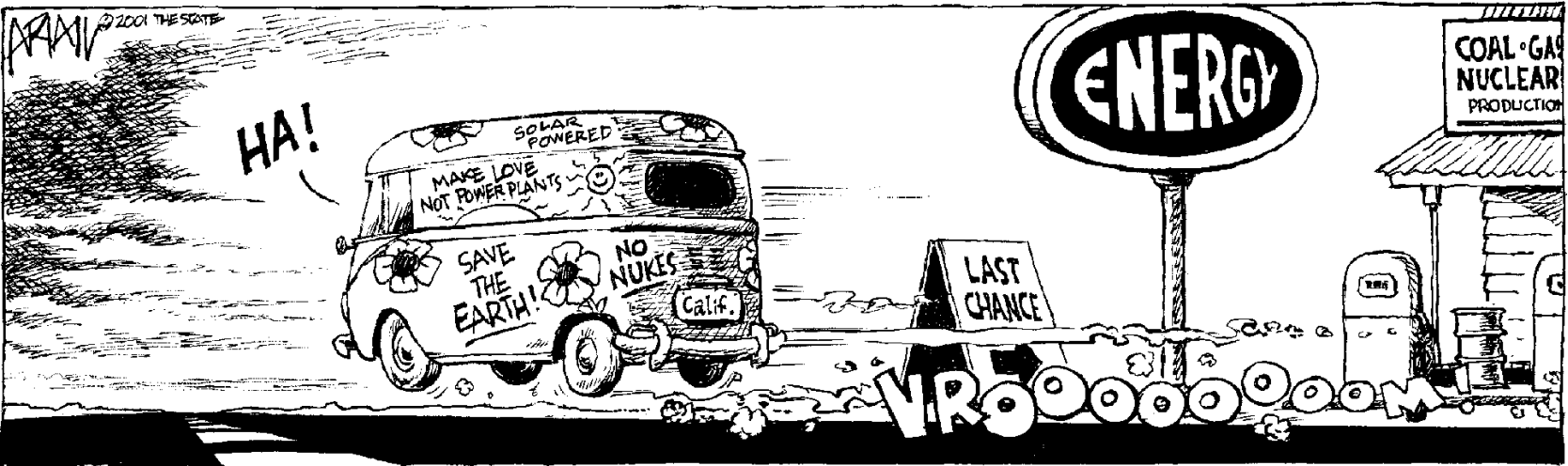
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## The only game in town

This city is a one-ring circus these days. From the press seats high in the Big Top, we watch as a lone lion raises his paw in angry defiance at a lone tamer.

The lion is Sen. John McCain. The figure fending him off with his chair is President Bush.

The match of man and feline carries daunting stakes.

Will the ex-POW from Arizona succeed in his intimidation, forcing Bush to sign campaign finance reform, a patient's bill of rights and a closing of the gun-show loophole?

Or will the narrowly elected president prove himself master of the ring, whipping McCain back into his cage?

As a D.C. political spectacle, this test of wits between these bitter campaign rivals is easily more exciting and arguably more vital than the emerging contest between Bush and the new Senate Majority Leader, South Dakota Democrat Tom Daschle.

Why? Because a Bush veto of a bill carrying McCain's seal of approval would be far more costly than a veto of one sporting only Daschle's partisan label.

This goes for HMO reform and gun control, but



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• commentary

especially campaign finance reform. It explains why McCain thinks Bush will do everything he can to protect himself from the lose-lose predicament of having to either sign or veto a bill that has teeth in it.

"He sent a clear message to the other Republicans," McCain told me in an interview this week. "You're going to have to take care of it before it comes to my desk."

Bush wants Republicans in the House leadership to kill the bill. Failing that, he wants them to wound it so badly that what survives the House-Senate conference carries the name of "reform" but leaves the political sewers rampaging with money from the big corporations to the politicians' TV ad buyers.

John McCain is the only force in America zealous enough to prevent that. At this point in his ca-

reer, campaign reform looms as a life's work. There is no abandoning the fight, no substitute for victory. If Bush wins this battle, McCain loses the war. The man who bombed him to merciless defeat in last year's South Carolina primary will have killed him twice.

McCain cannot let that happen. He may have accepted Bush's invite to dinner this past Tuesday. He may have said all kinds of nice things in public afterward about how the president is "growing in office," that he's "a smart man."

I don't believe this palsy-walsy for a second. They are lion and tamer.

Only one can command the ring.

Harry Truman once said that a leader is a person who gets other people to do what they don't want to do "and like it!"

If McCain gets Bush to sign a campaign reform bill with a smile on his face, or Bush gets McCain to accept defeat with a smile on his, we will know the winner and we will know the loser.

*Chris Matthews, a nationally syndicated columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle, is host of "Hardball" on CNBC and MSNBC cable channels. The 1999 edition of "Hardball" was published by Touchstone Books.*

## Stack it high and watch it fly or not

Inventory. The boon and bane of all retail business. If you get it right, sales will soar. If you get it wrong, it can stifle the growth of your business.

Several years ago, when I was a retailer of outdoor power equipment, I was asked by one of my suppliers to assist another dealership. This dealer had over extended and desperately needed cash. I agreed to go and help this fellow-dealer by purchasing any of his inventory I thought I could sell. The supplier had offered no-interest floor planning for a year if I'd help out.

When I arrived at the over-stocked dealership, I saw a warehouse full of inventory. In one corner there must have been 40 snowblowers. I did not sell the snowblower brand, but I was curious as to how this dealer could move so many units. So I said, "Boy, you must sell a lot of snowblowers!"

The dealer answered, "No, I don't really sell that many, but the factory representative who calls on me sure sells a bunch."

### Where money hides

There aren't many places in retail businesses where money can hide, but inventory is usually number one. For the record, "accounts receivable" is a close second.

For retailers, inventory is both a boon and a bane. Now, I may be showing my age by using these two words — boon and bane — but if you don't know what they mean, I'll tell you. Boon means "a welcome benefit or blessing." Bane is "the cause of harm, death, etc."



**don  
taylor**

• minding your own business

Whether your inventory helps or hinders your growth, depends on whether or not you get it right. Your business must have adequate inventory to attract and satisfy customers, but not so much that it ties up capital you need for other operations. It's a fine line, and if you miss it either way, your business doesn't reach it's full potential.

### Take charge, take control

Here are some tips for keeping inventory under control.

Carry the right amount. Arriving at the right level or amount of inventory is not an easy task. I don't know any shortcuts to get there, but here are three guidelines I'd use to get close. 1) Don't grow your inventory at a faster rate than your sales are growing; 2) Try to keep your inventory turns above your industry average; 3) Set a goal to reduce inventory as a percentage of sales.

Don't fall in love with it. I've worked with folks who grew so attached to their inventory that they wouldn't do what it takes to get it moving. You're better off getting even your cost out of slow moving inventory as opposed to not moving it at or near

full-markup.

Work your suppliers. I'm a believer in building relationships with your vendors and suppliers. If you're a good customer who keeps your accounts current, usually suppliers will help you reduce lead-time, lower shipping costs and move unsaleable merchandise. The best suppliers know how valuable their dealers are, and they work with them to keep merchandise moving.

Barter slow movers. Bartering will often work with both suppliers and customers. Smart retailers will often trade marginal inventory for more saleable product or needed services. Remember, you're trading at "cost dollars" not "list-price dollars." I've bartered my services for memberships, products and food.

Use technology. All too often retailers don't know what they've got. Technology is becoming more affordable, and it will help you track both the "current" inventory level and the "right" level. If you only sell one each month, you don't need 25 in stock. Remember, if you aren't measuring it, you can't manage it.

*Don Taylor is the co-author of Up Against the Wal-Marts. You may write to him in care of Minding Your Own Business, PO Box 67, Amarillo, TX 79105. Column sponsored by Goodland Area Chamber of Commerce Business Development Committee.*

### berry's world

