

commentary

from other pens...

Bush pushes agenda with arguments

By TOM RAUM

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Missile defense? It's time to move ahead even if the science has not been perfected. Global warming? That's different. Needs more scientific study.

President Bush gave diametrically opposing reasons when making separate cases in Europe last week for deploying a missile defense shield and for junking the 1997 Kyoto treaty on climate control.

He asserted that restrictions on emissions proposed by the Kyoto agreement are not "science-based" and should thus be ignored — and more spent on research into ways to address the problem.

On missile defense, however, Bush wants to move ahead quickly to put a preliminary system in place, even through research to date has not demonstrated that one would work. In fact, more tests of interceptors have failed than succeeded.

Of course, Bush is doing what most politicians do: rearranging his facts and arguments to bolster the case at hand.

"He didn't invent the process," said Bruce Buchanan, a government professor at the University of Texas and a longtime Bush watcher. "He's rather blatant about it, however. He's not as subtle as some politicians have been in reshaping the message to fit the audience."

And, after all, it has worked for Bush on domestic issues.

He got Congress to go along with his tax cut by repackaging it as an economic stimulus program. He has redefined his energy policy, which encourages more exploration, more pipelines, more refineries and more burning of oil and coal, into an antidote to chronic power shortages in California and soaring fuel prices elsewhere.

Bush was asked at a news conference last week if he could explain the apparent contradiction in demanding more scientific evidence on climate control but not on missile defense.

He didn't.

He did say that world leaders were becoming more supportive of his missile defense program once they heard "the logic behind the rationale."

Not everyone found his logic consistent or his rationale logical.

French President Jacques Chirac, for instance, suggested the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, which Bush wants to scrap, was a "pillar" of strategic balance and that a missile defense deployment could restart the arms race.

"It's hard for Europeans to be sniping at the Bush plan when we don't know what it is," said Philip Gordon, a European specialist at the Brookings Institution. "I suspect that the missile defense debate will be with us for the entirety of the Bush administration"

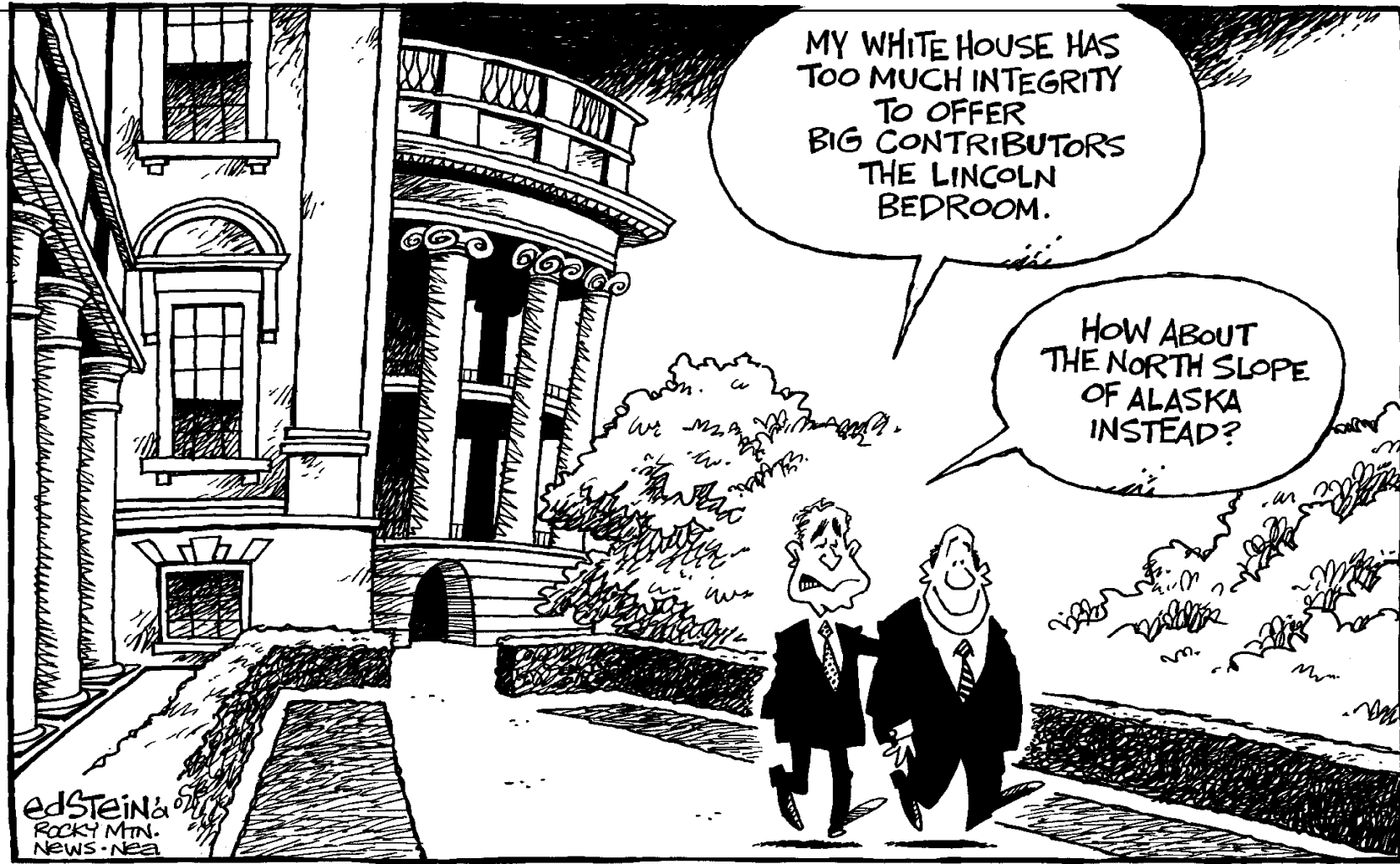
In selling his missile plan, Bush is emphasizing — critics say exaggerating — the potential threat to civilized society of ballistic missiles in the hands of unstable states or terrorists. He says he favors a bigger plan than former President Clinton did, although has not provided a blueprint.

In denouncing the Kyoto treaty, Bush is minimizing the potential environmental threat of greenhouse gases.

"It's though he's not conscious of his contradictions," said Wayne Fields, an English professor at Washington University in St. Louis who specializes in presidential rhetoric.

"I don't know that he exaggerates more or less than his predecessors. But there is a peculiar kind of self-assurance about him," Fields said. "He is not a man given to self-doubt, even when he has to correct himself or change things around."

Exaggeration is a common technique for politicians regardless of political stripe, and Bush has done it before — including in his comments on the U.S. economy.



Pain at the pump a lesson in elasticity

(First of two parts)

Just a few months ago I bought a tank of gas for \$1.09 per gallon. Recently, I paid \$1.69 for a gallon of the same stuff. By peak vacation time, I expect to see cheap grades sell at the \$2 or more per gallon level.

This is not the first time I've seen rising gas prices. I was around during the alleged 'oil crisis' in the 70s. We lived in Southern California at the time, and I remember skyrocketing prices, shortages and rationing.

We had 'odd or even' days at the gas pump. Your 'odd or even' designation was determined by the last number of your license plate. You could only buy gas on 'your' day.

There were long lines at the pumps, as we car-dependent citizens waited patiently to top off our tanks. No one ran a tank close to empty for fear you might not be able to get any gas when you needed it.

As I remember it, no one complained as much about the price of gasoline as they did about the possibility of not getting any.

Today at least where I live and travel there is no shortage, only higher prices. And, folks aren't really complaining very much.

It is common to hear discussions about the price of gasoline where it's the cheapest, how much you paid, etc. but there are few real complaints. Which proves to me the economic theory of 'price elasticity' is still valid in our current economic situa-



don taylor

• minding your own business

tion of the new century.

The Theory of Stretch

In a free market economy, prices are determined by costs, demand, competition and legal constraints. The floor, the lowest price, is established by costs and competition. The ceiling, the highest price, is usually controlled by demand, competition and legal issues.

The range between the low and high defines just how much price stretch or elasticity there is in goods and services. If the price can increase or decrease significantly while the amount or number of units sold remains fairly constant, we say this item has a lot of stretch or elasticity.

On the other hand, if a small change in price causes big changes in the number of units sold, we say this item is inelastic or has little stretch.

Let's use gasoline as an example. To most folks, a gallon of gas is a gallon of gas. So, since brand names have little value in determining gas sales, we know that price per unit becomes a critical purchasing issue.

What the last few months have proven is that the

price of gas is very elastic. We've seen prices increase by as much as 60 percent without any decrease in number of gallons sold.

No one is selling their SUV and buying a subcompact replacement. No one is canceling their travel plans, and I've heard only one person carpooling to work.

Folks may be grumbling, but most of us are still driving as usual.

Other things we spend money on have little or no stretch. Recently, in my home county, the County Commissioners decided to raise taxes by more than 20 percent. It darn near caused a revolt. Citizens collected signatures and voted in favor of a tax roll back. The county had to settle for 'only' an 8 percent increase.

Property taxes aren't elastic. Most people believe they are over-taxed. They can't see much value in return for the taxes they pay, so any increase draws a reaction.

Next week, we'll explain how these examples have a direct application for most small-business owners.

If you're concerned about raising your prices, don't miss Pain at the Pump, part two.

Don Taylor is the co-author of *Up Against the Wal-Mart's*. 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.

Living the dream differently at age 55

During a contentious Q-and-A session at the New School in New York City, where I was speaking recently, a woman lobbed a verbal grenade onto the stage. "Would you go back to Pennsylvania and run for office? And if so, would you run as a Democrat or a Republican?"

For a moment I was uncharacteristically speechless. I paused before giving what I thought was a pretty smart response to the two-part query. "I don't know, and I don't know."

The media buzz triggered by my double-barreled answer indicates the need for a fuller airing of my ambitions at age 55.

When I was a kid I dreamed of leading a cavalry charge across the plains of Russia. My saber raised high, my horse galloping, I was single-handedly defeating the Communist enemy.

As a fantasy, it's still hard to beat.

When I grew older, my heart stirred to other notions of glory.

As a Philadelphia high-schooler I wanted to be a U.S. senator. I read "Advise and Consent" with fascination.

On a band trip to Washington I thrilled at the sight of Hubert Humphrey standing before a Capitol elevator.

When the Democrats had their convention in Atlantic City, I waited in the crowd to see and shake the hands of the future anti-Vietnam War hero Eugene McCarthy.

I had caught the Senate bug while still in grade school, watching Republican Hugh Scott win his upset in 1958, beginning his long career as the dis-



chris matthews

• commentary

tinguished gentleman from Pennsylvania.

In my first national election, I voted for his Democratic colleague, the great liberal reformer Joseph Clark.

But in college, I watched the power of Philadelphia Inquirer columnist Joe McGinniss. Three mornings a week, he jolted the city's breakfast tables and car pools with his 800 words of a.m. audacity. Radio talk-show hosts would open by asking listeners, "So, what do you think of McGinniss?"

In grad school, I made a habit of catching CBS' Eric Sevareid deliver his big-picture reflections on the Vietnam debate. One of Edward R. Murrow's boys from World War II, he spoke with the crisp authority of someone who'd been there. I could not think of anything grander, more vital to the Republic, than to be a TV news commentator.

Judging by my career, those dreams have been powerful. Coming home from Africa in the Peace Corps three decades ago, I came straight here to learn about politics and government.

I worked for the estimable Edmund Muskie, wrote speeches for President Carter, and served Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill in his daily philo-

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