

commentary

from other pens...

Winning Blacks over is a tough sell for GOP

By Will Lester

Associated Press Writer

BOSTON — Of all the outreach efforts undertaken by the Republican Party, their most difficult is to the black community.

Many Republicans, both black and white, acknowledge it could take a long time, before they make much headway recruiting blacks to join the party. And the level of distrust in the black community remains high, say black Republicans attending a national GOP gathering in Boston.

Yvonne Brown became Republican mayor of Tchula, Miss., recently, six years after she and her husband started providing a ministry in the town. "It boils down to personal relationships," she said.

Jennifer Carroll, executive director of the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs, ran for Congress, but found many blacks were skeptical when meeting a black Republican. "They have a sense that you're not for real, not part of them, don't understand their issues."

Garry Sprauve, party chairman in the Virgin Islands, has found the Republican Party is still a very tough sell in the black community.

"The key is for the ultra-conservative wing of the party to understand if you're going to let everybody in, you have to come to the center a little more," said Sprauve. "Historically, the party has been for big business and for whites and has not made African-Americans feel welcome. And blacks have not made Sprauve feel welcome.

"I'm looked at many places I go as an Uncle Tom, like I sold out because I'm Republican," he said. "But I believe in a two-party system."

The black outreach effort may fare better among younger generations, said Chris Garrett, who leads the black outreach effort for the RNC.

"We've had a problem of not getting our message out," Garrett said. "We'll be getting it to African-American newspapers, African-American radio stations. We'll let them make a decision based on all the information."

Republican National Chairman Jim Gilmore knows the outreach to the black community is a slow process, but he said it's worth the effort.

"We will be thinking more about this community in terms of our policies," he said. "It is very difficult because the leadership in that community is mostly tied to the Democratic Party as an institution. Democrats have taken African-American leaders and built them into the party structure, and as a result Republicans get shut out. We don't get invited to things. If we do go, we're not made welcome."

Gilmore said he's encouraging state party officials to find people within their communities who aren't tied to the Democratic Party, and encourage them to consider the GOP.

President Bush has shown interest in winning over more black voters after losing their votes by a 9-1 margin in the election. Republicans are also targeting Hispanics, Catholics and women this year.

The state chairs assigned the job of increasing outreach to the black community acknowledge it's difficult, but say it's potentially rewarding.

North Carolina state GOP chair Bill Cobey has been working for two decades to win over black voters.

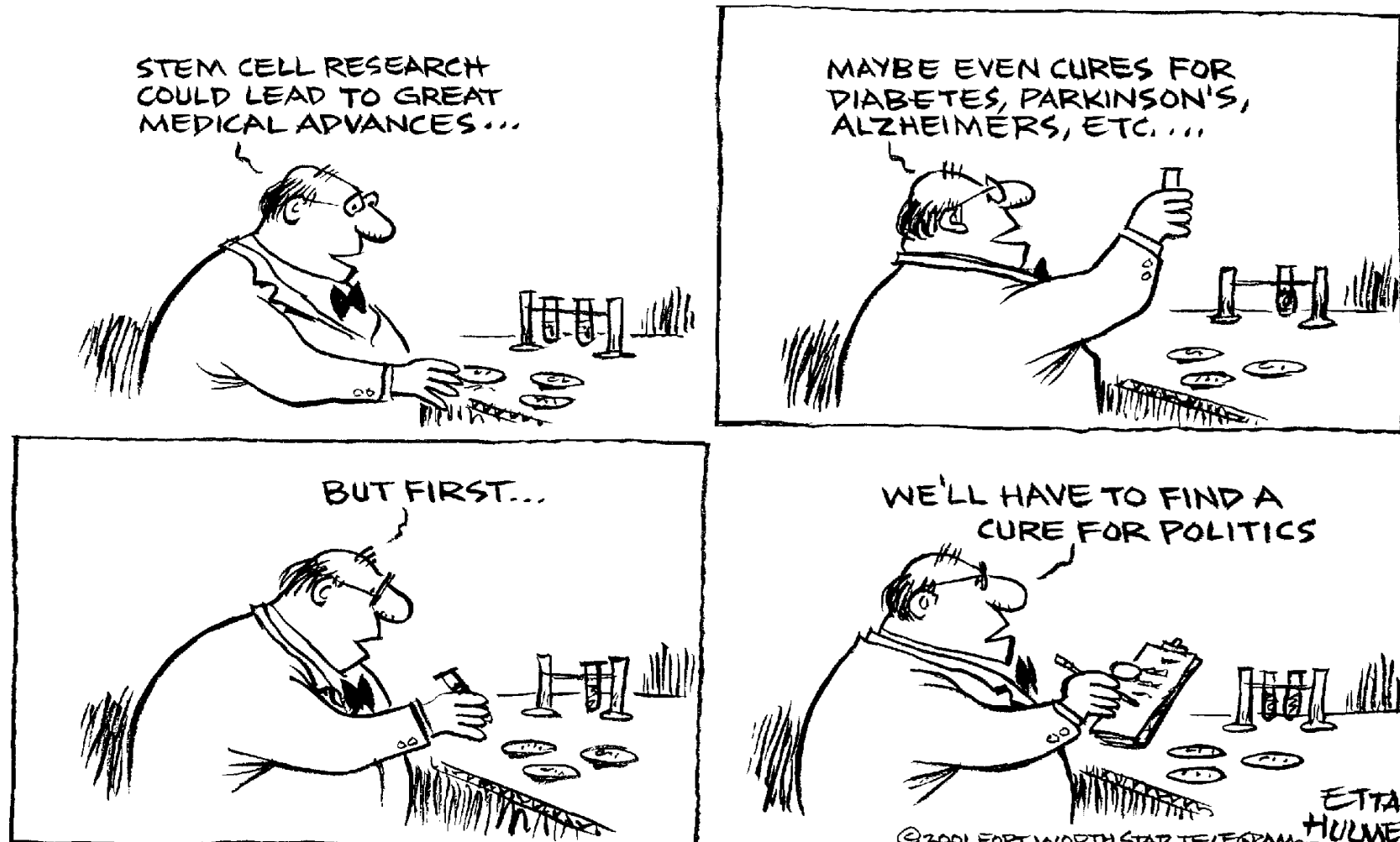
"I was a congressman and I know in the African-American community in the Raleigh area, they like me," Cobey said. "But didn't translate into them voting for me. They always voted Democrat and their mothers and fathers would turn over in their graves if they voted Republican."

The president can speed up a slow process by his leadership, Cobey said. "George W. Bush has the ability to fast-forward this process," he said.

For Jennifer Carroll of Florida, it's important to communicate to black voters that the Republican agenda could be good for them — tax cuts, education and policies aimed at encouraging private enterprise.

"When you look at everyone in this country, they're all affected by the same issues," Carroll said. "The Democrats have done such a great job of demagogue-ing the Republicans on this. The Republican Party hasn't done its part to say: These are the things we're doing for the working people."

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



This month marks sixth anniversary

I don't know about you. Well, I really don't! Sometimes I don't even know about myself. When I began writing these columns, I deliberately picked the "I don't know about you" beginning for each one because I thought it might be eye-catching. Many people never read an editorial, and I don't read very many of them either.

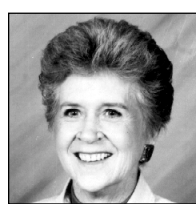
Either they are so opinionated I feel the need to present the opposing point of view or so intellectually written or wordy that I lose interest.

In my column, I wanted to present topics of interest in a "down home" format which almost anyone could at least understand. I also felt that if I openly stated that the material was mine, the reader would not feel obligated to agree with me on any or all topics. I wanted to encourage people to think and come to their own conclusions.

So I begin each column with "I don't know about you."

This month marks the sixth anniversary of my efforts. There are times when I feel I've said all I have to say (and maybe my readers feel that too.)

A too busy schedule makes the time for creative writing seem self-indulgent. Finding topics that might appeal to others is always a challenge. Etc.,



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etc. (Maybe you need to e-mail me at lornagt@nwkansas.com and let me know what you think about my continuing and/or suggest topics.)

The years have quickly passed, and it's hard to imagine that I have written approximately 300 columns with few repetitions and hardly a missed deadline. Of course I've re-visited topics, but tried to do that in some different way or with increased understanding of it.

It might be interesting to go back and arrange my columns chronologically by topic to see if I've grown in depth or not. Maybe I'll do that someday when I retire.

Meanwhile I only have time to keep cranking out weekly columns plus keep my house and job going.

I have a list of things I intend to do when I retire, but it's not as long as my sister's. She's always been

more interested in more things than I; her curiosity about the world has never wavered. I am more of a realist. There are projects I'd like to do when I can - maybe when I retire - but I also realize that my energy level diminishes with every birthday. There will probably come a time when I will be content to do more sitting than projects. There are days when that seems pretty appealing even now.

I'd like more time with my kids and grandkids; I like seeing how they relate to each other as well as to me. I'd like to spend a few days with them more often instead of weeks together after long separations, but my family is very scattered. The price of flying goes up and up, and extended trips aren't always convenient for everyone's schedules. So the days and years pass, and we are all getting older and know each other less well.

Yes, I sound like a grandmother. Yes, I sound almost like I'm extolling the "good old days." Even if those things are true, that isn't the point. I'm taking some time today for introspection. Who am I and why do I do the things I do? I'm the only one I can work with or on, because you have to be your own project. I know a little about me, but "I don't know about you."

How Jefferson saved the First Amendment

On the Fourth of July, not only the Declaration of Independence, written by Thomas Jefferson, was celebrated. Also honored, in various orations, was the Bill of Rights. How many Americans know that the Constitution was not ratified by the individual states until those 10 amendments, the Bill of Rights, were added? From the First Amendment — which guaranteed freedom of speech and of the press — all our other liberties flow. Jefferson was a strong advocate of the Bill of Rights.

But Thomas Jefferson's luster among the Founders is dimming as some historians agree with David McCullough, and Pauline Maier, an expert on the Founding, that — as she wrote in a New York Times review of McCullough's best-selling book, "John Adams" (Simon & Schuster, 2001): "On virtually all points of comparison" between Adams and Jefferson, "Jefferson comes in second."

Maier omitted from her review, however, the fact that Jefferson saved the First Amendment after our second president — the very same John Adams — and the Federalist Congress, nearly extinguished freedom of speech and press. Only seven years after the Constitution — including the Bill of Rights — was ratified, Adams signed the Alien and Sedition Acts, which made the president — any president — and members of Congress immune from criticism by "We the People of the United States."

Even McCullough wrote that the Alien and Sedition Acts "are rightfully judged by history as the most reprehensible acts of Adams' presidency."

The legislation punished — by imprisonment and fine — anyone who spoke, wrote or published anything that brought the President or Congress "into contempt or disrepute," or might excite



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against them "the hatred of the good people of the United States," thereby stirring up "sedition within the United States."

Revolutionary War veterans and other individuals could be imprisoned under this law for up to two years and fined up to \$2,000 — a princely sum in those days.

Thomas Jefferson disrespected President Adams and Congress by calling the Alien and Sedition Acts an "unconstitutional reign of terror." But historian Joseph Ellis tries to partially absolve John Adams by saying we should not impose "our modern notion of civil liberties or freedom of the press on an age that was still groping toward a more expansive version of First Amendment protections."

Then how come Jefferson, James Madison and other Americans immediately saw the danger of this suppression of free speech and press?

The first victim of the Act was Congressman Matthew Lyon of Vermont, who had fought in the Revolution. In a letter to the Vermont Journal, he had attacked the Adams administration for its "unbounded thirst for ridiculous pomp, foolish adulation and selfish avarice."

Paraded under guard through the town of Vergennes, Vt., Lyon was marched into a 12-foot-by-16 foot cell. So much for the Declaration of Independence!

On hearing the news, Jefferson said, "I know not which mortifies me most, that I should fear to write what I think or that my country bear such a state of things."

Also imprisoned were the editors of four of the five most important opposition newspapers. In Dedham, Mass., a number of nonjournalists had set up a Liberty Pole with the sign: "No Stamp Act, No Sedition, No Alien Bills, No Land Tax. Downfall to the Tyrants of America."

One of those Dedham lawbreakers — a common laborer and a veteran of the Revolutionary Army — was convicted of creating a "rallying point of insurrection and civil war." He was jailed for two years.

The U.S. Supreme Court did not strike down the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 until 1964 (New York Times vs. Sullivan). Justice William Brennan wrote then, "The attack on its validity has carried the day in the court of history."

Jefferson did not wait. On succeeding Adams as president, he pardoned and remitted the fines of the convicted and imprisoned Americans.

These days, when most American students — all the way through graduate school — have not been taught much American history, except in its multicultural requirements, the lesson of the Alien and Sedition Acts is a reminder that our liberties are not set in stone. And on this crucial point of comparison with John Adams, Mr. Jefferson comes out way ahead.

Nat Hentoff is a nationally renowned authority on the First Amendment and the Bill of Rights.

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