

commentary

from other pens...

What is proper role for Dems superstar?

By Will Lester

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — If people had forgotten, they were quickly reminded when Bill Clinton opened his Harlem office last month at a festive, campaign-like event.

At 54, the former president is the “elder statesman” of the Democratic Party, but as far as the faithful he remains the party’s rock star.

And from his Harlem headquarters, Clinton will offer much-needed fund-raising help, give valued political advice and, top Democrats hope, avoid outshining their next wave of leaders.

“More than anyone else, he wants to make sure Democrats win elections up and down the ballot,” said the Democrats’ national chairman, Terry McAuliffe. “He knows that he takes up a lot of the oxygen in the room. We need to highlight our new leaders and new ideas.”

Clinton will have plenty to divert him from domestic politics — writing his \$10 million memoir, working on his presidential library, seeking international solutions to the AIDS crisis and racial relations.

But he has no plans to give up politics altogether.

“The president has said if he can be helpful to the party or to a candidate, be it raising resources or other means, he will make himself available,” said his spokeswoman, Julia Payne.

Associates say he will try to be helpful while remaining in the background, but they concede competitive politics is in his blood.

Several Democrats eyeing a run for president in 2004 have sought his counsel. Even if he should remain neutral, Democrats and political analysts will closely watch his every move in national politics.

“He won’t try to be the guy out there articulating Democrats’ positions on the issues,” said John Podesta, Clinton’s White House chief of staff. “The critical voices in the future will be those out there running for office — Al Gore, Tom Daschle and Dick Gephardt.”

Democratic insiders talk privately about the challenge Gore will face if he decides to run for president in 2004. If he does, they say, the 2000 Democratic nominee will need to give some kind of public sign that he and Clinton have patched postelection differences.

Gore associates don’t talk about the relationship between the two, and associates of Clinton say the two have a mutual respect for each other even if they’re not best friends.

But persistent sniping between aides to the two men has fueled a perception of resentment over Clinton’s scandals and Gore’s decision to distance himself from the man he served eight years as vice president.

“Clinton continues to be the big hurdle for Al Gore in putting together his rematch with Bush,” said Republican consultant Scott Reed. “Does he still believe he’s the best president ever, or is he disgusted with his lack of personal values?”

“On a few rare occasions it will be appropriate for him to speak publicly for Democrats and on behalf of Democrats,” said former aide Joe Lockhart, “but those will be few and far between.”

But he will be tempted often because of his widespread appeal within the party, said veteran Democratic consultant Joe Cerrell.

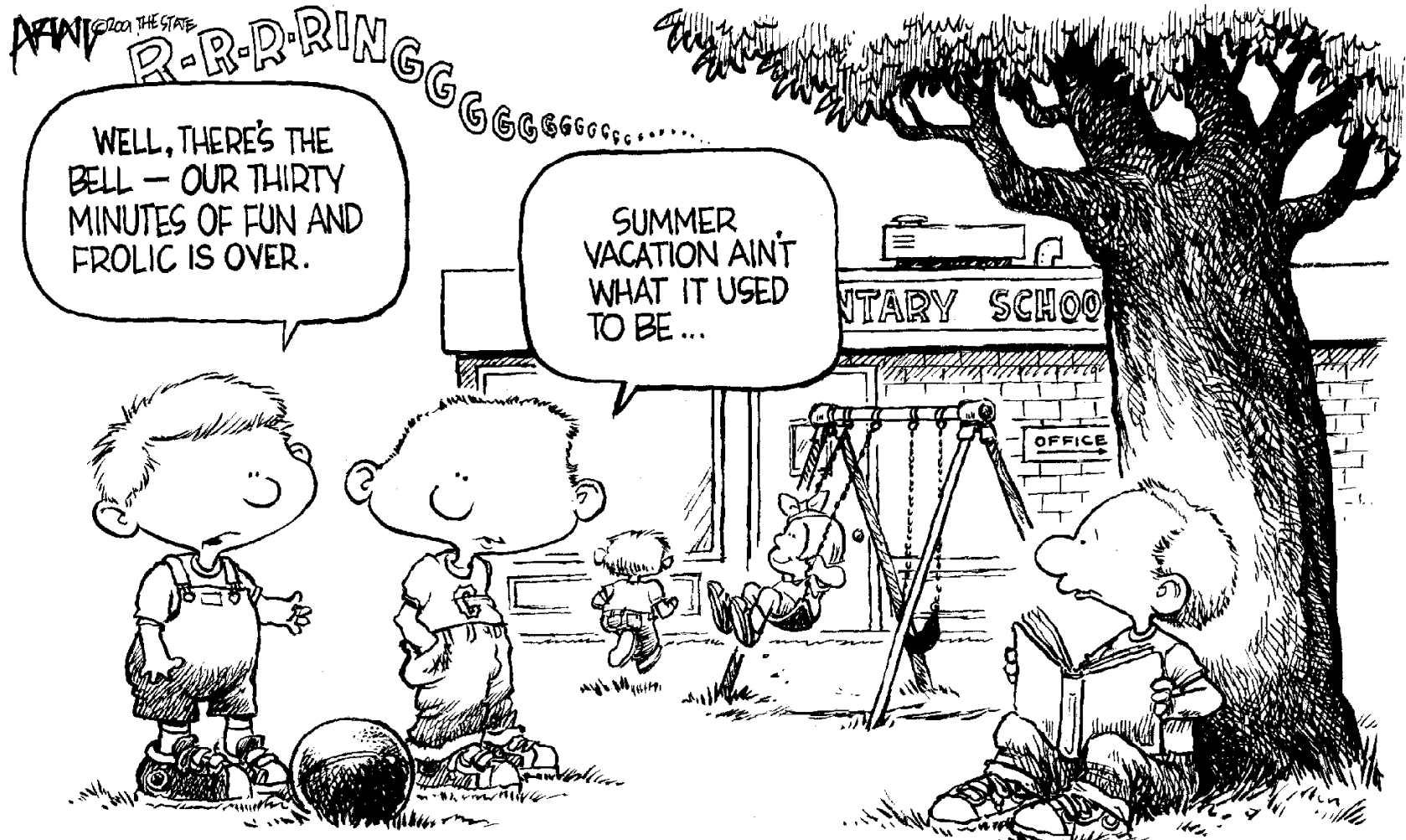
“If I were involved in a campaign in 2002,” Cerrell said, “I’d have no hesitancy to tell some prominent Democrat, if you get the opportunity, use the president.”

“He has incredible popularity among Democrats,” said Democratic strategist Bill Carrick. “On the other hand, he remains the Democrat Republicans love to hate the most.”

“After watching his performance in Harlem, it was clear he continues to be the champion of the Democratic Party,” said the GOP’s Reed, noting Clinton’s appeal to blacks and other key Democratic groups.

“The fact is in the pantheon of politicians, Bill Clinton is the ultimate rock star in terms of fund-raising and rallying the faithful,” Democratic consultant David Axelrod said. “There’s no one comparable.”

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



Bush launches August media offensive

WASHINGTON — George Bush has pulled a head-fake on the American press corps. Under the cover of a four-week vacation, he has launched an August media offensive.

In a maneuver worthy of Washington or MacArthur, the scrappy Texan has again outflanked his pursuers and produced the best TV images of his presidency.

His speech to the nation during primetime last week won a 70-percent approval rating among those who watched.

But the most compelling pictures of August have been his Jimmy Carter-like house-building with Habitat for Humanity, his Ronald Reagan-like brush-clearing in the Rockies. His schedule promises more outdoorsy video in the weeks remaining before Labor Day.

Those who denigrate such imagery as “form over function” must have forgotten how this cowboy got his current job.

During the month before the two 2000 presidential candidates stood side-by-side on TV, the Gallup polls showed the country leaning to Gore. For the two weeks afterwards, the Gallup had Bush in the lead.

Had it not been for Gore’s last-week campaign blitz, and Bush’s stupid hiding of an aged DUI charge, the picture we all got in that debate could have given this president a clear-cut victory.

Last week, the country got another comparison shot of the two men. Bush was in the “heartland” hauling trees around like a real American. A bearded Gore spent the time instructing young Democrats on electioneering techniques.

What a side-by-side! Bush looked like a Marlboro commercial. Gore had the off-putting appearance of some Bolshevik labor organizer.



chris matthews

• commentary

Or, worse yet, some geek teaching kids how to be geeks.

Ask yourself: If we are going to have clones in the future, do we really want more Al Gores?

What worked for Bush this week, once again, was the media snobbery of those in New York and Santa Monica who love looking down their noses at a man they want to believe is Alfred E. Neuman’s idiot nephew.

Keep thinking that. Keep teaching it at Columbia Journalism School. Keep sharing the in-joke over the dinner table in Beverly Hills. It only makes life easier for the White House ballyhoo boys. Every time you lower the bar on this fellow, the easier it becomes for him to clear it.

You know what I think sells about Bush? Humility. Yes, you can quote Churchill and say Bush is a “modest man with much to be modest about,” but I challenge you to say he is as dumb as the sophisticates say he is.

Is he as smart as those Democratic favorites, Adlai Stevenson and Mike Dukakis? Maybe. Maybe not.

But when Bush spoke to the nation about stem cells, he admitted right up front up front that such issues are not solvable by brainpower alone: Good people disagree on the subject. Nobody’s necessarily right. Nobody’s provably wrong. We’re all in this together, trying to square our religious views

with our medical hopes, our deepest human values with our scientific potential.

“The issue is debated within the church, with people of different faiths, even among the same faith, coming to different conclusions,” Bush said.

Most people, and not just those in that “red” part of the Electoral College map who voted for him, agree with Bush’s decision.

Politically, he faced hazards on both left and right.

Had the president rejected stem-cell funding outright, the decision would have painted him indelibly with the religious right. If he’d gone whole-hog for stem-cell research, he would have been The New York Times’ flavor of the week, but also a man who broke a well-known campaign promise.

Polls show he threaded the needle. Bush has retained his high Gallup number (59 percent) for being a president who “keeps his promises.”

But pretty cowboy pictures and shrewd “values” politics are not enough.

If I know my presidents, what Bush now needs to project is the some music to go with it. I’m talking about the optimistic spirit that lifted the nation in the past. I’m talking about a national sense of mission.

For FDR, it was “Happy Days are Here Again.” For JFK, it was “High Hopes.” For Clinton, it was “Don’t Stop Thinking about Tomorrow.”

The silence in the American air, the absence of any apparent national mission, is what keeps Bush’s pictures from putting some bounce in the country’s step.

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.

Comment was unfair to our young people

To the Editor:

The Hispanic Advisory Board would like to address a comment made by a spectator at this year’s fair parade regarding the MAS (Motivation + Achievement = Success) Youth Group. To show our support for these kids and outrage at the types of underlying attitudes these comments represent, we would like to share this experience with your readers.

The youth group was initiated by a small group of young people and adult sponsors to fill a need in our community. There are many great organizations providing alternatives to kids, but not every kid will feel “at home” in these. The community needs to continue to create other alternatives for those kids who have felt as if they did not “fit in” to traditional activities, clubs and groups. This group was not initiated exclusively for Hispanic youth, but these are the ones who make up the youth group at this time, and they should not be singled out or criticized because of this.

When the sponsors suggested to the kids they have a float at the parade with anti-drug messages, they hesitated. After revisiting their mission statement, “Creating positive initiatives which allow youth a variety of opportunities in the community, school and home environment for empowerment and for making lifelong healthy choices,” they realized that they not only had a right, but an obligation to be out there. This was another opportunity to show that young people can have a good time in healthy ways.

These kids have worked very hard the past five months providing anti-drug presentations, fund raisers, participating in educational programs and activities as well as their float for the parade (which, by the way, won third place). One of our board members overheard a spectator refer to them as a “bunch of Mexicans who are probably doing those things (drugs) themselves.” This comment was completely out of line and this woman should be ashamed of herself. After the youth group’s attributes and activities were brought to her attention, she did little more than turn her back and continue watching the parade.

We are appalled that such a racial, hateful remark would be made in public in the presence of others and in the presence of children, some of whom were Hispanic themselves. To stereotype these kids in such a hateful way is beyond ignorance. These kids are no different than the rest of the kids



from our readers

• to the editor

in the community. They are young, inexperienced, sometimes bored and always curious. These factors can make a mixture for trouble in any young person’s life. They are bound to make unhealthy decisions at one time or another. Adults do it every day.

It has been our experience in working with the schools, church and community in general that there has been a lack of participation from the Hispanic community. This type of remark does much to take us back instead of supporting the efforts of our community members, Hispanic or not.

A youth member’s question to all of this has been, “Why was our color looked at before our person?” This is something you will come across in your lives, but become stronger because of it and never lose sight of who you are and what you stand for. We are proud of you and if you should stumble and fall, we will be there to help you up again. We understand that this woman does not speak for everyone. It is unfortunate that such ignorance still exists. We are sorry that you have become blinded by your bigotry and hatred and have lost your vision, empathy and moral sense. We hope you regain these things, not only for your sake, but also for the sake of those around you.

In closing, we would like to congratulate the MAS Youth Group and its sponsors for their efforts in our community and the incredible example they are setting for all young people. We would also like to thank the people who have supported our youth group and others like it.

The Hispanic Advisory Board,
Sam and Avelia Valles
Irma Benavides
Barbara Fernandez
Adrian Conde
Art and Cris Lovington
Goodland

To the Editor:

I wanted to write to someone in Goodland and let them know how I feel.

My wife, daughter, and I attended the “Reunion”

last weekend and it was one of the most pleasant experiences I have had in a long while.

It displayed to me all the good things that can happen in a town that has pride in it’s heritage, it’s people and it’s leaders.

When we arrived in Goodland Friday evening, we went to a class party at the home of a classmate friend of my wife. (The group has known each other and has remained in contact for well over 50 years.) A lot of laughter, fun, and tears were shared that night. Most pleasurable!

The program at the arena the next morning was well done and thought out. The performers displayed worthy talents and gave it their all. I appreciate sincere effort and they were excellent. A wide range of people participated and I enjoyed that. I want to thank every one for their efforts.

A meal was again shared and there were planned activities for the afternoon and evening. Seeing all the old friends and renewing acquaintances brought back fond memories of the place we were raised. We love our hometown and once again, you’ve made us proud to call Goodland “home.”

Charles Jensen
husband of Annette Horner, class of ’56.
Overland Park

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