

commentary

from other pens...

Presidential hopefuls proceed cautiously

By Will Lester

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Democrats considering a run for the presidency are proceeding cautiously over a dramatically changed political landscape that currently favors those with a lot of political experience, a background in foreign policy and an established political network.

The current political picture is certain to change, however, say political analysts who predict the direction depends largely on the success of the anti-terrorism campaign and the economy.

For now, established Democrats with some foreign policy experience and a base of support have more time to quietly explore options without a lot of public attention.

Relative newcomers who need to work aggressively to raise their profile among party activists and money from financial donors may find it awkward to navigate in political waters for now.

“The spotlight is pretty tightly shining on the president,” said Chicago Democratic consultant David Axelrod.

Democrats with prominent roles in Congress like Dick Gephardt of Missouri and Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle of South Dakota get increased visibility because of their roles.

President Bush’s approval ratings have run from 80 percent to 90 percent in the weeks after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Few expect those ratings to last forever.

“If history is a reliable guide, it seems likely the surge in Bush popularity will be relatively short-lived,” said Jim Jordan, a Kerry adviser and veteran Democratic consultant. “And three years is forever in politics.”

The high ratings of Bush’s father after the Persian Gulf War scared off some veteran Democrats from running for president and helped clear the field for eventual winner Bill Clinton.

The senior Bush’s high ratings in the spring of 1991 — similar to the high levels his son has experienced — fell victim to the economy by the beginning of the next year, dipping by half.

While the anti-terror campaign dominates, Democrats considering a run will cautiously reach out to party activists and raise money quietly.

“Any potential candidate who wants to keep his or her options open for 2004, should be making plans to come to New Hampshire in the relatively near future,” said state Democratic chair Kathy Sullivan.

Gore plans to go to New Hampshire Oct. 27 to be keynote speaker at the state party’s Jefferson-Jackson Day fund-raising dinner. He appeared in Iowa last weekend at the party’s top fund-raising dinner and drove around the state in a rental car, calling party activists on a cell phone and sitting down for coffee with two or three at a time.

Many Democrats are keeping their options open without saying publicly they’re running for president. Among them:

—Massachusetts Sen. Kerry will keep his plans to go to New Hampshire for an Oct. 13 state AFL-CIO meeting and fund-raisers for state Democrats.

—Gephardt is busy in his role as a leader of the loyal opposition, trying to strike a bipartisan tone while representing the Democratic view on issues like unemployment benefits.

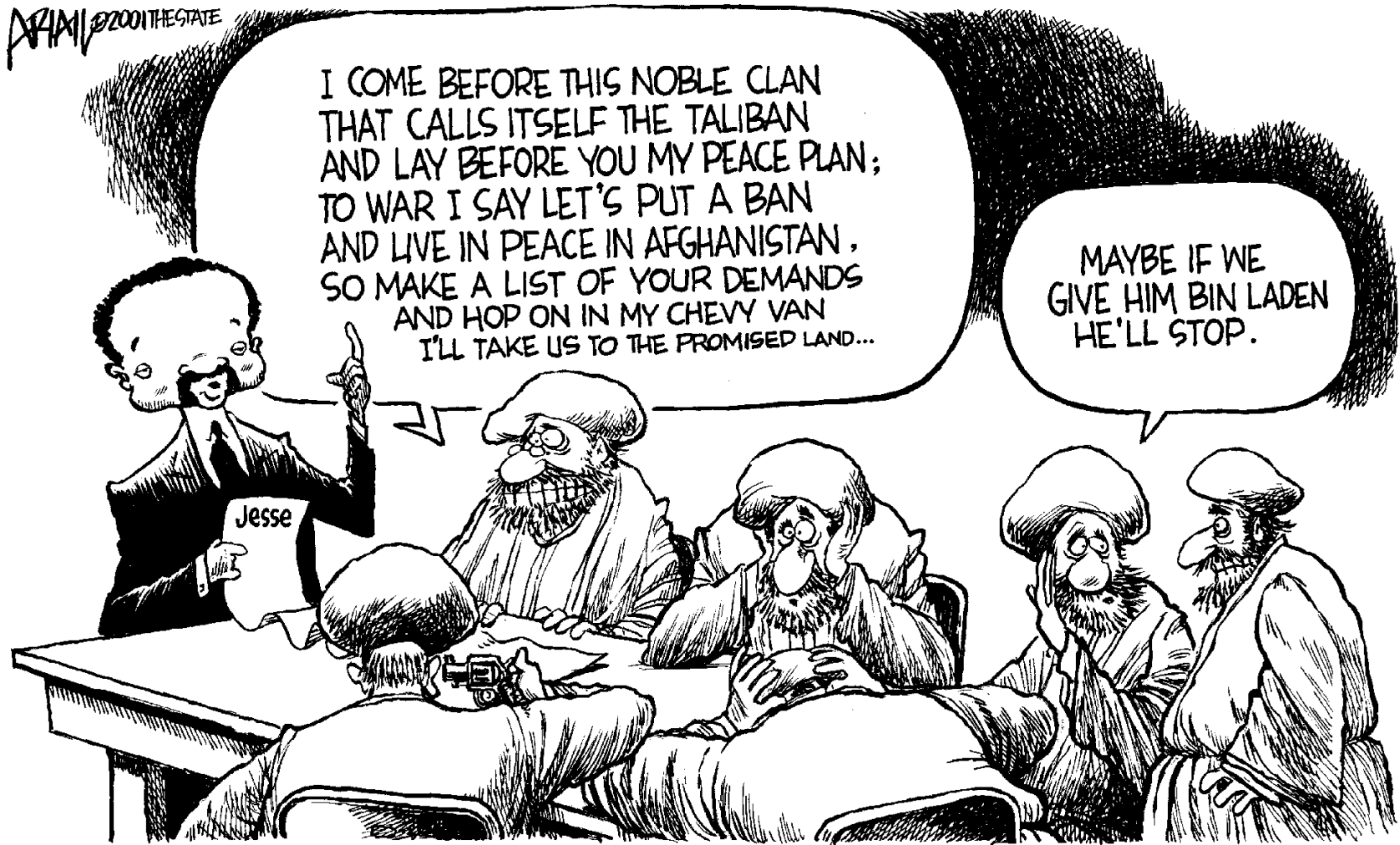
—Connecticut Sen. Joe Lieberman gets plenty of invitations to help Democrats around the country and will continue to help where possible, including a New Hampshire trip in early November.

—Delaware Sen. Joe Biden is getting increased visibility on the talk show circuit as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Democrats have plenty of time before they have to make a decision, said political scientist David Rohde of Michigan State, adding:

“It largely revolves around George Bush’s success or failure at accomplishing the things he’s laid out.”

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



The American war

NEW YORK — The “J” train headed uptown in relative silence. The only sound on the crowded Manhattan subway was the solitary moan of a sax some guy was playing near the middle doors.

I had just come from Ground Zero, where the barricades north of the demolished World Trade Center squeeze this skinny limb of an island like a tourniquet.

Yes, it’s as if the city’s bloodflow has been blocked. People mill in congested streets turned back on themselves by the barricades, the gawkers, and beyond them, a specter as rare as it is immense: war ruins.

For the first time in our collective national memory, Americans know the sight, smell, sound and tremble of what it’s like to be on the punishing end of battle. We have been hit, hurt and, say what we will, humbled. The snap left in our strut after Dallas and Saigon has vanished.

Remember how we loved Muhammad Ali bragging that he could “float like a butterfly and sting like a bee”?

Today, nearly a month after Sept. 11, we are like Ali in the weeks after that first, losing fight with Joe Frazer 30 years ago. Like Ali, we know what it’s like to have taken a beating. It hurts just to breathe. And it shows in our collective face.

“We’re going through a very difficult time with so many funerals and so many people affected,” Mayor Rudolph Guiliani told me later. “There probably isn’t anyone in the city that hasn’t been directly affected by this.”



chris matthews

• commentary

The question now is how to carry out justice toward those who attacked us without stirring further spin-offs of hatred, terrorism and death.

New York’s Cardinal Edward Egan says we Americans need to “examine our consciences.” Was there something we did to stir the conspirators and killers of Sept. 11?

That examination could be a useful exercise, not because it shifts blame to the victim, but because it lights the way to the right sort of retaliation. If our attack on Osama bin Laden incites more Islamic hatred against the United States and the West, we will be doing his work for him.

The greatest danger in the days and weeks ahead is that we “Americanize” this war. Led by the best intentions, we could find ourselves making enemies we never sought, stirring a grand nationalism where we sought to punish a particular evil: terrorism.

The death this week of former South Vietnam President Nguyen Van Thieu reminds us we have made this mistake before.

In 1965, we sent 100,000 combat troops to Saigon. We did it for the best of reasons, to save a

country from Communist takeover. The result was to convert a civil war into a war against U.S. “imperialism.”

Today, Vietnam recalls that horror as the “American War.”

We made the same mistake in 1983 when we entered Beirut under the self-deluding banner of “peacekeeping.” The enemy saw us as something more. After a car-bomber exploded our Marine barracks, leaving 300 dead, we left as something less.

We made the same mistake a decade later on the horn of Africa. Entering Somalia as food-bearers, we left carrying our fallen, after we watched from home as the locals dragged a body of our soldier through the streets.

Mullah Omar, the leader of the Taliban, has warned us this could easily happen again. We enter Afghanistan to catch a terrorist and destroy his network. We depose the Taliban, install an 86-year-old ex-king, then spend years propping up his government.

We morph, in the minds and hearts of the Afghans and their neighbors, into a crusading army come to invade and desecrate the land of Islam.

If we Americanize the war against Islamic terrorism, we’ll lose it.

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.

Kansas was progressive when it came to suffrage

By John Hanna

Associated Press Writer

TOPEKA — When she suggested women’s suffrage was a sign that American society didn’t value families enough, state Sen. Kay O’Connor may have inherited part of the political legacy of fellow Republican Joseph Hooker Mercer.

Mercer, from Cottonwood Falls, didn’t think highly of women’s suffrage. He suggested that it represented a burden for women and that, “It would be the means of disturbing the homes of our state, which is the foundation of our free government.”

The problem for O’Connor, the 59-year-old Olathe legislator who received national news with her remarks, is that Mercer made his comments 90 years before she did. It was February 1911, and Mercer had just cast his vote against a proposed amendment to the Kansas Constitution to give women full voting rights.

Mercer was on the losing side. Not only did both houses of the Legislature adopt the proposed amendment within a day of each other, but voters ratified it in 1912 — eight years before universal women’s suffrage was added to the U.S. Constitution.

Kansas has a fairly progressive history when it comes to women’s suffrage and the involvement of women in politics.

“The battle for women’s suffrage was a long and hard-fought one,” said Virgil Dean, a research historian for the Kansas State Historical Society. “Kansas became, early on, a place where that battle occurred.”

O’Connor said she isn’t against women voting, encourages them to do so and wouldn’t take the right away from them. But she argued that in an ideal America, one in which men are taking care of their women properly, women wouldn’t feel the need to vote.

The 1920 enactment of the 19th Amendment, which gave women universal suffrage nationwide, is a sign that men weren’t doing their jobs at the time, O’Connor said. Men should be the head of their families, women their hearts, she said.

Her comments led one angry constituent to start a recall attempt, and Attorney General Carla Stovall suggested O’Connor should resign. Even Jay Leno felt compelled to comment in a “Tonight Show” monologue.

Perhaps it’s because the debate over women’s suffrage seemed settled for so long. And it was settled in Kansas before it was settled in most other states.

“The land that was broken in this state was broken by women and men together,” said Senate Majority Leader Lana Oleen, R-Manhattan.

In 1869, the Wyoming territory granted women the right to vote in all elections, making it the first. But Kansas law had allowed women to vote in board of education races since statehood in 1861.

By the time Colorado granted full suffrage to its female citizens in 1893, women had been serving in local offices throughout Kansas.

An 1887 law allowed women to vote in municipal elections and hold city offices, and less than two months after its enactment, Susanna Madora Salter, of Argonia, became the first woman elected mayor in the United States. The following year, Oskaloosa had an all-female city council.

There were setbacks, of course. In 1867, a proposed amendment to the Kansas Constitution to allow full women’s suffrage failed by a wide margin, despite visits from nationally known advocates like Susan B. Anthony.

And in 1911, plenty of people still agreed with Mercer.

Some opponents claimed that women weren’t interested in voting. Rep. Clement Wilson, a Republican from Tribune, said no woman had asked him to vote for full suffrage.

“I take it from this, that the women of my district are satisfied with present conditions and care not for political equality by ballot,” he said, also suggesting that women generally believed “the protection of morals of a community rightfully rests upon the stronger sex.”

Some who voted for the proposed amendment said Kansans should have the right to decide. Others argued it was fair. One, Rep. W.T. Watson, an Iola Republican, said he voted yes “in deference to the wishes of the best woman in Kansas” — his wife.

Kansas became the seventh state to enact full suffrage for women, behind Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Idaho, Washington and California.

In 1978, Nancy Kassebaum, a Republican, won

a seat in the U.S. Senate, becoming only the third woman elected to that body. Kansas became the ninth state to have a woman governor in 1990, when Democrat Joan Finney was elected.

This year, 13 of the Kansas Senate’s 40 members are women, and 10 are Republicans. In the House, women hold 40 of 125 seats, and they include 23 Republicans.

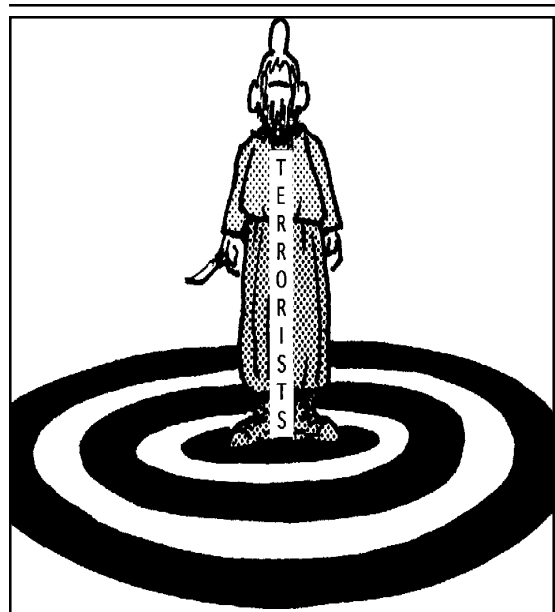
They all became legislators decades after the question of whether women should be given the vote was settled. It didn’t take long for opposition to vanish from Kansas politics.

In 1919, Gov. Henry J. Allen called a special session so that the state could ratify the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution as quickly as possible. The votes in both houses were unanimous, and Allen took pride in the fact that its enactment a year later would not give Kansas women something they didn’t already have.

“It is a fitting episode in the closing chapter of a long struggle — a struggle in which Kansas has held leadership from the beginning,” Allen said in a message to legislators.

Correspondent John Hanna has covered Kansas politics since 1987.

berry’s world



Jim Borgman
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“Cry ‘Havoc!’ and let slip the dogs of war.”
Shakespeare: Julius Caesar

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