

commentary

from other pens...

Democrats looking for a clean sweep

By Will Lester

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Democrats appear to be in a strong position to win governors' races in New Jersey and Virginia Tuesday, and the party is predicting their advantage could help Democrats down the ticket.

"Turnout is the key," said B.J. Thornberry, executive director of the Democratic Governors Association. "We are well-positioned, but nobody's been through this before."

She said voters could react to the chaos since Sept. 11 by going to vote as an act of patriotism, or they may just be distracted from politics.

Her counterpart at the Republican Governors' Association, Clinton Key, describes his party's candidates as "down a few points, but not out."

In New Jersey, Republican Bret Schundler, former mayor of Jersey City, was behind Democrat Jim McGreevey, mayor of Woodbridge, by double digits. In Virginia, Democrat Mark Warner, a high-tech businessman, was ahead of Republican Mark Earley, former attorney general, by anywhere from six to 10 points.

Key said the races have been tough for the GOP because the Democrats had run statewide before, have been running steadily for the last year or so, and were "Democrats running as Republicans."

Democrats say their advantage comes from the Democratic candidates running toward the political middle, leaving Republican opponents on the conservative fringe.

The Democratic National Committee has been researching how it can sharpen its appeal in the red states, the broad swath of states through middle America, more rural and conservative than the Democrats' strongholds on the East and West coasts.

If Warner can pull off a victory he will be held up as a role model for Democrats running in conservative-leaning states across the country. Warner dismissed political labels while emphasizing education, economic vitality and health care. He wooed rural voters across Virginia.

Earley, a relatively moderate Republican before the campaign, blended his support for education reforms with an anti-tax mantra and a late push to emphasize his anti-abortion stance.

Earley's message hasn't played well in the northern Virginia suburbs just as Schundler's message hasn't played well in New Jersey, described by pollster Cliff Zukin as "the quintessentially suburban state."

Democrats will rely on their candidates' appealing to suburban voters to gain victories in both states. Bush and Democrat Al Gore essentially split suburban voters in 2000, with Bush favored in southern suburbs.

GOP pollster Linda DiVall said Republicans should be very conscious of the centrist formula needed to win the suburbs.

"It's something the Republicans need to be reminded of," she said. "These candidates were placed on the fringe — either by their opponents or by earlier positions they couldn't get away from."

The Republicans might have been helped if President Bush had campaigned, but he has been absorbed with the anti-terror campaign.

"The president supports both of these candidates," said Republican national Chairman Jim Gilmore.

A two-state sweep would give Democratic national Chairman Terry McAuliffe the perfect trophy to rally Democrats for 2002.

"It sets us up perfectly for 2002," said McAuliffe, who says the elections are a referendum on Republicans' "stale ideas."

A victory in Virginia would highlight a successful Democratic strategy of highlighting solid education and a strong economy, while playing down divisive issues like guns and abortion.

Al From, who started the Democratic Leadership Council on just such a premise in the mid 1980s, says that approach has worked for some Democrats for more than a decade.

"It's moving to the center, while holding on to your base," said From. "Elections are won in the center."

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

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Facing up to the FBI's past mistakes

It's time for a pause, but not in the bombing. Great Britain's Tony Blair has just urged one and all never to forget "why we are doing this" — namely, fighting Islamist terrorism. But is it possible to forget?

The prime minister seems to believe that the shock of Sept. 11 is receding for some, settling into the past as a neatly repressible memory. That such callousness might exist is something to ponder as the grim pageant of memorial services continues, day after day, for victims who died in the attack.

Now might also be an appropriate time to pause and consider why we find ourselves in the historical position of having to be "doing this" in the first place — particularly considering that some people, as recently retired CIA veteran Anne Allen told The Washington Times, "don't even have the grace to keep their mouths shut."

Allen, a 37-year-veteran of the intelligence agency, was responding to what former Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright had to say this week about why the Clinton administration allowed Osama bin Laden and his network to terrorize and kill Americans during the past decade, and live on to terrorize and kill Americans in this one.

While Bill Clinton likes to talk up near misses on Osama bin Laden with the relish of a fisherman fooling about the "one that got away," Albright tells a different story. According to the former secretary of state, the poor Clinton administration never received the intelligence information needed to link bin Laden's group to attacks on the two U.S. embassies in Africa or the USS Cole. The administration, she adds, never had the public support required to take on Al Qaeda, either. In other words, her hands — her boss' hands — were completely tied. Given this handicap, it's a wonder that either



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of them ever managed to pass the buck at all.

What Albright doesn't mention, of course, is Clinton's disastrous move to bar intelligence contacts with anyone even teetering on the edge of eligibility for the Eagle Scouts. This decision effectively cut the flow of intelligence information off at its, frankly, often tainted source.

And there's no word from the former secretary of state on the sundry measures short of military action the administration could and should have taken. These possibilities include, as the former CIA employee noted, securing our borders, matching intelligence information with visa applications, linking FBI lists with airline manifests, and stockpiling assorted vaccines against the bioterrorist threat.

Albright seems similarly untroubled by second thoughts about the unconscionable Clinton policy of treating terrorism against Americans, from the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center to the 2000 bombing of the USS Cole, as criminal matters to be investigated by the FBI and dealt with by the courts — not terrorist attacks requiring national action.

And she shows little awareness of the opportunity her administration missed by not trying — ever — to muster public support for a campaign against terrorism. Guess everyone was too busy trying to muster public support to stay in office. "We can-

not alter the past," Albright said, a tad on the defensive side.

That, of course, doesn't mean that we shouldn't face up to it in an attempt to understand it.

But try understanding this: The Washington Post reports the FBI hesitated "for years" to investigate radical Islamic clerics in this country "despite evidence that their mosques had been used to recruit and fund suspected terrorists." Using the hair-raising example of the thankfully incarcerated Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman — "the blind cleric" whose enduring links to Al Qaeda and to those guilty of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and the 1998 U.S. embassy bombings make him a central figure in the Islamist terror network — the newspaper reveals that not only was Rahman's investigation stalled for five months after the first Trade Center bombing (three years after the bureau began receiving intelligence reports pointing to the man's terrorist past), the bureau never brought Rahman before a grand jury, bugged his offices, subpoenaed his mosque's records or wiretapped his phones. What gives?

Turns out the FBI considered possible charges of "religious persecution" to pose a greater threat to the national interest than possible acts of terrorism. "A change in thinking may be taking place today," a senior FBI official rather feebly told the Post.

May be taking place? While preserving the memory of why we fight, it's important to consider why we have to fight. We can't, as Albright has said, alter the past. But we can deepen our understanding and learn from it. No doubt our future depends on doing exactly that.

Diana West is a columnist and editorial writer for The Washington Times. She can be contacted via dwest@washingtontimes.com.

The national pastime

WASHINGTON — There are some things you can't fake. Either you can throw a strike from 60 feet or you can't. Either you rise to the occasion on the mound at Yankee Stadium with 56,000 people watching or you don't.

Last Tuesday night, George W. Bush hit the strike zone in the House that Ruth Built. He did it sporting the most revered insignia in America today: the New York City Fire Department's. This is about knowing what to do at the moment you have to do it — and doing it. It's about that "grace under pressure" that Hemingway gave as his very definition of courage.

A Canadian pollster once advised me that every great leader must have three things going for him or her: motive, passion and spontaneity. It does no good to have done your homework. When you get up on the stage — or the pitching mound — you need to feel the crowd's energy and act on it. You must be more than an office-holder. You need to be the leader of the moment as well as the nation. Like great shortstops, you can't plant yourself in a fixed position. You need to respond to the ball when hit.

It could be argued that this spontaneity, this ability to respond, is the essence of the American spirit. We are not a nation or plodders or of historic grudge-keepers. We do what we feel like. Right now we feel like we want to make sure that the horror of New York, Sept. 11, 2001 does not enter the history books all by its lonesome. As a nation, we have decided there must be another entry on the other side other ledger. The President said it first and best: we will either bring the killers to justice



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or bring justice to the killers.

But our greater mission is to champion this sense of freedom that lies at our country's heart. We're not talking Democratic or Republican here, but American.

"When an American says that he loves his country," Adlai Stevenson once said, "he means that he loves an inner air, an inner light in which freedom lives and in which a man can draw the breath of self-respect."

Stevenson understood democracy better than most. He was the Democrats' candidate who had to take on Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1952 and 1956. Ike was a political natural. He possessed that magic ingredient of spontaneity that President Bush flashed from the pitching mound on Tuesday. It's what we like to see in our leaders, whether they are presidents or mayors of New York City. We like to know that, amid all the Secret Service protection and beneath the words crafted by speechwriters, there's a living, breathing person in that president of ours.

That is what this fight is all about. Twenty-five years ago, there were only 36 democracies in the world. Today, there are 120. Today the world listens to our music, watches our movies, wears our

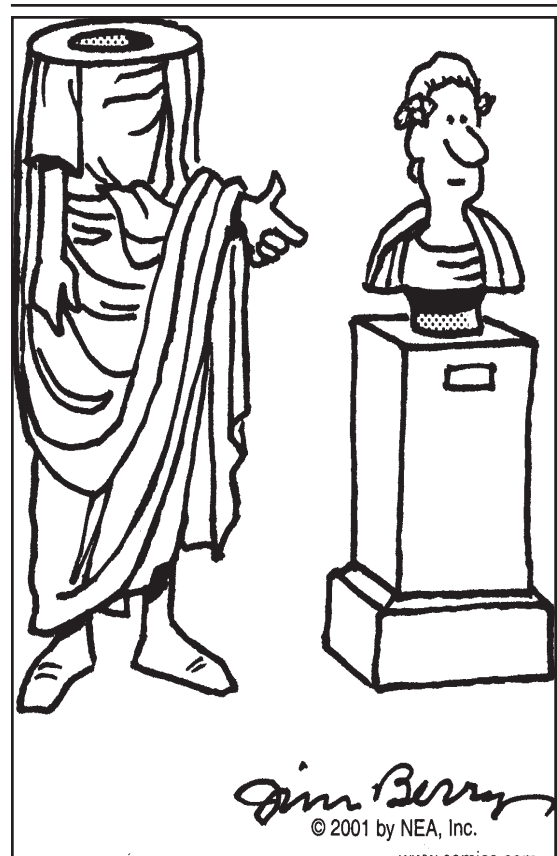
clothes. If you get to travel around the world, as I've been privileged to do, you'll discover this fact of the 21st century for yourself.

We — and the freedom we represent — are winning the big wars worldwide. Latin America, Asia and even Africa are finding and fighting their way toward democracy and open expression of human thought. They want to be more like us, less like the tyrannies of old.

Never forget that terrorism is the weapon of the weak wielded against the strong. It is embittered losers delivering desperate, brutal back swipes at the winners. The way to win this fight is to remember and honor the victims and never, ever forget the stakes.

Chris Matthews, author of "Now, Let Me Tell You What I Really Think" (Free Press, 2001) and "Hardball" (Touchstone Books, 1999), is a nationally syndicated columnist for the San Francisco Chronicle and the host of "Hardball" on CNBC and MSNBC cable channels.

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