

commentary

from other pens...

GOP quietly plans for 2002 elections

By Will Lester

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — For the past two weeks, GOPnational Chairman Jim Gilmore has had to endure this: Democrats openly bragging about the 2001 election results, personal taunts from the Democratic chairman and reports of grumbling within the ranks of his own party.

He says he's not fazed. "It does not irritate me. It's their job to put their best foot forward," the Virginia governor said. "My only response is congratulations." Democrat Jim McGreevey won the governors' race in New Jersey and Democrat Mark Warner took the governor's job in Virginia two weeks ago, while Republicans won the New York City mayor's race with billionaire Michael Bloomberg.

The day after the elections, Democratic national Chairman Terry McAuliffe spoke of his Republican counterpart by name several times, referring to "poor Jim Gilmore" as he predicted Democrats were on a winning streak that would extend to 2002.

"Now Republicans have to go back to their playbook and figure out how to win elections," McAuliffe said.

Gilmore, a blunt-spoken former prosecutor dismisses the taunting and says he hasn't changed the Republican game plan for 2002.

He wants to expand the party's to include more Hispanics, women and blacks. He says the party should support President Bush's agenda and campaign on a platform of "keeping taxes down, while providing a good economic stimulus package, international and internal security from terrorism as well as accountability and quality education."

He says he sees no reason to drastically overhaul the GOP's strategy. "On Election Day, we did not suffer a wipeout," Gilmore said. "It was a split decision. We won the mayorship in New York, won a landslide in the Virginia House of Delegates, won judicial races in Pennsylvania, special elections in Missouri."

He acknowledged the two governors' races were the contests everybody was watching. But Gilmore says he's personally unaware of criticism within the party ranks.

Several Republicans around the country said privately that few people blame Gilmore for the election losses, but they've heard scattered grumbling that he attempted to distance the national party and the White House from the gubernatorial candidates. Gilmore responds that the national party supported both Republican candidates for governor.

After the elections, the Bush administration quickly made clear there was no reason to speculate about Gilmore's future as chairman. Three days after the vote, Bush spokesman Ari Fleischer made clear the president was behind Gilmore.

Party officials around the country say the core Republican message of fiscal conservatism will work if blended with proposals that address voter concerns on issues like the economy, education and health care.

Gilmore says the biggest challenge in the 2002 elections could be Democrats running what they call "centrist" campaigns that tend to blur differences with Republicans. The winners for governor in New Jersey and Virginia have been described as centrist Democrats.

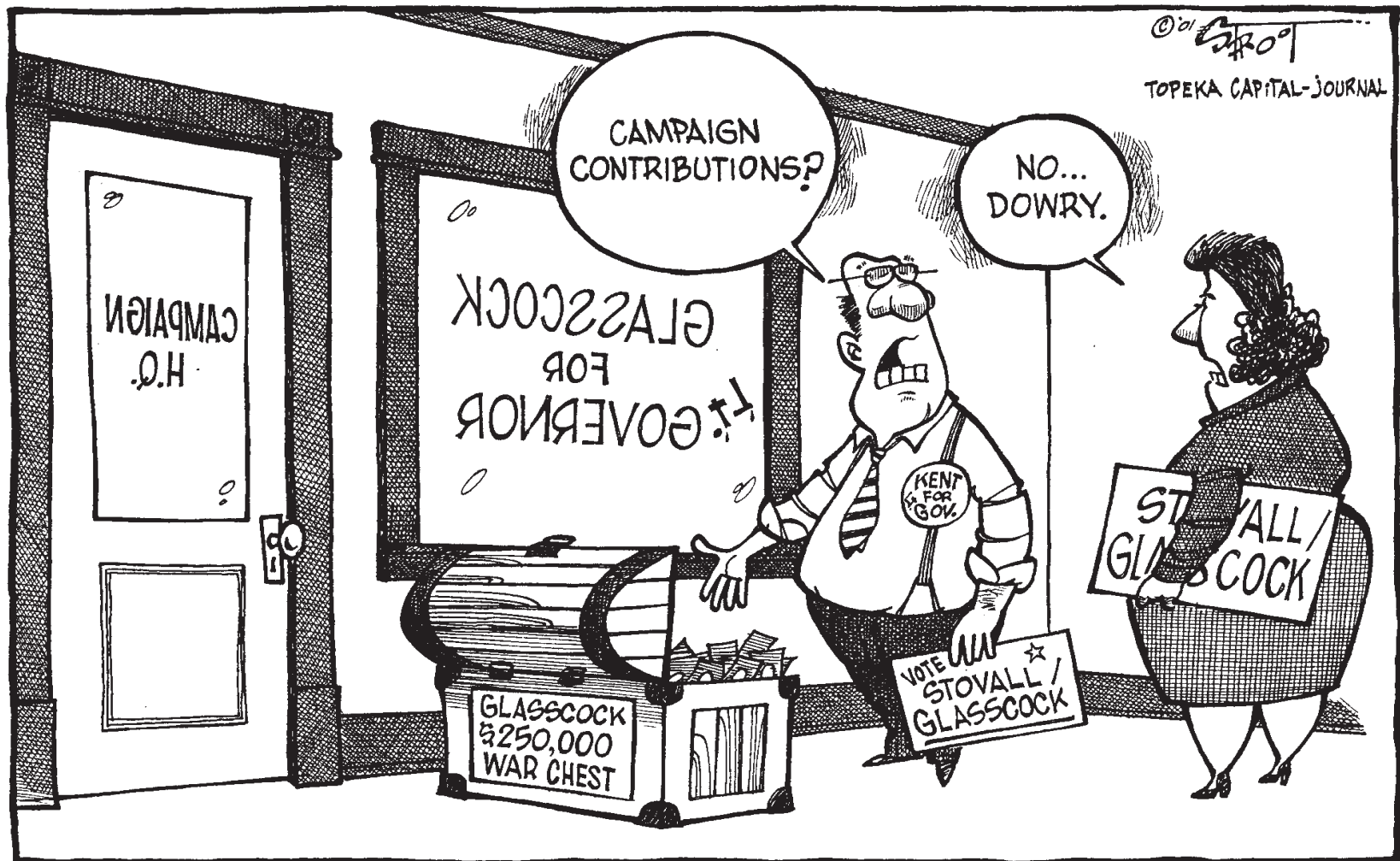
"We have to guard against the day that all the Democratic candidates are running as conservative Republicans," Gilmore said.

Political candidates will face "the most evenly matched political landscape since the late 19th century," said Georgia GOP chairman Ralph Reed.

Despite that intensely competitive political environment, Gilmore says he wants his party to maintain a diplomatic tone these days because the president is working for a bipartisan approach to government.

"The American people are expecting a higher level of public discourse, more public unity, support for the president," Gilmore said, adding if Democrats are more willing to criticize: "I'll let the people of the United States come to their own conclusions."

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



Can't keep a good man down



diana west

• commentary

When President Bush said this month that "out of evil can come great good," he put words to something Americans have come to understand since Sept. 11, watching and assisting the effort to rescue and restore, honor and avenge, assist, heal and donate to a wounded nation. If there has been an "awakening to service," as Bush takes pride in noting, there has also been an awakening of another kind: a realization that much of the good Americans are seeing in their country has been there all along.

One way this aspect becomes obvious, and painfully so, is to read through (or try to) the sketches of the dead that appear in The New York Times, day after day after day, as the newspaper fulfills an honorable mission to remember each of the nearly 5,000 human beings who died in the attack on the World Trade Center. (See <http://www.nytimes.com/portraits>.)

Reading these short pieces — "glimpses," the newspaper calls them — is not just a sobering exercise. It is an agonizing, angering and humbling one. In these very personal remembrances, we learn of the families, even the pets, left behind. We read about the teams these people used to coach, and the reunions they once organized. We become privy to the wedding invitations they didn't get the chance to send and the summer barbecues that will never be the same. We find out about the 9 a.m. meeting at Windows on the World, and the brand-new office on the 92nd floor — all the particulars of chance and design that placed so many people at the center of the world on the morning of Sept. 11.

Amid all those who perished simply because

they went to work, there also appear sketches of the 343 New York City firemen, the 37 Port Authority policemen and the 23 New York City policemen who perished trying to rescue them. These are the gallant ones, almost all of them men, who lived to serve and died doing so. And through these glimpses, we see into a world few outsiders are privy to: a place in the culture where it is not unusual for men to marry their high school sweethearts, follow their firemen-fathers into the force and, in general, live lives that, in certain basic ways, seem unchanged by the cultural revolutions of recent decades.

You might say, to paraphrase the president, out of evil can come an appreciation for great good. As further testament to these lost lives, such appreciation just might become an ennobling experience for us all. Acknowledging the selfless heroism of the men who kept climbing into the fire has already stirred a renewed respect, not to mention gratitude, for the old-fashioned virtues associated with what was once, a very long time ago, esteemed as "manliness." Courage. Duty. Endurance. Brotherhood. All the things that the corrosive elites — the media, academia and the entertainment world — have long undermined and vilified, if not eradicated, in society at large.

Writing in the left-wing weekly The Nation, Katha Pollitt correctly observes that the terrorism attacks and their aftermath "have definitely rehabilitated such traditional masculine values as physical courage, upper-body strength, toughness, resolve." But wrinkle your nose when you read her words for the proper inflection. Pollitt, who earlier in the season lamented her 14-year-old's sudden desire for a flag, is appalled by this revival and does what she can to pervert it. "The WTC attack is men vs. men — firefighters and fanatics," she writes in one of the uglier bits of analysis to congeal in this crisis, adding: "(It would seem positively ungrateful to ask why, in a city half black and brown, the 'heroes' were still mostly white, and, for that matter, still mostly male.)" She continues: "You can see the gender skew everywhere, in the absence of female bylines in the Op-Eds about the war, in the boeing of Hillary Clinton during the Concert for New York at Madison Square Garden, in the slavish eagerness of the media to promote the callow and inadequate Dubya as a strong leader whose 'cockiness' — interesting word — and swagger are just what Americans need in the hour of crisis."

Men vs. men, black, brown and white, "gender skews" and swagger: Talk about fanatics. It must be an unnerving experience to see life through such a cracked prism. Well worth remembering, though, is that, even through the black smoke and flame of the imploding towers, the heroes of Sept. 11 could still see a better world, one we would all do well to envision as we rebuild our lives from the ruins.

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Definitions fuzzy behind Republican labels



john hanna

• ap news analysis

TOPEKA (AP) — Carla Stovall is supposed to be the moderate running for the Republican nomination for governor, but she says her tough-on-crime stance as attorney general makes her conservative.

State Treasurer Tim Shallenburger is the conservatives' candidate, yet had a voting record as a legislator that gave him some support from traditional Democratic allies such as labor unions and plaintiffs' attorneys.

Moderate and conservative labels on candidates boil Republican primaries down to a struggle between the party's two wings. But the definitions behind those labels are fuzzy.

For some Republicans, the label depends upon a candidate's position on abortion. For others, taxes and government spending are key issues.

The labels also may depend upon a particular Republican's friends and allies. Does the person spend more time with Gov. Bill Graves and become a moderate, or with U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback and other conservatives?

Use of the terms "moderate" and "conservative" are not universal, though they are favored by news organizations and political scientists.

Moderates sometimes refer to themselves as "traditional" Republicans, reflecting their belief that the state GOP has a long-standing progressive bent. Some conservatives label them liberals or contend they are Democrats too pragmatic to join that traditionally downtrodden party.

At least a few conservatives don't even view the split as ideological, but as the moderate haves against the conservative have-nots, designating the moderates as the "country club" wing.

Moderates sometimes refer to conservatives as "the religious right" or "radical right," to suggest politics infused with evangelical Christianity. Lt. Gov. Gary Sherrer refers to conservatives as the "minority" wing, reflecting his view that they account for 30 percent or less of GOP voters.

Conservatives see themselves as the real Republicans, the heirs to President Reagan's political tradition. The conservative Kansas Republican Assembly has referred to itself as the "Republican wing of the Republican Party."

Stovall argues that she has been labeled a moderate because she supports abortion rights. Shallenburger opposes abortion.

And Kansans for Life, the state's largest anti-abortion rights group, has made itself an important source of support for conservative candidates over

the past decade.

Burdett Loomis, a University of Kansas political scientist, said the moderate-conservative labeling boils down to abortion, regardless of other issues.

"We have to make a decision whether the moderate or conservative label is just a euphemism for what your position on abortion is," said state GOP Chairman Mark Parkinson.

Shallenburger said other issues help separate conservatives from moderates, but abortion is the most important one.

"It's probably 80 percent of it," he said.

But other Republicans disagree that the labels are primarily about abortion.

Kris Van Meteren, executive director of the Kansas Republican Assembly, said moderates would like conservatives to be seen as single-issue activists, to minimize their influence.

Even Parkinson concedes that basing the labels on abortion positions can be problematic. He uses U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts and U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran as examples.

"People don't know how to categorize Roberts and Moran," Parkinson said. "They're pro-life, but they hang out with moderates."

Van Meteren says taxes are an important issue dividing the two camps, with moderates willing to increase taxes and even push a hike for public schools.

A big push for higher taxes for schools came this past legislative session from prominent moderates, including Graves and Senate Majority Leader Lana Oleen, of Manhattan.

In a postscript to an Oct. 25 letter that Graves wrote for Kansas Citizens for Excellence in Education, the governor said the group is committed to recruiting and supporting GOP candidates "who are supportive of public education."

His letter angered conservatives, and one, Rep. Melvin Neufeld, of Ingalls, replied in writing. He said incumbent Republicans should "refuse to be intimidated."

Sherrer believes the differences between moderates and conservatives are broader.

He said moderates see government as a potential force for good in society, while conservatives see it as the enemy, even while serving in it. Conservatives have helped create that impression with rhetoric that describes government as a problem that needs to be controlled.

Sherrer's remarks also suggest that the Republican split has an ancient political origin.

The moderates seem to be descendants of John Adams, who saw a need for a central government strong enough to preserve order and provide for the public welfare. The conservatives appear to follow Thomas Jefferson, who wanted a weak central government, suggesting one that governed least would govern best.

In the end, what has evolved in Kansas politics is a set of labels with fuzzy definitions behind them.

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