

# commentary

from other pens...

## New GOP chairman has a low-key style

Republican National Committee Chairman Marc Racicot thinks Washington is too obsessed with partisan conflict, doesn't like the verbal slugfest of the Sunday talk shows and has faced criticism for his link to Enron Corp.

Racicot associates say the former Montana governor is a solid fit to lead the GOP into the elections: a shrewd strategist, a low-key but effective spokesman for the party and a loyal friend to President Bush.

"He comes at you under the radar," says Connecticut Gov. John Rowland, a fellow Republican and a friend. "He has a great style, he's very unassuming, very uncharacteristic of a typical politician."

Racicot, 53, a Montana native of French-Canadian descent, concedes his personal style is not well-suited to the shouting matches that sometimes pass for political debate in the nation's capital.

"I've asked the (news) shows, 'Is this one of those where you want to know something or do you already know everything and I'm here as a vehicle for your theatrical skills?'" Racicot said. "It probably does cast a pall on the proceedings."

Racicot (pronounced Ross-koh) says he appears on the programs because it's an important part of the GOP job he accepted out of his close friendship with Bush.

Veteran Republican organizer Ron Kaufman describes Racicot as "a perfect fit. The most important single thing as chairman of the RNC," Kaufman said, "is to have the confidence of the White House."

He replaced Jim Gilmore, who was then governor of Virginia. The GOP lost two governors' races last year — Virginia was one — and some say there was friction between Gilmore and the White House.

Racicot said the job is a little more manageable because of the president's leadership skills and popularity. He wants to recruit solid candidates, raise money and expand the party's base to include more women, Asian-Americans, Hispanics, blacks and other minorities.

The GOP could fare better with those groups, he said, "if they have a chance to carefully review our agenda and experience the inspiration of the president's leadership."

But Republicans can't assume anything about the elections based on the president's popularity, he said.

Racicot says he will be "very aggressive with the travel schedule" as he works on keeping the majority in the House, picking off strategic races in the Senate and working for candidates at state and local levels.

He was elected Montana's attorney general after working there for 16 years. He served as governor from 1993 to 2001, then turned down requests last year that he run for the U.S. Senate in 2002.

After the deadlocked presidential election, Racicot was a key figure in the Florida recount battle, mapping out legal and political strategy, GOP strategist Ed Gillespie said.

Racicot went to work with the Washington office of the Texas law firm of Bracewell & Patterson, where his work included representing the interests of Enron. Critics seized on the connection, referring to Racicot as an "Enron lobbyist," a description he dismisses as inaccurate.

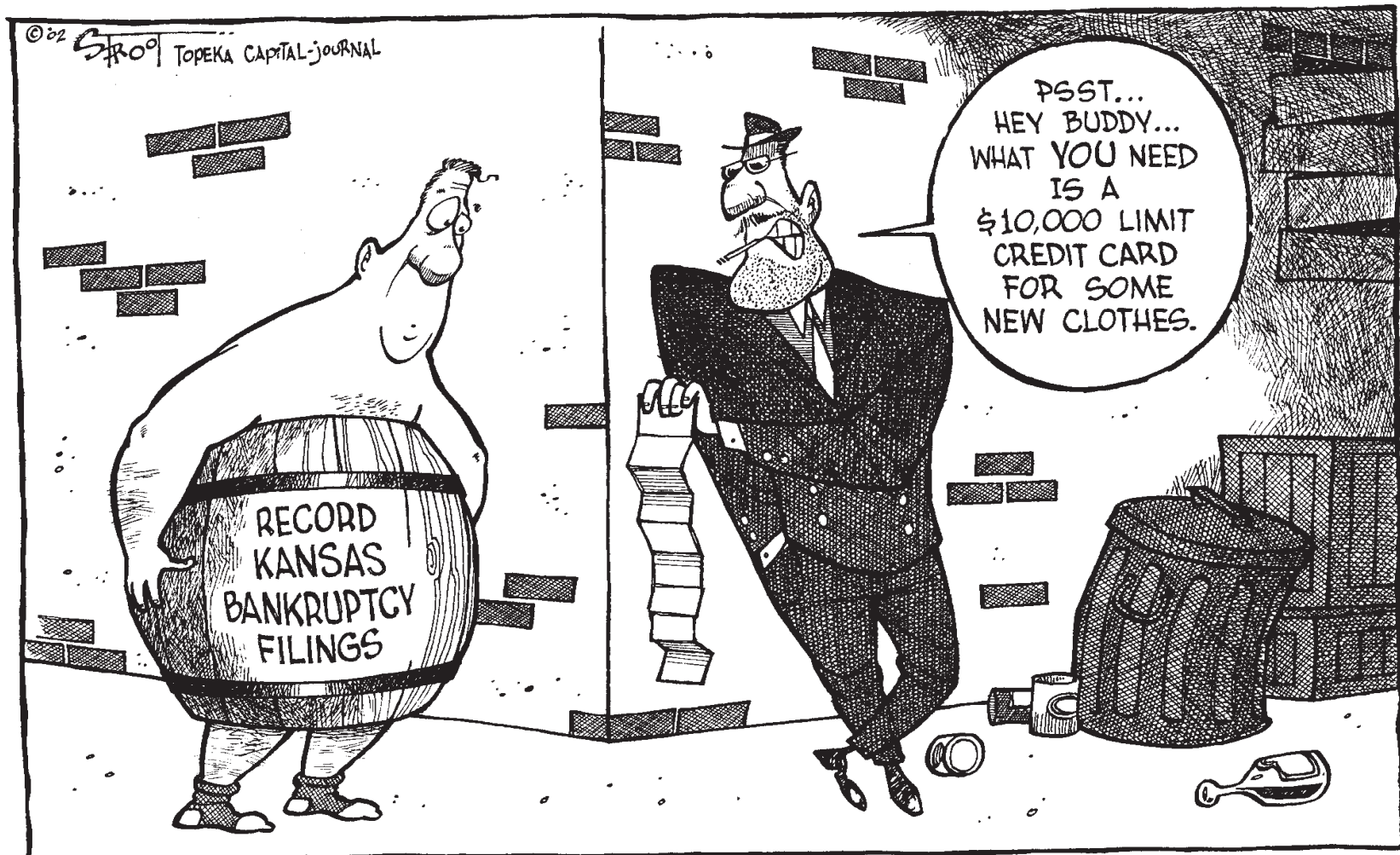
The furious controversy over the Houston-based company drowned out any message Racicot might have offered at the time he took over the GOP in mid-January. He was well received at a recent conservative conference after initial worries were voiced he might be too moderate.

Racicot continues to take a salary and do some legal work for other clients at Bracewell & Patterson. But the experience of recent weeks left a bitter taste about the news media.

His frequent sparring partner on the talk shows, Democratic National Chairman Terry McAuliffe, describes Racicot as "a classy guy. It's kind of like going up against one of my law school professors."

Asked how he likes debating the Democrat on television, Racicot grinned and said: "I'm going to provide adult supervision as best I can."

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



## His puzzle came with a special message

He'd been bugging me for days to put together this dumb 24-piece "Winnie the Pooh" puzzle with him.

It was a picture of Pooh and his friends celebrating at a birthday party in the forest.

I didn't question it because he does weird, spontaneous things like that all of the time. That's one reason why I love him.

It was the Sunday morning before Christmas and I had a ton of things to do. Actually I had made a list. 1. Buy last minute gifts. 2. Wrap presents. 3. Do laundry. 4. Pack for trip to Denver.

The last thing I wanted to do was put a puzzle together, but I figured it wouldn't take long since the side of the box read, "For children 3 years and older."

We cleared off his dining room table and sat down with the puzzle. We both had a cup of green tea.

As we pieced the puzzle together and it started forming a picture, I joked about how this was going to take us all day.

Then I realized the joke was on me. All of the corner pieces were missing.

I reached over and shoved his shoulder.



### rachel miscall

● unraveling

"Hey, you stole some of the pieces didn't you? Where'd you put them? Come on, I know you have them."

He couldn't keep a straight face for long and he pulled the missing pieces out of his front sweatshirt pocket.

I wondered when he had time to slip the four pieces out of the box, but I didn't think it was all that strange.

He set the pieces face up in a stack in front of me and told me to read the back of each piece before putting them in their place.

On the back of the first piece he had written "Rachel" with a black marker. I figured it would be a Christmas wish, like "Rachel have a great Christmas," or even, "Rachel, I love you."

But that wasn't it.

I read "will you" on the second piece and I knew what was coming next. My stomach flip-flopped and my mind started spinning. I finished the puzzle without looking up.

He pulled a blue velvet box out of his sweatshirt pocket, opened it and set it on the puzzle in front of me. He repeated the question I had just read. My first instinct was to run, but I didn't.

I sat there in silence frantically trying to weigh the consequences of various answers. He told me later that I looked like I was about to get sick.

At the time, he just sat there staring at me and chewing on his lip.

I've never felt like that before; a mixture of shock, fear, uncertainty and excitement.

Of course, I'd thought about it. But I imagined I'd blurt out "yes" and throw my arms around his neck. This was different. This was real.

I decided to listen to my heart and take a chance. I said "umm, yeah" and I've felt more sure about my answer every day since.

That list of things to do suddenly didn't seem as important. I pulled it out of my purse and added an item.

5. Plan a wedding.

## George W. Bush's New Frontier

WASHINGTON — This week, I finally figured out who George W. Bush is. He is a classic New Frontiersman.

If you doubt me, just run through the guy's policy blueprint — higher defense spending, tax cuts, a call to national service. Add to that his commitment to free trade, and his push for prescription drugs for seniors and you see the outlines of the John F. Kennedy agenda.

Let's face it. This first Republican president of the 21st century champions the same signature policies that Democrat John F. Kennedy did in the early 1960s.

Here's Bush in his State of the Union: "History has called America and our allies to action, and it is both our responsibility and our privilege to fight freedom's fight."

Here is JFK in his Inaugural: "Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to assure the survival and the success of liberty."

Both young presidents backed up their martial call to duty with a military budget hike.

Kennedy's rationale was the "missile gap" between the United States and the U.S.S.R. "We have not maintained our position and our prestige," he argued in his 1960 debate with Republican Vice President Richard Nixon.

Bush's rationale is the dangers implicit in the doctrine of mutually-assured destruction. Where Jack wanted more missiles, George wants a strategic defense system to neutralize enemy missiles. To get it, he wants the largest defense boost in 20 years.

Both presidents are foreign policy activists, uncomfortable in a defensive posture. Just as JFK wanted to help countries defend themselves against the Soviets and the Chinese, Bush wants to destroy the capability of countries such as Iraq, Iran and North Korea to attack their neighbors.

"We cannot merely state our opposition to totali-



### chris matthews

● commentary

tarian advance without paying the price for helping those now under the greatest pressure."

Another glaring similarity: Both leaders advocate the role of young volunteers in selling the American way overseas.

Kennedy created the Peace Corps to show how a "free society" can compete for the hearts and minds of those in the Third World.

"Every young American who participates in the Peace Corps — who works in a foreign land — will know that he or she is sharing in the great common task of bringing to men that decent way of life which is the foundation of freedom and a condition of peace."

Bush has created a Freedom Corps at home, and wants to expand the Peace Corps overseas.

"I believe that one thing we must do," he told a North Carolina audience the day after his State of the Union, "is to expand the Peace Corps, revitalize the mission, encourage the Peace Corps to go into the Islamic world to spread the message of economic development and really share the compassion of a great nation, and that is America."

A third area of common purpose is cutting federal taxes.

Kennedy pushed a tax cut as a way to lift America out of recession and slow growth rates. Like today's supply-siders, he told us that cutting taxes was a more powerful way to achieve that goal than increasing government spending.

"To increase demand and lift the economy, the federal government's most usual role is not to rush into a program of excessive increases in public expenditures, but to expand the incentives and opportunities for private expenditures."

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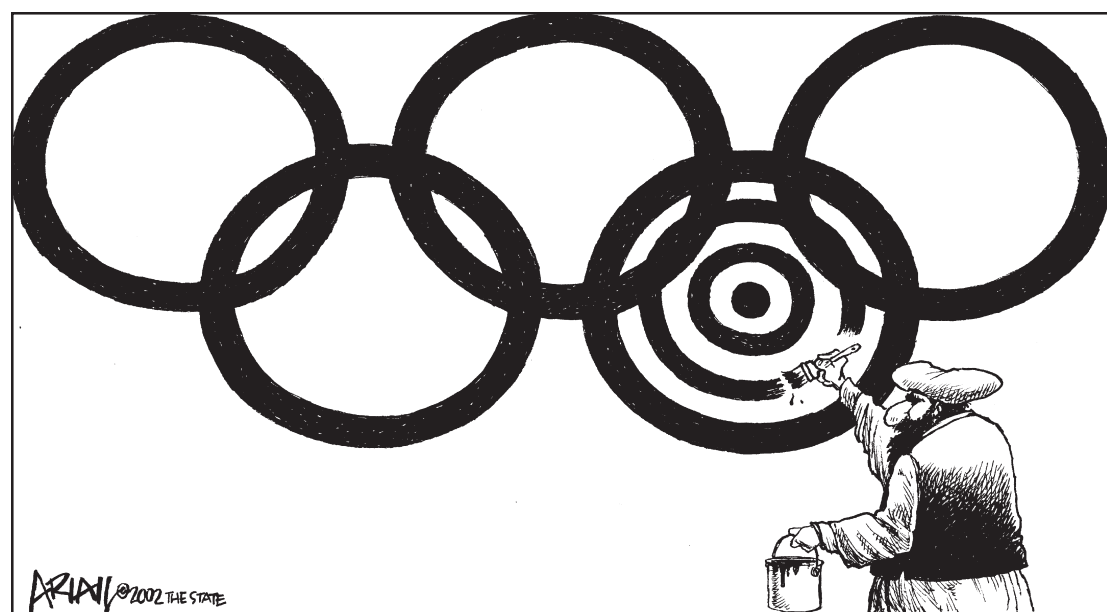
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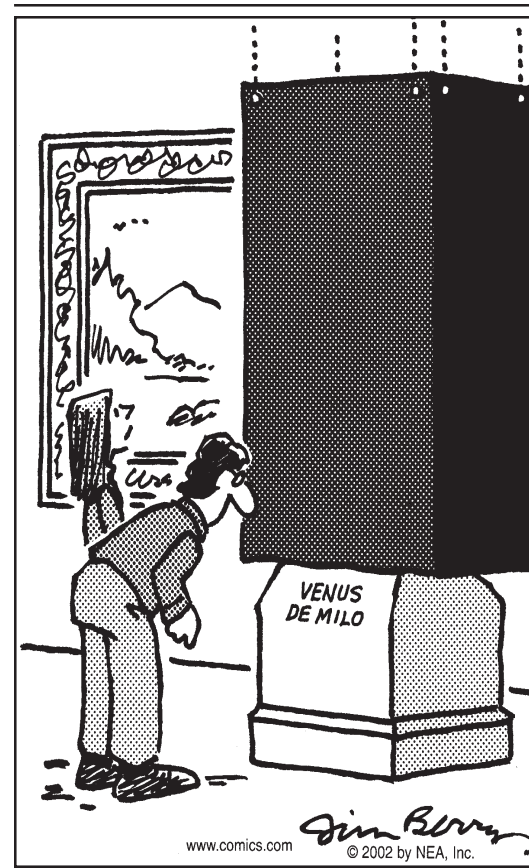
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