

commentary

from other pens...

Dems, from the many, look for effective voice

Democrats are fighting a tide of public opinion these days — especially President Bush's high approval rating — without benefit of a dominant figure within the party to rally behind.

Party activists are concerned now, however, that their troops rally behind leading Democrats who are willing to speak out. They said it's not unusual for the party out of the White House to be at this stage without one dominant figure, although former House Speaker Newt Gingrich played that leadership role for the Republicans in the mid-1990s.

"The reality is we have several spokesmen, all of whom are very good," said Mark Mellman, who polls for the Democratic National Committee. "When you don't have the White House, you don't have a spokesman."

Democratic national chairman Terry McAuliffe, Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle and House Democratic leader Dick Gephardt have been leading the charge for the Democrats.

Potential presidential candidates like Sens. John Kerry of Massachusetts, John Edwards of North Carolina and Joe Lieberman of Connecticut are among those who have offered their views in policy speeches over the last few months. The Democrats' 2000 presidential nominee, Al Gore, joined the debate this month.

Gore's re-entry to the political debate, including a foreign policy speech this week, has activists watching to see what political approach he will take to make voters forget his 2000 failure.

"Democrats want to rally around tomorrow, and they don't know who tomorrow is," said political analyst Stuart Rothenberg. "Gore may turn out to be tomorrow, but right now he's yesterday."

Bush's job approval rating has been in the 80 percent range since he rallied the nation after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11. Republicans now have a big advantage in public opinion on fighting terrorism, an edge on handling the economy and generally break even on education.

Former President Clinton remains the hot draw on the money-raising circuit, and Democrats probably won't have settled on a dominant voice on issues until the presidential nomination fight nears its close.

"No one's going to be appointed or anointed," said Democratic consultant Dane Strother, who noted the lack of a national party theme can help conservative Democrats at the local level.

The presence of many voices within the party is a good thing, because Democrats get to test the kinds of themes that can work both in this year's congressional elections and in 2004, said Al From, founder and chief executive of the centrist Democratic Leadership Council.

"Congressional elections are fought on local and regional issues," From said, "and for the Democrats there is no advantage to nationalize this election because Bush has such high approval ratings."

Democrats note the overall competition between the two parties remains close in the congressional races. Democrats still have the advantage on issues like Social Security and health care, which could become influential issues closer to the congressional elections.

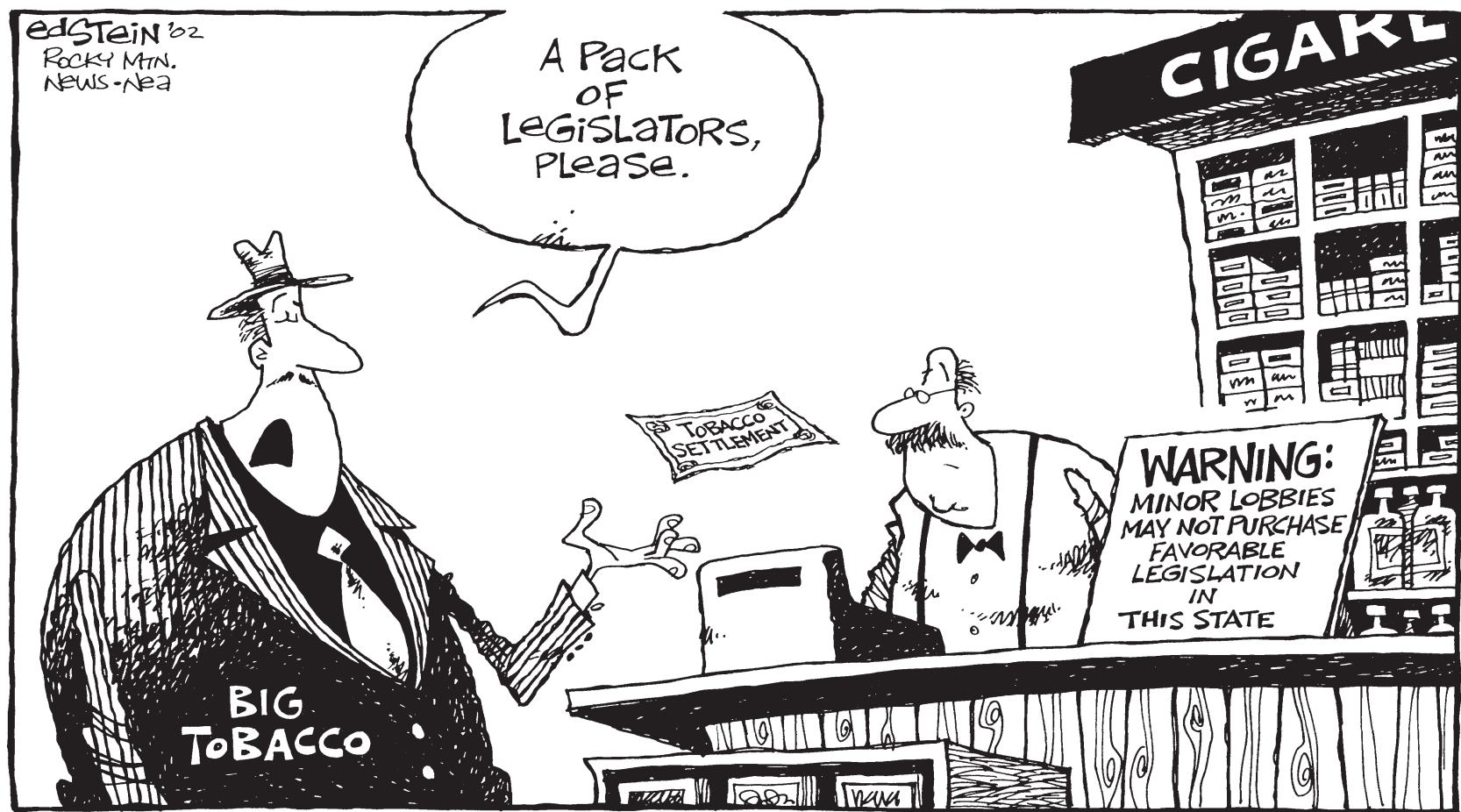
"My only concern is there aren't enough people standing up and fighting," Begala said. "To win an argument, you have to engage it."

That debate remains a complicated task for Democrats given the current climate and Bush's popularity, said political scientist Ross Baker of Rutgers University.

"The Democrats' message has to be modulated and targeted, and it's a real test of political dexterity of Democratic leaders to land a few soft blows on the president and soften him up a little," Baker said. "To be the loyal opposition doesn't mean you are a lapdog to the president."

The budget debate, with its tax cuts and reductions in many domestic programs, will be a rich campaign target for Democrats, said consultant James Carville. He said they will have to figure out who is most effective at telling that story. "When we find out who can do that, bingo!" he said. "We've got a nominee."

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



Finding humor in the English language

I don't know about you, but there is at least one other person who finds humor in the English language.

An unknown author has made this list:
 1) The bandage was wound around the wound.
 2) The farm was used to produce produce.
 3) The dump was so full that it had to refuse more refuse.

4) We must polish the Polish furniture.
 5) He could lead if he would get the lead out.
 6) The soldier decided to desert his dessert in the desert.
 7) Since there is no time like the present, he thought it was time to present the present.
 8) A bass was painted on the head of the bass drum.
 9) When shot at, the dove dove into the bushes.
 10) I did not object to the object.



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11) The insurance was invalid for the invalid.
 12) There was a row among the oarsmen about how to row.
 13) They were too close to the door to close it.
 14) The buck does funny things when the does are present.
 15) A seamstress and a sewer fell down into a sewer line.
 16) To help with planting, the farmer taught his sow to sow.

17) The wind was too strong to wind the sail.
 18) After a number of injections, my jaw got numb.

19) Upon seeing the tear in the painting I shed a tear.

20) I had to subject the subject to a series of tests.
 21) How can I intimate this to my most intimate friend?

My computer's language checker certainly didn't like some of those, but aren't they funny?

It makes you wonder how anyone learns English as a second language. There are just so many variables of pronunciation in it.

Keep your eyes open for language quirks, and I don't mean the vulgarity that's invading all our worlds.

It's getting so common we're beginning to think that type of language is normal. How sad!

Valentines Day and more Internet fun

Most husbands spent the week thinking about what to get their spouse for Valentines Day, and may have waited until the last moment before settling on the traditional flowers or box of candy.

To be exact I am sort of in that same class, however, in my case it is that I won't see my spouse of 30 plus years until the weekend. That does not mean I have not been looking for a Valentines present, but it gives me the opportunity to take advantage of all the after the 14th sales.

I have already given her one present the last time she came to visit me in Goodland, but I know that will only count as part of the day's efforts. I do miss the old Valentines days when I was younger and would write out one to every person I knew, of course, hoping I would get one in return — especially from that cute girl in the next row I had been watching for months.

Ah, yes, those were the days of parties and the fun of discovering who might send something in return, and sometimes hoping it would be more than those little Valentine shaped candies.

Married people find a whole new level of gifts, and as the years go by the gifts become more elaborate and expensive. We seem to have reached a plateau between ourselves where we enjoy the company as much as any giving — that does not mean we totally forget the event. This year, if all goes well, we will attend the Elks Valentines Dance.

Thinking about Valentines reminds me that I got another of those messages out of the blue Sunday as I was working online. Another classmate sent me a message of welcome, one I haven't seen in at



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least four years. This is sort of a special one as she is one of those "old girlfriends," and someone I really enjoyed being around.

All this alumni activity is different for me this year. In all the past class reunions I have been directly involved in planning and putting things together. This year I am on the outside wondering what they are planning and if I am going to be able to attend.

The complication this year is that in March my Grandmother who lives in Grandville, Mich., turns 100. The family is planning a reunion in May or June to celebrate and enjoy some time together. I am planning to make that trip as I haven't seen her in five or six years. I spent a number of wonderful summers at their home, and playing with many cousins who now have grandchildren themselves.

I am torn between these two events, but depending on the scheduling people I may get lucky enough to attend both—I have my fingers crossed.

Most people know I do technical support for the Internet Service Provider *nwkansas.com*, mostly by phone from our office in Goodland. We are working on some upgrades, and as part of that I was watching an auction on *ebay* Sunday to buy some

equipment.

While online I was chatting with my wife, daughter and my father. As I have said he is getting the hang of the computer thing at the age of 76, but sometimes the confusion of all those screens gets to him.

Sunday we were in a chat room, but he must have minimized the screen or clicked on something else as he would not answer our messages. He was connected to the system, but not able to see the right screen.

He asked my daughter, Nikki, if she could help with a printer problem he was having. She was unable to get an answer from him — another of those mysterious screens. Then he found the one with me and asked for help.

It took well over an hour, but with Nikki describing the information to me in the chat room and my reporting this to him we managed to get it printer going again. I would have been able to help him directly, but at that time my Virtual PC version of Windows 98 was not functioning as I was in the throes of upgrading to the new Mac OS X operating system.

It was a bit slow going, but I thought we made a great long distance tech team.

Fun to think she is in Fort Collins, Colo. He is in Casa Grande, Ariz., and I was communicating with both from Goodland, Kan. What makes is more fascinating to me is that to reach each one my signal was traveling all the way to St. Louis and then out to each location. That is why it is called the World Wide Web, or as I like to put it the Worldwide Wonder Web.

Ted Kennedy versus a free thinker

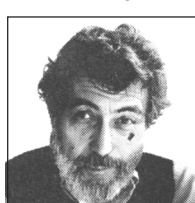
One of the president's most important and controversial nominees has yet to have a hearing before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions. He is Gerald Reynolds, and the position is assistant secretary of Education for Civil Rights. There were heavy storm warnings as soon as the nomination was announced last June.

The committee chairman, Ted Kennedy, has "serious concerns" about the nominee's qualifications, and the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights - a coalition of supporters of affirmative action - vehemently opposes Reynolds. Julian Bond, chairman of the NAACP, charges Reynolds with being a "staunch opponent of fairness programs."

Mr. Reynolds, who is black, grew up in the South Bronx and Queens, the son of a retired New York City police officer. He attended public schools, graduated from New York's City University at York College, and received his law degree at Boston University. His seven-year-old daughter attends public school, where his wife is the president of the parent's association.

So far, there is nothing at all incendiary in this resume, including his work as a private litigator, and in regulatory law for Kansas City Power & Light Co. However, during his term as president of the Center for New Black Leadership in Washington, D.C., Mr. Reynolds committed the heresy of opposing racial preferences in education. Instead, he has redefined affirmative action as "community-based programs whose primary aims are to replace self-defeating values with improved test scores for students, enhanced employment skills, and economic development of urban communities."

The Office of Civil Rights in the Department of



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Education deals with affirmative action policies and programs as well as complaints of racial and gender discrimination. Reynolds is clearly against discrimination practices and, despite accusations to the contrary, intends to vigorously enforce Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972 prohibiting sex discrimination in education programs, including sports funded by the federal government. "That," he says, "is a straight-out anti-discrimination statute."

So what is so troubling to his accusers? In a long, bristling letter to Sen. Kennedy on Reynolds, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights states unequivocally that Reynolds is vehemently opposed "to all forms of affirmative action."

As I've indicated, that depends on your definition. In 1997, Reynolds wrote that abolishing "racial preferences and set-asides will return us to affirmative action as it was first proposed in the late 1960s - aggressive and affirmative outreach to increase the participation of minorities in education settings and the workplaces."

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The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights accuses Reynolds of denying that "racism is a barrier preventing African Americans from making progress." But in his writings and public appearances, Reynolds has - as Secretary of Education Rod Paige assured Ted Kennedy - "never denied - and does not deny - that racism and discriminatory prac-

tics do exist." But he also believes collective racial classifications can only be used under "very restrictive circumstances," where the remedy is narrowly tailored.

In its letter to Sen. Kennedy, the Leadership Conference ends its indictment of the nominee by citing his "criticism of Jesse Jackson in particular."

I ask the senators who will be judging Gerald Reynolds if this requirement of fealty to Jackson reveals the extremes to which opponents of Reynolds will go to defend racial preferences. Justice Lewis Powell's swing vote in Regents of the University of California v. Bakke (1978) is continually used by advocates of racial preferences because Powell said that race can be a factor - but not the primary factor - in college admissions. But in that very decision, Powell also said that nonetheless, there has to be strict scrutiny when using race collectively:

"The individual," Justice Powell wrote, "is entitled to judicial protection against classifications based on his racial or ethnic background, because such distinctions impinge upon personal rights," rather than general extra protection for membership in particular groups. That means all individuals of all races.

When and if there is hearing, in view of the likely party-line vote in the committee Sen. Kennedy chairs, Gerald Reynolds's fate - as well as a fair definition of affirmative action - will depend on Sen. Jim Jeffords of Vermont, who has stated "a president is entitled to a nominee of his or her own choosing unless that person is unethical or unqualified." Gerald Reynolds is neither, even if he does not genuflect to Jesse Jackson.

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The Goodland Daily News

(USPS No. 222-460. ISSN 0893-0562)

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Published daily except Saturday and Sunday and the day observed for New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day, at 1205 Main St., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

Periodicals postage paid at Goodland, Kan. 67735; entered at the Goodland, Kan., Post Office under the Act of Congress of March 8, 1878.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Goodland Daily News, 1205 Main St., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

TELEPHONE: (785) 899-2338. Editorial e-mail: daily@nwkansas.com. Advertising questions can be sent to: gdnadv@nwkansas.com

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SUBSCRIPTIONS: In Sherman County and adjacent counties: three months, \$22; six months, \$38; 12 months, \$72. By mail in Kansas, Colorado: three months, \$28; six months, \$50; 12 months, \$95. (All tax included.) Out of area, weekly mailing of five issues: three months, \$25; six months, \$40; 12 months, \$75.

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