

commentary

from other pens...

Bush's polls down, but Dems can't cheer

After more than seven months of soaring poll numbers, President Bush's standing with the public is returning to more normal levels.

If that trend continues, Democrats are likely to grow more bold about challenging the Bush administration on policy. Republicans may have to learn to live without the updraft that has raised the party's standing for months because of a president with approval in the 80 percent range.

The Republican National Committee, trying to soften the affect, already has warned the party faithful.

Matthew Dowd, pollster for the committee, sent a memo out to fellow Republicans reminding them the president's poll numbers could continue to slip. The president's job approval was at 90 percent soon after Sept. 11 but has slipped recently to the mid-70s.

Dowd predicted the president's "approval rating should return to a new normal" — possibly in the 60s — by the end of July if the historical pattern proves true.

GOP consultant Scott Reed said Dowd's memo was the political equivalent of preparing for "a soft landing."

Democrats are relieved at the prospect of campaigning against the party of a president with more typical levels of public support. But they cannot count on a replay of his father's collapse in 1991.

"George Bush has not abolished the laws of political gravity," said Mark Mellman, a pollster for the Democratic National Committee. "What goes up, does come down."

Democratic pollster Celinda Lake said "it will be kind of liberating" once Bush's approval rating drops. People won't think he's invincible, they'll understand he's only a mere mortal."

RNC spokesman Jim Dyke said the memo was intended to let people know in advance what the party expects will happen.

"By a natural gravity, the president's poll numbers are going to come down," Dyke said, adding people will try to attribute all kinds of reasons to the slippage. The polls are likely to slip further as more Democrats return to the base as the political debate over domestic policies grows more intense. More than half of Democrats approved of Bush's job approval in a recent Pew poll, a number likely to drop.

The pre-emptive warning was smart politics, said political analyst Thomas Mann of the Brookings Institution.

"It's part of the permanent campaign," Mann said. "It's partly a matter of meeting or exceeding expectations."

Bush's high ratings reduced criticism of him, Mann said. "I think it helped make Democrats cautious about giving more voice to differences."

But in Florida last weekend, potential Democratic candidates for president were openly critical of Bush administration policies, both domestic and in the Middle East.

The Democratic reticence to speak out on differences has more to do with the war than the president's popularity, said Bruce Reed, president of the centrist Democratic Leadership Council.

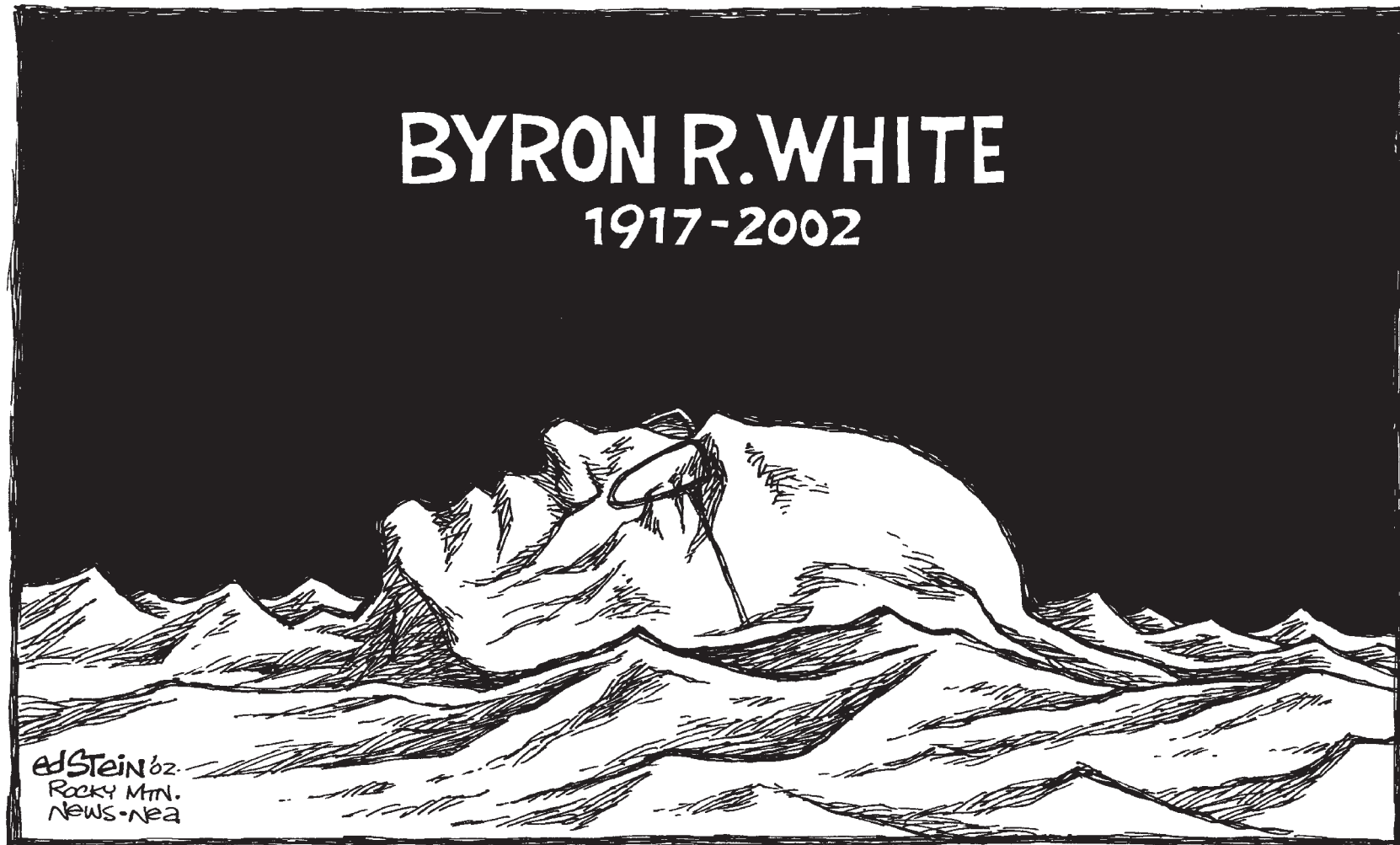
Democrats cannot count on the kind of free fall in the polls experienced by Bush's father throughout 1991.

Former President Bush's job approval was in the low 80s through the Persian Gulf War and gradually slipped throughout the year. Eight months later, at the beginning of September, he slipped below 70 percent and continued to slip until his job approval was at 46 percent in early January, with an equal number disapproving.

But there are some significant differences between the 1991 and 2002. By September 1991, Americans by almost a 2-to-1 margin disapproved of the elder Bush's handling of the economy — the most important issue that year. People in 2002 approve of President Bush's handling of the economy by a 2-1 margin and the war on terrorism ranks in the polls as a top issue along with the economy.

Any slippage in the polls will make Democrats "much more willing to come after" the president, Democratic consultant Paul Begala said.

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



BYRON R. WHITE 1917-2002

Kansas law ensures fair debt collection

Dear Attorney General Stovall:

About a year ago I lost my job due to my previous employer deciding to downsize. I faithfully looked for work for five months and was finally able to find another job. Due to my being out of work, however, some of my family's bills lapsed. One of the bills was turned over to a collection agency which has begun to call me at home and at work.

The agency representative calls me names and threatens to have me sent to jail if I don't pay the whole outstanding balance within 48 hours. The representative will not even discuss payment plan options with me. The calls are getting way out of hand, and my boss is getting tired of screening all my calls. Attorney General Stovall, the last thing I need is to lose another job. Is there anything I can do to stop this harassment?

Dear Kansas Consumer:

The Kansas Consumer Protection Act (KCPA) is intended to protect consumers against deceptive and unconscionable business practices. My Consumer Protection Division often assists consumers who have disputes with bill collectors. Usually, as in your case, we are able to obtain a mutually-



carla j. stovall

• consumer corner

acceptable solution by way of a payment plan, whereby a consumer's bills may get paid. However, if the conduct of a bill collector is unscrupulous and overreaching, it may constitute an unconscionable act or practice in violation of the KCPA.

The Fair Debt Collection Practices Act is a federal law enforced by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). However, individual violations must be addressed in private lawsuits brought by consumers. The Act allows consumers to request that bill collectors not contact them at their place of employment, provided the bill collector is able to reach them at their residence. Consumers will need to make this request in writing, and my office suggests that it be sent via certified mail, return receipt requested, so that there will be proof of sending it. The Fair Debt Collection Practices Act also sets

forth the ways in which a collector may contact consumers (in person, by mail, telephone, telegram, or FAX), and when (between 8:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m., unless the consumer agrees to a deviation). The Act further prohibits collectors from harassing, threatening, or being otherwise verbally abusive to consumers.

If you have further questions about the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act, you may contact the regional FTC office by writing to 1405 Curtis Street, Suite #2900, Denver, CO, 80202-2393, by calling (303) 844-2271, or by contacting my Consumer Protection Division at 1-800-432-2310.

Attorney General Carla J. Stovall offers this public service to help you avoid becoming a victim of consumer fraud. Although some of the details have been changed, the cases appearing in this column are based on actual complaints. For further information or to file a complaint, please write Attorney General Carla J. Stovall, Consumer Protection Division, Kansas Judicial Center, Topeka, Kansas 66612, or call the toll-free Consumer Hotline, 1-800-432-2310. Leave your name, number and subject of your inquiry with the receptionist and your call will be returned promptly.

Is it wrong to have an abortion?

Four bills are before the state legislature that would protect unborn children. One would require the secretary of health and environment to set minimum standards of health and staffing for abortion clinics, and one would amend a 1992 law requiring doctors to notify the parents of a minor seeking an abortion to require the notification to be in person or by certified mail.

Another bill would make it a crime to injure or kill a fetus except for an abortion, and the final bill would allow the state to issue "Choose Life" license plates. (The license plate bill passed the legislature, but was vetoed by Governor Graves.)

These bills have caused some to wonder if protecting the unborn will lead to limits on abortion or even lead to a law against abortion.

The mistake many people make is thinking this is a moral issue. It is a political issue and a legal issue — that is, even though having an abortion is wrong, does a woman have the right to make that decision herself?

It's not likely everyone will ever agree on this. But the Bible is clear on whether or not having an abortion is wrong.

Exodus 21: 22, 23 says, "If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman's husband demands and the court allows. But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life."

In his law to the Israelites, God said that anyone who kills someone is to be put to death, even if the life he takes is that of an unborn child and even if that is an accident.

Why does God put such a high value on human life? Because he gave us that life.

Acts 17:28 says, "By him (God) we have life and move and exist."

Psalms 36:9 says, "With you (God) is the source of life."



sharon corcoran

• use it or lose it

Why does this value on life apply to those who are not yet born?

Jeremiah 1:4, 5 makes that clear with the statement: "Before I was forming you in the belly, I knew you, and before you proceeded to come forth from the womb I sanctified you. Prophet of the nations I made you."

God told the prophet Jeremiah that he knew him before he was born. That he was a real person with a future ahead of him before he was born. God did not simply know him as a mass of tissue — he knew the qualities that Jeremiah would have, and he knows the qualities of all children before they are born.

In short, unborn children are people in God's eyes. He intended a mother's womb to be a safe place where a child would be nurtured and protected until he is ready to be born.

Psalms 139:13, 16 says, "You (God) kept me screened off in the belly of my mother. . . . Your eyes saw even the embryo of me, and in your book all its parts were down in writing."

As the Creator, God has a clear understanding of genetics as it is his invention. He can see every detail of the genetic plan for each individual person even shortly after conception.

That being said, would I participate in demonstrations against abortion? No. Jesus said his followers would not debate such issues.

At John 17:16, he said, "They are no part of the world, just as I am no part of the world."

And Jesus himself refused to get involved in

politics. John 6:15 says, "Jesus, knowing they (the Jews) were about to come and seize him to make him king, withdrew again into the mountain all alone."

Most people are familiar with the "Lord's Prayer." It is found in the Bible at Matthew 6:9, 10. It says, in part, "Our Father in the heavens, let your name be sanctified. Let your kingdom come. Let your will take place, as in heaven, also upon earth."

It is only under God's kingdom that all problems, including the debate over abortion, will be solved. And only then that his will will be done on earth.

Acts 4:24 says, "Sovereign Lord, you are the One who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all the things in them."

Only God has the authority and power needed to end such debates. He has the ability and the right to put people to death who refuse to obey his laws. He has the power to make and enforce one set of laws over the entire earth. And he has the moral character to be able to say what is right and wrong without leaving room for question as to his own righteousness.

Revelation 5:13 says, "And every creature that is in heaven and on earth and underneath the earth and on the sea, and all the things in them, I heard saying, 'To the One sitting on the throne and to the Lamb be the blessing and the honor and the glory and the might forever and ever.'"

Only God's rulership over the earth will bring all people into agreement and make the earth a peaceful place to live.

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