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# commentary

from other pens...

## Clinton's role: Energize, raise money

When it comes to raising money for Democrats and getting them excited about voting, no one can do it like Bill Clinton.

The former president is still a dominant presence in the Democratic Party, advising 2004 presidential hopefuls and 2002 candidates around the country. He helped coax Andrew Cuomo out of the New York governor's race to strengthen Carl McCall's uphill challenge of Republican George Pataki. He counseled Sen. Robert Torricelli as he considered dropping out of the New Jersey Senate race.

Clinton has targeted where and how he campaigns to avoid stirring up Republican voters who dislike him as much as Democrats like him.

"In no way is he going to campaign in places where he would be a lightning rod for criticism," said political analyst Norm Ornstein of the American Enterprise Institute. Still, Ornstein said, "he makes enough appearances so it's not like he's gone into the witness protection program."

Clinton's staff estimates he'll have done 100 campaign events by Election Day and spent much more time offering advice, quietly raising money and recording radio spots and automated phone messages. Some candidates in GOP-leaning states want his help in a more private way.

"President Clinton believes strongly in the ideas and values of the Democratic Party, and has traveled the country to help candidates in many ways, from rallies to raising funds to talking with voters on the radio, on the phone or on the street," said spokesman Jim Kennedy.

On a trip to Michigan recently, Clinton campaigned for governor candidate Jennifer Granholm and for congressional candidates, holding fund-raisers and appearing at a rally in downtown Detroit.

"He's a huge draw, people will attend fund-raisers in order to talk to him and have their pictures taken with them, and they will flock to public events to hear him speak," said Mark Brewer, Michigan's Democratic chairman. Pollster Ed Sarpolus said Clinton's trip to Michigan was handled perfectly because he was able to rally Democratic voters and raise money without getting extensive news coverage.

Clinton traveled to Maryland to help Lt. Gov. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, who is in a race for governor in the Democratic-leaning state.

"Bill Clinton is the best there is at getting out core Democrats," said Al From, founder and chief executive of the centrist Democratic Leadership Council. Clinton was recently named to the Arkansas Black Hall of Fame, an honor underscoring his standing with blacks.

"It is a natural thing for either party that has lost the presidency to continue to focus attention on the former president until we coalesce around a nominee," said Joe Lockhart, former press secretary in the Clinton White House.

The former president often focuses on the economy in his campaign appearances, criticizing Republican policies and arguing for a Democratic approach he says served the country well during the booming 1990s.

"President Clinton's record on the U.S. economy for eight years is the living embodiment of the differences between the Democratic and the Republican stewardship of the economy," said Michael Meehan, a senior adviser at the Democratic National Committee.

Clinton seldom criticizes President Bush directly, though he aims his criticism at Republican policies. Republicans frequently have blamed the Clinton administration for the nation's current problems.

"To the extent he's on national television, it helps Republicans," said Steve Schmidt, spokesman for the National Republican Congressional Committee.

At a recent political rally in Arkansas, Republican Gov. Mike Huckabee criticized Democratic opponent Jimmie Lou Fisher for taking help from Clinton, the state's former governor.

"If you liked Bill Clinton for 12 years, then elect Jimmie Lou Fisher, because that's basically what you're going to have," Huckabee said. "She's pretty much listened to him for political strategy, for philosophy, and he's raised her funds. I think he's had his turn."

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



## I loved living in a foreign country

I don't know about you, but I once lived in a foreign country.

It was a wonderful experience, and I'm glad I had it.

I loved England - especially because they speak the same language I do.

Well, at least most of the time we speak the same language. There were times when I wasn't completely sure.

However, over all I got along pretty well.

Later, when my sons and I went back to England for a visit, we started making a list of the unusual words and phrases.

I've always been going to look up that list and write a column on it, but haven't done it yet. But sometime, I will.

Recently I read a novel by an English author and learned some additional expressions.

Maybe their language changes as often as ours does, but these are some I'd never heard before. They may be "the Queen's English," and they may



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just be modern slang. Either way, I thought they were interesting.

Speaking of smiles that might be too perfect, the author called them "orthodontised smiles." That "ortho" word certainly doesn't please my computer's spellcheck! But then it doesn't like "spellcheck" either!

Snap fasteners on a shirt were called "poppers." Well, that makes sense, doesn't it? Girls were referred to as "pre-women." And I guess there's logic in that. Now I've heard of the Old West's Hole-in-the-wall Gang, haven't you? In this book, a "hole-in-the-wall" was an ATM machine.

People who were talking by phone more than

once were "telephonically reunited."

I've called myself "technically challenged" on occasion, but stop short of referring to myself as this author called one of her characters - a "technophobe." There are days when I probably am that bad though.

This next one I had to think about for a while, and finally figured out that "mod cons" were really "modern conveniences."

An "answerphone" was a telephone answering machine, and a "breakdown lorry" was a wrecker. ("Lorry" is English for a truck.)

Traveling can be broadening, I've heard.

I didn't enjoy English food enough to gain weight on it (except fish 'n chips), but I have broadened my vocabulary.

I just have to remember that a typical American probably wouldn't understand if I tried to use these new words in everyday conversations.

They're interesting to think about though, aren't they?

## Why do I get all this junk e-mail?

My e-mail is full of junk — offers for Viagra, loans, free computers, work-at-home scams, get-rich-quick schemes and lots and lots of columns and features for the paper.

How do they find me? I wonder. Do they think I'm really going to fall for this stuff?

Somebody must. They keep sending dozens, hundreds of messages each week.

It's gotten so the first 10 minutes of the day is taken up with trashing the junk e-mail, but you have to be careful. There are some legitimate news items stuck in there with the trash.

Everyone has discovered e-mail as a way of getting press releases out. It's handy to sender and editor alike, but the problem is the same one we've always had with the regular mail.

Most of what gets sent will never get into the paper, because it's not news here.

There are pages about new products, national companies, politicians and more. None of it says anything about Oberlin.



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Darned few, anyway.

We don't need filler — we have enough trouble getting people's news in as it is. Local news fills the paper every week, and we usually have some holdover for the next week.

We don't buy outside columns or run out-of-town news. We're a local newspaper, pure and simple.

Then there are the politicians. Politicians think they can "work" newspapers for free space. Someone teaches them that, I think.

When a candidate comes to town, of course, we cover them. That's news, and elections are important in our society.

But a lot of politicians think they can get free coverage by generating a bunch of phony letters to the editor. They send them out by the dozen,

signed (or e-signed) by some loyal supporter.

These same politicians spend all their money on radio or television ads even though those markets are increasingly fragmented, making it almost impossible to reach the majority of voters that way.

They know newspapers are influential with real voters, but they figure they can get what they want for free.

Not in this town. Our rule is simple: we only run political letters from our readers, not from random people in Hutchinson or Pittsburg.

If a candidate can get someone in town to write, then they'll score. But if the letter is from a non-subscriber, then they're out of luck. If a reader wants to comment on a campaign, that's what the letters column is for.

But nix on campaign spam. Some still send these letters out by "snail mail," but mostly today they're e-mailed. At least that way, they're not killing trees just to fill our wastebasket.

It's a lot easier to trash an e-mail. You don't have to get up and walk to the wastebasket.

## When speaking out isn't allowed

In a time of more controlled chaos, linking the Rev. Jerry Falwell to French author Michel Houellebecq would be unthinkable. After all, what could the founder of the Moral Majority possibly have in common with uh French authair known for novels of emotional desolation and sexual explicitness? Not much — until lately.

Just as politics makes strange bedfellows, religion has paired this unlikely duo — but not on the topic of religion. That would be impossible given the celebrated Houellebecq rejects monotheism altogether, and Falwell is a famous Christian preacher of the Religious Right. And while both men share an unfavorable view of Islam (Houellebecq is no fan of Christianity or Judaism, either), that alone doesn't team them up. What really unites the man of God with the man of letters, whether they know it or not, is the international furor they have kicked up simply by expressing themselves. In voicing bluntly critical opinions of Islam, they have inadvertently revealed the shocking extent to which our freedom of speech has been curtailed, and the still more shocking extent that Western society is willing to accommodate itself to the new limitations.

In Houellebecq's case, spoken candor and a new novel that includes Muslim-terrorist characters has landed him in a Parisian courtroom where he now stands trial for having called Islam a name: "the stupidest religion." While this schoolyard-level charge is almost laughable, the case is no joke: If found guilty, he could spend a year in prison and pay a heavy fine. Why? Dalil Boubakeur of the Paris mosque, one of four plaintiffs, put it this way to the London Telegraph: "Words have a price. One can kill with a word. Freedom of expression stops at the point at which it does damage and the Muslim community feels insulted."

In Boubakeur's worldview, "community" feelings trump personal opinion every time; in the



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event this case isn't dismissed, the future of public discourse is none too good. What we have here in Paris is a little wave of sharia law lapping at Western justice. In the case against Houellebecq, there's no comprehension of what free speech means (in-sults included), nor any understanding of it being a keystone of civilization. Instead, there is only the drive to censor. Meanwhile, I'm curious: Where exactly is it that can one "kill with a word?" Iran? (More on that below.)

Maybe no one ever thought French schools would go multi-culti to the point of eliminating old Voltaire and his quotable chestnut — the one that says, "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it" — but it looks as they have consigned this all-important lesson to the dead (white and male) file. But it's not just Muslims who have missed out. According to the Telegraph, "Mr. Houellebecq has won the backing only of diehard free speech activists and a handful of fellow writers." Two questions: What are the members of the French intelligentsia afraid of? What aren't they afraid of?

Then there's Falwell. Earlier this month, the good reverend had the audacity to speak his mind about Mohammed, the Islamic prophet. "I think Mohammed was a terrorist," he told CBS. "I read enough by both Muslims and non-Muslims [to decide] he was a violent man, a man of war." With these comments, Falwell may have bypassed a court trial, but for exercising his right of free speech he now finds himself sentenced to death — to

death! — by an Iranian cleric described in news accounts as a personal representative of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. (Also slapped with death sentences for criticizing Islam are the Revs. Donald Graham and Pat Robertson.)

Now, let's be serious: Given their many official, if futile, attempts to cobble together a working definition of terrorism that excludes explosive-strapped humans bent on self-detonating in crowds of people, Hezbollah-supporting-Iranians and other Islamics are hardly the people to resolve whether Mohammed was a terrorist. To be sure, history tells us Mohammed, at the very least, terrorized his rivals and opponents, many of whom were killed at his behest. But that's neither here nor there. Surely, Falwell's contention is debatable — and without chopping off his head. And surely Falwell's right to express himself is one well worth defending, particularly when weighed against censorship and threats of murder.

You'd never know it. As in Houellebecq's case, Falwell has had to stand virtually alone, even apologize, having been castigated, repudiated and blamed for everything from the resurgence of Islamists in the Pakistani elections, to Muslim-Hindu violence in India. But how much easier it is for the truly enlightened among us to dump on Falwell, a man who threatens no one, than to stand up against a repressive movement that threatens us all.

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