

commentary

from other pens...

Gore's tough decision shadowed by doubts

Al Gore is caught in an emotional tug-of-war on whether to run for president again, knowing he would be the likely front-runner for the nomination and very aware of lingering criticism from fellow Democrats about his 2000 bid, associates say.

The former vice president will sit down in the coming weeks with family and close friends and decide in his own methodical way what to do. He has said he will announce his decision after the holidays.

Political observers are trying to read the tea leaves on Gore's plans. His decision will shape the Democratic field.

Some base their theories on how much he's doing now to raise money (not that much), how much he's cultivating potential staffers (not that much) and whether he thinks he would enjoy other options in private life (probably).

Some who know him think that means he probably won't run, while several in his inner circle reaffirmed their position this week that he is truly undecided.

In the meantime, the 54-year-old Gore is going about the process his own way: making a gradual re-emergence in politics over the last year while finishing the book on the family he wrote with wife Tipper; doing a steady round of interviews and TV appearances over the last month that wrap up this week on NBC's "Saturday Night Live"; and beginning a round of calls to financial and political players in the party on Sunday.

Any Gore presidential effort could be boosted by a newly disclosed \$7 million left over from the 2000 campaign that could be transferred into a presidential account for 2004 and push him to the front of the money race.

While many polls suggest he would be the early favorite for the nomination by a wide margin among Democratic voters, other surveys have indicated there is resistance among the party activists who feel his 2000 campaign fumbled away big advantages of incumbency and a strong economy.

A Los Angeles Times poll that found only a third of Democratic National Committee members say he should run again.

"There is a real foundation for a candidacy among rank-and-file Democrats, many of whom still bear the wounds of 2000 and feel that what Gore said about (George W.) Bush in 2000 has sadly turned out to be true," said Democratic consultant David Axelrod. "But by the same token, he is reviled by a lot of party insiders for whom losing — even among the most suspect circumstances — is the one unpardonable sin."

While many party insiders grouse privately about Gore considering another run, few talk publicly about it. They know that if Gore gets in the contest, he would be a powerful force.

His campaign manager in 2000, Donna Brazile, says she frequently hears from Gore supporters in the public who say he should run again.

Some Democratic officials occasionally make a public comment, like Sen. Byron Dorgan of North Dakota, who said recently: "Al Gore had his shot. He didn't carry his home state (Tennessee). He got clobbered in the heartland states. I don't want to go through that again."

Or Rep. Barney Frank of Massachusetts voicing strong support for home state colleague Sen. John Kerry, while urging Gore not to run.

"There are a million people who will second-guess the 2000 election," said Mike Feldman, a Gore adviser who worked in that campaign. "You can find an endless number of things that you could have done differently" in an election decided by a few hundred votes.

As Gore ponders his decision, he'll be weighing how the Democratic Party can best oppose a Bush administration that he believes is making errant choices on everything from the economy to the war on terrorism.

He'll also consider whether he would be the strongest choice for the Democrats because of his experience and strong showing with voters in 2000, or whether another Democrat might have a better chance.

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



Technology has a way of changing attitudes

I don't know about you, but I marvel at how times and my own attitudes change.

I used to absolutely hate getting an answering machine when I called someone. There were times when I practically slammed the phone down in disgust. Now I feel almost the same way when the phone rings on and on and on, and a machine doesn't pick up.

Answering machines can be helpful and save a lot of time. They are a particular blessing for those of us who don't like to call on the phone anyway. I used to worry that they message didn't get conveyed due to a faulty machine, but that seldom happens anymore.

It doesn't take long for technology to get the kinks worked out. And it's amazing how things that used to be new and considered a luxury soon become an absolute necessity.

I continue to dislike the automated transferring



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systems utilized by most businesses now.

Yet I find some clever and amusing — like this one I heard about from an e-mail, with thanks to Kathy Gaskins, Brighton, Colo.

According to her, this is the answering machine message at Pacific Palisades High:

"Hello! You have reached the automated answering service of your school. In order to assist you in connecting with the right staff member, please listen to all your options before making a selection:

- To lie about why your child is absent - Press 1
- To make excuses for why your child did not do

his work - Press 2

- To complain about what we do - Press 3
 - To swear at staff members - Press 4
 - To ask why you didn't get information that was already enclosed in your newsletter and several flyers mailed to you - Press 5
 - To complain about bus transportation - Press 6
 - To complain about school lunches - Press 7
 - To request another teacher for the third time this year - Press 8
 - To complain about school lunches - Press 9
 - To complain about school lunches - Press 0
 - If you realize this is the real world and you want your child to be taught to be accountable/responsible for his/her own behavior, class work, homework, and you applaud our efforts to make that happen, hang up and have a nice day!"
- Maybe more schools should adopt that system!!!

Vanquished deserve a few crumbs

To the victor go the spoils . . . but sometimes it's nice to leave a few crumbs for the vanquished.

In Topeka, conservative Republican Doug Mays won the speaker's post in the Kansas House, a job which has been in "moderate" hands since the days when Tim Shallenburger ran the House.

As is his prerogative, Rep. Mays announced that he would name new chairmen for the powerful Appropriations and Judiciary committees. The old chairmen, Rep. Kenny Wilk of Lansing and Rep. Mike O'Neal of Hutchinson, ran against Mays for speaker.

Mr. O'Neal told reporters he had called the new speaker last week, but hadn't gotten a reply even though the two share a Statehouse office suite.

So much for party unity.

The speaker-elect did appoint Rep. Wilk to head the Economic Development committee and O'Neal to chair Higher Education. Maybe they can learn to work with him.

It's more evidence that with an 80-45 margin in the House, the Republicans are so powerful they will be fighting amongst themselves instead of



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with the Democrats. That's how it is in three-party Kansas.

It's a sad spectacle to see the Catholic Archdiocese of Boston teetering on the brink of bankruptcy because of legal claims by young men who say they were molested by priests.

It's sadder still that for years, the diocese (and many others) tried to deal quietly with abusive priests but never cracked down to solve the problem until it was too late.

How can it be OK to have ministers abusing children?

Still, the church has a chance to learn from its sins and emerge stronger and more united. No

human organization is immune from such failures. But history shows we can learn from our mistakes. Let's hope so.

Cities and counties are screaming bloody murder after the governor said he would cut off "revenue sharing" or "demand transfer" payments from state sales and income tax revenues.

The state doesn't have the money. It can't pay all its bills, so it has to cut somewhere.

Cities and counties would do well to remember that they used to raise their own money before accepting state handouts. The shift to financing city and county government, and especially schools, from the sales and income taxes, instead of the property tax, is to blame.

Property taxes, though unpopular, are pretty stable from year to year. Sales and income tax collections go up faster in a good economy, but they go down a lot faster in bad times.

Now we're paying the price of 20 years of tax policy aimed at easing property taxes. Was it such a great idea?

Grass roots resistance to Ashcroft

The growing number of critics — from liberals to conservatives — of what they call John Ashcroft's war on the Bill of Rights — now includes former Manhattan United States Attorney Mary Jo White. This tough prosecutor, during her term, indicted Osama bin Laden for the U.S. embassy bombings in Africa and convicted more than 30 terrorists.

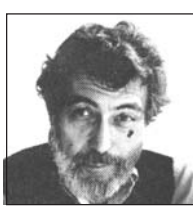
Speaking before the New York City Bar Association, she questioned — as reported in the New York Daily News — Ashcroft's policies such as detaining immigrants in secret proceedings. "Secrecy," she said, "is the enemy of democracy."

But most remarkable in the rising resistance around the nation to Ashcroft's far-reaching expansion of electronic surveillance — and lowering of judicial supervision in some of his edicts — is the ferment at the grassroots.

In February, some 300 teachers, lawyers, doctors, retirees, students and nurses in Northampton, Mass. formed the Bill of Rights Defense Committee. Through the committee's Web site (www.bordc.org), similar committees have formed nationwide. Now, 15 town or city councils — from Takoma Park, Md. to Santa Fe, N.M. — have passed resolutions by those local committees.

On Oct. 30, for example, Santa Fe's City Council enacted "a resolution supporting the Bill of Rights and civil liberties for Santa Feans." It instructs the city's Congressional delegation to "actively monitor the implementation of Ashcroft's USA Patriot Act, any new Executive Orders . . . and actively work for the repeal of those portions that violate the guaranteed civil liberties enumerated in the Bill of Rights."

Characteristic of most of these official disagreements with the attorney general is the Madison, Wis., City Council instruction that local police and prosecutors not be drawn into activities that threaten the constitutional rights of area residents



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— such as random surveillance based on country of origin and fishing through library records to see what books people under vague suspicion of terrorist links are borrowing.

Simultaneously, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is engaged in a "Safe and Free Campaign," challenging many of Ashcroft's policies. The ACLU declares that, as part of this campaign, it will "work with dozens of communities around the country to go on the record against repressive legislation."

Laura Murphy, director of the ACLU's Washington Legislative Office, points out, "Local governments have the power to tell their law enforcement officers not to spy without evidence of crime. With the help of ACLU members and activists around the country, we will encourage them to say 'no' as strongly as possible to other violations of the Bill of Rights."

Already, because of the Northampton, Mass., Bill of Rights Defense Committee's initiative, resolutions are being prepared for 40 other city, town and county councils in 24 states — in addition to the 13 that have already passed official criticisms of the Justice Department's actions that diminish civil liberties.

The legacy of committees that defend the Bill of Rights now stems back to the pre-American Revolutionary Committees of Correspondence, initiated in Boston in 1767 by Sam Adams and the Sons of Liberty.

In 1805, the impact of those committees was emphasized in Mercy Otis Warren's "History of the Rise and Progress and Termination of the Ameri-

can Revolution": "Perhaps no single step contributed so much to cement the union of the colonies, and the final acquisition of independence, as the establishment of Committees of Correspondence. This supported a chain of communication from New Hampshire to Georgia that produced unanimity and energy throughout the continent."

Through these committees, Sam Adams and other patriots reported on the assaults on Americans' liberties by the King, his ministers and his officers and governors in the colonies.

Now, largely through the Internet, contemporary Committees of Correspondence — though not achieving "unanimity" among Americans — are encouraging more citizens to question whether the Bush administration is indeed securing the liberties we are fighting to protect from the terrorists. As a high school student told the Madison, Wis., City Council: "We need to be more than passive observers of history, because the decisions made right now are our future."

Nat Hentoff is a nationally renowned authority on the First Amendment and the Bill of Rights.

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