

commentary

from other pens...

Lott, Gore affect efforts to attract Black voters

Republican Sen. Trent Lott's unsuccessful fight to survive the fall-out over his racially charged remarks and Al Gore's decision not to run for president could shake up both political parties' approach to attracting black voters.

Lott's mistakes complicate the Republicans' minority recruitment efforts but could give them an opportunity to build bridges, analysts of black politics say. Gore's departure means the support of black Democratic voters who were loyal to him in the 2000 presidential election is now a prize the party's remaining presidential prospects will compete to win.

It's as if "great big pieces of ice have collided in the ocean," said black historian Roger Wilkins of George Mason University. "All of a sudden, we're in a moment that is fluid."

Lott's recent comments — that the country would have been better off if Sen. Strom Thurmond had been elected president in 1948 on a segregationist ticket — had the Senate majority leader fighting to keep that job until he said Friday he would step down.

Lott has been apologizing profusely for his comments and talking about how he can make amends.

"It seems this is the the Republicans' opportunity," said Wilkins, "especially if the Republicans respond in a way that reaches out to black people, do things young blacks can look at and say 'that's interesting.'"

David Bositis, a senior political analyst for the Joint Center on Political and Economic Studies, said there's a growing number of blacks — especially younger ones — who could find some Republican positions appealing if the GOP made a determined effort to attract them.

"The Trent Lott thing is just one more example where you have the Republican Party appearing to be mired in the past about race," Bositis said.

President Bush and his team have been making a determined effort to win more minority voters and hope they can make progress with programs such as school vouchers, which raise interest among blacks frustrated with their public schools, and government aid funneled through religious groups.

But Lott's comments touched a nerve in a country trying to put the segregation era behind.

"This is clearly a very serious matter, one that can have lasting effects," said Florida Republican Chairman Al Cardenas, who is active in the GOP's Hispanic outreach efforts.

Chris DePino, chairman of the Connecticut GOP, said winning over minorities is crucial in Northeastern states. The anger over Lott's comments is caused more by perception than reality, "but the perception rules," said DePino, who is white.

While Republicans figure out how to cut their losses in the Lott situation, Democrats are looking for ways to bolster their appeal in a community that often votes for them by a 9-1 margin.

Donna Brazile, a leading black Democratic strategist, said Gore was the strong favorite of black lawmakers and mayors. "Now the black vote is up for grabs."

Likely Democratic candidates in 2004 have already been reaching out to blacks, especially in Southern states such as South Carolina and Virginia, which are likely to have early contests in the 2004 presidential race.

President Clinton was popular among blacks and Gore was known for his connection to him. Other Democratic contenders, however, are not well known among black voters.

"That will create some serious competition," said Democratic pollster Ron Lester, who is black. "That is a good thing. They will have to go in with some solid proposals. ... Each candidate will have to have an African-American outreach program."

Wilkins said the entire country is getting a stark reminder of the racial politics of the past because the Lott situation "is providing a tutorial for young people — both black and white."

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

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THE LIST IRAQ DIDN'T WANT HANDED OVER

I have given up Christmas shopping

I don't know about you, but I have given up Christmas shopping.

I used to love the lights and window displays of the season, but the allure has faded since businesses begin those things even before Halloween.

Somehow, for me, the magic has been absorbed by greed.

I suppose part of my disillusion it also caused by age.

The stores are too big, the parking lots too hazardous, the danger of being rammed by poor shopping cart drivers, all add up to a Scrooge-like frame of mind. I avoid crowds whenever possible; I also get a feeling of sadness to see the obvious displays of materialism when I know there are people who need food and shelter.

Last year a friend told me that he doesn't do his Christmas shopping until December 23. That way he has much less to choose from. I've thought about that a lot this year.

I think that used to be true, but I'm not sure it is anymore. Granted, you may not get THE toy your



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children have been whipped into a frenzy to want this year, but you certainly have a plethora of other things to choose from - even as late as Christmas Eve. In 2001, I went into a store two days before Christmas, and the shelves were still full and overflowing. And the shelving displays were so close together, you could hardly get through the aisles. That was a shock!

Years ago by that time of the Christmas season, the stores would have been practically empty. Not so anymore! I couldn't help but think of the inventory burden they were going to have in January and February.

I've given up Christmas shopping. It doesn't

mean I don't love my family and friends anymore. It just means I can't face the hassle of the holidays. I prefer a much more contemplative, leisurely holiday season. From now on, I'll send a card and a check, and they can do the shopping for me. And it would even be better, if I could hand it to them in person. Because, after all, Christmas is about being together, about giving and receiving the gift of love, about being grateful, etc.

Please no letters!
I understand that capitalism needs manufacturing and excessive buying to keep the economy strong. I really do understand that. But somehow that process also spurs us to want too much, and then waste precious time working and worrying about to pay for it all.

That time would be better spent with our loved ones — showing our love in more personal ways.

Maybe you don't agree. That's okay. I just want you to think about it. When all is said and done, isn't Christmas a celebration of a free gift — given to the whole world?

I'm watching the political flotsam and jetsam

Connie Morris and Trent Lott.

Political flotsam and jetsam, washed up ashore in the wake of an oh-so-correct storm.

Neither one of them knows it — yet. But their days are numbered.

Sen. Lott's sin — pronouncing at a retirement party marking Sen. Strom Thurmond's 100th birthday that the country would have been better off if the Dixiecrat senator had been elected president in 1948.

It's not likely the majority leader meant to endorse Sen. Thurmond's pro-segregation stance of half a century ago — he didn't get where he is by being stupid — but people took it that way.

Especially, Lott's enemies took it that way — leftists, Democrats, anti-Republican hard-liners. And because what he said wasn't politically correct, no one it coming to his defense.

Lott is chopped liver. Even his own president denounced him.

He'll wind up as jetsam, dumped overboard to lighten the GOP ship.

Connie Morris. She just doesn't get it. In her latest faux pas, Mrs. Morris wrote that the mayor of Garden City, Tim Cruz, was "an admitted illegal immigrant." In fact, the mayor says, he was born in Garden City and his parents were born in the U.S., and he never told her otherwise.

If she keeps this up, Mrs. Morris will give her enemies more than enough tools to bury her with.

Well meaning and intelligent, she found faith which gave her the strength to righten her life and



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realize her political ambitions. An arduous grassroots campaign gave her a seat on the state Board of Education with a double victory over a more liberal incumbent.

But her statements on immigration show she understands only part of the American dream.

America was founded by people who had drive, ambition and a dream. They came here for their own reasons — to make money, to worship the way they pleased, to conquer a new land.

They were no better, and no worse, than those they left behind. They often were more grasping and less tolerant than the old rulers. The Pilgrims, for instance, came here seeking religious freedom for their church, but offered the same to no one else in their colony.

Out of the colonial settlements, though, came a dream, a nation founded on the principle that all men are created equal and have certain inalienable rights. It was a dream honored often as not in the beach as in the observance.

But in spite of our failures, the dream has grown. We've become the richest, freest, most successful people on earth, and it's the dream that's brought

us that far.

And Connie Morris gets that part of it. The part she misses is that the dream has always been for everybody, not just "us," whoever that is.

Minorities who have come here, Pilgrims, Catholics, Jews, Swedes, Germans, Chinese, people from every country, all religions, every hue, have assimilated and become part of the dream, even though we've made it hard on many of them.

Some, like blacks, we kept legally separate through the first part of Strom Thurmond's career. Some, like the Italians and the Irish, were set apart until they learned the language and the customs of the new land. Most — whoever the newcomers were — had to toil in the packing plants and sweat shops to earn their place.

And so it is today with immigrants, Hispanics, east Europeans, Asians, all those who come here seeking a better life. It's not easy, but they come because they know what is here — freedom, jobs, safety, a way of life envied by the world.

Our immigration laws don't mean much, not when millions want to come so badly. And these people would not come unless our economy needed the labor. They take jobs most Americans won't touch, whatever it takes to make a living.

Our system still is not perfect, and maybe it never will be. But when people want to come here to work and build a better life, we ought to welcome them, not shun them. They're less of a threat to the dream than some Americans.

In a real sense, they're what the dream is all about.

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