

from our viewpoint...

Picking our best for next President

Tom Vilsack for president.
Mitt Romney for president.
Plain and simple.
Vilsack is former governor of Iowa. Democrat.
Romney is former governor of Massachusetts. Republican.
Both are smart. Sharp.
They will bring new faces onto the national stage. New thinking.
Forget Republicans Rudy Giuliani, former New York mayor, and Sen. John McCain, and Democrats Sen. Hillary Rodhan Clinton and Sen. Barack Obama. Senators rarely win presidential elections.
Giuliani is way too liberal for the party in which he camps, McCain had his chance but was blown out of the pond by George W. Bush in 2004, Hillary Clinton is all over the place and we'll never really know what she's all about, and Obama is just too inexperienced.

The analysts — those people who gum up the machinery — are of the opinion that Romney's religion could be a drawback. He's Mormon. Didn't they try to use that same tactic against President Kennedy, a Catholic?

If we are serious, really serious, about getting the train back up on the track, we shouldn't be so quick stick with conductors and assistant conductors who managed to do very little to keep it going the past few years — both Republicans and Democrats. All they need to do is point the fingers at themselves when they talk about blame.

The problem is — money! Neither Mr. Vilsack nor Mr. Romney has war chests bursting with cash. Millions and millions of dollars will be needed. Unfortunately, the prize goes to the financially endowed. Which makes us wonder if perhaps the presidential derby should become a financial responsibility of all of us — federally funded. No more passing dollars under the table.

Mrs. Clinton, for example, just won re-election to the U.S. Senate. That's a six-year commitment. If she decides to pursue the White House, she'll have to pretty much walk away from the job as a senator and campaign full time. If she wins the nomination but is rejected at the polls, she can go back to her Senate seat. That doesn't seem quite right, but that's how it is and it assures her crowd of employment when they flunk the test. All the candidates should be required to resign, go after the intended seat and then let the chips fall where they may.

There will be many more wannabes organizing committees to assess their chances at an Oval Office run. Reason for this is simply because the playing field will be level. There will be no incumbent president seeking re-election in 2008.

President Vilsack? President Romney? Either sounds good to us. But reality says that isn't going to happen.
—Tom Dreiling, The Norton Telegram

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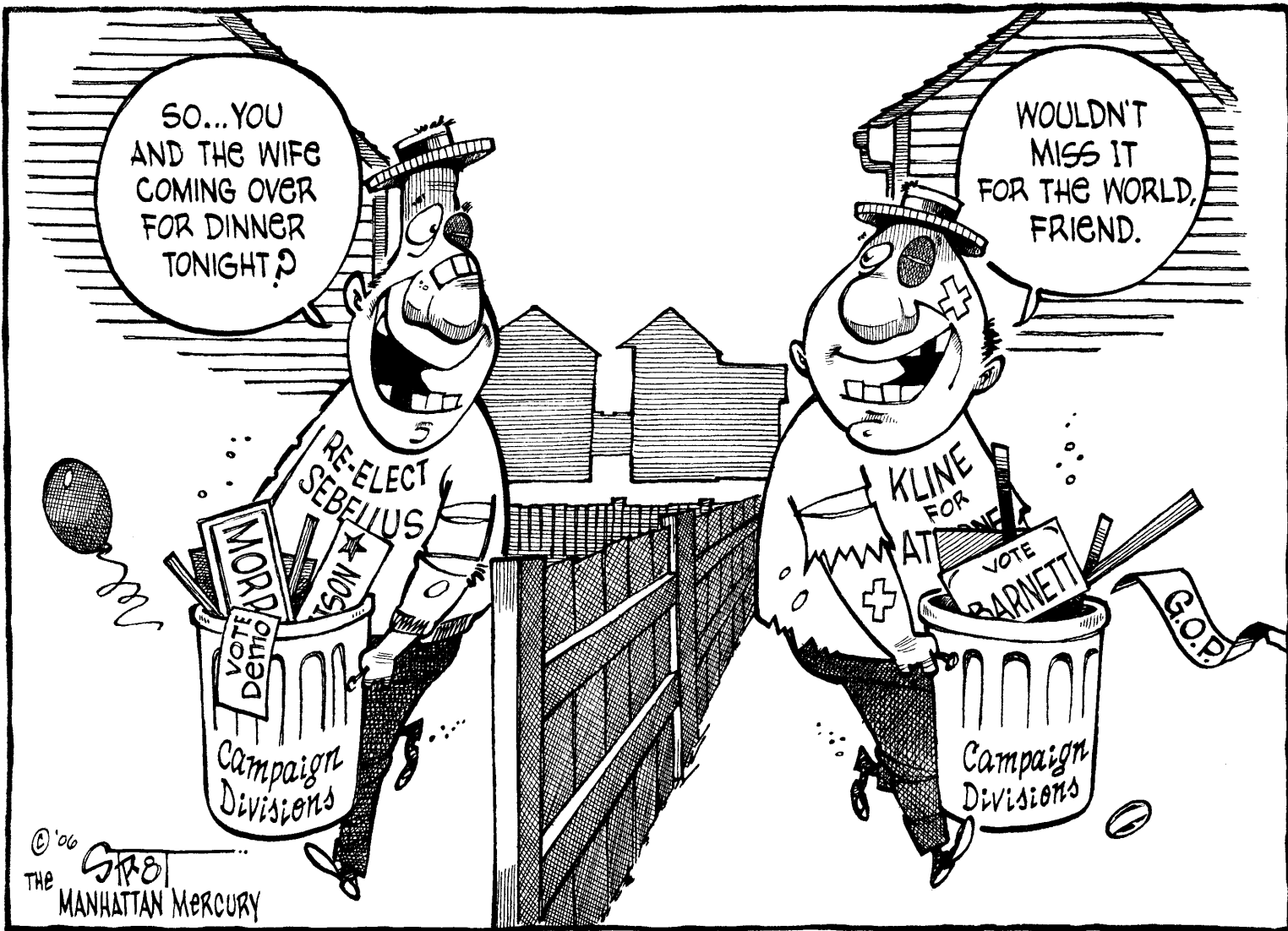
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Off with their heads

By Dick Morris and Eileen McGann

House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) has been a disaster and the rest of the House and Senate leadership has not been any better.

The lean, ascetic, ideological purity of the Gingrich Republicans of 1994 had yielded to the corrupt, feather-your-own-nest psychology of the current Republican congressional leadership. They assumed that the partisan gerrymandering of 2000 left them invulnerable and they dipped into the till to get earmarks for their favorite lobbyists in return for contributions and free vacations.

It's time to get rid of this kind of leadership and to bring in people with a fine, tough partisan and ideological edge.

In the Senate, the problem is a little different. There the issue is not impurity but incompetence. Former Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) was not a man of the Senate. He didn't know how to make the trains run on time. He was helpless when it came to using the tools and procedures of the body to control the floor and force action.

Whether the Republicans are in the majority or the minority in the Senate, they need new leadership. Since Frist is retiring, they will get it in the person of Kentucky Republican Sen. Mitch McConnell, a partisan in the mold of a Newt Gingrich or a Phil Gramm.

But McConnell needs someone to run the shop and tie up the Democrats in knots with



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procedural moves and skillful parliamentary tactics. The man for the job is Mississippi Sen. Trent Lott (R). The Republican Senate caucus should make Lott the whip. As minority whip, he would stop the Democrats from passing crazy legislation and befuddle them with his maneuvers.

It's time to bring in the "A" team again. The Republican congressional caucus needs leaders who put ideas ahead of patronage and who know how to get the job done. They need to reach back into their past and recapture the tough, raw partisanship that animated their return to power after 40 years in the wilderness.

The Democrats, for their part, will use their new House majority to plague the administration with investigations. While the left would be appeased by investigations into why we invaded Iraq in the first place, it is financial scandals that will do the greatest damage to Bush and the Republicans.

Democratic committee chairmen will examine Halliburton contracts in Iraq, royalty deals for offshore oil drilling, defense procurement scandals, and resource leases in national for-

ests and wilderness areas. They will examine the nexus between campaign contributions and favors from the trough of the executive branch.

Immunized from congressional scrutiny by a compliant Congress, the administration has been getting away with pork politics of the worst sort and the Democrats will find sufficient fodder for years of hearings and investigations.

The last two years of the Bush administration will most closely resemble the Clinton years, where scandal after scandal after scandal battered the president's image and ratings. But, unlike the GOP assault on Clinton, the Democrats will stay on financial issues rather than stray into the personal. The results will be devastating for the Republicans and their prospects in 2008.

To contain the damage and to develop a counteroffensive, the Republicans need good leaders in the House and to bring in a McConnell-Lott team in the Senate. Otherwise, a President Hillary will be waiting in the wings.

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Tales of mass transit boondoggery

Wendell Cox's fancy title is international public policy consultant, but for anyone who needs facts, figures or strong opinions about public and private transit issues, Cox is the great go-to guru of transportation.

His enemies will say he hates public transit. But Cox, who has worked with scores of state, local and national governments to build and improve transit systems, is a real radical. He actually believes that big-city mass transportation monopolies should and can be run efficiently and rationally.

Cox, whose Web site Demographia.com groans with geographic and demographic data from around the world, was at his office near St. Louis when I called him to ask him how he'd fix the Port Authority of Allegheny County in Pittsburgh, a typical example of the bloated, mismanaged government mass transit systems in major U.S. cities whose costs are rising each year but carry fewer and fewer passengers.

Q: You've just been named head of the Port Authority of Allegheny County. Your pay is only \$250,000 a year but you have absolute power to do anything you want to do. What do you do?

A: Start competitively contracting the service. Now granted, if this happened and I were there, believe me, the afternoon I made such an announcement I would be out on my ear. I'm serious. You cannot believe how strong both the public transit unions and the bureaucrats are. It's not just the unions. I understand the unions and their interest in preserving their empire. But the fact is, the public transit bureaucrats are just as bad as the unions.

But there's no reason why we can't contract out everything Port Authority does — buses and light rail. Right now, for example, in Stockholm the entire system, including the subway, is contracted out. In London, the entire bus system — 6,000 buses — is contracted out.

What we would do is basically offer the existing employees separation allowances and that kind of thing and convert the Port Authority system to a competitively run system. Port Authority would continue to determine the fares, to determine where the routes go, etc., as is being done very successfully in Denver, Stockholm, London, Adelaide, Perth and



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around the world. So this is not privatization per se. What it is using the competitive market to provide virtually the same services that are being provided today.

Q: How much could be saved?

A: My guess is in the case of Pittsburgh, knowing something about the Port Authority's cost structure, is that you would be looking at savings in the neighborhood of 40 to 50 percent. The payback period would be less than three years. Then you could take that money and either put it into something else or you could expand public transit service.

Of course, no transit manager is interested in that. I'm serious. The whole bent of the transit industry in Europe and the United States is to maximize cost. They do not want to minimize cost; they want to maximize cost. They are not interested in saving money at all.

Q: Basically, the Port Authority is the same size in terms of employees, number of buses and light-rail vehicles as it was in 1982. Plus its budget is bigger in inflation-adjusted dollars than it was then but it carries about 30 percent fewer riders today. Is that good?

A: That's pretty good. I'll tell you, it's hard to find performance that good in the transit industry.

Q: Are Port Authority's peers in other cities equally afflicted?

A: There are a few semi-success stories around. Denver, for example, which now contracts out 50 percent of its service based upon my legislation which passed in 1989 and has since been expanded, has actually increased its ridership rather substantially and they've reduced their costs. They've also wasted a trainload of money on light rail, which has changed nothing. There are systems in Los Angeles that I was involved in establishing, where we took sections of the main transit operator's structure and created new small transit districts. In the first year we did that we had savings of 60 per-

cent and ridership has gone up substantially because they've taken the money and expanded service.

Q: In the Wendell Cox-run universe, what would a perfect public transit system look like?

A: You've got to competitively contract it. Now some people call that privatization, but it's like if the City of Pittsburgh were to contract out the garbage service. The service still remains public. The City of Pittsburgh is still in charge. It tells the garbage companies what to do. The point is, with respect to public transit, the Port Authority should be nothing more than a marketing operation. It should market the service. It should determine where the routes go. And it should determine budgets.

Q: You don't hate public transit, right?

A: Precisely. As a matter of fact it was my motion in 1980 that created the funding source for the Los Angeles rail system. There are two problems with mass transit: One is that it is all about downtown. The latest data I've seen on downtown Pittsburgh from the Census Bureau is that somewhere in the neighborhood of 30 to 35 percent of Downtown work trips get there on public transit. On the other hand, if you go outside Downtown, you're probably going to find it less than 5 percent. This is the case virtually everywhere around the world.

Q: Have you heard about our North Shore Connector project, the \$425 million-and-counting twin-tunnel under the Allegheny River for a light-rail extension from Gateway Center to the North Shore?

A: What they should do with that \$425 million is do a study and figure out what is the least expensive way to reduce the travel delay in Allegheny County. It's doubtless with some sort of a road project.

What's going to happen in the long run is cities are going to find themselves with congestion getting worse and worse because they are not dealing with the problem. The problem is that traffic congestion gets worse. There is nothing you can do to reduce traffic congestion except provide more road capacity.

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