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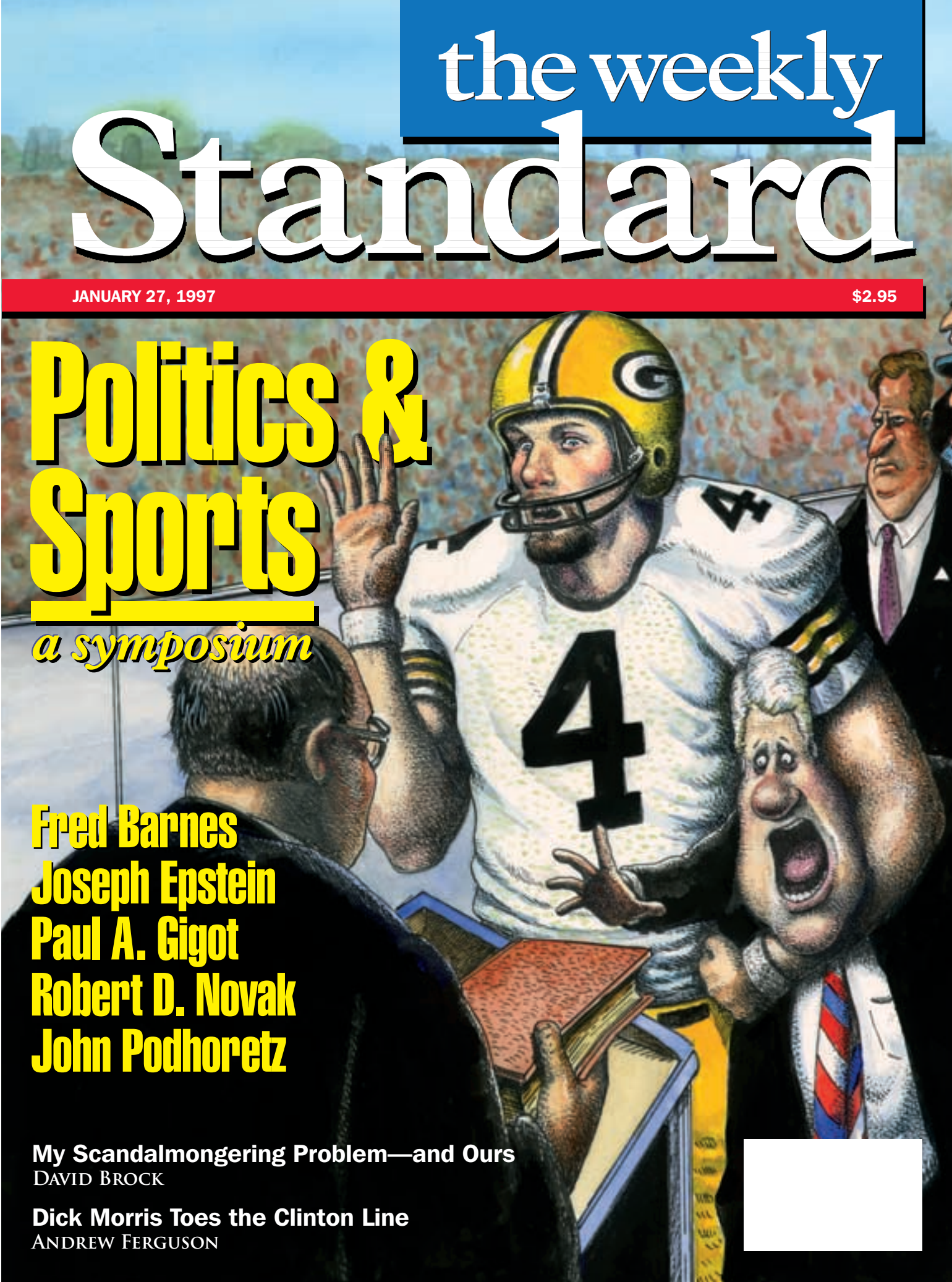

Politics & Sports

a symposium

Fred Barnes
Joseph Epstein
Paul A. Gigot
Robert D. Novak
John Podhoretz

My Scandalmongering Problem—and Ours
DAVID BROCK

Dick Morris Toes the Clinton Line
ANDREW FERGUSON

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Cover by Sean Delonas

Books & Arts

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The *Real* Party of Big Business

When congressional Republicans (Coverdell, Gingrich, Armey, DeLay, Boehner) met privately with the leaders of the Business Roundtable on January 9, the plan was to discuss the 1997 agenda after quickly putting to rest the bad blood over campaign donations. Republicans have long complained that corporate America's flagship organization "will not fight to reelect members of Congress who advocate and vote for free enterprise," as outgoing party chairman Haley Barbour put it just after the elections last November.

Well, they never did manage to talk about Agenda '97. Instead, the Republican leaders, joined by Barbour, persisted in their criticism that the bigwigs give too much to congressional Democrats, who hate the business community and, being out of power, can't help anyway. And why, they also asked, is the Roundtable staff loaded with Democrats who play footsie with the Clinton White House? And why did the Roundtable water down TV ads last year touting a balanced budget? And why did the Roundtable take its name off the letterhead of the business coalition that responded to the AFL-CIO offensive against the GOP?

So many questions, so few answers. After two hours, the business types simply ended the meeting and rushed to their corporate jets to beat the 10 p.m. curfew at National Airport.

De-grant the Left!

One of the more interesting fights of the First Gingrich Congress was the effort by House freshmen to restrict lobbying by non-profit groups (many more of them liberal than conservative) that receive federal grants. The idea behind the McIntosh-Istook amendment was that the $39 billion in federal grants given each year to non-profits freed up other money in the groups' budgets for lobbying. Economists call this fungibility, a concept grasped even by very young children when they realize that the $25 Grandma gave them to buy clothes means they can spend an equal amount of their allowance on the Power Rangers paraphernalia that Grandma disapproves of. Sensing the danger to liberal groups living off the dole if this idea should take root, Nan Aron of the Alliance for Justice (the infamous inventor of "Borking") and her allies on the left fought McIntosh-Istook tooth and nail, repeatedly denying that federal funds were fungible. And they prevailed (thanks mainly to President Clinton's threat to veto any legislation containing such an amendment).

Now that the freshmen are sophomores, a similar idea has been incorporated into the rules, adopted by the GOP majority on Jan. 7, under which the House will operate. Lobbying will not be restricted, but all witnesses who testify before House committees will be required to list the federal grants and contracts they have received during the preceding three years. The rule, dubbed Truth in Testimony, was championed by the Heritage Foundation, which noted that 3,000 or so recipients of federal grants testify before Congress each year and that disclosure would "expose financially self-serving testimony." Nan Aron, et al., are no less unhappy with this. But because Truth in Testimony is a House rule, all they can do is whine. Which they did at some length in a Jan. 16 article in the *New York Times*—so much so that Aron unwittingly strayed off the reservation in her comments to reporter Kathryn Seelye, allowing at last that "money theoretically is fungible." The truth, theoretically, will out.

Scram, Uncle Sam, Here's Aunt Pam

If in another few decades your grandkids come home from school coloring pictures of Uncle Sam and his sidekick Aunt Pam, don't say we didn't warn you. Aunt Pam is scheduled to make her inaugural debut this year cavorting alongside Uncle Sam on Pennsylvania Avenue. And she bears all the hallmarks of a feminist icon aborning. After all, Uncle Sam has had the stage pretty much to himself since his creation, supposedly during the War of 1812, making him perhaps the country's longest-surviving manifestation of patriarchy. And when it comes to personifying the United States, why should there be a male monopoly on wearing silly costumes and walking around on stilts?

There is, of course, the small problem of the initials. Uncle Sam's are obvious, but what the heck does A.P. stand for? Well . . . nothing, really. According to Steve Myott, the Winterville, N.C., drama teacher and actor

Scrapbook

who is the official Uncle Sam of the Inauguration, his stilting friend Pam Horne came along to a local gig six years ago; when a young boy asked who she was, Myott dubbed her Aunt Pam on the spur of the moment. Myott is not without the sort of PR skills that fit in at Clinton-Gore festivities: "Aunt Pam," he says, "represents women in America." And, in a preemptive strike, he says that nothing should be read into the fact that Aunt Pam has shorter stilts than Uncle Sam. It has nothing to do with gender. With fewer years' experience, Horne simply has not yet worked up to the Uncle Sam-scale stilts that Myott uses.

Trial Lawyers In Extremis

The Association of Trial Lawyers of America is mobilizing its members once again against a sensible legal reform that might cut into their lavish incomes. We're talking about a change in the way automobile drivers insure themselves—a change that would indeed jeopardize the million-dollar contingency fees some trial lawyers earn from car-crash suits.

Long championed by Michael Horowitz, a Reagan administration official now at the Hudson Institute, this auto-insurance reform would allow drivers a choice. They could still buy exactly the policies they already have. Or they could lower the cost of their insurance substantially if they agree to give up the right to sue for "pain and suffering" in the event of an accident.

Why does that matter? Because it is precisely the notoriously subjective "pain and suffering" claims that are responsible both for huge payments to lawyers and for the health-care fraud and abuse that the current system perversely encourages.

States like New Jersey (whose governor, Christine Todd Whitman, just made these reforms a centerpiece of her efforts this year) like the Horowitz proposal because it would save consumers large sums, unclog courts, and reduce the amount of parasitic business — mostly dubious medical consultations—created by these "pain and suffering" suits. Sounds pretty smart, no? Not according to the trial lawyers' group. In a mass mailing to members and prospective members, ATLA issues a call to arms against auto-insurance reform. The letter describes the reform as "a cruel hoax," and "insidious," and pleads: "we urgently need you to help us defeat this latest assault on our livelihood and our clients . . ."

Consider the wording here: "Our livelihood" first, "our clients" second. Very revealing, don't you think?

Oversight Works Wonders

The Scrapbook reported two weeks ago that Texas Rural Legal Aid, an arm of the Legal Services Corporation, had returned to the leftie glory days of the 1970s by filing suit on behalf of two Democratic office-seekers who had lost local elections. Well, the corporation and its tax-supported outposts are not supposed to engage in politics, and certain Republicans were up in arms over it—and amazingly the outrage spread to corporation headquarters back in Washington.

Texas senators Phil Gramm and Kay Bailey Hutchison sent letters to the Legal Services Corporation and the Justice Department alleging "blatant political activity." Whereupon the Legal Services Corporation fired off an alarmed and indignant letter to its Texas subsidiary notifying it of a "substantial violation" of the grant agreement.

Sometimes it's worth remembering that it really does matter who controls Congress.

Casual

Charge!

I moved from Belgium to Washington in July 1995 and my life has changed in a number of appreciable ways. I no longer eat French fries with mayonnaise. I no longer write on subjects like the Italian pension system. And I am, at long last, on the verge of joining the American consumer culture. I haven't been through the true blood ritual of American consumerism, because I have yet to buy a car. But I am on the verge, finally, of getting myself some real, actual, physical things: a computer, some furniture, and a cordless phone.


Kevin Chadwick

I'd like to think the explanation for this behavior is that I'm growing up and taking responsibility for myself, but I'm afraid it's something more perverse: It's the American Express "Membership Rewards" program. According to the rules, you get one "point" for every dollar you charge on your American Express card. I enrolled in the program a year ago for the same reason every other naive soul has: There seemed to be nothing to lose, and eventually I would redeem my points for some fabulous reward, like a "free" trip to Europe.

I quickly discovered the rewards wouldn't come as rapidly as I had thought. First I would have to accumulate 50,000 points in order to get that trip to Europe. So, even with what I consider an accelerated spending plan, my trip will come sometime in the next century. My disappointment was tempered when I learned that for just 15,000 points I could get a $300 gift certificate from the Tourneau watch company. And for 25,000 points, I could get a football autographed by Joe Namath. I have no use for either of these items, but I must go on: The knowledge that I could one day get something "free" in exchange for buying things has had a liberating effect. Every time I question whether I really need some new books I probably won't ever read, or an expensive set of pillows designed to control allergies, I convince myself to throw down the plastic on the grounds that the purchase will in some small way contribute to my attaining a future reward.

I use my credit card in places I don't need to. I recently charged a movie ticket on my Amex—it costs extra, but there's another point or two!—and a single $3 beer. (I'm not as obsessed as one fellow I read about who built up miles by approaching people in restaurants and offering to let them use his credit card in exchange for cash.) I also ordered a MasterCard recently because the advertisement claims it will allow me to accumulate points that can be redeemed on any airline, any time. Thanks to the wonders of modern technology, I can now charge my groceries and my dry cleaning. I hope lottery tickets aren't next.

I see the problem. After all, when am I ever going to have the time to use my "free" flight? I tend to travel during the peak holiday seasons, which are "blacked out" precisely to keep people like me from redeeming our rewards. In the past few years, I've accumulated enough miles for free flights on three different airlines, but have yet to be able to use them.

And spending begets more spending. I finally broke down and bought a CD player in May, and as a result I've bought a pile of CDs I never listen to. And because I do practically all of my shopping over the phone, I now receive about 15 different catalogs a week. I dutifully look through every one and realize I exactly fit the profile of the person these companies are preying on: a credit-card holder with itchy fingers.

But this hasn't stopped me—in fact, I keep discovering new ways to move closer to those elusive rewards. One of my favorite catalogs, Huntington Clothiers, will give me a few hundred United miles when I buy their dress shirts. Delta will give me miles for eating at select restaurants. All the eating out will probably mean more pounds, which means new shirts, which means . . . more miles! American Express will give me one point for every ten dollars I invest in one of its mutual funds. You know, that could be a good deal. But who wants a good deal?

Can you charge a car?

Matthew Rees

What To Do About Newt

Your commentary in support of Newt Gingrich in the editorial "Stand By Your Man" and John Podhoretz's "Stick It To the Democrats" (Jan. 13) neglect what is perhaps the best reason for supporting Gingrich in his plight: Gingrich's respect for the investigation process, especially when compared with the Clintons' contemptuous disrespect for that process.

The ethics subcommittee investigating Gingrich was able to proceed in the fact-finding process only because Gingrich did not engage in anything approaching a campaign of obstruction or of smearing his accusers. Neither the investigators nor the American people have been asked to believe ludicrous tales of disappearing and reappearing documents, "bureaucratic snafus," and selective memories. Unlike his similarly embattled neighbors down Pennsylvania Avenue, Gingrich has substantially complied with requests from investigators for information and, in the end, has honorably acknowledged his transgressions (to use the term loosely, as it remains unclear whether Gingrich actually violated any provisions of the morass we call the tax code).

Indeed, Gingrich's problems have been partly self-imposed, but only because he was willing to own up to his mistakes and take his beatings like a man. Our president would be wise to watch and learn from our speaker.

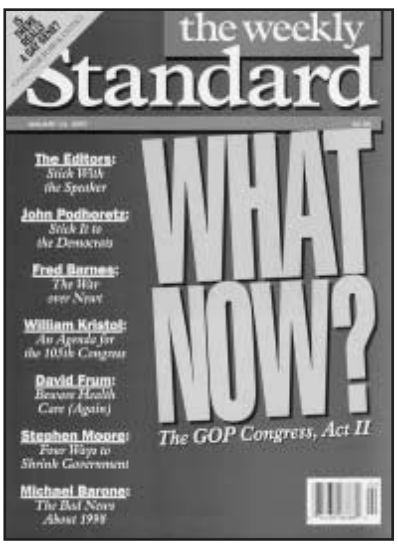
Ray Beeman
Arlington, VA

In "Stand By Your Man," the editors describe conservatives as being divided and ambivalent about supporting the speaker because "conservatism has long suffered from an inferiority complex." They include Richard Brookhiser's remark, "In their hearts, they know they're wrong." But they fail to explain why conservatives feel this way.

Conservatives have conceded the basic premises of liberals. They don't believe in big government, but they say some government help is needed. So their answer is yes to statism, only on a smaller scale. But there is no smaller scale in matters of principle.

Every time conservatives support a policy that defends individualism they understand, at least implicitly, their contradiction and feel they're doing something wrong.

In any conflict between two groups that hold the same basic principles, the more consistent one wins. This is why the liberals, who are consistent statists, have been able to force the conservatives into retreat on the minimum wage, Medicare, and pre-election spending sprees, and turn conservatives into self-haters when they support their leader over an ethics violation that is the political equivalent of a traffic ticket.



Until conservatives defend the principles of individual rights, and fight for them consistently, Capitol Hill will never truly be theirs.

William Van Nest
Wayne, NJ

I couldn't agree more with "Stand By Your Man," as well as the Kristol and Podhoretz plans of action described in "An Agenda for the New Congress" and "Stick it to the Democrats".

As conservatives, we need to quit hoping that the media will someday stop hating us and start treating us fairly. It's not going to happen. We need a strategy to defeat the left-liberal cabal.

Thanks for being bold, visionary, and confident. It's what the conservative movement, as a whole, needs to be.

Mike Matya
Bellevue, NE

John Podhoretz's essay "Stick It To the Democrats" is long overdue. He could have added, with accuracy, that the Democrats' double standard is exceeded in pusillanimity only by the Republicans' failure to fight back.

As a former Republican voter who now votes Libertarian, I decided to switch rather than fight because the Republicans seem to enjoy getting beaten up. The only time the leadership ever seems to get angry is when they snarl at the religious Right.

The current political battles are similar to the fight over Vietnam, in which the Republicans let the ideological enemy set the tactics. Republicans lost that struggle because they deemed it better to sacrifice American lives than to use all our force to safeguard them. Many Republicans are now doing the same thing: sacrificing Newt in order to appease the hungry dogs of Bonior, Daschle, Rangel, and Gephardt.

Bryan Taplits
Cincinnati, OH

On the Agenda

William Kristol hit the nail on the head when he said the Republicans stumbled on the education issue ("An Agenda for the 105th Congress," Jan. 13). But maybe they have anticipated the reaction to reform. It would be similar to the reaction caused when John Silber recommended, among other things, that Massachusetts high-school students be required to pass the G.E.D. (Graduate Equivalent Diploma) as a condition of graduation from high school. The howl from the education establishment over this recommendation could be heard from Providence to the Canadian border. Never mind that the test apparently covers only eighth- grade skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Never mind that Silber sought to blunt the effect of his radical suggestion by giving students *three chances* to pass the test, beginning in the tenth grade. The education establishment would

have none of it. An *objective test?* Never.

CLINTON P. SHERWOOD
CHESTER, NH

William Kristol's agenda seems like weak tea and offers little to fire the imagination. It fails to confront the major issue before our republic—how to improve our politics and revive civic life.

The Congress could achieve these goals by honoring the Reagan revolution. This includes decentralizing power and money to the local level, not just to the states. But a rehash of the "New Federalism" does not go far enough.

An agenda for the 105th should include campaign-finance reform. A Republican version of this would recognize that soft money and PACs are not the real problems.

These two initiatives would not only constitute a remarkable Republican agenda for the 105th Congress; they would make "strengthening local democracy" and "rebuilding civic life" Republican issues. Furthermore, these issues would go a long way towards ensuring continuation of the Republican congressional majority for many years to come.

PETER BEARSE
GLOUCESTER, MA

Welcome the Little Fix

As the author of the Patient Right To Know Act, which would prevent health plans from restricting the content of discussions between patients and their health-care providers, I must take exception to a statement in David Frum's "Health Care: Beware the 'Little Fix'" (Jan. 13). Frum inadvertently makes the case for passage of this legislation when he states that my anti-gag-rule law "would force all HMOs to make one single price/quality tradeoff—a tradeoff that would again tend to drive the cheapest health-care alternatives off the market."

By arguing that the bill would drive up costs for health plans, Frum tacitly acknowledges that some health plans keep providers from telling patients about treatments that are both *appropriate and covered* by the plan. On a healthcare plan there is no obligation to pay for any treatment that is not medically necessary or included in the package of benefits. My bill would not alter this fact, nor would it require health plans to pay for treatment not currently covered in the benefits package.

The Patient Right to Know Act would ensure, however, that health plans cannot guarantee certain benefits, and then make those treatments virtually inaccessible by keeping health-care providers from offering them with appropriate advice. My bill would ensure that people have the full and unrestricted advice of their trusted health-care provider when making difficult medical decisions for themselves or a loved one.

Far from being a big step on the road to national health care, the gag-rule bill is a small common-sense step to protecting patients.

REP. GREG GANSKE
WASHINGTON, DC

To 1998 and Beyond

Kudos to Michael Barone for drawing attention to Republican overconfidence regarding congressional gains in 1998 ("The Bad News About 1998," Jan. 13).

I submit that Clinton is expecting the 1998 election to overturn the pattern of the White House party's losing seats in Congress. To gain seats would bolster his claim to be a successful president. We all know that Clinton isn't very successful at governing, but he is at campaigning. On Nov. 6 Clinton switched his permanent campaign to winning back the House in 1998. It is in full swing already.

Republican congressmen who say they cannot campaign continually and still attend to the business of governing had better learn how. Clinton has cast the die.

ROBERT K. DAVIS
WEST HOLLYWOOD, CA

Michael Barone's article was particularly thoughtful regarding the 1998 House races. But I utterly fail to see how the 1998 U.S. Senate race in Washington state can be considered a GOP vulnerability, given that liberal Democratic senator Patty Murray is facing reelection that year. Rather, the Washington Senate race is a prime GOP target of *opportunity*. Barone is incorrect that GOP senator Slade Gorton of Washington faces reelection in 1998; his seat is actually up in 2000.

As for the "vulnerable" seat in Iowa next year, Charles Grassley was reelected in 1992 with 70 percent of the vote despite the downdraft of Bill Clinton's concurrently carrying Iowa over President Bush.

GOP targets in the Senate races in 1998 are much more promising than Barone says and, depending upon retirements, include opportunities in California, Washington, Illinois, Ohio, South Carolina, North Dakota, Oregon, Arkansas, and Kentucky.

M. WILLIAM LOWER
BEAR, DE

Changes for Henry James

Donald Lyons's exposé of the astonishing biography of Henry James ("Homosexualizing Henry James," Jan. 13) brings to mind Vladimir Nabokov's 1962 parody *Pale Fire*.

Nabokov writes an execrable thousand-line poem about the banalities of middle-aged suburban life, then provides a bogus critical apparatus (foreword, commentary, index) that turns the poem into an adventure tale of the lost kingdom of Zembla.

Sounds like poor Henry James has suffered at the hands of his latest biographer, Sheldon M. Novick, a fate roughly akin to Nabokov's hapless suburban poet.

DANIEL PIPES
PHILADELPHIA, PA

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the weekly Standard

Four Bore Years?

How to approach the prospect of a second Clinton administration? On the occasion of Richard Nixon's inauguration in January 1969, the cartoonist Herblock, a Nixon-phobe of rare distinction, gave the new president a famously magnanimous graphical pat on the fanny. For years he had drawn an indelible image of Nixon with a gutter sociopath's five o'clock shadow. But in honor of the man's inauguration, Herblock granted his hated subject a shave. Maybe the "New Nixon" would grow in office.

From its inception, this magazine has sternly criticized the character of Bill Clinton's politics. For novelty's sake alone, therefore, we might almost be tempted at this juncture to favor him with our own version of Herblock's razor. At least since the beginning of last year's presidential campaign, his boosters have been forecasting an end to the manic, circular inconstancy of Clinton's White House wonder years. He has finally found himself, they say. He is, at last, philosophically grounded, determined, purposeful.

Perhaps this president, too, as he retakes the oath of office, deserves an image-cleansing fresh start. Perhaps a "New Clinton" will grow in office.

Forget it. In point of fact, politicians seldom if ever truly "grow in office." Show us one who has, and chances are we can show you a man or woman who's gone puffed up and weightless with self-consciousness. In this respect, Bill Clinton has little room to grow in Washington these next four years. He was full-grown when he got here. Shorn of image—the one we hold of him, the one he wishes for himself, old, new . . . whatever—Clinton barely exists at all.

On January 5, the *Washington Post* reported that the president's aides believed they were entering a two-week period of "vast possibility and acute peril" that would go far toward shaping "how Clinton's second term is viewed by the nation and help determine whether he can translate a political victory into a governing strategy." That two weeks is up. What have we got? We've got hints that positive economic numbers have reduced the projected federal deficit to the point where Clinton is now likely to accept a balanced-budget compromise with Congress. But we knew that already. We've had a series of mood-piece announcements and ceremonies, like the president's genuinely moving award of long-overdue Medals of Honor to seven African-American G.I.s from World War II. And a weekend retreat of 80 senior administration officials, the publicly stated theme of which was "substance." That "substance" was, unfortunately, classified.

So, got a fix on Bill Clinton, years five through eight? No, of course not, and neither does he. He does not like the way he looks standing on his own party's activist mountaintop, nor can he realistically climb the conservative mountain on the other side. His home is the great valley in between, and a river of photo-ops and focus groups runs through it. In the water are the same policy pebbles Clinton has been trying for months to arrange into a small-is-beautiful "agenda." It is all deeply pointless.

Which offers his rivals in the Republican party an opportunity to make *their* points. Will they take it? Republicans are a rather dispirited bunch at the moment, still unsettled by last year's legislative and presidential-campaign disappointments—and the ongoing flap over Speaker Gingrich's "ethics." No doubt many of them would like nothing better just now than to hibernate for a few months and repair their confidence with sleep.

But political life doesn't work like that. So the GOP is obliged to clean the ash out of its mouth and quickly address its own unresolved questions of strategy and agenda.

Should they look for big fights to pick with Clinton—as their predecessors in the 104th Congress did, with some unfortunate results? It might come out better this time. Then again, it might not. In our view, since the president is so obviously and fundamentally unambitious where actual governance is concerned, a GOP strategy of conflict-for-conflict's-sake would grant Clinton far greater importance than he deserves. And since the president is so fabulously unpredictable, such a course would also inevitably devolve into a

game of mere tactics—the kind Clinton has already proved he can play better than any ten Republicans combined.

Rep. Cass Ballenger of North Carolina believes "Republicans made a horrible mistake last time when we tried to push through things we thought were right without having everyone understand what was going on." He proposes an opposite tack. On this year's opening day in the House, January 7, Ballenger's "Working Families Flexibility Act" won the symbolic honor of being dubbed "H.R. 1," the GOP Congress's first piece of legislation. The bill governs "comp-time" leave for hourly workers. It is probably a good idea. It stands a fair chance of becoming law. It is also micropolitics in the Clinton-Morris mode, and hardly a means of convincing the nation that its conservative impulses are sound—or that the Republican party is best suited to satisfy those impulses.

Is there, pardon the expression, a "third way"? Haley Barbour has issued (on the *Washington Post* op-ed page, January 16) a valedictory message to the GOP as he ends his successful tenure as its chairman. Demonizing the president, Barbour suggests, would be "the wrong course." When Clinton is willing, Republicans should "use the chance to make our ideas law—even if he tries to get the credit." Barbour probably has a pending budget and tax-cut deal in mind here, and it's fine by us—a moderately conservative agreement moving policies incrementally in the right direction.

But in circumstances that do not admit of principled bipartisan cooperation, Barbour continues, the GOP should forge ahead with its agenda and should certainly *not* abandon its arguments. Republicans "now must learn to campaign and govern in an environment that is intellectually and politically friendly to our party's philosophy. . . . Think and act like the majority party by remaining the party of ideas. . . . Communicate not only what we're for, but why we're for it and how it will improve the lives of everyday Americans."

This is pretty good advice, we think. The Republican Congress should not focus its energies on President Clinton; it should (and likely will) achieve a more than respectable scorecard of legislative achievement; and it should also concentrate on influencing the public at large. Hill Republicans should use the legislative process to advance a reasoned debate on subjects of commanding national interest. Any number of issues commend themselves as possibilities: race and gender preferences, partial-birth abortion (again), school choice, trade with China, and so on.

We have no idea which such issues might ultimately win a presidential signature. With Clinton in the White House, you really never know. But win or lose, an intelligent effort like this would clarify some real choices. It would haul the country further rightward, which is all to the good. And—every bit as welcome—Republicans might thus elevate American politics above the otherwise suffocating, syrupy tedium of "four more years."

—David Tell, for the Editors

The End of Statehood

by Tod Lindberg

Last year, D.C. congressional delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton liked to tell the story of her meetings with residents of the nation's capital, lately a site of high and rising crime rates, failing schools, collapsing infrastructure, and impending municipal bankruptcy. The burning question on residents' minds was, *Should I stay or should I go?* "If you've stuck with us this long," she said, "don't give up now." Help is on the way, Norton was telling her discouraged constituents. And last week, the cavalry finally made plans to move in, with the announcement of a plan for a federal takeover of many city services.

But the help comes with a surprising twist. For when you combine the new federal initiative with the recent takeover of the city's school system and budget by a congressionally appointed "control board," you have a new reality: the end of "home rule" in the District of Columbia.

Under the provisions of home rule, adopted a quarter-century ago, Congress delegated much of its constitutional responsibility for the nation's capital to an elected, citywide government that has, in the years since, proved staggeringly corrupt and inefficient, employing more than 10 percent of the city's population in a giant nest of patronage.

In 1995, when the city faced a gigantic budgetary shortfall of $722 million (in a municipality with fewer than 600,000 residents), Congress created a financial control board to whip things into shape. The control board's most dramatic act was to chuck out the entire elected D.C. Board of Education and fire the superintendent of schools. They were replaced with an appointed board of trustees and a retired three-star Army general. Residents, in whose interest home rule

was presumably extended to the District, took one look at the control board's expulsion of officials they had elected and . . . cheered.

But after careful examination of the city's expenses, liabilities, and future, the control board became discouraged over the prospect of an entirely local plan for reform. The question, simply put, is this: Can the District survive on the strength of its own resources?

Michael Ramirez

For years, D.C. politicians have been answering that question with a loud no: The feds ripped off the District from the beginning with a lousy deal that has granted the city a mere $660 million in one lump-sum "federal payment" each year. But unlike other cities, they complain, the city gets no help from a *state* government. Their solution: Congress should make the District of Columbia itself a state called New Columbia. As local fenders say, "D.C. Statehood Now!"

The pot of gold at the end of this rainbow would be a much-fantasized commuter tax, so that the District could collect money from workers who live in Maryland and Virginia. And statehood would allow local pols to broaden their ambitions to two new Senate seats, a governorship, and a voting slot or two in Congress. The statehood argument is a bit hard to take coming from the very politicians—especially once, present, and future mayor Marion Barry—who allowed their government to run amok in the first place even as they played any card, including the race card, to attach blame to everyone but themselves.

The control board, by contrast, does have credibility. And while it came up with a plan Norton dismissed as a non-starter—namely, that what the District needs is another billion in annual revenue from Congress—it galvanized the administration into action. Hillary Clinton has made D.C. her new cause, and in a speech two weeks ago, Newt Gingrich also argued that special efforts must be made on Washington's behalf.

The new plan, largely the brainchild of Clinton budget director Franklin Raines, is a proposal for a federal takeover of the "state" functions of D.C. government. The federal government would assume control of the D.C. prison system and pay for city courts (which would still be locally managed). It would increase its share of the city's Medicaid expenses from 50 percent to 70 percent. It would collect taxes, pay for road and infrastructure projects, and finance the D.C. budget deficit as the control board brings it down to zero. And it would assume responsibility for billions in unfunded pension liability. Though the $660 million federal payment to the District would end, the new plan would cost $339 million more over five years than the federal government is spending now.

As for the matters that remain local—schools, housing, police, libraries, parks, social services—they are and will be subject to the unsentimental supervision of the undemocratic control board or the courts. (It appears that the board will soon follow its seizure of the school system with a comparable seizure of the gigantic and incompetent police department, an action that will lead to . . . more cheering from residents.)

Republicans appear apt to go along with Raines's plan, even though it violates the ideal of devolution in its confidence that federal control is superior to local control. One early dissent came from GOP senator Lauch Faircloth, who wasn't briefed on the plan before the White House unveiled it even though he is the incoming chairman of the Senate D.C. subcommittee. But a few days later, his feathers presumably unruffled, Faircloth was making conciliatory noises.

To be sure, Republicans will try hard to add specifically conservative experiments to the plan when it is turned into legislation—tax breaks of some kind and school choice for the District, which passed the House last year but was derailed by the Senate.

When they heard the federal government was, in effect, seeking to disenfranchise them, D.C. residents stood as one to . . . cheer again. Once you've experienced "home rule," it seems, the benevolent despotism the founders had in mind for the District of Columbia looks pretty good.

Tod Lindberg, editorial-page editor of the* Washington Times*, lives in the District of Columbia.

A Visual Guide to the Inaugural

text by Danielle Crittenden • drawings by Charles Jaffé

Despite the gushing coverage they receive, inaugural balls are never any fun. They're not glittery, they're not glamorous, and they're hardly exclusive (you can purchase an invitation, after all, through Ticketmaster). The Clintons, however, may just set a record for tawdriness. What follows is a guide to the attendees and their couture. And out-of-towners, don't forget: Before you buy that special souvenir ("My Daddy Slept in the Lincoln Bedroom and All He Got Was This Lousy T-Shirt"), just make sure it was officially endorsed by the Presidential Inaugural Committee—or else.

1. **Generic Democratic Guest:** A trial lawyer, wearing what he thinks Quincy Jones would when accepting a Grammy: deconstructed tuxedo over collarless silk shirt, gold stud in place of the bow tie. AIDS ribbon optional.

2. **Friends of Hillary**

3. **The White House's Chinese-food delivery man**

4. **Society Hostess:** Who says the great ladies of Georgetown are dead? This one looks *fabulous*. By the way, she didn't like Pamela Harriman any better when she was Pamela Churchill.

5. **Guests from Arkansas:** The same gown she wore when crowned Little Rock's Miss Pit Barbecue 20 years ago. He's wondering why the donkey has stopped rocking on the watch he received for his $100 donation to the president's legal defense fund.

6. **Friends of Bill**

7. **The "Niece":** A few hundred bucks is a small price for a congressman in a safe seat to pay to have such a lovely young companion on his arm. He got her number from Dick Morris.

8. **The Liberal Print Journalist:** Her piece on the event will note the lavish amount spent on festivities while the administration is readying to starve welfare kids.

9. **The Big Contributor from Out of Town:** This elegant fellow has just deplaned from Jakarta to be here. What a tribute to Clinton's global popularity.

10. **The Ambassador's Wife:** Her dress recalls the last time her country occupied a leading world role—in the 18th century. Bodice so encrusted with sequins it appears barnacled.

11. **The Sleazy Hollywood Executive:** Has brought his own but can set up the president anytime, no problem.

12. **The Big Contributor from Another Plane:** Cheerful Buddhist dispenses wisdom—and cash! Has many generous followers, too!

13. **The Network Correspondent:** Wears cocktail suit during on-air time to maintain appearance of objectivity, but slips into a gown to attend late private party with Bill'n'Hill.

14. **The Indispensable Man:** Policy adviser, pollster, and presidential aide all in one. Dick Morris made him get rid of the earring.

15. **Generic Democratic Politician's Wife:** Still a person in her own right.

16. **Generic Democratic Guest (female):** Dress bought at Nordstrom's January sale in a panic, after hearing Laura Dern would be in attendance. Alas, two hundred bucks gets her a fuchsia satin number that threatens to tear down the back when she dances the "Macarena." Her date, meanwhile, thought he'd brought instructions to the wretched dance, only to discover Dick Cheney's FBI file in his breast pocket.

17. **Lobbyist for Time-Warner**

18. **Conservative Party Girl (crashing):** If Bill Clinton knew these gals were going to grow up to be Republican campaign workers, he'd have changed parties—especially since her fierce espousal of family values will for the next ten years be strictly theoretical.

Note to Mike McCurry: The preceding was subsidized by a right-wing foundation and first appeared on the Internet.

McDermott of Tapegate

by Matthew Rees

When House speaker Newt Gingrich met with House minority leader Richard Gephardt two years ago to settle committee assignments, there was a problem. Representative Jim McDermott of Washington, the former ethics chairman and one of the most partisan members of Congress, planned to remain the committee's senior Democrat. Gingrich balked, but Gephardt assured that if McDermott acted up, the Democratic leadership would set him straight.

It hasn't worked out that way. As everyone knows, McDermott is believed to be the person who leaked to the press tapes of an intercepted cellular telephone call between Gingrich and the Republican leadership. The leak was the explosive culmination of a Democratic effort to undermine the speaker—and forced McDermott to recuse himself from the ethics case.

For the past two years, while David Bonior, the House Democratic whip, has publicly attacked the speaker, McDermott has toiled behind the scenes in the secretive and traditionally nonpartisan Ethics Committee. This made for a highly politicized environment; Republican Jim Bunning cited McDermott's partisanship as the reason he quit the committee just weeks ago. Congressional analyst Norman Ornstein insists, "McDermott was the wrong person to be in the job."

There's a simple explanation for McDermott's ceaseless assault: Gingrich wants to undo everything the liberal McDermott stands for. Name an issue on which Gingrich has led—Medicare, welfare, regulatory reform—and McDermott has been an ardent foe. To say McDermott is "a liberal" is an understatement on the scale of calling Napoleon "a soldier."

A psychiatrist by profession, McDermott gained notoriety a few years ago when he called the Clinton health-care plan "a special-interest smorgasbord with the insurance industry as the main glutton." Instead, he favored a Canadian-style system in which government would pay for everything (and anyone guilty of disclosing unauthorized patient information could go to jail for ten years). This played well in his Seattle district, home of the coffee bar and Kurt Cobain. But McDermott's anachronistic view of government has put a ceiling on his political career: He's failed in all three of his runs for governor.

When Democrats lost control of Congress two years ago—an event McDermott equated with the death of one's mother—his anti-Newt mission began. He was an early advocate of hiring an outside counsel to investigate Gingrich. He also criticized the Ethics Committee's "flawed, ad hoc process" and frequently tangled with Nancy Johnson, the mild-mannered committee chair. Frustrated by the pace of deliberations, McDermott took to the House floor in mid-July and laid out options for how a deadlocked Ethics Committee could proceed. Republicans charged him with breaching the committee's strict code of secrecy, but McDermott said that because he had never referred to the Gingrich case specifically, there had been no violation.

This willingness to flirt with impropriety meant House Republicans immediately suspected McDermott in the flap over the tape. They've long believed he leaks confidential information—he's the lone ethics member to have vented his frustration with the committee's direction, and he alone reportedly has not signed a secrecy pledge. Yet he postures as upright. "This [ethics] process is built on trust," he declared in December 1995. "All we have is the trust in each other's words." Oh? As the tape story was breaking, it was McDermott who falsely told the *Washington Post*, twice, that he had no knowledge of the matter.

McDermott has also come under scrutiny for employing Democratic operative Steve Jost. Described by *Newsweek* as the speaker's "most dangerous enemy," Jost worked for Gingrich's challengers in the 1990 and 1994 elections and has provided the media with complicated paperwork related to GOPAC and other Gingrich ventures. According to Federal Election Commission records, McDermott paid Jost's firm $14,160 in 1994 and 1995 for fund-raising. Republicans filed a conflict-of-interest complaint with the committee last year, but McDermott was cleared, denying knowledge of the connection between his own campaign and the Jost firm—and blasting the GOP for daring to raise the issue.

No one is quite sure what's next for McDermott, but it's obvious he has done Gingrich and the House Republicans a great favor. That his partisanship would get the better of him comes as no surprise. He told *National Journal*'s Richard Cohen that he tried, unsuccessfully, to resign from the Ethics Committee two years ago because he would have "a responsibility to be nonpartisan," and in an interview with the *Sacramento Bee* he darkly warned that "Gingrich should learn to be a gracious winner because what goes around, comes around." Indeed, what goes around sometimes comes around farther than you expect and proceeds to blow up in your face.

Matthew Rees is a staff writer at The Weekly Standard.

Politics & Sports

a symposium

Sports Trumps Politics

robert d. novak

As a 15-year-old in 1946, I attended the final home game of my fellow townsman from Joliet, Ill., DePaul University basketball great George Mikan. When Joliet mayor Art Janke was introduced before the game to present an award to Mikan, the more than 20,000 fans gathered at the old Chicago Stadium greeted His Honor with a lusty Bronx cheer.

"Dad, why are they booing the Mayor?" I asked my father.

"Because he's a politician," he responded.

No other justification was necessary. Politicians always get booed at sports events. President Herbert Hoover showed up at the 1930 World Series and got booed. President Bill Clinton stayed in the owner's sky box when Cal Ripken set his baseball endurance record in 1995, but when his visage was flashed briefly on the stadium screen, the packed house reflexively booed. Consequently, political handlers tell their clients to resist the temptation to present themselves to such multitudes.

This is the disconnection between sports and politics. For all the sports analogies offered by politicians, these are two different worlds, and, for the most part, they attract quite different kinds of people. Political junkies are interested in what's in it for them—money, personal advancement, ideological promotion. Sports junkies are disinterested.

Why would a self-respecting burgher of Green Bay, Wis., wear a huge imitation cheese on his head? To identify with something outside himself, devoid of self-interest or self-promotion. Such cheese-heads are engaged in the out-of-body experience common to sports fans.

They are also immune to the political illusion, the virus that has infected the 20th century. A person who loses himself in the joy of victory and/or the agony of defeat accomplished by strangers is not likely to be seduced into believing that the government and politicians can yield personal success, much less happiness.

Those politicians seldom are sports fans, though they may pretend to be. Bob Dole, a fine athlete before his near-fatal war service, could never waste his time watching sporting events. The same was true of Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, John Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson (though he regularly attended University of Texas football games after leaving office), Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and George Bush (despite his recent interest in his son's major-league baseball team).

Two possible exceptions are Richard Nixon and Bill Clinton, though I suspected both of these nonstop politicians of looking for votes when they professed to be sports junkies. The first time I ever covered Nixon in person came in 1959 when the then-vice president took the train to Philadelphia to host a Republican fund-raiser at a Phillies game; I thought that Nixon's spouting batting averages to the reporters present smacked more of a political trickster than a genuine fan. Clinton's self-designation as an avid University of Arkansas basketball fan seemed to be valid only when the Razorbacks were playing for the national championship.

It is difficult for egomaniacal politicians who claim to be the salvation of mankind to lose themselves for a couple of hours in an activity whose outcome cannot help or hurt them. So it is rare that anybody sees a big-time politician at a big-time sports event in Washington.

The bevy of freeloading pols in the owner's box at Washington Redskins games does not count. Indeed, claiming allegiance to Washington's professional foot-

ball team goes along with being part of the in crowd. But most Redskins fans who actually go to games are individuals who pay for their own tickets out of their own pockets, which means many of them are making a personal sacrifice. (This is in contrast to other professional sports venues in the Washington area, where corporations buy up loads of tickets to give away to employees and clients considerably less knowledgeable than Redskins supporters, but that is another story.)

I am one of the paying (non-tax-deductible) season-ticket fans at Redskins, Bullets (soon Wizards), Orioles, and University of Maryland football and basketball games. I spend a lot of time watching games as a diversion from the political scene that in my 40 years of Washington-based reporting I have found progressively more brutish and less elevated.

At the top of the list comes Maryland basketball. In the first week of January when Democrats and Republicans were locked in mortal combat over the fate of Newt Gingrich, I managed to slip away twice to "Tobacco Road" to watch the Maryland Terrapins defeat the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill and North Carolina State University in Raleigh.

Now, my astonished friends and colleagues wonder, why would I make this effort to watch young men, representing a university I never attended, engage in athletic competition whose outcome has no impact on my life? Ah, that is the essence of being a fan: to be engaged in a pursuit totally divorced from everyday life—the opposite of the political illusion.

Filling arenas to cheer on these young gladiators seems a clear alternative to either nationalistic or revolutionary fervor tied to the political illusion and often resulting in bloodshed. William Hazlitt had it right on February 7, 1810, when he wrote on the death of John Cavanagh, the famous handball ("fives") player:

> It may be said that there are things of more importance than striking a ball against a wall. There are things indeed that make more noise and do as little good, such as making war and peace, making speeches and answering them, making verses and blotting them, making money and throwing it away.

I think Hazlitt might be a basketball fan today.

Robert D. Novak is a syndicated columnist.

Politics Trumps Sports

john podhoretz

Four years ago, just weeks before the baseball playoffs, it occurred to me that I had no idea which teams were playing. Football season had started as well, and I could not name the quarterback, the star running back, the star wide receiver, or the star linebacker of any of the four teams that played in cities I have lived in—the Jets and Giants in New York, the Bears in Chicago, and the Redskins in Washington. And only because of the memory of a recent tabloid headline did I know that Patrick Ewing was the center on the New York Knicks basketball team.

I had ceased to be a sports fan—an unthinkable thought only a few years earlier, when I would routinely make a 10-hour drive from Washington to New York and back to attend games at Shea Stadium featuring my beloved baseball team, the New York Mets. I watched Monday Night Football every week for 15 years, and spent most Sundays in the winter happily sunk in a chair for six hours of Giants and Jets games. And from 1969 to 1975, I handed all my allowance and birthday money to Madison Square Garden so that I could take in a dozen Knicks games a year.

What happened to turn me away from sports? The explanation has nothing to do with players' salaries or overexposed endorsers: The games have not changed; I have. My interests shifted in such a way that the satisfaction I derived from following sports I now get from another subject entirely. That subject is American politics, the real nuts and bolts of it. Only in my late twenties did I become engrossed in its inner workings, the day-to-day shifts of power, and the strategies and maneuvers used to bluff, outfox, and outwit opponents. I am now a politics fan, and it is remarkable how closely the experiences of the politics fan track those of the sports fan.

There are, I think, three sports-fan archetypes. The first—call him the lover—experiences an emotional merger with a team comparable to intimacy: He loves the players beyond simple reason and gets furious with them in the manner of a disappointed lover, a disapproving parent, or a deserted child. (There is a brilliant portrait of one such fan in John Sayles's movie *Lone Star*.)

The second—call him the aesthete—takes an almost artistic pleasure in watching athletes accomplishing things with their bodies the rest of us can only dream about. The aesthete may have been something of an athlete himself, and may have a more thorough sense of these games than the average couch potato.

The third—the intellectual—brings a scholastic approach to the subject. Games for him are secondary to the statistics they generate, stats he memorizes and throws back at people during arguments like darts. If he emerges from this lowbrow version of social science, he is not content to take sports for what it could be (like the first) or what it is (like the second). Instead, the intellectual attempts to apply a universal field theory to a bunch of games. He overanalyzes, draws ludicrous analogies, and inflates team rivalries to Homeric proportions—the purpose of which, I think, is to alleviate his own fears that these matters are actually beneath him. (Greetings, Roger Angell!)


Sean Delonas

Most fans have some of each archetype in them. Some lean more to one than the others: I used to share an office with a 40-year-old graduate of the University of Nebraska who wept for a week at odd hours of the day when his football team lost the 1984 Orange Bowl to Miami because of an infamous, last-second play dubbed, for the ages, the "fumble-rooski." But the real joy in following sports comes from combining passionate partisanship, an objective sense of the games themselves, and an effort to bring the lessons and truths of sports to bear in other parts of one's life.

All this is true of the politics fan as well. The "lover" throws in his hand with one side or the other—Democrat or Republican, liberal or conservative. He roots for every conceivable victory and feels a sting at every conceivable defeat. He loves those who lead, feels rage toward those who don't seem to be giving it their all or seem uninterested in the overall fortunes of the party and the cause. Grover Norquist, the conservative activist nonpareil, doesn't talk about liberals, conservatives, Republicans, Democrats: He talks about "our team" and "their team." And every politics fan knows exactly what he means.

The "aesthete" is fascinated by the art of politics—the way its masters really know how, as they say in schools of government, to "game" the system. The best example I know has to do with Ted Kennedy and Rupert Murdoch, whose News Corporation owns THE WEEKLY STANDARD. In 1987, a major appropriations bill finally got through Congress after weeks of haggling between the House and Senate, arrived on the president's desk, and was immediately signed. Only later was it discovered that somebody on the conference committee empaneled to reconcile the Senate and House versions of the bill had stuck in a little provision about waivers to a rule forbidding common ownership of a television station and a newspaper in the same city. Nobody had voted on it; nobody even knew precisely how it had got in. But its meaning and purpose were entirely clear: In Boston and New York, Rupert Murdoch would have to sell his newspapers.

Now, why would such a matter interest legislators at the last minute on a crucial bill? Because for years, Ted Kennedy had been the target of columnist Howie Carr in the *Boston Herald*, who regularly called him, among other epithets, "Fat Boy." It soon emerged that Kennedy's Senate colleague Ernest Hollings had sneaked the provision into the bill a week before in his capacity as a senior member of the conference committee.

Thus did Kennedy get revenge on Carr and Murdoch. It was a shocking and disgraceful use of legislative power (and I don't say that because of corporate allegiance; it was later ruled unconstitutional). And yet, at the same time, it was—what other word can you use?—beautiful, a cunning legislative trick that left almost no fingerprints. Kind of like the "fumble-rooski," actually. But you can appreciate it only if you overlook the horrible fact that a measure intended as an act of revenge on which nobody specifically voted and about which the president and his staff never knew before he signed the bill containing it became the law of the land. Aesthetes know enough, and are cynical enough, about politics to put aside such moral considerations and concentrate on the beauty.

Finally, the "intellectual" approaches politics by concentrating on hard, raw data. He examines maps of congressional districts the way a golf fan studies the breaks and mowing patterns of a Robert Trent Jones course. He studies congressional vote tallies the way a baseball fan studies box scores. He remembers 30-second commercials for losing Senate races from two

decades ago and brings them up when he wants to criticize or praise a new ad.

It is at this very point that politics fans and sports fans diverge, and the divergence helps explain why I became a politics fan and have left sports behind, at least for now. The intellectual sports fan, as we have seen, attempts to place the games he likes into a mythic context where they do not belong. Football is not equivalent to a war; like chess, it is a parody of war in which two guys' running over to the left side of the field is described with a straight face as a "flanking maneuver." And baseball is not a timeless pastorale that evokes the cornfields of our youth, as most stomach-churningly lyrical sportswriters claim; actually, it's an inner-city street game with rules whose very peculiarity (quick, explain the rationale for the infield-fly rule) makes baseball a singular phenomenon that defies analogy.

But politics is mythic, even if the people in it don't quite seem deserving of mythic stature. And politics matters (though fortunately, it doesn't matter nearly as much as it could). Our president really does have the weaponry to destroy the world, and what legislators do affects all our lives. Issues are debated in a manner derived from principles of behavior first systematized about 2,500 years ago. When Bill Clinton sits in the White House, he is, like it or not, following in a line that began with Washington, Adams, and Jefferson. Where he lives, Abraham Lincoln lived. That is myth made flesh, six blocks from my office, and no more than five hours by plane for anybody else in America.

John Podhoretz is deputy editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

A Conservative Pursuit

paul a. gigot

Either I am a lousy political columnist, or the country is in much better shape than I thought. Or both.

I say this judging from the response I've received to a *Wall Street Journal* column I wrote in late December on the Green Bay Packers. The letters, e-mail messages, and phone calls are still coming in, outdrawing by at least 10-to-1 the response I get on even a well-received political column, which is supposed to be my bread and butter. Members of my family who sprint like Michael Johnson away from a political topic bothered to read and comment on the Packer piece. More surprising still, most of the letters come not merely from the state of Wisconsin but from football fans around the country.

As a political columnist, I suppose I should find this greater interest in sports demoralizing. But as a conservative, I'm encouraged. Readers are showing they have sensible priorities, especially in this age of understandably diminished faith in politicians. Any country with more passion for sports than politics might not be slouching toward Gomorrah after all. While sports has been infected with some of the same corruptions as the rest of American society, its popularity is a sign of cultural health.

One sports virtue is its ability to appeal across lines of ideology, class, race, and age. Especially among men, sports remains America's great common cultural currency. Politics, by contrast, has become ever more fragmented. There isn't much the uptown elites of Northwest Washington, D.C., have in common with the poor of the city's Southeast quadrant save bad snow removal—and the Redskins. During the five years I lived in Hong Kong, my best entree into Chinese culture was basketball. Half of my teammates couldn't speak English, and my Chinese was rudimentary, but a decent jump shot opened doors.

As a conservative, I also don't have too much cause to talk to Democrat David Obey, one of Congress's most aggressive class warriors. But Obey is from western Wisconsin, and on the day of Newt Gingrich's reelection as speaker, I was suddenly handed a note up in my seat in the press gallery above the House floor: "If the Packers win, then you should buy me a drink or I should buy you one to celebrate. Double for the Super Bowl. Obey."

The next thing I know, Obey has dragged Jay Johnson, the new Democratic congressman from Green Bay, down to the well of the House to give me the thumbs-up and chant, "Go, Packers." If they win Sunday, I'll gladly do the buying. Maybe I'll even invite Speaker Gingrich to join us.

A good populist like Obey would understand that one sign that the conservative movement was becoming more popular was when it began to attract more

athletes to its ranks. Once former jocks always seemed to be Democrats—Bill Bradley, for one. Many conservatives were detached from such hoi-polloi concerns.

Working for the sainted Bill Buckley in the late 1970s, I once got a scribbled note asking, "Who is Henry Aaron?" Bill's brother Jim, the former senator from New York, was asked during the 1970s what he thought about the death of Vince Lombardi, who before being a legendary football coach had been a legendary athlete at Fordham in the Bronx. Buckley replied, "New Year's Eve will never be the same." I doubt this helped his image as a man of the people. (Note to Gen-X readers: Buckley confused Lombardi with band leader Guy Lombardo, who did a New Year's gig before Sinbad.)

But in recent years, former sports stars have usually run for office as Republicans. Miler Jim Ryun, Hall of Fame receiver Steve Largent, quarterbacks J.C. Watts and Jack Kemp, and fastball pitcher Jim Bunning all made their names as athletes before they ran for Congress. Even basketball's Charles Barkley says that if he ever runs for governor in his home state of Alabama, he'll do it as a Republican. Liberals may dominate Hollywood, but conservatives hold their own on America's playing fields.

Regarding race, I'm always struck when sportswriters who know nothing about Green Bay fly in to do the black-players-in-a-white-town piece. The Packers have had numerous black superstars, even going back to the glory days in the 1960s. Hall of Fame safety Willie Wood was a personal hero. The Packers were the first football team to have blacks as both offensive and defensive coordinators. One of them, Ray Rhodes, left Green Bay amid rumors of unhappiness, but the experience didn't do him any harm. He's now head coach in Philadelphia. When Packers star Reggie White's Tennessee church burned down, Wisconsin residents sent him more than $200,000 without even being asked.

Sports has done as much as any American institution, including the military, to break down racial stereotypes. It's harder to be a racist if you spent your childhood cheering for, and marveling at, Michael Jordan. In the 1970s, serious people worried that pro basketball was doomed because white Americans wouldn't attend a sport dominated by black players. That was shortly before the NBA soared in popularity. Black ballplayers have become some of America's most popular cultural icons, and its most effective salesmen.

One of the sillier clichés of sportswriters and other moralists is that Americans admire sports stars too much but (let us say) teachers too little. I'm all for admiring teachers, at least those who don't run the NEA. But what's wrong with a kid looking up to Grant Hill and Rebecca Lobo, whose talent and discipline allow them to do things few others can? To appreciate heroes is to admire excellence, which is a way of maintaining a society rooted in merit. And there is no greater meritocracy than sports.

One reason sports is so popular is precisely its adherence to measurable standards, to absolutes. Unlike politics, where as George Shultz once famously put it, nothing ever gets settled, sports provides finality. A team wins or loses. Someone finishes first, someone last. Coaches win or they are fired. Players perform or they get cut. Fans tolerate runaway salaries, because they understand that in sports, at least on the field, people are held accountable. Elections, on the other hand, rarely settle much of anything, especially in this age of the permanent campaign. I'm convinced that one reason so many football fans favor the return of instant replay is that it eliminates even the rare possibility of ambiguity. We don't want the rightful fruits of triumph to be stolen by some knucklehead's "judgment call." We put up with enough arbitrary judgments in the rest of our lives.

The other great cultural virtue of sports is that it allows us to form tribal attachments, but without the Balkanizing side effects. We pick a team because it's our local team, or because it was Dad's, or because its players or nature appeals to something personal in us. But unlike in religion or politics, we don't hate each other when the game's over. (Except for the Chicago Bears. Every good Packers fan hates the Bears.)

One of the most appealing things about the Packers is the sense of reciprocal obligation that exists between town and team. From time to time the city has bailed the team out, and the team in turn adds luster to the city. Despite the city's small size (fewer than 100,000), the Packers are a rare NFL team with a national following. Partly this flows from its Lombardi glory years, but I suspect Americans also like the idea of a city whose residents own the franchise.

In this sense, a game in Lambeau Field, especially a big championship game, amounts to a kind of civic rite. The colder the weather, the better the sense of shared ordeal. Only in recent years has the team built cozy skyboxes shielded from the elements. And on my trip to Green Bay for the championship game, I ran into a fan who said he had a seat in one of the boxes. He also allowed as how he felt ashamed to have people see him walking through the parking lot in his loafers when everyone else was wearing boots. When the game-time temperature of three degrees was announced last Sunday, the crowd roared.

The most remarkable moment, though, came during one of the those "TV timeouts" in the first half. The teams were lined up on the field but the refs held the ball while music blared until the ads finished on the tube. During one early timeout, with the Packers

defense on the field, the jumbo TV screens inside Lambeau began to play a music video of defensive lineman Reggie White singing "Amazing Grace."

Now, White is an ordained minister who says he came to Green Bay as a free agent because God told him to. A year ago he claimed a hamstring injury had been healed by a miracle. He evangelizes at every press conference, and he leads players from both teams in prayer after every game. He lives his creed, and so he has credibility among fellow players and fans.

About 20 seconds or so into this White video, the crowd starts to sing along. Soon 60,000 fans are booming out, ". . . saved a wretch like me." Meanwhile, down on the field, moments from clubbing some 300-pound tackle, White is pointing his arms up at the heavens. The jumbo screens show, "We Believe!"

You can call this corny if you want, but as a display of shared civic purpose, it sure beats anything I'm likely to see at Bill Clinton's second inaugural.

***Paul A. Gigot writes a column on Fridays in the* Wall Street Journal.**

My Sports Right or Left

fred barnes

I went to the Army-Navy game in Philadelphia last December, and I won't soon forget it. And not just the game, which Army won when a desperate drive by Navy fell short in the final seconds. What happened moments *after* the game was even more memorable. Veterans Stadium suddenly went silent. The heartbroken Navy team, having lost to Army for the fifth straight year, gathered itself in front of the full brigade of midshipmen, and together, football players and coaches and Middies sang the Naval Academy alma mater. Then, after a brief burst of noise, the crowd quieted again. Smoke from cannons fired to celebrate Army's victory hung over the section of the stands where the entire corps of cadets was standing. Once the Army players collected in front, the West Point alma mater was sung.

The whole episode lasted two, maybe three minutes. It was one of the strangest and most exhilarating moments I've experienced in years of attending sports events. And I think it's also fair to describe it as a conservative moment: a hard-hitting football game between traditional rivals, cadets and midshipmen (in uniform) standing throughout the game, the military brass in attendance, President Clinton seated for the first half on Navy's side, the second half on Army's. I loved it. Clinton, by the way, was politely but coolly received at the game.

Yes, there are conservative and liberal athletic events. Sports are either conservative (football, basketball, boxing) or liberal (soccer, jogging, baseball), and teams can be conservative (Dallas Cowboys, New York Yankees) or liberal (Washington Redskins, Atlanta Braves) as well. The same is true for big games. I don't think anyone would dispute that the Army-Navy game is a conservative event. And it's no coincidence that Army and Navy are better teams now that we're in a conservative era. In the liberal '60s and '70s, serious athletes boycotted the service academies. It got so bad that *Sports Illustrated* a few years back urged West Point and Annapolis to drop big-time football. Last fall, *SI* changed its mind.

What makes a sports event conservative or liberal? I've got four criteria. The first is the sport itself. Boxing, for instance, is conservative because it's so violent, individualistic, and masculine. The second criterion is the crowd: You don't find many liberals at football games. The third is the nature of the event. Does winning matter to the exclusion of practically everything else? Is it southern? Is it tradition-bound? If the answer is yes to these, it's a conservative event. Thus, the Masters golf tournament at a stuffy country club in Augusta, Georgia, in April is very, very conservative. The fourth measure: How much commercialism is associated with the event? There's nothing wrong, from the conservative standpoint, with commercialism in sports, mixing Adam Smith and Edmund Burke. What's repugnant and definitely not conservative is glitz, such as when a half-naked Michael Jackson sang during halftime at the Super Bowl.

Still, the Super Bowl is the summit of conservative sports. It's the biggest football game of the season. The crowd at the game consists of rich folks, high rollers, and moderately well-heeled fans of the two teams involved. It's an event where winning is everything. The Buffalo Bills have played in four Super Bowls, yet they're the laughingstock of football because they lost all four. The Super Bowl has become traditional. The

game on January 26 is the 31st—sorry, I mean the XXXIst. Okay, it's a relatively *new* tradition, but let's not get picky. As for commercialism, it's got plenty. The TV ads during the game are a media story all by themselves. The star of the Super Bowl used to be paid to declare he's going to Disney World right after the game. I miss that. Anyway, it's liberals who hate commerce. Conservatives loathe glitz, the Super Bowl's chief drawback. Who's performing at halftime this year? Siegfried and Roy?

There are other, lesser conservative sports events. The World Series is one. Baseball is a liberal sport, so boring it's adored by liberals. But the series is steeped in tradition, and the crowd is a downscale version of the Super Bowl throng. Winning matters. After the Boston Red Sox lost ignominiously to the New York Mets in 1986, I was so crushed I lost interest in baseball for several years. Both the NBA championship and the NBA All-Star weekend are conservative. The emphasis is chiefly on individual players like Michael Jordan and Hakeem Olajuwon, the true entrepreneurs of the sporting world. Sometimes a sandlot hustler pulls himself up by his bootstraps, as Tim Legler of the Washington Bullets did by winning the 3-point shooting contest in 1996. Oh, yes, the World Cup is conservative, though soccer as a sport isn't. The cup generates fervent nationalistic feelings, which is fine. Losing the World Cup is death. When Italy lost in 1994 on Roberto Baggio's missed penalty kick, Baggio fell to the ground like a man who'd been shot. He understood what losing meant.

Sean Delonas

Now for the liberal sports events. The NCAA basketball Final Four is at the top of the list. Why? It's a great event that I never miss (on TV), but winning the championship isn't all that significant anymore. It's getting to the Final Four itself that produces bragging rights. Notice how good college teams are often described as having been to the Final Four *x* number of times in the past decade or two. That's not a conservative yardstick. It reminds me of the defense of affirmative action: Those rewarded are always said to be "qualified," but never the "most qualified" or the "best." Winning doesn't matter in the baseball All-Star game either. Who remembers who won last year, the AL or the NL? And who cares? Still, individual performances are important, which makes the All-Star game neo-liberal.

What's sad to see is a conservative event that turns liberal. This has happened to the college football bowl games. They used to be very traditional (and very exciting): Big 10 versus Pac 10 in the Rose Bowl, the Big 8 champ in the Orange Bowl, etc. Now the major bowls have become part of a playoff system. It doesn't matter which bowl you go to. Worse, there are dozens of bowls. Mediocre teams get invited. California, a 6-5 team, played in the Aloha Bowl. After losing to Navy, Cal wound up 6-6 for the year—but with bragging rights about having been a bowl team. Rewarding a mediocre or losing performance is a liberal practice. Liberal soccer parents in my neck of the woods, for example, think every player on every team should get a trophy, even if they lost every game. Good for self-esteem, you know. Conservatives see things differently. Rather than rewarded, losers should be spurred to play harder next time in hopes of winning a trophy. The Cal football team should have stayed home.

A few weeks after the Army-Navy game, I got a letter from an Army fan, the wife of a West Pointer and the mother of a cadet. (She'd seen me at the game.) "Wasn't that a wonderful game?" she wrote. "At halftime [with Navy ahead] my spirits were very low and I was wet and miserable." Her son came by to cheer her up. "Don't worry, Mom," he told her. "We're always down at the half. That's our strategy. We'll come back." Army did. It wasn't like those "shameful seasons" Army had in the early '70s, she wrote. "Those were the days of Vietnam, Nixon, and silly hippie girls throwing flowers at the cadets and calling them 'baby killers.'" Nope, it wasn't like that at all.

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A Super (Yawn) Sunday

joseph epstein

This is going to be Super Bowl XXXI, and it is with no pride whatsoever that I have to report having watched the preceding XXX. Only two have left memories in my mind. The first, when Joe Namath and the Jets shocked the greatly favored Baltimore Colts. The second, when my own team, the Chicago Bears, crushed the New England Patriots. For the rest, all those Sundays now constitute a blur, in which I can barely make out the lined faces of the tyrannical Vince Lombardi, the merciless Don Shula, the phlegmatic Tom Landry, and the anxious Marv Levy.

According to a recent piece in the *New York Times Magazine*, interest in professional football has greatly lessened in recent years. I suspect this is true, even though it was printed in the *New York Times*. It has lessened greatly for me, with more than fifty years in the supine business of being a sports fan. The athletes no longer seem admirable or even interesting, and are exceeded in unattractiveness only by the small but dreary pack of owners; the money has screwed things up hugely; and the hype is no longer even close to believable. I should like it much better, in fact, if they began to call it, instead of the Super Bowl, the Nice Bowl, and, while at it, dropped the Roman numerals.

So fatigued am I by the spectacle of it all that I have come to feel a strong personal dislike even for the announcers. Dick Enberg's endless agreeableness makes me want to challenge him to a fight. John Madden's enthusiasm for the crudity and brutishness of the game no longer seems quite credible; and it would be wonderful if some clever investigative reporter were able to uncover that Madden was working on a translation of the poetry of St. John Perse during the long commercial breaks. Monday Night Football is one of the few sports-watching habits I have been able to break, and it is pleasing no longer to have to worry about Frank Gifford's and Al Michaels's hairlines.

Yet if pro football seems to be losing ground, it has a lot of ground to lose. For a time it looked as if the game were to become as much a part of the culture as baseball once was. Seven or eight years ago at lunch, Erich Heller, the great critic of Central European literature, whose illness had forced him to move into a retirement home, in his case an all-male retirement home, said to me, in his strongly Teutonic accent: "Joe, I haf a qvestion to esk of you."

"Of course, Erich," I said. "What is it?"

"Who," he asked, "is dis Ditka?"

Good God, I thought, poor Erich, up in his rooms reading Goethe and Rilke, even he has had his life invaded by Mike Ditka. "Erich," I replied, "believe me, you don't need to know."

For all my grumbling, I think you should know that I shall once again be at my post—that is, on my duff on a couch before the television set—for this year's Super Bowl. The reason is that for the past fifteen years, my wife and I have been the hosts of a Super Bowl dinner for her congenial family. (My own family, whose theme is ingratitude, has too few members left who still speak to one another to make such a dinner tenable.)

We eat a swell dinner, various cousins contributing side dishes. We organize a small betting pool, with the person who comes closest to guessing the total points scored winning. Bonhomie fills the room. Only the quality of the game itself has been wanting. In recent years, the true excitement has been over the commercials, which are more amusing than the football and which by now must cost up to a quarter million dollars a nanosecond.

As the game drones on, people drift in and out, and the chief interest is in who will win the pool. Although sentiment and pro football go together like oil and water, I have decided to like the Green Bay Packers this year, partly because the team represents a small town, and even more because it does not have a single owner or small syndicate of owners, but is owned, in effect, by the town itself. Having no Jerry Jones, no Jack Kent Cooke, no Mike McCaskey, no beautiful and talented Al Davis, no egomaniacal, publicity-seeking zillionaire, gives the Packers a fine negative allure.

As the family cynic, I shall doubtless once again hold forth on the state of the sport. The subject of this year's sermon will be that sports, and especially pro football, is a metaphor for absolutely nothing. Three-hundred-and-fifty-pound interior linemen are not gladiators, soldiers in the trenches, but only extremely well-paid brutes in shoulder pads and helmets. Third-down conversions are just that—a chance for another four downs. You may punt in football, but never in life. Nothing in the entire game, truth to tell, applies to life. Professional football is merely a game, an increasingly specialized and brutish one that you probably don't want your sons to play, and anyone who attempts to make more of it is fooling himself or trying to con the rest of us.

Have a Super Sunday.

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My Scandalmongering Problem—and Ours

By David Brock

The events of the past week—President Clinton fighting a sexual harassment suit in the Supreme Court, Speaker Gingrich under investigation for violating tax laws and providing false information to Congress, and top House Democrats implicated in the illegal dissemination to the press of a tape of a cellular telephone call involving Gingrich—have brought the Washington scandal-and-ethics regime to a new level. At a moment of convergence like this one, it is wise to stand back from the partisan heat and reflect on its implications.

For instance, almost immediately upon hearing of the illegal tape recording, Republicans in the House of Representatives began calling for a Justice Department investigation and even a special prosecutor. Rather than use congressional power to smoke out the various hidden actors in this little melodrama in full public view and thus hold these elected officials accountable to the people who voted for them and the rest of the American people, the members will allow the matter to descend into the silence imposed by a proper criminal investigation. Isn't the real issue here not the criminal activity, but the political activity and ideological motivation that gave rise to it? And isn't the revelation and explanation of this matter the responsibility of the political process?

It seems that, yet again, we conservatives have taken a wrong turn in pursuit of an important goal. On occasion, over the course of the past four years, we have sadly undermined and trivialized the case against the character and ethics of President Clinton, his administration, and the recent conduct of the Democratic party with indiscriminate and sometimes patently absurd allegations that delegitimize and discredit more serious charges.

Scandals have been thought of as the best, maybe even the only, way of defining public character in an age seemingly without shame but with a hair-trigger mistrust and dislike of government. But by placing too much emphasis on scandal and potential acts of criminality rather than on the ideological and political failings of our opponents, we have adopted the very tactics that we rightly deplored when liberals used them in an attempt to destroy the Reagan administration. We have also inadvertently given an unfriendly media an easy way out of focusing as intently and passionately on these scandals as they would if they had occurred on the Republicans' watch.

In the process, the hard work of developing a serious political and ideological indictment of the Clintons has, in too many cases, fallen by the wayside. This proved a colossal strategic mistake for the Republican party, as we saw in the last presidential election. And it has proved a crutch for conservatives.

Two examples should suffice to make the point. On Election Morning 1996, the media columnist for the *New York Post* gave over his column to speculating that the reason Clinton had refused to release his medical records in the closing weeks of the campaign was that he had had the infamous "distinguishing characteristic" identified by Paula Jones in her sexual harassment suit against him surgically removed or altered. There was no proof whatsoever to back up the wild claim, but there it was in black and white anyway. The columnist in question is Hilton Kramer, the eminent conservative intellectual, editor of the fearsomely highbrow *New Criterion*, whose sensibility is usually as far from the *National Enquirer* as one could possibly get.

Was this what the conservative case against Clinton had boiled down to—talk about the president's private parts? It seems that when it comes to the Clintons, the usual regard conservatives have shown for careful argument based on fact has been overtaken by a mix of strong personal distaste for the first couple and what they represent in the culture and an understandable frustration with the political realities of the 1996 election.

This was evident as well on Election Eve, when spokesmen for the Clinton and Dole campaigns appeared on CNN's *Crossfire* and were given a clear shot—several uninterrupted minutes on *Crossfire*!—to

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make the case for each candidate. Ann Lewis, deputy chair of the Clinton campaign, went first and concentrated on substance and issues: the state of the economy; jobs created on Clinton's watch; welfare reform; the free-trade pact with Mexico.

Then it was Susan Molinari's turn. Astonishingly, the Republican representative from New York spent her entire segment trying to explain Filegate and why voters should care about it. Molinari never quite got straight what she was alleging in the Filegate matter, but even if she had, it's doubtful that many undecided voters on the eve of the election could have been brought in a minute or two to view Filegate as the definitive reason to vote for Bob Dole.

The conduct of Dole himself was almost as discouraging. He was reluctant to go after Clinton on the character issue for most of the campaign (we know now that Dole's reluctance was due to his own skeleton in the closet). And when Dole finally did bring up the issue, he never found a persuasive way of relating voters' real doubts about Clinton's private character to his performance in public office. Dole settled on a pale rerun of the 1992 Bush campaign against Clinton's character—TV commercials showing Clinton's claim that he "didn't inhale" and faint reminders from the campaign that Clinton didn't have a military record. (And Dole, too, began muttering incoherently about Filegate.)

The character attacks, to be sure, have taken their toll; they likely prevented Clinton from winning more than 50 percent of the vote in either 1992 or 1996. But the number of voters responding to these attacks appears to be small and fixed, and they abandoned Clinton for good in 1992 in any case. Indeed, even if Dole had raised more serious issues like Whitewater and Paula Jones on the campaign trail, polls last year suggested that character—at least defined in this way—would not have inflicted further damage on Clinton's candidacy. Upwards of 70 percent of poll respondents said Clinton couldn't be trusted—and yet this same group overwhelmingly favored him for president. For conservatives who have staked so much on the importance of character, the downgrading of the issue in politics should be an especially troubling development. We need to try to figure out why this is.

First, we have to acknowledge the unusual nature of Clinton's appeal and his undisputed brilliance as a politician. Much of the public clearly has accepted Clinton's personal defects and made their peace with them. For whatever reason, voters have given him a pass they have not extended to other politicians under fire. To be sure, Clinton has lowered the bar on acceptable behavior simply by surviving so many allegations about his character, beginning with his introduction to the American public in the Gennifer Flowers scandal. But "defining deviancy down" is not enough to explain why arguably lesser charges than those made against Clinton brought down a succession of politicians—from Gary Hart, to John Tower, to Jim Wright, to Bob Packwood—and yet Clinton remains virtually unscathed.

It could be argued that Clinton's questionable character has actually been a net plus. Clinton plays the role of a wayward child who does wrong, then bites his lip and asks for forgiveness. For some voters, Clinton's character flaws seem to make him more approachable and more human—in short, more like them.

More important, of course, was Clinton's ability to adopt much of the Republican agenda. This took the GOP by surprise and left the opposition with seemingly little ground to fight on. Hillary Clinton's healthcare plan was not adopted and Lani Guinier was not named to the Justice Department. Instead, Clinton ended the federal welfare entitlement. Absent an ideologically galvanizing issue, Republicans and conservatives turned to Filegate and "distinguishing characteristic."

It is also a testament to Clinton's political skill that the Democratic establishment and certain segments of the media have protected him from exposure. For this group, the question of Clinton's character comes down to a simple power calculation: They apparently are willing to countenance and defend a certain level of political corruption as the price of finally having a winning politician in the White House after two decades of arch losers like Carter, Mondale, and Dukakis.

But it does no good to blame the media, though blame is surely merited. The media have been generally hostile to Republicans and supportive of Democrats, yet Republicans do manage to prevail at the polls, as they did in retaining control of Congress even as Clinton was being reelected. No, the problem is deeper than media bias. It can be found in the way conservatives and Republicans have defined their attack on Clinton almost exclusively as a matter of *personal* ethics instead of joining it to a broader discussion of the character of Clinton's *policies*, as in, for example, his refusal to ban partial-birth abortions.

In retrospect, it is possible to see why the emphasis on personal foibles turned out to be quite dicey. As Dole's own alleged record of infidelity shows, personal-character warfare is a dangerous game because it knows no partisan boundaries.

Yet, in their desire not only to defeat but to destroy

the Clintons, many conservatives have lost sight of their principled view—held since the Watergate period—that the Washington ethics machinery ushered in by liberal reformers, including the independent-counsel provision, is destructive and needs to be scaled back substantially. How ironic it is that conservatives have spent the past two years looking to an independent counsel to do their political work for them! Perhaps now that what former Nixon White House counsel Leonard Garment has called the Guns of Watergate have been turned on Newt Gingrich, Republicans will once again see the merit of tempering their ethics attacks and recommitting themselves to conducting political debate where it belongs: in the political, rather than the legal, arena.

Conservatives will no doubt continue to disagree about the tactical and strategic wisdom of engaging the liberals on their own terms in tit-for-tat ethics warfare, or remaining above the fray for the sake of the long-run health of our political system. But maybe both sides in the debate could agree that when charges are made against the character of our political adversaries, those charges should be, *must* be, grounded in fact.

> THE CLIMATE CREATED BY THE RIGHT-WING SCANDAL INDUSTRY GIVES THE PRESS ANOTHER EXCUSE NOT TO COVER REAL SCANDAL NEWS.

While it is no substitute for a political platform, journalistic inquiry into various aspects of our leaders' character—including their private behavior—is, in my view, perfectly appropriate and defensible. But in the Clinton case, conservatives took this too far: Not content to show the president as weak and unprincipled, which is directly relevant to the way he carries out his public duties, they wanted to portray him as evil.

The Troopergate and Whitewater stories of early 1994, some of them by me, spawned a virtual scandal industry in the right-wing press, on talk radio, in right-wing interest groups like Floyd Brown's Citizens United, on the Internet, and in the promotion of such items as Jerry Falwell's anti-Clinton videos. Recent White House accusations of a vast political conspiracy among these groups to infiltrate the mainstream press and bring down the president are silly, especially since the promotion by these groups of unfounded and irresponsible stories has been a tremendous boon to White House damage-control efforts.

Just last week, the *Wall Street Journal* summed up White House scandal spin this way: "Because no one could prove the President sneaked out of the White House for a liaison at the Marriott Hotel, there must be nothing to the accusations in the Paula Jones lawsuit the Supreme Court will hear today."

The *Journal* editorialist, of course, was being facetious, but on the level of public perception, there may be a real connection here. Outlandish claims about the circumstances of Vince Foster's death from Accuracy in Media's Reed Irvine and reporter Christopher Ruddy, among others; preposterous stories about Clinton's having fathered illegitimate children and even having political enemies in Arkansas murdered; tales of strange doings at Arkansas's Mena Airport from dubious sources like Terry Reed; the promotion of attack books like former FBI agent Gary Aldrich's *Unlimited Access* (which contained the spurious Marriott allegation)—all helped lead an already cynical electorate to shut out other messages about Clinton's character. In a culture with such a glut of information from so many varied sources, it is impossible to expect the public to distinguish the good from the bad, the credible from the fantastic. At a certain point, *everything* attains the same level of credibility, and all charges, even serious ones, become joined in the minds of many voters with Falwell's *Clinton Chronicles*. It was with this kind of exaggeration, overstatement, and outright dissimulation about the Clintons—in a mirror image of the October Surprise hoax promoted by the Left against Presidents Reagan and Bush in the 1980s—that conservatives really forfeited the character issue.

It might be argued that all of these reckless attacks have been confined to the lunatic fringe and therefore haven't really mattered. But that's not true. For one thing, the climate created by the right-wing scandal industry has given an already reluctant press another excuse not to cover real scandal news. For what it's worth, one *New York Times* reporter has told me that he and other reporters, in pushing for increased Whitewater coverage at the *Times*, are concerned that they will be seen as tools of Floyd Brown and Jerry Falwell—precisely the line the White House pushes.

The Foster conspiratorialists have provided the biggest distraction from the important issues at stake in opposing Clinton. As Laura Ingraham noted in a recent column in the *New York Times*, the incoming chairman of the House Government Reform and Oversight Committee, Dan Burton, launched his own Keystone Kops investigation of Foster's "murder," including a reenactment of the death scene in his backyard. When Whitewater independent counsel Kenneth Starr finally issues his report on the Foster

matter, we will see that the only scandal attached to Foster's death is the amount of public money Starr and his staff had to spend to rebut these conspiracy theories—which, by their very nature, are not rebuttable.

What *was* rebuttable was the Aldrich book. While it was shut out of any discussion in the mainstream media after it was exposed on the day of publication as unreliable, *Unlimited Access* was a number-one best-seller. Even a cursory reading of the text by someone with no knowledge whatsoever of the Clinton White House ought to have revealed an animus so deep and an author so credulous that *Unlimited Access* could not be taken seriously as an exposé. Yet the book was celebrated on right-wing talk radio across the country and even on the *Journal* editorial page.

This sorry spectacle marked perhaps the final stage in conservatives' surrendering the chance to make a credible case against Clinton's character. Indeed, after I publicly disputed a key portion of the Aldrich book that might have been politically damaging to the president, I was told by more than one prominent conservative that I should have kept my mouth shut. In other words, truth was not to get in the way of the impending election. At one point last fall, I discussed my disillusionment over the conservative embrace of the Aldrich book with a conservative intellectual who had read it and agreed that it was worthless. Yet when I said the book was stoking an irrational hatred of the Clintons, he replied: "I'm not sure that's a bad thing."

Injecting hatred and phony charges into our politics is a pretty bad thing, no matter who is targeted. If this is what the conservative opposition to Clinton has devolved to, perhaps the question we should be asking is whether the character of some of Clinton's critics is really any better than the character of Clinton himself. ♦

The Health Insurance Mess

How We Got In, How We Get Out

By William Tucker

As the new Congress gets down to business, the issue of health care will once again be at the top of the agenda—which is good news for conservatives. No issue is riper for the strategy of dismantling regulation and letting the free market do its work. The problem is, no one much thinks this way. The Republicans may have beaten back socialized medicine for now, but the game is still being played on the Left's turf. Last year's Kassebaum-Kennedy Act, for example, imposed new mandates of the kind that has made health insurance so expensive at the state level. Mandated benefits force consumers to buy things they do not want, which, at the margin, is what makes insurance too expensive for many to buy.

And this remains at the core of the health-insurance crisis. More than 41 million people are still without coverage—up from 36 million in 1994—at a time when a single hospital visit can bankrupt a family. Who are they? They are not the poor, who are covered by Medicaid, but rather people either self-employed or working for small businesses. Of those employed by businesses with 10 employees or fewer, a full 75 percent are without coverage.

And all the while, the whole subject of health insurance remains a mystery. Can anyone explain why we have a health-insurance crisis and no auto-insurance crisis or homeowner's-insurance crisis? How is it that employees of large corporations can get low-deductible coverage on everything from psychiatry to dental care without paying a penny out of their paychecks, while others fork over $5,000 a year for insurance that covers nothing until they have spent $10,000 from their own pockets?

For 25 years, health insurance in America has been an odd burlesque, stage-managed out of Washington. And the unlikely stage manager? The Pension and Welfare Benefits Administration of the Department of Labor. This obscure federal agency has done more to

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shape health insurance than have senators and House members, the National Association of Insurers, and the American Medical Association put together. And it has done so while barely lifting a finger. PWBA administrators have only a slight idea of what they are administering. Says Gloria Della, an agency public-affairs specialist, "We've always done most of our research on the pension side. We're just starting to look at health statistics, because it's become such an important issue."

And here are some other important letters to learn: ERISA. For behind this unassuming acronym lie all the convolutions, the intrigue, the rhetoric, and the tragedies of the health-care crisis. The Employee Retirement Income Security Act is "the most underreported story in America," says Mike Ferguson, of the Self-Insurance Institute of America. Adds Jennifer Belles, of the Association of Private Pension and Welfare Plans, "When you talk about health-care reform, you're basically talking about ERISA."

> THERE IS NO REASON THAT PRIVATE CARRIERS CANNOT PROVIDE HEALTH COVERAGE TO THE ENTIRE NATION THROUGH RISK-BASED POLICIES.

ERISA was born in 1974, culminating a decade of reaction to the bankruptcy of Studebaker, which left thousands of employees without their pensions. The specter of insolvent corporate pension plans haunted Congress, so Richard Nixon signed this bill, in the presence of Speaker Carl Albert and several union leaders, to ensure that it would never happen again. Nothing could come between an employee and his pension fund.

Then, in one of those quarter-turns of the screw that produce tremendous unforeseen consequences, *health*-benefit plans were added to the pot. There was no obvious reason. Some say that it was done as a favor to the unions, which wanted the Labor Department to oversee their Taft-Hartley plans, which are benefit trusts set up as part of collective-bargaining agreements. Others contend that the department itself wanted such oversight, fearing the plunder of those trusts. In any event, internally funded health plans—"self-insurance"—were gathered under the ERISA umbrella. What no one could have guessed is that, by 1996, 70 million Americans—almost a third of the population—would receive their health coverage through these self-insurance programs.

ERISA offered many advantages, the most important of which was exemption from state insurance regulations. Since World War II, the regulation of insurance companies has been almost entirely reserved to the states, whose main concern is fiscal solvency. States conduct audits and require companies to keep minimum reserve balances, to prevent them from making wild promises that they later do not fulfill. But states have rarely been content to limit themselves to financial review. Instead, they are filled with little Hillary Clintons, who try to "improve" health insurance by mandating additional coverage for specific services, which, of course, increases costs.

ERISA has always been justified by the argument that it is unreasonable to expect major corporations and labor unions to conform to different insurance rules in all 50 states. There is some truth to this. As states became more aggressive about tacking on insurance mandates, companies and unions discovered that the ERISA exemption was all the more valuable. "ERISA is the greatest consumer-protection plan ever devised," says Fred Hunt, president of the Society for Professional Benefit Administrators. "Why should a company have to buy all kinds of extra benefits that its employees don't want?" Echoes Mark Ugoretz, president of the ERISA Industry Committee, "The costs of conforming with these mandates is what has made health insurance so expensive."

In Minnesota, for example, insurers are required to cover nearly two dozen different types of medical and cosmetic services, including in-vitro fertilization, toupees, and hair transplants. And of course it isn't employees seeking hair transplants who are lobbying for these mandates; it is the *providers* of these services. Any state that begins to mandate specific insurance benefits enters into an unholy alliance with medical providers. Particularly active are those on the fringe of need or respectability, for whom mandated coverage is the holy grail. Chiropractors, for example, are nationally organized and have besieged state legislatures to be included in mandated coverage. Their services are now mandatorily covered in 41 states. Twenty-four states now mandate coverage for social workers; seven do for occupational therapists, six for acupuncturists. Pastoral counselors are mandated in North Carolina, "natropaths" in Alaska, massage therapists in Florida.

ERISA plans quickly discovered that they could avoid these mandates by exercising their federal option. As a result, health-care costs for employees at large corporations and major unions remained low. But for everyone who stayed under state jurisdiction, things got more expensive.

Nor was that all. Insurance involves pooling risks—the broader the pool, the less risk any individual has to bear. But as ERISA companies opted for self-insurance, they took large pools of healthy workers with them. ERISA was originally designed for major firms and unions, but smaller groups began to enter the game. Soon, canceling your commercial insurance policy and switching to self-insurance became an easy route to cheaper health benefits. Slowly but inexorably, American health insurance began to divide into separate tiers: those with the ERISA exemption and those without it.

Of course, there were considerable risks in setting up an insurance pool with only 100 or so employees in it; if one person required expensive medical treatment, a small number of people had to shoulder the costs. But this was quickly alleviated by the invention of "stop-loss" insurance—which is really nothing more than health insurance with high deductibles. A company with only 10 employees can self-insure up to $10,000 per individual, $50,000 for the group, then buy stop-loss insurance to cover all expenses beyond that. To the untutored, this is merely health insurance with high deductibles, but legally and technically, it is "business insurance," which allows companies to buy it and still retain their ERISA exemption. When Maryland and Missouri recently tried to limit this practice, both lost in federal court. According to the Self-Insurance Institute, there is no reason that a two-person law partnership could not qualify for the ERISA exemption. Says the PWBA's Della, "There's no qualifying process. It's essentially a self-declaration. We're not a gatekeeper. After all, there are 2.5 million ERISA plans around the country, and we have a staff of fewer than 600. How many plans could we get through?"

Before long—by the early 1980s—entrepreneurs entered the picture. They invented multiple-employer welfare arrangements (MEWAs), which are essentially group-insurance plans designed to exploit the ERISA exemption. Pooling people on any kind of basis (profession, church membership—even soil-conservation district), they set up self-funded plans that offered insurance unfettered by state regulation. Some were honest, but in the absence of financial oversight, the possibilities for fraud were almost limitless.

Congress received enough complaints about this that, in 1983, it granted to the states some oversight over MEWAs. They are now illegal in 25 states, but they have been embraced by the remainder. Many MEWAs are legitimate plans that offer ERISA-protected insurance to small-business employees, the self-employed, part-timers, the unemployed, and others. But the fly-by-nights still flourish. According to the National Association of Insurance Commissioners, almost 400,000 MEWA participants between 1988 and 1991 were stuck with more than $123 million in unpaid medical claims.

By the end of the 1980s, the two-tier system was creating astounding distortions. People in corporate plans often had "first-dollar" (no-deductible) coverage and would crowd doctors' offices for the slightest complaints. "As long as patients and doctors are spending someone else's money, there's no reason for restraint," says health-care author Gerald Musgrave. But this pushed up demand and made care more expensive and even less accessible for people without employer coverage. As more and more people opted out of commercial insurance pools, those who remained were increasingly lumped with the "uninsurable"—people with AIDS, multiple handicaps, chronic diseases, and so forth.

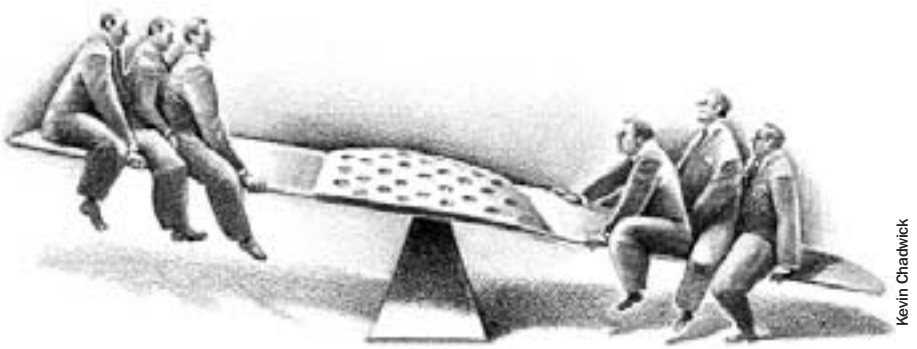
So the states took some action. One strategy was to create high-risk pools, which function exactly as high-risk auto-insurance pools do for accident-prone drivers. About half the states now have such funds. Some states established funds to reimburse hospitals for "uncompensated care" (that is, care provided to the poor who cannot pay their bills). Some states directed additional funds into Medicaid. And almost without exception, these programs were funded by a special tax on health-insurance premiums, usually about 2 percent. Every state in the country except Utah now has one.

Incredibly, self-insured ERISA plans argued that they were exempt from such a tax. The 1974 act, after all, stated that their health-benefit plans could be spent on their own medical expenses, not someone else's. The federal courts agreed; no ERISA plan pays a state premium tax.

Faced with this loss, the states tried to impose taxes on the providers of medical services. But once again, ERISA plans claimed that they were exempt. In 1993, for example, Minnesota instituted a program aimed at extending insurance coverage to working families whose employers cannot provide them with insurance. About 92,000 people pay 52 percent of the costs through premiums, with the remaining 48 percent subsidized by $134 million raised each year through a 2 percent medical-provider tax. Before the plan went into effect, the state was sued by a cluster of unions, which argued that the tax violated their ERISA exemption. In an unusual reversal of trends, a federal court ruled in 1995 that such indirect taxation of ERISA plans is in fact permissible. The Supreme Court upheld a similar New York hospital tax in 1996.

Yet ERISA plans remain untouched by every other state attempt to provide health care for the sick and the poor. They are exempt from state guaranty funds, which cover medical claims unpaid by private insurers that go bankrupt; from state laws allowing punitive damages in medical malpractice suits; and from "community-rating" systems, intended to lower insurance costs to the sick and the elderly.

This last is particularly burdensome to people outside ERISA. New York, for example, mandated a statewide community rating in 1991, meaning that insurance companies could not rate people according to age or health. The predictable result was that premiums rose 80 percent for the young and well and fell 30 percent for the old and sick. A family of four must pay $5,000 a year for a policy with a $10,000 deductible. There are more people without insurance in New York today than there were in 1990.



Kevin Chadwick

The states petitioned Congress for waivers that would allow them to bring ERISA plans into these programs, but the ERISA lobby—whose spokesmen are usually from General Motors or IBM—easily shot them down. Several states now have abandoned efforts to broaden insurance coverage because of the ERISA roadblock. Says Sue Crystal, of the Washington State Health Care Policy Board, "It's hard to do anything when half the employees in the state can immediately opt out through ERISA."

And while recusing themselves from broader societal responsibilities, some ERISA plans began to purge the seriously ill from their own ranks. In fact, most of the horror stories told during the ClintonCare push—usually blamed on the health-insurance industry—were actually the actions of ERISA plans operating in the free-fire zone created for them by the Labor Department. A Texas company, which had guaranteed lifetime benefits up to $5 million, abruptly changed this limit to $25,000 when an employee contracted AIDS; the Supreme Court affirmed that ERISA overrode this breach of contract. Many ERISA plans do not enroll newborn babies until they have been deemed healthy, saddling parents of struggling infants with colossal medical bills. And so on.

So the appeal of ERISA is practically irresistible. Almost all companies with more than 20,000 employees are ERISA companies; 84 percent of companies with 10,000-19,999 employees are ERISA companies; 82 percent of those with 5,000-9,999 employees; 78 percent of those with 1,000-4,999; but only 13 percent of those with 10-49. Where does that leave us? In the push-and-pull of Washington lobbying, two broad approaches to ending this "two-societies" system have been proposed. One is to give everybody the ERISA exemption; the other is to eliminate it entirely. Either solution would probably work, but the problem is that, with reformers tugging in both directions, nothing gets done.

Here is a simple but utterly indispensable observation: There is no reason that private carriers cannot provide health coverage to the entire nation through basic risk-based commercial policies. We have almost universal coverage for other types of insurance, and the health variety should not be all that more difficult. One state, Hawaii, has been allowed to opt out of the ERISA system. It spends only 9 percent of gross product on health care, as opposed to the nation's 14 percent, and 99 percent of its residents are covered, the highest such percentage in the country.

The secret of delivering affordable health insurance should be a secret no longer. It should be whispered—shouted—as follows:

(1) Allow everyone to buy health coverage with tax-free dollars.

(2) Avoid mandated benefits, at either the state or the national level.

(3) Continue the actuarial regulation of insurance companies, at either level.

(4) Put all those people who are truly uninsurable in subsidized high-risk pools, openly and justifiably.

(5) Level the playing field by making ERISA all-inclusive or abolishing it entirely.

There. That should satisfy the Republicans. And if the Democrats won't come along, just call this system "socialized medicine" and the rest will take care of itself. ♦

"...Because He's Just My Bill"

Dick Morris, Inadvertent Truth-Teller

By Andrew Ferguson

I was about to write that Dick Morris's memoir, published last week, was "long awaited," but then I remembered that it's scarcely four months since he contracted to write the book. They can get out books so quickly now. And as the books come, so can they go. *Behind the Oval Office* is too dry, too pedantic in its political detail, to make a great popular success, and its near-total silence on the deliriously tawdry scandal that brought Morris low guarantees that it will be ignored by the mass of readers it needs to turn a profit. (Morris was paid a $2.5 million advance.) It is a useful and revealing book nonetheless—extraordinarily rich, in fact, and far richer, I imagine, than Morris and his subject, the president of the United States, realize.

You never have to pan this stream too long to find a glittering nugget. There's one every few pages, popping up when you, and apparently the author, least expect it. To show the president's lighter side, for example, Morris discusses plans for a Clinton family vacation in 1995. Morris had conducted a massive national survey to identify the swing voters the president would need for reelection, and he put the data in service of deciding how the commander in chief should recreate. Crunch, crunch went the numbers. "Camping out," Morris concluded, "was a favorite for swing voters."

The president should camp out.

The president was incredulous: "This was carrying things too far." Morris recounts a couple of not terribly funny presidential wisecracks about his pollster's overambitious polling. "I deserved the ribbing," Morris writes sheepishly.

But the most startling point is quickly passed over: The president did, in fact, camp out. He dragged his family to a national park, where they hiked and slept in tents, and where the president himself could be photographed jiggling in his Izod shirt astride some loping, sedated steed. A swing-voter vacation! And worse, it left the approval ratings untouched. Morris writes: "'That's the first vacation I've taken that didn't help me in the polls,' Clinton said irritably upon his return."

Dick Morris
Behind the White House
Winning the Presidency in the Nineties
Random House, 359 pp., $25.95

This story, like so much of the book, is offered to us with seeming insouciance, as if Morris isn't quite aware of what the words mean—as if he doesn't know that he has confirmed, yet again, the picture of a president afraid even to draw a breath without the approval of polls.

Readers will have to decide for themselves how far to trust Morris's innocent tone. He is a smart man, or at least a man with an energetic intelligence, but as a memoirist he is not particularly self-aware. In long expository passages, he strives to convince us of Bill Clinton's prodigious virtues—his lack of vanity, his depth of feeling, his indifference to political calculation. ("Lincoln and Clinton, it seemed to me, had a lot in common.") But then the passages end and we run headlong into an anecdote that proves quite the opposite.

This discontinuity is all the stranger given the self-consciousness of the relationship between the two men. One of their conversations was so important that Morris relates it three times. "I know we both have a duty to talk about this relationship," the president told him. "It's very likely unique in American history for a relationship like this to exist." This is not just another stretch of the president's imagination, like his pronouncement a few years ago that he was more familiar with farming than any previous president (forgetting such professional farmers as Jefferson, Jackson, Truman, et al.). The relationship was—is—unique, if only because two men of such character have never before operated successfully from the White House. At times it's almost as if the Duke and the Dauphin had been lifted from the pages of *Huckleberry Finn* and handed the reins of power.

Morris reveled in the relationship. Both men, of course, are famously and strenuously heterosexual, but it must be said that the author's account verges on the homoerotic. There are volcanic rages, despairing estrangements, abject apologies, sighing reconciliations. In spirit they were twins, Morris writes, but "what wasn't the same were our bodies." To the Munchkin-sized pollster, the

Senior Editor Andrew Ferguson's book of essays, Fools' Names, Fools' Faces*, is out in hardcover from Atlantic Monthly Press.*

president looms as a "Sequoia": "six feet two inches of oozing charm." When the president "reaches out" to him, it "soothes my hurt." Sometimes, it is the president who is hurt: "I get the sense," Clinton pouts, "that you're not interested in talking about Whitewater with me."

At first, the president keeps their relationship secret from his staff. "I called you as soon as I got rid of those guys," he says into the phone. Morris understands: "He wanted to keep me for himself and not share me with his staff." But then days go by and the president doesn't call! "I felt intoxicated," Morris says. "I wanted more and more and more. I called Clinton day after day. I left messages. He didn't return the calls." And then, at last, the president does call: "A fix, rushing, warming, stimulating, enticing, addicting." Who can blame him? "Clinton has bags under his eyes. I like them. They remind me of JFK." Nowhere, however, does Morris mention the president's feet.

This passion explains why Morris is always, for public purposes anyway, willing to extend the president the benefit of the doubt. There has been talk—surely you've heard it—that the president avoids taking responsibility for his mistakes. Dick Morris knows the reason: "He doesn't articulate his responsibility because his mind is so filled with self-criticism." Ah. Some people have questioned the sincerity of the president's frequent public displays of emotion, as when Clinton was inconveniently filmed leaving Ron Brown's memorial service wiping away a non-existent tear. Wellllll . . . "In private he is more shy and reserved, usually keeping his feelings within." But "in public Clinton is deeply emotional."

Occasionally, Morris raises the art of euphemism to unprecedented heights. Is the president indecisive, as detractors have claimed? He may not be a snap decisionmaker, but "he has an almost Oriental way of waiting until the forces move, as they naturally will, in the direction he prefers. . . . If he feels the force is with him, he'll wait for the force to produce results. If he feels things are moving against him, he'll usually wait then too. . . . Only when all else fails does he take direct, personal action." From the Ozarks, our first Zen president.

But where does euphemism end and outright mendacity begin? And who is fooling whom? The president is often accused of "flip-flopping," as we know. The problem, Morris explains, arises from leaks. They often convey the impression that he has decided something when he hasn't: "If he 'reversed' the decision he had actually never made he was accused of flip-flopping." Morris describes an Oval Office meeting in 1993: "The president was livid because a story had leaked on April 15 that he was considering a value-added tax. . . . Clinton was determined not to raise taxes again that year. . . . He also felt that a value-added tax was dishonest. . . . " Even under the kindest interpretation, the levels of guile here are dizzying. Clinton himself publicly raised the possibility of a value-added tax in early 1993, at a town meeting in Ohio. He talked about the idea as late as May 27. Is Morris lying to us, or was Clinton lying to Morris?

BOTH MEN ARE STRENUOUSLY HETEROSEXUAL, BUT MORRIS'S ACCOUNT VERGES ON THE HOMOEROTIC.

No matter. After all, we are here in the funhouse world of "spin"—itself a favorite Washington euphemism for "lie," or, more charitably, "shading the truth." "Reporters like to use the word 'spin' to describe what political consultants do," Morris writes. "I don't spin anything. I put new substance and ideas before the voters. . . . I take the general themes from the candidate and then find new specific issues to illustrate them. This is not spin. It's substance."

This is spin. As a political consultant, Morris is a master manipulator of surfaces, and in Bill Clinton he found his perfect politician. Their collaboration began in Arkansas, early in both their careers. One incident in particular suggested to Morris the immensity of his client's gifts. It is a splendid story, worth repeating.

Clinton had been defeated for reelection after his first term as governor, largely because he had doubled car-license fees. He was determined to run again. Reading the polls, Morris recommended a commercial in which the candidate would apologize for the fee increase. Clinton, citing a vague commitment to "principle," refused to apologize. This deeply impressed Morris, who is impressionable. But Clinton agreed to film the ad with his own words. Soulfully he addressed the camera:

"When I became governor we had serious problems with our streets and roads, and I did support those [car-license fee] increases to solve the problems. But it was a mistake because so many of you were hurt by it. And I'm really sorry about that."

By his own account, Morris was floored. "I was amazed, just amazed," he recalls. "I could never have scripted those lines. And he had stayed within his principles. He wouldn't lie. He wouldn't apologize. . . . But the voters would feel that they had heard an apology when he apologized for their pain." One can see here the birth of Clintonism as we have come to know it. In his ad, the future president had fudged (he not only "supported those increases," he rammed them through the legislature). He had misled (he said he was sorry but, somehow, wasn't). And he had found a consultant who could watch it all and still testify that Bill Clinton "had stayed within his principles."

As Morris writes: "We were a match."

The strategy reached its perfection in 1995 and 1996, when the matched pair orchestrated perhaps the greatest political resuscitation in American history. Conventional wisdom has its own accounting for this comeback: Buoyed by a strong economy, the president adopted the essence of his adversaries' popular agenda. He agreed to reform welfare and balance the federal budget in seven years. And he advanced a series of bite-sized initiatives like school uniforms and juvenile curfews, which, while essentially meaningless, nevertheless repudiated the left-wing meandering of his first two years and solidified his reformed image as a cultural conservative.

Sean Delonas

Morris agrees with the conventional wisdom, but his elaboration of it is definitive, even discounting for the self-aggrandizement that invariably enters in. And try as he might, he cannot obscure the essential cynicism of the enterprise.

Polling, of course, was at its heart. But don't get the wrong idea: "Bill Clinton uses polls in an important and unique way. It's not the way many suppose it to be: 'What should I be for? What should I do?' He knows that already. He wants to know how to get there, and he uses a poll to help him find out." Plus it tells him where he's going on his summer vacation.

Morris is at pains to refute the notion that Clinton is, as the phrase goes, "poll-driven." His testimonies to Clinton's political courage sound like Macaulay extolling Horatius at the Tiber bridge, if Macaulay had been a semi-literate political consultant. So florid is his praise that he occasionally sounds like Bill Clinton talking about himself.

But then Morris runs up against the hard evidence of his own anecdotes. He devotes a long chapter to those bite-sized, culturally conservative initiatives that characterized the winning campaign. Each story is intended to paint a miniature profile in courage—a cameo in courage, you might say—in which the president rises above partisan interests to do what's right "for the people." You will recall how he "took on" the fearsome tobacco companies. "I fought hard to extend the values agenda," Morris writes, "to include a ban on advertising tobacco products to teenagers."

At first Clinton didn't much like the idea. "It'll cost me whatever chance I had in North Carolina," he told Morris. "I'm most concerned about Kentucky and Tennessee. I need those states."

The pollsters went to work. Soon the president was shown survey data from each tobacco state that demonstrated such a position would actually help him. Amazingly, his courage rose. "Clinton acted," Morris concludes with a flourish.

But action was not always so easy. One of the more curious of the bite-sized issues was a proposal to ban the sale of handguns to persons convicted of domestic violence. It seemed an issue made in focus-group heaven, almost too good to be true: Handguns + wife-beaters = a winner.

But the president again was wary. What about the NRA? His housing secretary, Henry Cisneros, worried about alienating rural voters; as a Texan, he understood the electoral prowess of crackers who slug their wives. The pollsters took to the phone banks once more. The president's worries, Morris found, "had no basis in political reality." Once more, the president's steel hardened. "At our next meeting, the president approved the idea."

Where to make the formal announcement was a dicier question. How about a meeting of the NAACP? No: too racially sensitive. Then perhaps one of those police-union confabs the president so enjoyed? No again. "Police groups

[said] they might not endorse Clinton because many policemen might be affected by this proposal." (There goes the wife-beating cop vote!) The announcement "soon faded." Sometimes it is hell being a New Democrat, especially a courageous one.

Even when the polls were with him, the president would not necessarily act. Morris discovered that 60 percent of Americans supported handing out condoms in high schools. Clinton liked the idea, if it were coupled with a program encouraging sexual abstinence. But in the end they decided to scuttle the proposal—unless support rose above 70 percent. Morris is unclear whether this is a profile in courage or another instance of the president's "pragmatism."

The president, of course, hates the suggestion that he is unwilling to take risks, that he refuses to make courageous decisions. Many of the firsthand glimpses we are offered of him in *Behind the Oval Office* have him losing his temper over such talk.

"He was red-faced as he yelled. . . . 'I will not have decisions that I make'—his fist now pounding his chair arm, keeping time with his words—'that take guts, that take courage, where I'm really risking everything, and have them transformed into'—his lips curling into a sneer—'seamy, seedy, political decisions . . . '"

And so on. For four years, rumors have circulated about the ferocity of these presidential temper tantrums, and Morris's book piles example upon vivid example. On those rare moments when he comes truly alive in *Behind the Oval Office*, the president is red-faced. The tantrums sometimes approach the kind normally associated with autistic children—except in the president's case they are overlaid with self-righteousness and megalomania. When George Stephanopoulos mentions that White House staffers object to a bill the president is about to sign, Clinton erupts:

"Well, I get a vote, don't I? I mean, I'm the president so I get a vote, don't I? Don't I? If there are people here who don't like it, well, I've created seven and half million new jobs and maybe it's time for them to go out and take some of them."

The incident is noteworthy not only for its childishness but also for the president's apparent belief that he created new jobs. It is of a piece with his account of negotiating budget-cutting provisions in the welfare bill with Senate majority leader Trent Lott. "He *loved* cutting off children," Clinton shouted to Morris. "You should have seen his face. He was *delighted* that he could savage them, *delighted*."

Contrast this picture of Lott with the president's picture of himself. Clinton told Morris that "when he has to do things that hurt the poor—like budget cuts or welfare reform—he suffers physically with headaches and stomachaches."

It's hard to admire, much less love, a man so consumed in moral vanity. But with Dick Morris's coaching, Bill Clinton became a man Dick Morris could love—and a man the country could tolerate. "It's time," Morris told Clinton in 1996, "to be almost the nation's father, to speak as the father of the country, not as a peer and certainly not as its child." And sure enough, "the more he presented himself as America's father, the more he became it."

Well, it's a bit of a letdown after George Washington. Clinton may not have become the father of his country, but even so, 1996 was a year of amazing transformations. If nothing else, it was the year, to borrow Morris's terminology, when spin became substance. Or maybe substance became spin. Whatever. As this book proves, it was the year when many people could no longer distinguish between the two. ♦

Anchor Steam

Walter Cronkite, News Reader

By Philip Terzian

Anyone tempted to romanticize the American people should be reminded that, for nearly twenty years, the "most trusted man in America" was a TV news reader with a mustache and mellifluous baritone named Walter Cronkite. Cronkite believes his status was due neither to the mustache nor the voice but to his "credibility." He explains: "Without credibility, of course, the press cannot be effective in carrying out one of its most important duties in a democracy—monitoring the performance of government." There is the anchorman's creed. It is also a fair sampling of the lumbering prose of *A Reporter's Life*, in which the 80-year-old Cronkite reviews his career as prodigal son, war correspondent, devoted husband, print reporter, proud father, sports announcer, informed citizen, TV personality, and national conscience.

Cronkite's eminence was scarcely confined to viewers. The great and powerful trusted him as well, sought his approval, and invited him to dine. Jimmy Carter awarded him the Medal of Freedom, and Bobby Kennedy once urged Cronkite to succeed him in the Senate. Jackie Onassis related, in strictest confidence, her inaugural-night sexual adventures with President Jack; but Cronkite's faulty hearing, and Jackie's breathless voice, prevented the anchorman from gleaning the details. Ronald Reagan invited Cronkite to an intimate private gathering in the White House where the two "had cake and champagne, and we spent possibly two hours there in a hilarious exchange of stories—most of them dirty." And, for good measure, "Lady Bird Johnson happens to be one of my favorite people."

Walter Cronkite

A Reporter's Life

Knopf, 384 pp., $26.95

Nor is his vanity successfully disguised. Cronkite's famous 1968 commentary denouncing the Vietnam war is the last word on the subject, and is supposed to have prompted Lyndon Johnson to unburden himself to Bill Moyers: "If I've lost Cronkite, I've lost middle America"—which sounds more like Moyers than LBJ.

Those who remember Cronkite on the air will recognize him in these pages: He has a curious way of emphasizing syllables that, wedded to a mock-pompous vocabulary, achieves a well-modulated comic effect. Of delivering the *Kansas City Star* at age seven, he recalls, "There were other entrepreneurial excursions in my early life, although the earliest ones had a certain nepotistic coloring." Or remembering the sounds from his hometown railroad tracks: "The passenger trains were a transient panorama of human endeavor." Explaining his lifelong affection for sailing, he rhapsodizes: "I love the challenge of the open sea, the business of confronting Mother Nature and learning to live compatibly with her, avoiding if possible her excesses but always being prepared to weather them."

Reporters, of course, aren't literary people. But the truth is that Cronkite ceased being a reporter half a century ago. Like most TV news pioneers, Cronkite was a product of the wire services. Once he graduated from United Press (where he covered the Nuremberg trials and Stalin's Moscow) to CBS's *Morning Show* (where he joined a puppet named Charlemagne the Lion for "a totally ad-lib discussion of the day's news that was remarkable for its depth"), his powers of analysis diminished. His enthusiasm, for the most part, is reserved for static spectacles—space shots, conventions, the Bicentennial—or breaking stories that challenge the mechanics of TV. CBS, he recounts with evident pride, beat NBC by one minute in reporting the

Kent Lemon

Philip Terzian writes a Washington column for the Providence Journal.

shooting of John F. Kennedy in Dallas. For Cronkite, television is not a rough draft of history, as journalists like to say, but a series of disconnected visual effects, yielding physical, not mental, sensations.

Reading the news aloud, or standing with a microphone in corridors and parking lots, Cronkite seems to have transmitted loads of timely data, and yet emerged ignorant of the intellectual currents of modern politics. In their place are a number of tutorials to posterity. You may not have realized, for example, that Richard Nixon "was the most complicated personality to occupy the Oval Office." In civil rights, "we have made huge strides in thirty years," he explains, "but, of course, we have a long way to go." Gerald Ford, incidentally, "was the only person who served as President without being elected either President or Vice President."

For that matter, Cronkite's credibility is a sometime thing. He appears to believe that James Baker was Reagan's secretary of state and that Nixon was once chairman of the ("infamous") House Un-American Activities Committee. In one strikingly self-congratulatory passage, recalling his brief tenure as a radio editorialist, he castigates the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1949 for preventing Marian Anderson from singing in Constitution Hall "simply because she was black." (Miss Anderson was banned in 1939; but a good "hard-hitting opinion piece," as Cronkite describes his early efforts elsewhere, is timeless.)

There is a poignancy in all this. After Cronkite's retirement, the celebrities unaccountably begin to drift away, and he falls into a standard TV memoir device: remembering the golden age of broadcast news (when he was on the air) and lamenting the contemporary emphasis on profit. Cronkite ends his memoir with a chapter of pronouncements on the state of modern journalism (not good) and electoral politics (even worse), suffering as they do from a lack of credibility. Democracy is imperiled by low voter turnout, pollution is destroying the forests and seas, the young are increasingly estranged from the old, the right wing persists in seducing the electorate. And Cronkite cannot understand how more information, credibly reported with rigid objectivity, has only made things worse. ♦

B&A

World Beater

William Greider's War on the Global Economy

By Francis Fukuyama

At a conference last summer on the future of big government, I was struck that the left-wing attendees lacked any kind of an agenda. What stumped them was the complexity of the global economy. Almost all of them recognized that the international bond market, the threat of being undercut by upstart countries in Asia, and various other new social conditions limited their leeway in implementing social policy. *Rolling Stone* national editor William Greider is not so easily intimidated. His *One World, Ready or Not* is an impressive effort to think through the social consequences of globalization and to come up with a clear-cut left-wing agenda for beating it into submission.

William Greider
One World, Ready or Not
The Manic Logic of Global Capitalism
Simon and Schuster, 528 pp., $27.50

At the center of Greider's critique is what he calls the global crisis of overproduction. The global automobile industry, for example, has a maximum capacity of 60 million vehicles a year, but demand is only about 45 million. Of course, this "crisis" comes straight out of Karl Marx: Capitalist producers, under intense competitive pressure, can build more and more goods at lower and lower cost, but workers, whose wages are squeezed by the same pressures, cannot afford them. Aggregate supply outstrips aggregate demand, and the whole system collapses. Leftist economics holds such a mismatch to have been the cause of the Great Depression, and Greider fears that the current world system, for all its apparent prosperity, is headed for a similar meltdown.

There can obviously be a crisis of overproduction in individual sectors, like autos. But it strains credulity that overproduction can persist for years across the entire global economy without any market correction. The problem with Greider's analysis is that it assumes that the global economy produces *only* autos. A century ago, when a majority of Americans still worked on farms, many worried about a looming crisis of agricultural overproduction: Who, they asked, would buy all the food that was being produced by ever more efficient methods, and where would all those farm workers find jobs? But the global economy is constantly producing new products and services. Two-thirds of the American economy now consists of new services, from software design and systems integration to home health care

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and overnight package delivery, many of which didn't exist a generation ago. While the problems of moving workers from declining industries to growing ones are often underestimated, aggregate employment is at historic highs.

Greider also worries intensely about the trade surpluses that a number of Asian nations have run, beginning with Japan. By promoting savings and subsidizing exports, while artificially holding down consumer demand for imports, they accumulated productive capacity, jobs, and trade surpluses. A large and open American market has absorbed these surpluses for the past couple of decades. Greider is right, for political and economic reasons, that American borrowing to cover current account deficits cannot persist indefinitely. But a gradual adjustment should take place, as the United States boosts its savings rate by closing the budget deficit, and as Asian consumer markets grow wealthier and more open.

Greider can't wait that long. He urges a heavy across-the-board tariff, as a means of bringing the American current account into rapid balance. Such measures, more than any global trend now present, run the risk of tipping the global system into the vicious deflationary spiral that Greider so fears. Indeed, most of the solutions he proposes will produce more problems than they will solve. His central recommendation is to revive Keynesian demand management through a modern-day New Deal. But globalization means that a new New Deal could never be pulled off by any one nation. So the world's leading industrial nations, according to Greider, must enter a global pact to redistribute wealth through new taxes and controls on capital, subsidies for labor, public spending on infrastructure, further welfare-state protections, and, of course, looser money. Redistribution of the pie from capital owners to workers will lead to greater demand, stimulating growth, savings, and investment.

Kevin Chadwick

The global bond market, however, punishes any nation that engages in such policies, by raising interest rates. Hence Greider's frequent railing against what he calls "finance capital." Greider's argument with the bond market revolves around what economists call the "natural rate" of unemployment. Greider believes that, since there is a global crisis of overproduction, the potential for growth in the world's leading economies is actually much higher than the bond market or central bankers would allow. In this he is joined not just by a number of other populist economists and politicians, but also by the editorial page of the *Wall Street Journal*, which for years has argued that markets underestimate the long-term potential of the U.S. economy under a low-tax regime. The consensus among bond traders is that pushing employment below its "natural" level by stimulating too much growth will lead to a "money illusion": Nominal growth will simply be offset by inflation, leaving everyone worse off in the long run. The world lived through such a money illusion in the late 1960s and 1970s; it took central banks a generation to finally wring the ensuing inflation out of the global economy. Given my own lifetime experiences, I'd rather bet with the bond market.

The crisis of overproduction Greider points to is a phony one, but the distribution problem he warns of is real. Globalization has clear-cut losers. Since capital is highly mobile but labor is not, managers have new opportunities to grab a larger share of the pie by moving, or threatening to move, production to parts of the world where labor is cheaper. Low-

skill workers are in a double bind, since technology more readily substitutes for their labor than for that of their skilled counterparts. There are essentially two policy responses to this problem. The European route is to protect the wages and standards of living of these workers through a variety of welfare-state measures, with the result that long-term unemployment increases to double-digit levels. The American response is to let workers fend for themselves, with the result that the bottom 20 percent or so of the labor force—those with less than a high school education—see a significant drop in their real incomes.

Greider puts a grim human face on these statistics. But unlike nationalists such as Ross Perot or Pat Buchanan, who simply denounce globalization, Greider, as a man of the left, is aware that it has lifted millions of Third World peasants into industrial-age wealth. Every job lost to American workers through international trade and investment means a job (or several) gained by workers in some poorer part of the world. Greider even admires the beauty of a state-of-the-art Motorola factory in Kuala Lumpur and the social impact it is having on the formerly powerless young Muslim women who work in it. But he argues that developing nations like Malaysia and Thailand, whipsawed by competitive pressure from still-poorer countries like China and Vietnam, are replicating the worst abuses of early capitalism.

China emerges as the ultimate spoiler in the new global system. With its 1.2 billion people, it provides an almost bottomless pool of cheap labor that will continue to depress wages worldwide. China can scuttle any international action to moderate the global economy—and will, as long as it is ruled by a corrupt Communist party that has grown wealthy suppressing wages and denying rights.

The desire to see China observe human rights and ultimately democratize its regime is often portrayed as being at cross purposes with economic interests, but the two ultimately go hand in hand. Indeed it is not clear why we should celebrate American multinationals that use the coercive power of the Chinese state to undercut the wages of their American work force, just because they produce cheaper running shoes.

The possibilities for bringing the global economy under control are more limited than Greider thinks. But he is right in criticizing the tendency of many to throw up their hands in the face of the global economic juggernaut and become politically passive in the face of its economic imperatives. Property rights, rule of law, and the creation of economic value have political foundations, and those foundations are ultimately defended through political rather than economic means. ♦

BCA

Libertarian Nation

David Boaz and "Lifestyle Conservatism"

By Adam Wolfson

In 1960, Friedrich Hayek wrote an essay called "Why I Am Not a Conservative." In it, he argued that conservatives and libertarians had become allies, but only due to a peculiar historical circumstance—namely, the Cold War. With the end of global communism, libertarians are now free to present their governing vision undiluted. In his intelligent and often witty polemic *Libertarianism*, Hayek protégé David Boaz seeks to do just that.

David Boaz
Libertarianism
A Primer
Free Press, 336 pp., $23

Boaz, a vice president of the libertarian Cato Institute, tells us that "libertarianism is an old philosophy," with roots in the Greek and Judeo-Christian traditions; that America was founded upon libertarian ideas; that the goal of the American revolution was the libertarian one of protecting individual rights; that modern-day libertarian theorists such as James M. Buchanan seek only to confirm the libertarian insights of the Founding Fathers. Boaz does not think, as some conservatives do, that tradition is worthy of our consideration and respect *per se*. But in boasting of libertarianism's deep roots, he makes a critical concession: He acknowledges that he must do more than merely show that libertarianism will work; he must first show that it is not some eccentric newfangled philosophy.

Boaz defines the modern concept of liberty as "the right of individuals to live as they choose, to speak and worship freely, to own property, to engage in commerce, to be free from arbitrary arrest or detention." Few Americans would quibble with that, or with the definition of rights embedded in the Declaration of Independence—that all men "are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." But for Boaz this doesn't go quite far enough. "Most libertarian philosophers," he

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Jacqueline Goldberg

writes, "would begin the argument earlier than Jefferson did."

How is this possible, given that the Declaration begins with the "Creator" and "the laws of nature and of nature's God"? In fact, Boaz wants to start the argument not earlier than Jefferson did but later. He wants nothing to do with a Creator, with the obligations and duties this implies, or with the laws of nature and their implied limits on freedom. So Boaz replaces Jefferson's bit about the "Creator" with the doctrine that "each individual owns himself or herself." This doctrine—which Boaz calls "self-ownership"—appears to mean that the self is its own creator, sovereign over itself, without obligations or duties beyond self-satisfaction. Most Americans, who still sense that absolute liberty corrupts absolutely, are thus likely to view modern-day libertarianism not as the heir of the American political tradition but as a twisting of that tradition to conform to modern lifestyles.

The upshot of Boaz's new starting point is to deny the legitimacy of the public realm. This becomes especially clear as he moves from libertarianism's philosophic pedigree to the practical question of how it would confront such issues as Social Security, race, the underclass, and the family. As Boaz puts it, the goal of libertarianism is "a narrowing of political society," and particularly of its claims on the individual. Thus he opposes military conscription and the V-chip, and he favors the legalization of drugs. Boaz argues that the government has no role to play in "moral suasion," and denounces the "moralistic conservatives" who would use government policy to bolster traditional families. He thinks the state should not even be in the business of granting marriage licenses, but that, as long as it does, gay couples should also be allowed "the basic human dignity of being able to make a public affirmation of one's love and commitment."

Boaz predicts that the 21st century will pit libertarians against an alliance of big-government liberals and statist conservatives. That's doubtful. On the defining feature of today's culture wars—the struggle between the modern ethic of personal fulfillment and the older ethic of personal responsibility—libertarians and liberals are on the same side. Both defend "lifestyle choices," differing only over economics. And even that difference is narrowing: Libertarians say the market shouldn't be regulated at all. Liberals won't go that far, but admit that the era of big government is over. They say it with regret for the time being. Yet they, too, are coming to appreciate that latter-day capitalism is a friend to the new values of liberation. That is something Boaz and the libertarians already know. ♦

The Washington Times

Gephardt, Bonior, Hillary in phone call

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The Washington Times has acquired the transcript of a telephone conference call placed from Florida on January 12, 1997, involving top Democratic party officials and the modest Florida couple, Alice and John Martin, whose tape of a conference call between Newt Gingrich and his lieutenants ignited a firestorm and a federal investigation:

Rep. Dick Gephardt: Can you hear me, Alice?

Alice Martin: Oh, glad you could *join* us, Gephardt. What were you doing, having your eyebrows retouched? Listen, buster, when I order a conference call for 11, I mean 11. I don't mean 11:02. Got it?

Gephardt: I...

Alice Martin: Shut your trap, or I'll stuff a St. Louis shoe down it. Okay, roll call. McDermott?

Rep. Jim McDermott: Um... here. I'll get back to you, Clymer...

Alice Martin: Thurman?

Rep. Karen Thurman: I have to go to the bathroom. May I be excused?

Alice Martin: You'll be excused for five to seven years if you don't listen up, girl. Campbell?

Rep. Tom Campbell: I really have some ethical problems with this phone call...

Alice Martin: You'll know what ethics problems are when we let slip that you took a cool 2 mil for that vote against your own leader, Newt Gingrich. And speaking of Gingrich: Bonior, report.

Rep. David Bonior: I must destroy Newt. I will destroy Newt. I must destroy Newt. I will...

Alice Martin: I'll tell you, that Charlie Trie sure knows a thing or two about that Red Chinese brainwashing, don't he? Now, all of you, this whole plot is messed up and taking on water. When the Riady family gave me that tape of the Gingrich call, I assured them there'd be no questions about where it came from. But now McDermott and Bonior have screwed everything up.

Gephardt: I'm sorry. Bonior said he had it all organized. He said McDermott would be fully protected. Clymer said he could control things on the Times end.

Buddhist Nun: Could I borrow $5,000 again?

Bonior: I must destroy Newt. I will destroy Newt. I...

John Martin: The first thing is Alice and I are going to go up to Washington and play dumb. We'll say *we* taped the call. Thought it was part of history. Wanted it for our grandkids. Thrilled to hear the voices of real politicians. All that bull...

Hillary Clinton: Nobody will believe that...

John Martin: Who the hell is that? That you, Hillary?

Hillary Clinton: Hi, John, Alice, Dick, Sister Chun, Adam...Is Adam there?

Alice Martin: No, he's busy "discovering" another tape. Now let me continue. Campbell, I want you to call John Yang at the Post and throw smoke in his eyes.

Campbell: Yes, ma'am. Anything for the team. I'll tell him Newt's lawyer told me Newt lied intentionally. He'll just love that.

John Martin: Bonior. Can you hear me, Bonior?

Bonior: Yes, master.

John Martin: I want you to level 30 or 40 more charges against Gingrich. I want you to coordinate another sting operation.

Bonior: I must destroy Newt. I will destroy Newt. I must...

Buddhist Nun: Look, if it can't be 5 large, could you spare maybe $3,500? I need cab fare to the vice president's mansion...