

## OUR VIEW

## Political Amnesia Afflicts America

With all the furor over the presidential candidates' military records—the pro-Bush, Swift Boat crowd questioning John Kerry's service in Vietnam and, by extension, his patriotism; the pro-Kerry folks attacking the president's spotty National Guard career, which includes time gaps in service and intimations of favorable treatment (Papa Bush was a congressman at the time)—you can't blame voters for being unable, or unwilling, to wade through the morass. Call it voter fatigue. Andrew Kohut, director of the Pew Research Center in Washington, D.C., said swing-state voters in 2000 had a much more negative view of the presidential campaign than voters in non-swing states. Ditto 2004. According to a new Pew Research study, one in every three voters in 15 swing states felt they were getting too much information about this presidential election. The fatigue is starting to show—and not just at the presidential level.

Though Clark County School Board Trustee Shirley Barber, a two-time incumbent, coasted in her re-election primary (41 percent), Gary Hunter, recently ousted as pastor of Greater St. James Baptist Church and arrested last month on a felony charge of failing to register in Nevada as a convicted sex offender, earned a notable 10 percent. Voter fatigue at play?

At the core of the fatigue problem is negative campaigning, which has been ramped up with the presidency at stake. But local polls are proving as adept as their federal counterparts, slinging mud with impunity. Two cases in point: drudging up former Assemblyman Wendell Williams' various ethical lapses (government double dipping, driving with a suspended license, etc.) and former state Sen. Ann O'Connell's support of the historic \$833 million tax package in the 2003 legislature. Tame, compared to the low blows of the Bush vs. Kerry battle, but negative nonetheless.

Bush fired the first salvo in the war of words in March, launching a multimillion-dollar media onslaught in 18 swing states, in which he began questioning Kerry's ability to preside in an age of terrorism. From June to August, Bush spent \$70 million on television advertising, much of it negative. (By contrast, Kerry spent \$40 million over the same period, including \$25 million for ads airing this month in 19 states and on cable news networks; Kerry has responded with his own affronts, blasting Bush for going to war for the wrong reasons and without a plan to win the peace). The most vicious criticism comes from partisan 527s, groups named for the section of law exempting them from campaign finance strictures, unencumbered by soft-money guidelines. They've turned the race into a contest. Who can unearth the most damaging information? Who can best disparage the other's leadership, stability, intellect? It's a strategy both sides hope will motivate supporters and lure the undecideds. It could also backfire, causing voters to stay away from the polls altogether. "If that (negative campaigning) persists the entire year, I do think there will be a backlash or fatigue factor," said Greg Haas, a Democratic strategist in Ohio, told the Associated Press.

Democratic strategist James Carville, who managed Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign, agreed, telling reporters: "We've never seen anything ever, not in our lifetimes or anybody's lifetimes, something of this duration and intensity. I don't know come June how the public is going to react to this."

Amazingly, some polls reflect great voter interest (this could also be due to large voter registration drives throughout the country). Which brings up another issue contributing to voter fatigue: polls. Everyday another poll and everyday another poll saying something different—Bush ahead, Bush behind, Kerry flagging, Kerry surging. So many polls, no one knows what to believe or go with; so many ads distorting the truth. It's enough to cause collective political amnesia. That's if it hasn't done it already.

The only way to mentally survive the political season...



## GOP uses wedge issues to help Bush

By Louie Overstreet  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Democratic Party and Republican Party platforms (principles) comprised of a number of planks (issues) form the foundations on which the parties make their stand every national election.

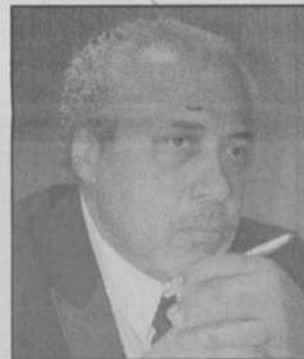
This year's party platforms, non-binding statements, are documents in contrasts, both in terms of volume and content.

The Democratic platform is only 37 pages long and the Republican platform is 95 pages.

Each of the documents addresses the following issues: (1) Abortion; (2) Budget; (3) Death Penalty; (4) Education; (5) Energy/Environment; (6) Foreign Policy; (7) Gay Marriage; (8) Guns; (9) Health Care; (10) Homeland Security; (11) Immigration; (12) Iraq; (13) Social Security; (14) Taxes; and (15) Trade.

It's the Republicans' calculated strategy of using "wedge issues," however, that accounts for the difference in volume of the platform documents.

In order for Republicans to use the strategy of wedge issues, they must have data that suggests people in certain regions of the country are basically one-issue voters. While the voting public would be well served if we were to develop an understanding of all fifteen listed issues, I am somewhat fear-



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ful that five wedge issues will carry the day in a number of regions of the country.

The five wedge issues the "Grand Old Party" is counting on to carry the day for them are abortion, death penalty, gay rights, guns and immigration. The planks in the party platform on these four issues are the following:

**Abortion.** Backs a constitutional amendment banning abortion. This position is slightly different from that of its standard bearer, George W. Bush.

**Death Penalty.** Supports the death penalty, as does George Bush.

**Gay Rights.** Backs a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriages and opposing any legal recognition or benefits for same-sex civil unions. President Bush is in lock step with this plank in the platform.

**Guns.** Favors granting gun-makers immunity from civil lawsuits. The phrase GOP gun lovers are most fond of using is "guns don't kill

people, people kill people."

**Immigration.** Proposes granting legal status (not citizenship) to millions of illegal workers, as well as people currently outside of the U.S. who line up jobs in America.

The strategy of the Republicans is designed to fit with their theme of the party concerned with faith and family. Polls show that this theme plays well in the red states (states where citizens vote solidly Republican in national elections).

Some of my half-dozen or so readers are old enough to remember when the term "solid South" referred to how reliable the votes were for the Democratic Party in southern states. This term is now the sole province of the Republican Party. Things began to shift when Strom Thurmond ran as a Dixiecrat in the 1948 election

against Harry Truman. However, things really went south, so to speak, when President Lyndon Johnson started pushing civil rights as a national agenda item in the 1960s.

President Johnson even forecasted such would be the case when he basically stated in the mid-1960s that his actions would cause southern White Democrats to join the Republican Party. If you had a chance to see and hear retiring Georgia Democratic Sen. Zell Miller act a complete fool during his keynote address at the Republican Party National Convention, then you would realize the metamorphosis is total for southern Democrats who have found a happy home in the Republican Party.

Next week, let's talk about the other ten national issues that informed people could cast their ballots on Nov. 2.



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