

OUR VIEW

Burning Bush

Nary a day goes by that we don't hear something about President Bush's approval ratings. On Monday we learned that the president's approval rating and public confidence in his handling of the Iraq war hit new lows. According to a USA Today/CNN/Gallup poll, 36 percent of Americans surveyed in the poll approved of Bush's performance, a one-percent drop from November's 37 percent. There was a two-percent increase, from 55 percent to 57 percent, in the number of those polled who think it was a mistake sending American soldiers to Iraq, while 67 percent, according to the poll, said Bush "lacked a clear plan for handling the situation in Iraq."

Such is the nature of our totally connected, 24-7 news cycle of a world that we can receive near-instantaneous updates on the turmoil in Iraq and can, just as speedily, assess the impact that every bout of violence has on Bush's popularity. Such is the nature of our reactionary, perpetually second-guessing American culture that many of us find more delight in counting Bush's mounting missteps than we do in calling on our leaders to make the tough, hard choices that we elected them to make, such as creating a timetable for U.S. military pullbacks.

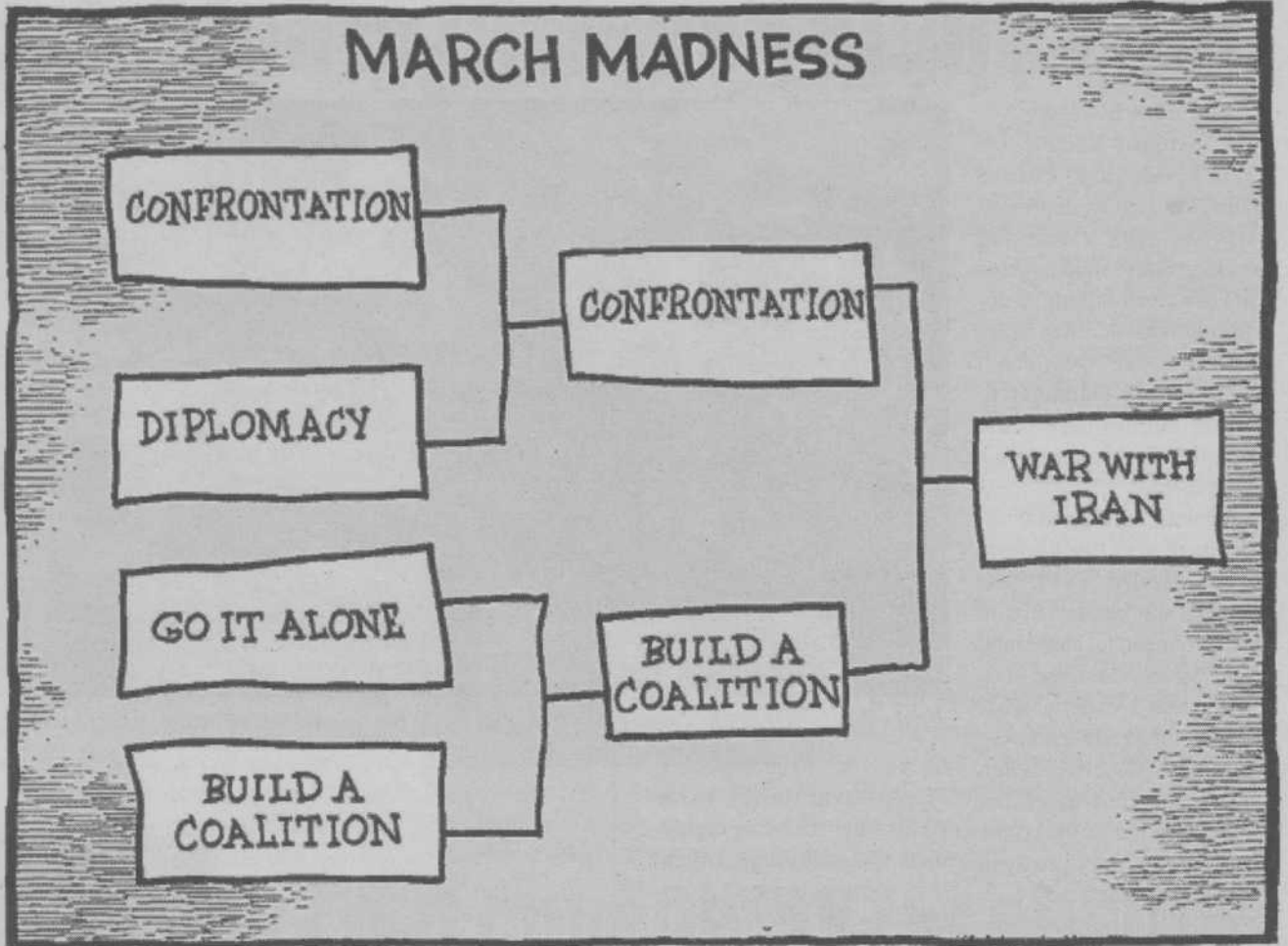
Consider it a function of the zero-sum media game that Bush's approval rating is fluid, up and down and up, moving with the vicissitudes of time. His approval ratings tanked after the discovery of the abuses at Abu Ghraib prison, after the federal government's inept response to Hurricane Katrina, after it was discovered that an Arab company was going to be in charge of security at six U.S. ports. His popularity has jumped slightly when there's been good news: the historic Iraqi elections, moderate job and economic growth. The real key to correctly assessing Bush's overall legacy is not solely in foreign policy—it's reasonable to say that his actions have made America more vulnerable and less safe from enemies—but to look at how his domestic agenda has weakened this country's vibrancy.

Maybe African-Americans were prescient in their near-unanimous support of Al Gore in 2000, assuming that a Bush presidency presaged rollbacks of some sorts. Sure enough, affirmative action was attacked, particularly as it relates to higher education. In addition, there have been few efforts to scrutinize or repeal discriminatory drug sentencing laws. Sliced federal funding for law enforcement has meant less community policing in tough neighborhoods that had actually seen a reduction in crime during the Clinton years. Bush has also been mum on the voter disenfranchisement scandals of 2000 and 2004—scandals that delivered him into 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue by scaring, intimidating and dispiriting a legion of African-American voters. Sadly, many Black leaders and clergy have embraced Bush's push of faith-based initiatives which, boiled down to its essence, is a money-for-loyalty exchange—Bush delivers the money and the churches who're cashing in deliver support to the Republican party. In the streets, it's called pimping.

Which leads to the question of where we go from here. Where Bush goes is anybody's guess. History offers some clues. If at the height of his powers—re-elected with more votes than anyone in history (he also had the most-ever votes against him) and ready to spend his political capital—Bush was myopic and dictatorial and didn't change his tune as he fumbled Social Security privatization, botched the Iraq war, alienated large portions of the Arab world, ratcheted up the federal deficit, misjudged the appointment of failed Supreme Court nominee Harriet Miers, mishandled domestic intelligence, fractured the once cult-like unity of his own party—his mistakes are legion—then it's a stretch to think that low approval ratings will make this Texas leopard change his spots.

Two years from now, President Bush will be former President Bush. What America looks like then, in large part, will be determined by what we do now. Where we go from here are the mid-term elections, a chance to translate the low approval ratings into action by booting out of office those Bush acolytes whose mindless subservience has allowed this president to run roughshod over American and the Constitution. It's time to burn the Bush.

MARCH MADNESS



Power, greed mar politics

*By Dora LaGrande
Sentinel-Voice*

When President James Madison said, "While the essence of government is power; and power lodged, as it must be, in human hands, will ever be liable to abuse," he could not have spoken truer words.

Over the past three to four years, political scandals in Las Vegas, the state of Nevada, all the way to Washington, D.C., have been at the forefront of news stories all across this country almost every day. The art of scandal making, which used to be conducted behind closed doors, has become as mainstream as apple pie and baseball. America's favorite past time.

Tom Delay is indicted for using funds for golfing in Scotland.

Bill Frist is investigated for insider trading.

Locally, State Treasurer Kathy Augustine is impeached, convicted and censured by the Senate for illegally using state equipment.

Former County Commissioners Dario Herrera, Lance Malone, Erin Kenney and Mary Kincaid-Chauncey indicted in a federal corruption and bribery case.

Senator Sandra Tiffany faces the Ethics Commission on Sept. 13 to defend allegations she used her position as a legislator to fatten her pockets.

Former City Councilwoman Janet Moncrief indicted on four felony counts



ON THE RECORD

By Dora LaGrande

of submitting false documents to a public agency and one felony count of perjury.

Just last week, Clark County Recorder Fran Deane was ordered to step down from her job while she is investigated for allegedly using her public job to make money for herself.

The above referenced infractions are just a few of them and constitute some of the more recent ones in the past few years.

While the scandals dominate the news and are very disheartening, they are by no means surprising. For the past ten or more years, we have been hearing about campaign finance reform, and as a result, we have formed an ethics review board locally to try to combat the problem. The problem, apparently results from one very strong driving force: GREED (an inordinate desire for wealth).

We live in a time when the United States government, as well as local governments are larger and more powerful than they've ever been. All facets of our governmental entities consist of huge departments, agencies, programs and tons and tons of employees. The U.S. government as a whole spends 24

trillion dollars a year, which makes the possibilities of corruption in such immense and unaccountable institutions endless.

That being said, as Americans and citizens of small locales we, understandably, have the right to expect our elected officials to conduct themselves ethically. Public distrust of elected officials and political candidates is continuing to grow, and many Americans believe that politicians are dishonest, hypocritical and power hungry (greedy).

The elected officials do nothing to dispel this stereotype when they portray themselves as the manipulating, undermining, scheming, coniving, unethical politicians Americans believe them to

be. And when they publicly prove that "self preservation, for them, is the first law of nature," they further solidify our beliefs.

But what is the problem? Why are so many political figures being sucked into the arms of greed, like being sucked into a black hole? Is the problem that the whole system is so out of control that it is simply unrealistic to place faith in each and every government official in a position to sell influence? Or is the problem that our moral fiber as a people has been so tainted that we really can't differentiate between right and wrong?

I don't have or know the answer, but I do know that the temptation for individuals, businesses and lobbyists to buy votes and for politicians to sell them is enormous, as we have witnessed here locally and read about almost daily on a national level. When we indict and reelect one group of politicians (See LaGrande, Page 11)



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