

Disarray rampant in the Democratic Party's mid-term election strategy

By all of the polling I have seen, the Democrats are poised to win back the House and perhaps the Senate if the numbers hold up until election day. That is, "if" the Democrats don't find a way to blow a formidable lead by playing it too safe.



RON
WALTERS

Not only are George Bush's approval numbers the lowest of his presidency at 32 or 34 percent, depending on the survey, but respondents also say that, by a majority, they feel that the country is heading on the "wrong track" and that they trust the Democrats to lead the Congress.

However, already Nancy Pelosi, leader of Democrats in the House, has begun to lay down some tracks for a mid-term election agenda by emphasizing issues such as: Republicans have led by creating a "culture of corruption," the administration should craft a timetable for withdrawal from Iraq, Republicans should take responsibility for a failed energy prices since the price of gas is out of control, and there should be an extension of the deadline for enrollment in the new Medicare prescription drug benefit beyond May 15.

Does anyone think that these issues are structured in a way that will dislodge the Republicans from their control of the House? Think back to the right-wing "Contract for America" that Newt Gingrich and his colleagues put together as an organizing document to help take control of the Congress in 1994. There is nothing like that on the horizon that Democrats have developed yet.

But there should be because the contract was a device for nationalizing that mid-term election and it worked to give their ideology some coherence and power. At this point, coherence seems to evade the Democrats.

Recently, the Democratic Leadership Council produced a book arguing that the way the Democrats should take advantage of their golden opportunity to take back the Congress is to resolve the lack of confidence that Americans have that they can ensure their security by looking just as tough as Republicans on the issue of Homeland Security and fighting terrorism.

This leads right into the John Kerry trap where, rather than opposing the war, he posed as tougher than the Republicans, promising Americans he could do a better job of "winning the war on terrorism" and make them safer. This was a dumb idea when Bush pronounced it and it is even dumber now that it has proven to be impossible, by virtue of the lack of manpower to pursue a military solution, the exhaustible supply of financial resources and the waning patience of the American people.

Some of the other issues Democrats could mobilize such as corruption and gas prices have traction now, but the leadership has to be able drive a hard bargain, by characterizing Tom Delay as the Godfather of Republican slush-fund politics and tying him tightly to Jack Abramoff, following the money and the political influence right into the White House. To prove it, they have to name the names of Dick Cheney's oil baron cronies who participated in the theft of our energy policy; they have to describe his role in leaking the secret identity of Valerie Wilson, a CIA agent, and his persistent push for the Iraq invasion by distorting intelligence even before 9/11. Then they have to point to Bush's continued incompetence in responding to hurricane Katrina, the lag of employment in his tax-cut economic recovery that has benefitted his rich friends and his role in serving up exploitable migrants to willing profit-hungry capitalist.

That Democrats are anything but coherent is illustrated by Democratic Senator Joe Biden of Delaware who plowed yet another divergent path by proposing to divide Iraq into three sections dominated by the Shiites, the Sunnis and Kurds. This silly idea would fail because of the inability of American forces to do it without a larger scale of violence and the fact that Shiites will not be denied the power they almost have over most of Iraqi affairs. Biden's presidential play has drawn a massive silence so far.

More proof that not only are Democrats unprepared to lead is exhibited by the fact that they met in New Orleans the middle of the recent municipal elections wrongly cleared by the Justice Department, and they did not take a position on challenging the impediments to the right to vote for thousands of New Orleans' citizens.

Yes, they could blow this grand opportunity by their lack of guts, and mistaken strategies and if this continues to be the case, they would deserve to lose this Fall.

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Dumbing-down of Black America by black Americans

Much of what I hear, see, and read in black media these days is an insult to black people. Entertaining to some, no doubt, but still insulting.

Knowing that very few positive messages are coming from so-called "mainstream" media, you would think our black media would take up the slack and do more to uplift, enlighten, and educate our people rather than acquiesce to the desires of those who control the vast majority of the media outlets in this country.



JAMES
CLINGMAN

You would think that, at the very minimum, black-owned and operated media would make a firm commitment to smarten us up rather than dumb us down with silly, meaningless, empty messages and images that only capitulate to the status quo. You would think... But, as Brother Glen Ford of Black Commentator once chided me for wrongly assuming that black-owned media are really black conscious media, and for suggesting we secure more of the same, black ain't necessarily black, is it?

Like many of our black politicians, much of our black media are really doing a job on us by keeping a wide range of black folks, especially our children and young adults, uninformed, misinformed, and just plain dumb. Watch that (white-owned) outlet we call Black Entertainment Television; listen to some of the conversations on some of these so-called black radio stations; read some of the absolute junk in some of our pseudo-black newspapers, magazines, and Web sites. You will see that we are, as our elders used to say, "Going out of the world backwards."

Having been a guest on many radio shows, and a several television shows, across the country, I can attest to the fact that there are media hosts who do not fall into the dumbing-down category. I desperately want to name them for you, but I know I will omit someone. If you really want to change the messages going into your brain, you can find them; it's not that difficult to do.

One of the first things you can do is use your critical thinking skills to determine the validity and usefulness of what you listen to on these shows. Don't just settle for the entertainment aspect. As a conscious person, ask yourself what the benefit is to listening or watching certain material. Remember: "Garbage in, garbage out." If we are getting a daily mega-dose of nonsense, of falsehoods, of non-educational clap-trap and slap-stick, it's no wonder we are so far behind in serious aspects of economic empowerment. It's no wonder we seldom follow through with initiatives that will make us stronger, as individuals and as a collective.

In case you didn't know, as Booker T. Washington once said, "There are some Negroes who don't want the patient to get well." They want us to remain psychologically crippled to keep us dancing to their beat and buy what they are selling. They want us to keep on bobbing our heads and shuffling our feet and guffawing throughout the day, oblivious to our plight and totally without a clue as to how to fix it.

Thus, we get a barrage of jokes, self-deprecating comedy, and exploitation on television. We are on the receiving end of mindless "beats" that are pounded into our brains by 1200-watt speakers in the backseats of our cars. We are fed some of the most useless rhetoric, much of which is not even factual, by brothers and sisters on the radio who obviously have no idea what they are talking about. And, as we read some of our Black newspapers, we are ensconced in a lifelong dream of hitting the number, getting psychic readings, or checking our horoscopes before we make a move.

Even in the spiritual marketplace, we are the subjects or, should I say, fodder, of hucksters who want to sell us God's blessings, as if they have cornered the market on His grace. It's fascinating that on Sunday mornings we can find a white "preacher" on BET selling us a quarter-ounce vial of miracle water that will cure sickle-cell disease, all for the low cost of \$206. Of course, if you send him more money, well, you know the deal.

Brothers and sisters, isn't it bad enough that we are being dumb-down by white folks? Why do we accept the same thing from our own people? We must do better than that. Take politics. What do you think of the statement attributed to the ex-footballer, Lynn Swann? "I certainly believe that George W. Bush is the most qualified and most credible candidate to fulfill the role as president of the United States." Now, I didn't hear Swann say that, I just read that he said it. But if he did say that, in light of what we have experienced over the past five years from the Bushman, why should anyone, blacks especially, vote for Swann to be their governor?

We had better take stock of what is going on in this country, right in our own backyards. There are black folks who control media outlets that do not operate in the best interests of black people. Why would you support them — in any way? They do not want us to get well, nor do they care if we ever get well. The next time you find yourself wasting your valuable time ingesting their mind-numbing potion, remember this saying: "When the ax enters the forest, the trees view the handle as one of their own." Just because it's black on the outside, doesn't mean it's black on the inside.

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When diplomacy really means war

By Norman Solomon

GLOBAL INFORMATION NETWORK

One of the nation's leading pollsters, Andrew Kohut of the Pew Research Center, wrote a few weeks ago that among Americans "there is little potential support for the use of force against Iran."

This month the White House has continued to emphasize that it is committed to seeking a diplomatic solution. Yet the U.S. government is very likely to launch a military attack on Iran within the next year. How can that be? In the run-up to war, appearances are often deceiving. Official events may seem to be moving in one direction while policymakers are actually headed in another.

On their own timetable, White House strategists implement a siege of public opinion that relies on escalating media spin. One administration after another has gone through the motions of staying on a diplomatic track while laying down flagstones on a path to war. Several days ago President Bush said that "the doctrine of prevention is to work together to prevent the Iranians from having a nuclear weapon" — and he quickly added that "in this case, it means diplomacy."

On April 12 the Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, urged the U.N. Security Council to take "strong steps" in response to Iran's announcement of progress toward enriching uranium. Bush and Rice were engaged in a timeworn ritual that involves playingact diplomacy before taking military action. Seven years ago, President Clinton proclaimed that a U.S.-led NATO air war on Yugoslavia was starting because all peaceful avenues for dealing with the Serbian president, Slobodan Milosevic, had reached dead ends. The Clinton administration and the major U.S. media outlets failed to mention that Washington had handed Milosevic a poison-pill ultimatum in the fine print of the proposed Rambouillet accords — with Appendix B stipulating that NATO troops would have nearly unlimited run of the entire Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Recent decades of American history are filled with such faux statesmanship: greasing the media wheels and political machinery for military interventions in Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, Central America and the Middle East.

But the current administration's eagerness to use "diplomacy" as a prop for going to war has been unusually brazen. On Jan. 31, 2003 — five days before the ballyhooed speech by then-Secretary of State Colin Powell to the U.N. Security Council — the president held a private Oval Office meeting with Tony Blair. Summing up the discussion, which occurred nearly two months before the invasion of Iraq, the British prime minister's chief foreign policy adviser David Manning noted in a memo: "Our diplomatic strategy had to be arranged around the military planning." Meanwhile, President Bush and his top aides were still telling the public that they were pursuing all diplomatic channels in hopes of preventing war. Funditis have often advised presidents to use diplomatic maneuvers as virtual shams in order to legitimize the coming warfare.

Charles Krauthammer blew his stack in mid-November 1998 when U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan seemed to make progress in averting a U.S. missile strike against Iraq. "It is perfectly fine for an American president to mouth the usual pieties about international consensus and some such," Krauthammer wrote in Time magazine. "But when he starts believing them, he turns the Oval Office over to Kofi Annan and friends."

In late summer 2002, with momentum quickening toward an Iraq invasion, Newsweek foreign affairs columnist Fared Zakaria urged the Bush administration to recognize the public-relations value of allowing U.N. weapons inspectors to spend some time in Iraq. "Even if the inspections do not produce the perfect crisis," he wrote optimistically, "Washington will still be better off for having tried because it would be seen to have made every effort to avoid war."

When reality can't hold a candle to perception, then reality is apt to become imperceptible. And in matters of war and peace, when powerful policy wonks in Washington effectively strive for appearances to be deceiving, the result is a pantomime of diplomacy that's scarcely like the real thing. When the actual goal is war, the PR task is to make a show of leaving no diplomatic stone unturned.

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