

# Getting dirty early in the campaign

**THE ISSUE** | The presidential campaign.

**OUR OPINION** | Sen. John McCain's decision to go negative in ads comparing Sen. Barack Obama to laughingstock celebrities Britney Spears and Paris Hilton before the race is even officially under way is in conflict with the GOP candidate's promise to run a "respectful" campaign.

The Straight Talk Express appears to have veered sharp right and opted for the well-worn path of smear that has been the road for many to the White House in recent years.

Sen. John McCain's decision to go negative in ads comparing Sen. Barack Obama to laughingstock celebrities Britney Spears and Paris Hilton before the race is even officially underway — neither has been officially nominated by their parties yet — is in conflict with the GOP candidate's promise to run a "respectful" campaign.

It shows that McCain, who earned a reputation in his quixotic run for president in 2000 as a maverick and independent thinker, has sold his soul in what is likely his last attempt to win the White House.

We had hoped this campaign would be different from the last few decades — going back to the the infamous "Daisy" ad intimating Barry Goldwater would lead us into nuclear destruction — where the battles had deteriorated into preying on people's worst fears and instincts rather than substantive discussion of the issues.

Obama, despite his meteoric rise on the national stage, is still very much an unknown, untested and undefined quantity to many voters. His dearth of experience, especially on the world stage, is surely a valid point that is open to question.

But it trivializes the issue, the voters and the McCain campaign to equate Obama's

popularity as nothing more than celebrity voyeurism on par with sad public figures who have issues best dealt with out of the public view. And coming so early in the campaign, it is a sorry harbinger of what we can expect between now and Nov. 4.

Frankly, we had hoped for and expected more of McCain, a full-fledged war hero who won the hearts of voters for his willingness to put the country's best interests ahead of partisan politics.

McCain clearly must do something to overcome the public fascination with Obama and his ads have reflected that. More than 90 percent of the ads by Obama make no mention of McCain, but one-third of McCain's commercials make negative references to Obama, according to a study of political commercials by the Advertising Project at the University of Wisconsin.

But negative ads with no campaign relevance are not the only ways to win votes. Ronald Reagan proved that with his optimistic visions of America as a "shining city upon a hill" and his reelection theme of "Morning in America." And Bill Clinton rode into the White House as "the man from Hope."

We still haven't moved past the party conventions yet so it's not too late for either side to fulfill its promise and, hopefully, the desire of American voters to leave the negative behind.

## NATIONAL VIEW | PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

### On Sen. Stevens' indictment

Welcome to the chalet of Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska. It has a new first floor, a handsome wrap-around deck, a tool cabinet loaded with new tools, and a professional Viking gas grill.

And all of it came courtesy of an oil-services company in Alaska that sought government help from Stevens, according to a seven-count federal indictment.

The indictment accuses Stevens of failing to report gifts of more than \$250,000 as required on his annual Senate financial disclosure forms. Those gifts allegedly included free construction work on his house in Girdwood, Alaska, and an SUV for one of his children.

If Stevens ever puts up his home for sale, one wonders, will the arrogance convey?

The charges are a blow not just for Stevens and Republicans hoping to hold onto his seat, but for the Senate itself. Stevens is no back-bencher, as with other recently scandalized lawmakers such as Reps. Rick Renzi, R-Ariz., and William Jefferson, D-La.

He is an institution in Washington.

Stevens, 84, is the longest-serving Republican in Senate history. For six years, he chaired the powerful Senate Appropriations Committee, controlling hundreds of billions of dollars. If the charges are proved, he will be just one more example of lawmakers who couldn't draw a line between serving the public and serving themselves.

Yet the clubby nature of the Senate produced little if any outrage. Republicans and Democrats alike spoke of their sadness, and how Stevens has been a wonderful

champion for his state.

Yes, how can taxpayers in the Lower 48 ever forget his \$400 million "bridge to nowhere," a boondoggle intended to link one Alaskan island to another with 50 inhabitants? Or his \$23 billion proposed military air-tanker lease deal that provoked needed opposition by Sen. John McCain, the presumptive GOP nominee for president?

Stevens said he is innocent of the charges, but his initial denial on Tuesday was couched in legalese. "I have never knowingly submitted a false disclosure form," he said.

Reading the indictment, it's hard to believe that Stevens was unaware of the freebies being lavished on him by the now defunct private company, Veco. He wrote thank-you notes to Veco employees who performed the contracting work and fixed his heating system.

The indictment alleges Stevens received hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of free labor.

Although prosecutors do not claim a direct quid pro quo, Stevens allegedly received these gifts while Veco was requesting various federal grants and contracts through his Senate office. The firm also sought Stevens' help to build a natural gas pipeline on Alaska's North Slope.

So often in recent years, lawmakers have preached about the importance of personal responsibility. With at least a dozen members of Congress indicted in the last five years, it's too bad so many are incapable of taking their own advice.

## ARTIST'S VIEW



## COMMENTARY | LEONARD PITTS JR.

### Query speaks volumes about Bush and Co.

“What is it about George W. Bush that makes you want to serve him?”

I have gone forward and back for a while now trying to figure out where today's rant should begin, but I find that I cannot get past that question. It was posed by Monica Goodling, an aide to then Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, to job seekers at the Department of Justice.

“What is it about George W. Bush that makes you want to serve him?”

Is it me, or doesn't she sound less like a job interviewer than like an adolescent girl splayed out on her bed, giggling with her girlfriend about some hottie actor they both adore? I mean, what, exactly, was an applicant expected to say?

“I adore his strong chin?” “That crinkly smile really turns me on?”

“I can't resist the manly twinkle in his eyes when he mispronounces 'nuclear?’”

Presumably, Goodling is somewhere doodling the president's name and hers inside Valentine hearts while she awaits her fate. You see, she faces possible professional sanctions for violations of both civil service law and the DOJ's own policy. As detailed last week in a Justice Department report, she and other aides systematically schemed to fill non-political positions with Bush loyalists.

It wasn't just that she asked a question that would have been more at home on the cover of Tiger Beat. It was that she passed over a respected prosecutor with almost 20 years of experience for an important counterterrorism job because his wife was active in Democratic politics, hiring instead a Republican with three years' experience. And that she denied one applicant on the suspicion — the “suspicion,” mind you — that she was a lesbian. And that she jettisoned yet another because he was a member of the Council on American-Islamic Relations. And that she ran Internet searches to determine applicants' political views. And that one of her interview questions was: “Why are you a Republican?”

It goes on. And on. Goodling's priority was not experience, talent or competence. Rather, she was looking for, as she put it in a note, applicants who were suitably conservative on “god, guns + gays.”

Yes, every president is entitled to fill political positions with loyalists. But these were “not,” I repeat, political positions. Rather they were, or were supposed to have been, career, non-partisan jobs: immigration judges, assistant U.S. attorneys, trial attorneys.

The problem is, in this administration, there's no such thing as a non-partisan job. For them, the campaign never ends.

Just last month another report found applicants for DOJ internships and honors programs being turned away for political reasons. Then there's Rajiv Chandrase-

kar's book, “Imperial Life in the Emerald City,” which recounts how people inter-viewing to work in the Green Zone in Iraq were asked their opinion of Roe v. Wade, among other conservative litmus tests.

What does abortion politics have to do with turning on the electricity in Baghdad? Hey, you got me. This administration prizes ideological purity above ability. As a result, it has driven the presidency off a cliff, the country following close behind. These are not people who came to government to govern. No, these are true believers who came to government to institutionalize true belief, to make it permanent as a stain.

There is something Stepford, something robotic and chilling, in the glassy-eyed, ends-justifies-the-means faith of these young Bush aides in their own righteousness. Forget credibility. Forget competence. Just give us your answer, please: “What is it about George W. Bush that makes you want to serve him?”

It is a telling question. Apparently, these people have forgotten or never even knew: it wasn't George W. Bush they were supposed to serve.

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## COMMENTARY | DEBBIE S. MILLER

### 10 reasons high oil prices are good for you

On a hot summer day, my 22-year-old daughter paused from reading the local paper. She proclaimed that rising oil prices were good for America. How so? I asked.

1. Pointing out that obesity has become a national epidemic, she, a full-time nursing student, noted that people are driving less, and getting more exercise by walking and riding bikes.

2. High gas prices and the slump in SUV sales have prompted automakers to produce more hybrids and develop all-electric cars. That's better for consumers in the long run and it helps the environment by reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

3. Another good reason, she said, is that finally renewable energy is getting a chance. People are investing in wind and solar. Clean energy is the way to go for our future.

My daughter and I discussed seven other benefits.

4. People are increasingly carpooling, using mass transit, and batching their drive-around errands together. This ultimately will give people more time in their lives to do other

activities.

5. Some states are considering four-day workweeks, such as Utah recently enacted for its government employees. This would take millions of commuter cars off the road. Who dislikes three-day weekends?

6. Drivers are speeding less, no pedal to the metal through the intersections. That not only saves gas; it also saves lives. In the first five months of this year, deaths from car crashes dropped 9 percent from last year.

7. As we gradually wean ourselves from fossil fuels, this means fewer oil spills, less air pollution, and less harm to the environment.

8. By developing and distributing clean energy, such as solar, wind, geothermal, tidal, biomass and synthetic fuels, we help the environment by offering clean, non-toxic energy to consumers.

9. As petroleum becomes a fossil fuel of the past, we eliminate the prospect of war over oil, and our nation truly becomes more energy secure. Good news: Based on 2008 projections by the Energy Information Administration, the United States is on track to import

100 billion barrels less oil through 2050, due to greater efficiency, conservation, and alternative energy. This equates to 10 times as much oil than what is projected to be recovered from the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

10. We don't need to drill for oil in sensitive areas, such as the extraordinary Arctic Refuge, because we have better energy choices. Should we rip open America's greatest wildlife refuge so the oil companies can make another billion in profits for a few months' supply of oil? Choices, ingenuity and change are part of any civilization. The Stone Age didn't end because we ran out of stones. The Fossil Fuel Age will likely end because of our innovation, advancement of more efficient technology, development of clean energy sources and America's can-do spirit through leadership.

My daughter and I vote for clean energy sooner versus later because it's a win-win vision for America.

■ Debbie S. Miller is a writer for Progressive Media Project.

# High oil may give Kuhl edge in election

The best shot Randy Kuhl has to win reelection in November is if the price of oil remains high.

## CITY BEAT



Je Dunning

The reason is that the cost of gasoline is the top issue with the public, followed by concerns of high heating bills this

winter.

Kuhl's position, and that of most Republicans and a limited number of Democrats, is to drill our way out of the problem, at least for now.

And since three out of four Americans feel the same way, that gives Kuhl a decided edge over his opponent, Democrat Eric Massa, regardless of how he stands on other issues.

The fact that the Democrat-controlled Congress won't bring the issue of drilling to a floor vote also helps Kuhl's cause. The incumbent has been complaining since the day the Democrats took over that they accomplish little and often use parliamentary tactics that skirt the Democratic process.

On this issue, it's hard to disagree with him.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid have done almost nothing to advance a comprehensive plan to get the country out of this energy crisis. They talk about it, but there's been no action.

Maybe it's because the Democrats realize their plan won't do the job as well as what the Republicans are pushing for. If they did, they'd at least bring it up for debate and a vote, don't you think?

The Democrats' solution is to tax Big Oil, invest in clean energy sources and raise the fuel mileage standard for cars. Democrats argue that if drilling was such a good idea, why aren't oil companies using the millions of acres they currently lease from the federal government?

Massa subscribes to that approach but has said the decision whether to drill offshore should be made by coastal states, not the federal government. Drilling in the national reserve in Alaska shouldn't be considered, he said.

The problem with the Democrats' approach is that it doesn't address short-term needs.

Everyone agrees, Republicans included, that developing clean energy sources is a good idea, but widespread use is at least a decade or two away.

Taxing Big Oil won't lower the price of oil and raising the fuel standards is something Democrats want in place in 2020.

Drilling in places where oil can be reached and extracted quickly is the short-term answer — whether it's offshore, in Alaska or on leased land. Along with adding to the oil supply and creating jobs, drilling would also give Americans some satisfaction that something is being done to increase our energy independence.

So far, the Democrat-led Congress hasn't made much headway on this, the most important issue in the minds of Americans. That should give Republicans like Randy Kuhl an edge come November.

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