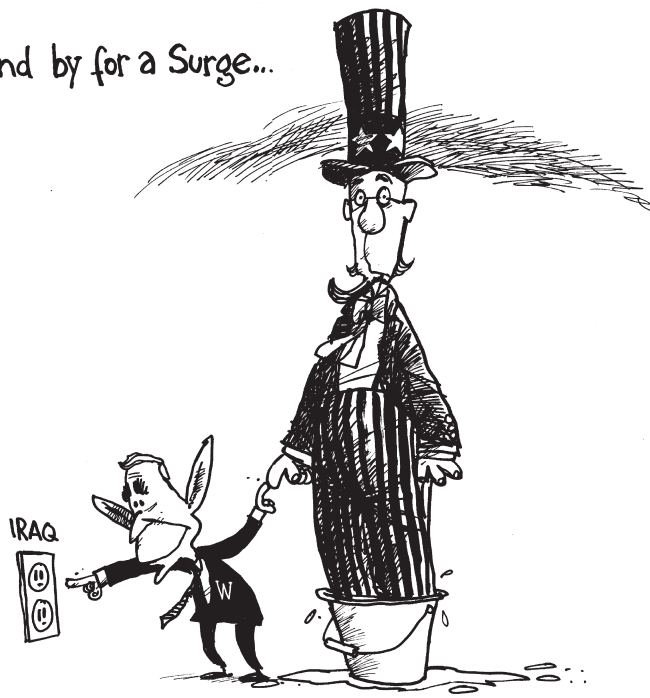


stand by for a Surge...



[BELTWAY]

DANCE WITH THE ONE WHO BRUNG YOU

As Democrats glory in their new majority, they would do well to realize that they don't now control Congress because voters wanted a minimum-wage hike. Most people probably didn't read Nancy Pelosi's 31-page glossy "A New Direction for America" and flock to the polls to secure its promised "Competitive Small Business Environment for Innovation."

They are weary of Mr. Bush's war. That's not the same as trusting Democrats, for whom "voting for before voting against" is the height of dissent. Sixty-nine percent of registered voters surveyed by ABC News said they don't think the Congressional Democrats "have a clear plan for handling the situation in Iraq." But in a credit to American optimism, voters wagered that partisanship might stand in for principled opposition. CBS polling found that 72 percent believe Democrats will decrease current troop levels in Iraq or seek to withdraw from the country entirely.

They'll likely be disappointed. When ABC's Charlie Gibson asked freshman House Democrat Nancy Boyda, "If [President Bush] says we need more troops, is the Democratic majority going to be compliant?" she replied, "I think we're going to vote to support what the commander in chief and head of the military asks us to do. At least, I'm certainly going to vote to support it." Perhaps she'll polish his boots as well.

That's why the White House can widen its war without risk of the other side finding a spine. Democrats are busy indulging in the delusion that they were elected to deliver the standard liberal wish list. But those who gave them the gavel have a more pressing concern than student loan rates, and they won't take well to being ignored.

[MEMORIAM]

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

The low-key and dignified ceremonies that surrounded Gerald Ford's passing were a reminder of how fortunate the country was to have him in the White House as Richard Nixon's successor. The quip uttered during one of his first addresses to the nation after Nixon's resignation—that he was "a Ford, not a Lincoln"—perfectly struck the tone the country needed: lawful, sensible stewardship of the executive branch following eight years of turmoil.

For baby boomers who had become "alienated," as one of the 1960s catchphrases had it, Gerald Ford was the first president they did not despise; his great political accomplishment was to effectively usher in a post-radical era. His pardon of Nixon was the correct way to move Americans beyond the purported crimes of his predecessor.

Saigon finally fell to the North Vietnamese on his watch, and while he wished to do more than he could to reinforce the failing government, once it was gone, Ford was masterful in conveying to Americans that they had more important things to do than wallow in defeat and bickering over who "lost" Vietnam. Many in his party would not have been so wise.

Ford's posthumously aired criticism of George W. Bush's Iraq War made us nostalgic for his political style: homespun and cautious, a Main Street kind of

Republicanism. "I just don't think we should go hellfire and damnation around the globe freeing people unless it is related to our own national security," he told Bob Woodward in 2004. He was right—and Republicans could do far worse than to produce more Fords.

[IRAN]

MIDEAST DEMOCRATS

Though the rest of the world cringes and clucks each time he mounts a podium, these are dark days for Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. In mid-December, he was forced to flee Iran's premier polytechnic institute when student protesters carrying "fascist president" banners cut short his speech, chanting "Death to the dictator." Even as Ahmadinejad tried to speed away, students kicked the doors of his limousine, causing the vehicles in his convoy to collide several times.

This augured a grim result for the candidates Ahmadinejad hand-picked to run in the first national referendum on his presidency. Just days later, when an unexpected 60 percent of Iranian voters cast their ballots for local councils and the Assembly of Experts—the clerical body that installs and supervises Iran's supreme religious leader—they delivered a major blow.

Ahmadinejad's candidates took only 20 percent of local council seats—the opposition now controls 13 of 15 seats on the Tehran council, a political bellwether.

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And the faction of reformer Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the two-term president Ahmadinejad routed in the 2005 election, dominated in the national vote for the Assembly of Experts.

Ahadinejad hasn't delivered on his populist campaign promises. Iran's struggling economy is no better, its unemployment rate no lower than when he took office. When Iranians want economic prosperity and instead get a belligerent quest for nuclear power and talk of wiping Israel off the map, the president's men should get trounced at the polls—and they did.

This electoral rebuke won't soften Ahmadinejad's rhetoric or end his show-down with the West overnight. But the discontent he has produced among student activists and Iranian voters bodes well for the moderates and reformers who want Iran to engage the world rather than confronting it. America's own unpopular president might take note before he declares war on the only functioning Islamic democracy in the Middle East.

[WHITE HOUSE] **LAWYERING UP**

The president is preparing for another war—with Congress. First step: find a new general. White House Counsel Harriet Miers stepped down just as the Democrats are preparing to exercise their power of oversight. Bush advisers, worried that she wouldn't be able to withstand the scrutiny of Congressional subpoena power, drafted former Reagan counsel Fred Fielding.

Congress has endured Miers's response to questioning before. During the confirmation debacle surrounding her short-lived Supreme Court nomination, Sen. Patrick Leahy called her answers to the Senate questionnaire, "incomplete and insulting." Now incoming chair of the Judiciary Committee, Leahy has announced that he will hold

hearings on the administration's policies on torture and other human-rights issues. If Miers can't testify on her own behalf, she can't be expected to answer tough questions about Abu Ghraib, Gitmo, or possible war profiteering.

The pressure of an opposition is forcing the White House to finally prize competence over loyalty. For that alone, we can be thankful for divided government. But Miers's resignation also calls into question the judgment of a president who would entrust the Constitution to a woman who can't handle the defense of his own record.

[ELECTION] **GAY TALK EXPRESS**

One relevant vignette from Todd Purdham's *Vanity Fair* profile of John McCain has Mr. Straight Talk Express before an Iowa forum, pressed on the subject of gay marriage. "Should gay marriage be allowed?" Chris Matthews asks. McCain says "I think gay marriage should be allowed, if there's a ceremony kind of thing, if you want to call it that." An honest position, if not one *TAC* concurs with. But during the commercial break, McCain aide John Weaver whispered in the candidate's ear, and McCain interrupted an answer about a farm bill to say, "Could I just mention one other thing? On the issue of gay marriage, I believe that if people want to have private ceremonies, that's fine. I do not believe gay marriage should be legal." Later he hissed to Weaver, "Did I fix it, did I fix it?"

McCain will try to feign concurrence through the social gauntlet of the Republican primaries. But plain to all is the sincerity of his belief in neoconservative foreign policy: escalate in Iraq, bomb Iran, embroil America forever in Mideast wars. A false wrapping over a core of sheer madness—this is the GOP frontrunner in 2008, and the nation's most likely 44th president. ■

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Of Terrorists, Tyrants, & Martyrs

In life, Saddam Hussein was a pitiless tyrant. He had murdered thousands, been caught hiding in a rat hole with a weapon he failed to fire, and blustered

and bellowed at his trial for the mass execution of men and boys in reprisal for an attempt on his life.

Yet “Nothing in his life became him like the leaving of it.”

Before transfer to his executioners, Saddam thanked each U.S. soldier who had guarded him. He entered the chamber with dignity. He answered with brave defiance taunts of “Moqtada, Moqtada, Moqtada” from the Shia thugs around him. And he fell to his death with a prayer of submission to Allah on his lips.

“Where, O death, is thy victory? Where, O death, is thy sting?”

The contrast between that manliness, and the callousness and crudity of those who hanged him and came to watch, has gone far to convert a Stalinist tyrant into a Sunni martyr of American imperialism and Shi’ite vengefulness.

In death, Saddam now likely has more admirers in the Middle East than George W. Bush does in life. Such was the travesty of his execution. Though the hanging of Saddam was justified, why can we not learn from history that magnanimity in triumph is often wiser than a strict justice better left to higher authority?

Looking back, what did the burning of Joan of Arc do for the English? What did the guillotining of Marie Antoinette do for Robespierre and the Revolution?

Even the 1859 hanging of John Brown, witnessed by Union Col. Thomas J. Jackson, made a martyr to abolition of a terrorist who had perpetrated the massacre of Pottawatomie Creek.

In a letter to his wife, Jackson described Brown’s death: “John Brown

was hung today. ... He behaved with unflinching firmness. ... and ascended the scaffold with apparent cheerfulness.”

Compare, if you will, the thoughts that crossed the Christian mind of Stonewall Jackson, as Brown was hanged, to the conduct of that Shia execution party. Wrote Jackson to his beloved wife, “I was much impressed with the thought that before me stood a man, in the full vigor of health, who must in a few minutes be in eternity. I sent up a petition that he might be saved. Awful was the thought that he might in a few minutes receive the sentence ‘Depart ye wicked into everlasting fire.’ I hope that he was prepared to die, but I am very doubtful—he wouldn’t have a minister with him.”

Between Jackson’s Christianity and today’s radical Islam, the gulf is unbridgeable.

Though the British blundered eternally in the burning of Joan, they behaved wisely with Napoleon. Following his retreat from Russia, the Corsican who had set Europe ablaze and was responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands was sent into exile on Elba. When he escaped and raised an army to meet Wellington at Waterloo and was defeated, Napoleon was not hanged, but exiled again, to St. Helena. He died a natural death, if one does not credit reports that he was slowly poisoned with arsenic.

The body of Napoleon rests in the church at Les Invalides. And because the British did not execute their emperor, France and Britain could come together to resist the German invasion of 1914.

Compare that British act of magnanimity with later British folly. On Easter Monday 1916, 2,000 rebels seized the General Post Office in Dublin and other public buildings. The conspirators were seen by Britons and many of their own countrymen as traitors, stabbing in the back the Mother Country and British army, in which thousands of their Irish kinsmen had enlisted.

Met by ridicule, facing superior firepower, the rebels capitulated in a week. Had their leaders been sentenced to long prison terms, the incident would have been over. But at this point, the British government committed what many consider its greatest blunder in seven centuries of dealing with Ireland. Fifteen rebels, including cultural nationalist Patrick Pearse and labor leader James Connolly, were sent before firing squads, creating 15 martyrs for Irish independence to be immortalized by Yeats:

I write it out in a verse—
MacDonagh and MacBride
And Connolly and Pearse
Now and in time to be,
Wherever green is worn,
Are changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.

With the execution of the rebels of the Easter Rising, the Home Rule Party of John Redmond that supported the war effort and urged Irishmen to enlist was finished, replaced in Irish hearts by Sinn Fein, the party of independence. The executions had elevated the bungling conspirators into the pantheon of Irish freedom fighters.

Within months of the war’s end, the rebellion that would tear Ireland forever from England was underway. “In victory, magnanimity,” said Churchill, who did not always practice what he preached. ■