

# THE NATION'S PULSE



## REPUBLICANS ARE STUPID

by Fred Barnes

Maybe the dumbest thing said about the 1986 election was that the spate of negative ads on television turned off the voters and drove down turnout to the lowest point in four decades, a measly 37.3 percent of eligible voters. On the contrary, attack ads were practically all there was in the campaign to keep up voters' interest. Imagine how low the turnout in Wisconsin might have dipped if Republican Senator Bob Kasten hadn't gone on the air with a commercial accusing Democrat Ed Garvey of creative bookkeeping as director of the National Football League Players Association, and if Garvey hadn't fired back with an ad consisting of testimonials on his behalf by NFL veterans. The NFL dispute was certainly weightier than much of the campaign dialogue in Wisconsin, which included such bones of contention as Kasten's refusal to hold a joint press conference after a debate with Garvey, the hiring by Garveyites of a gumshoe to investigate Kasten, and Ralph Nader's heroic and high-toned entry into the campaign with the charge that Kasten, once arrested for drunk driving, needed to be "rehabilitated," not re-elected. Compared to this stuff, the thirty-second spots were downright Socratic.

The next dumbest thing said about the campaign was that it was a victory for conservatives and Republicans. True, it wasn't a big setback for the right. The new ideological baseline in American politics established by Ronald Reagan was confirmed once again in the election. America is conservative, but we knew that already. Since voters aren't veering to the left, liberals and Democrats didn't offer up a fresh vision of new spending programs (except for more costly farm subsidies) and an expanded federal government. These people are not suicidal, after all. They craved control of the Senate and did what it took to achieve that. For Republicans, the pain of losing the Senate was eased a bit by

gains in governorships. Only a bit, though. In a moment of unwarranted optimism, Donald Regan, the White House chief of staff, noted that the twenty-four states with GOP governors have 270 electoral votes. Big deal. This does not assure a Republican presidential win in 1988. Democrats held the governorships in states with many more than 270 electoral votes in 1980 and 1984, and what good did it do them? Frankly, I was most impressed with the GOP's success in holding down House losses to five. Still, it's hard for Republicans to claim that the eighty-one-vote margin now held by Democrats in the House (258-177) represents a big victory for the GOP. It could have been worse, I admit, but a victory it ain't.

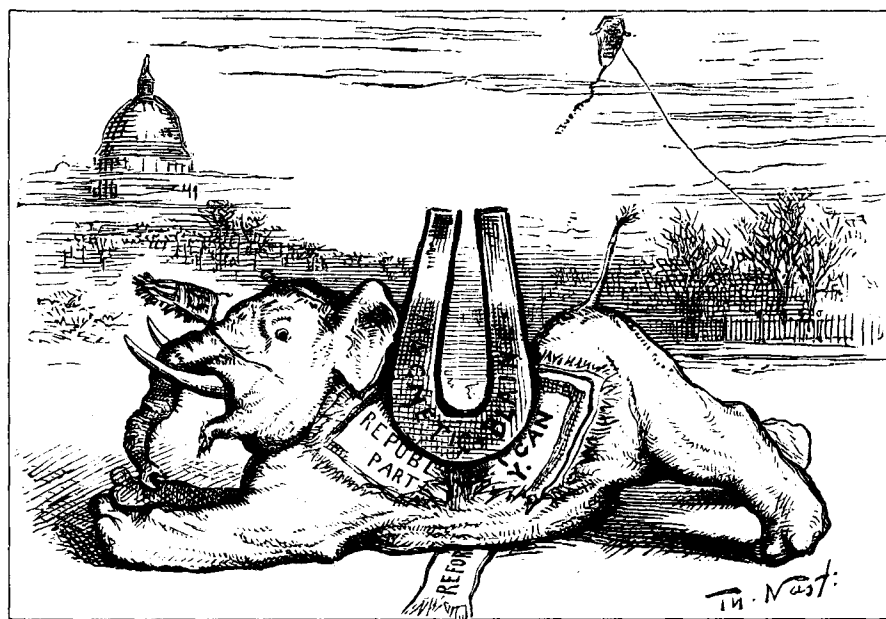
The sad fact of life for Republicans is that Democrats are far better at politics than they are—smarter, quicker on their feet, more flexible, more personally appealing, and I could go on. The conservative trend in America has endured for nearly two decades, and yet the party of welfarism and isolationism hasn't been driven into minority status. Why not? Democrats simply adjust well to whatever political situation faces them. They learn the correct political lessons, sometimes the hard way. Walter Mondale ran on a platform

of more taxes and a bigger government in 1984, and lost ignominiously. Democrats weren't about to copy him in 1986.

They made two important decisions in 1985 that aided them immeasurably in the election. One was to give up the idea of trying to impose a tax increase on Reagan. The other was to go along with Reagan's plan for tax reform, though many Democrats had a visceral dislike for dropping the top rate on individual income to 28 percent. In passing tax reform over the objection of the corporate class, Republicans thought they were inoculating themselves against the charge that they represent big business instead of the people. But it turned out that Democrats did the inoculating, freeing themselves from the charge that they are high taxers. And tax reform, rather than being a realigning issue for Republicans, was "the dog that didn't bark" in the 1986 campaign, as Jeffrey Bell of Citizens for America has aptly put it. Look at the House race in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, where Republican Marc Holtzman spent \$1 million against incumbent Democrat Paul Kanjorski. Holtzman rattled Kanjorski with a TV spot saying the congressman had backed "the Democratic tax increase of 1986." This was based on Kanjorski's vote for a budget resolution that called for unspecified new revenues. Since he'd voted for tax

reform, Kanjorski had a terrific response. He aired an ad that showed both himself and Reagan, and said: Come on, Marc, the President and I were lowering tax rates in 1986, not raising them. Kanjorski won 71-29 percent.

The most resourceful Democrat of all was Terry Sanford of North Carolina. He saw what happened to James Hunt in the 1984 Senate race, namely that Senator Jesse Helms linked Hunt to the liberal leadership of the national Democratic party. Sanford campaigned *against* the national party. And when Republican James Broyhill revived the old charge that Sanford, as governor in 1961, had imposed a "food tax," Sanford had a strong comeback. He called it a "school tax," saying the money went to improve schools. He thus aligned himself with the ever-popular education reform movement. Better still, Sanford outflanked Broyhill on the supply side. He blamed Broyhill in a TV ad for having voted for "the biggest tax increase in American history" in 1982. The ad worked wonders, mainly because the charge was true. Sanford, a liberal by North Carolina standards, won, and he did it without trying to make those hardy perennials of Democratic campaigns, compassion and giveaway programs, the focal point of the election.



Republicans are stupid. They are always looking for some gimmick to help them win elections. This year, the gimmicks were coattails, technology, and two frivolous issues (drugs and terrorism). For years now, Republicans have failed to understand that it doesn't work to use motherhood issues against Democrats. Economic and national security issues often work, but it's not credible to suggest that Democrats are soft on drug traffickers and terrorists. Democrats only had to list the number of antidrug and antiterrorist bills they'd sponsored. Senator Alan Cranston of California ran an ad consisting entirely of the names of antidrug bills he'd backed. In 1970, Republicans tried the

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same tack with the motherhood issue of that era, crime. They said Democrats were soft on criminals. This flopped once Democratic candidates began presenting TV spots of themselves riding in police cars. There was a lesson for Republicans in the 1970 experience, but they didn't learn it.

Nor have their minds cleared on the subject of presidential coattails. Eisenhower didn't have them, Nixon didn't, but Republicans insisted Reagan would in 1986. For heaven's sake, why? Why would he pull Republicans through this year, when he wasn't on the ballot, after having failed to do that in 1984, when he was on the ballot? Anyone who can tie a shoe ought to be able to figure out that Reagan wouldn't be much help at midterm time. Besides, it's slightly insulting to voters to be told, as Reagan and other Republicans did, that they'd really be voting for the President one final time by backing Senator Mark Andrews of North Dakota or Ed Zschau in California, or some other Republican. Voters, who like to think they can make up their own minds, not only saw through this tackiness but prided themselves on seeing through it.

Republicans made a critical mistake in not turning the Senate races into a national referendum on Reagan's conservative policies. By failing to do so, they left many of their candidates exposed. A half-dozen or more of them had won in 1980 solely because the conservative mood, exacerbated by the Carter presidency, was at high tide. Left to their own devices, they would have lost in 1980. Left to their own devices in 1986, they did lose.

Now, I concede that it would have been difficult to nationalize the campaign even if Reagan & Co. had tried early on. Democrats weren't about to get in a fight with Reagan. After the Iceland summit, the President did seek to inject the Strategic Defense Initiative, suddenly more popular than ever, as a cutting-edge issue. It didn't cut. The reason was that Democrats simply said they were for Star Wars, too. And there wasn't enough time left before election day to force the Democrats to flesh out their position. Were they only for laboratory research, which is the Gorbachev position, or did they favor testing and deployment, the Reagan position? I suspect many of these Democrats would be willing to settle for research alone, but they weren't compelled to make this crucial distinction. Had Republicans begun earlier—last summer, say—to concentrate the campaign on Star Wars, they might have made Democrats come clean. Instead, they did too little, too late. They stressed expensive technolo-

gy—taped phone messages to voters from the President, tracking polls, and so on—over issues. Someday, they'll learn that good technology can't match good issues or good candidates, and never will.

Given their thickheadedness, Republicans may fall for all the pious condemnations of negative ads and miss the real lesson of the 1986 election. No, the lesson is not that negative TV spots

don't work. It's that they do, and you'd better get on the air with them fast. The most effective spots this year were Cranston's against Zschau in California. Cranston was ready the day after the June 3 primary with a commercial attacking Zschau as a flip-flopper. Had Bruce Herschensohn won the primary, Cranston was also ready with an ad attacking him. Over the summer, the Cranston ads pounded away at

Zschau, and the highly vulnerable incumbent opened a wide lead. Zschau balked at going negative, but he finally relented in early September and went with attack spots. Cranston's lead began shrinking, and it continued to shrink week after week. But not enough. Everything Zschau did in the fall couldn't overcome what he hadn't done in the summer. □

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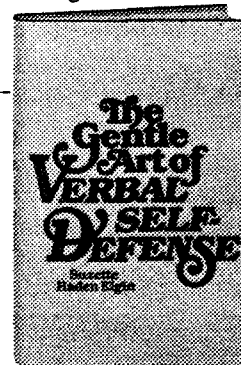
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### About the Author

Psycholinguist Suzette Haden Elgin has presented her innovative self-defense principles in a variety of formats. She has given workshops and seminars all over the U.S., including verbal self-defense sessions for doctors, lawyers, and other professionals. Dr. Elgin has also created a self-defense tape and a training manual for people who teach her self-defense techniques.



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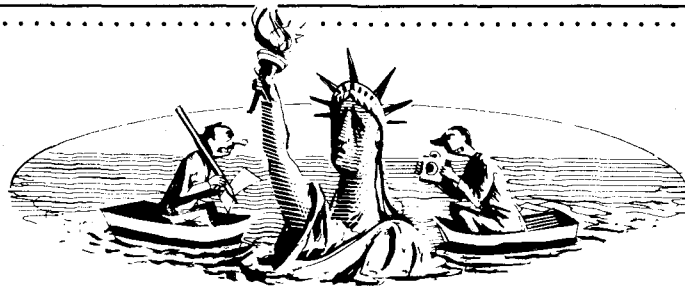
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# PRESSWATCH



## HEROES AND OBJECTS

by Michael Ledeen

### Heroes of the Month:

To Jonathan Yardley for his *Washington Post* article of October 20 on Secretary of Education William Bennett. "Bennett is the best friend higher education now has in public life, because he cares so deeply about educational standards and is in a position to do something about them," Yardley writes, and then adds:

but because he works for Ronald Reagan he is not given a chance. Bennett, like Reagan, is a buzzword: If Reagan does it, it must be wrong, and if Bennett says it, it must be wrong.

As Yardley recognizes, this is part and parcel of the growing intolerance of many of our leading universities to conservative ideas and their advocates. At the same time, American higher education is quite clearly dropping in

quality, becoming more and more obsessed with money, and defaulting on the moral education of our students. Insofar as Bennett is one of the few national figures regularly to lambaste the universities for their shortcomings, he is one of the most hated men on campus.

Full marks to Jonathan Yardley for spelling it out.

To Tom Wicker, for his confession of error in the *New York Times*, entitled "Getting It Straight," in which he listed some of the egregious mistakes he had made in recent months in his *Times* column. It was an honest, good-humored admission of fallibility from which many of our overstuffed columnists could learn, and we salute Mr. Wicker for his candor and his humanity.

### The Mystery of the Soviet Stockpiles

Shirley Christian broke the story in the *New York Times* several days earlier, but it remained to Joanne Omang of the *Washington Post* to put the matter

into political context on October 22 (there's a lesson there: if you want information, read the *Times*, if you want to know what Washingtonians are likely to try to make of it, read the *Post*). The story was the discovery of "ten tons of arms" in Chile. These weapons and ammunition were hidden away in northern Chile, and were valued at more than \$10 million.

Miss Omang pronounced that while it is clear from these discoveries that the Soviet Union and Cuba are working hard to destabilize Chile, they have now "undermined some of Pinochet's critics and strengthened his 13-year-old government, at least temporarily . . ."

This is the sort of remark that passes for wisdom at the *Post*, which is always more interested in the "who's winning, who's losing" side of things than in the significance of events. But there's a real question in there. You may recall that when Israel invaded Lebanon four long years ago, the Israelis found an enormous stockpile of weapons, far more than the PLO could possibly have used in a war against Israel. Intelligence analysts wondered why, and several answers were provided:

- Maybe it's a sign of status in the Middle East to have lots of weapons (a sort of military potlatch), so the PLO built up a treasure-trove.

- Maybe the PLO were offered lots and lots of weapons, and couldn't say no (unlikely, to be sure, since they seem to have paid for their weapons).

- Maybe it's part of a Soviet plan of advance stockpiling of weapons in various theatres around the world, in the event they or their surrogates have to fight a major engagement.

The same questions can be raised about the Chilean case. Why so very many weapons and shells and mortars? For whom were they intended? I don't know the answer, but it's a great question that deserves serious consideration.

### Who is the Mysterious Mr. Shevardnadze?

The new batch of Soviet leaders is getting a good press in these parts, but one

could hope for a bit more information about them. You might have thought our journalists would learn from their shortcomings during the Andropov affair, when they waxed rhapsodic about the "moderation" of the former KGB chief, crediting him with a taste for White Horse Scotch and American jazz, fluency in English, and closet liberalism. Overlooked in the general rush to praise the new dictator was his background as butcher of Budapest. Similar oversights are with us today, most notably in the case of the new Soviet foreign minister, Eduard Shevardnadze. Comrade Shevardnadze was Minister of the Department of the Interior from 1965-1972, and then sent to become First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Georgia. In both capacities he was in charge of "anti-corruption" campaigns, the sort of thing that Gorbachev is waging nowadays, and for which he is receiving near-universal praise.

You will not read much about Shevardnadze's anti-corruption campaign in Georgia if you stick to the American press; in order to get decent details, it's necessary to lay your hands on *samizdat* publications. I have found a particularly interesting one, consisting of the signed confession of Yuri Tsirekidze, who was convicted in April 1973 of "extensive bodily injury leading to fatal consequences" and "refusing help to a suffering person." These criminal acts were carried out in the Investigatory Detention Center in Tbilisi, Georgia.

Tsirekidze's actions were part of a vast purge carried out under the supervision of Shevardnadze: in the two years preceding the trial of Tsirekidze, some 25,000 persons were arrested in Georgia, of whom 9,500 were Party members, and 7,000 were members of the youth organization, the Komsomol. It's almost impossible to describe the confession, so I will provide lengthy excerpts. The translation was done by Soviet émigrés living in New York City. I am grateful to Yuri Yarim-Agaev, executive director of the Center for Democracy in New York, for his help in ob-

