

Thomas Mallon

RHODE SHOW

Rhode Island's senatorial race pitted doddering Claiborne Pell against perky Claudine Schneider. It offered the voter New Age rhetoric in old age homes, lots of ethnic food, and a gaggle of wayward Kennedys—and confirmed that, in an era of vapid politics, age still comes before beauty.

This is by no means a done deal," says Rick Gureghian. "I think these polls can move." He means downward, but five days before the election, the campaign staff of Senator Claiborne Pell hardly seem worried. Their headquarters, here in Providence, Rhode Island, on the fourth floor of the converted Davol rubber-goods factory, are busy, but hardly frantic. Gureghian, the press man, is merely making the don't-tempt-the-gods remarks required of frontrunners. Such Grecian caution is perhaps in order, since Gureghian, like Pell's campaign manager, Mary Beth Cahill, used to work for Michael Dukakis—"in the good days," he tells me.

Claiborne Pell is almost 72 years old, and has served Rhode Island in the Senate since 1961. Except for his 1972 race against John Chafee, another of the state's disappearing Brahmins, his campaigns have been walk-throughs. This one was supposed to be different. The Republicans have nominated Claudine Schneider, a popular five-term congresswoman from the western part of the state. Still only 43, she is pro-choice, conspicuously pro-environment, and except for a bit of Republican parsimony, dependably liberal. (In 1987 she voted against President Reagan more frequently than any other Republican member of the House.) The state, while overwhelmingly Democratic, can be generous with ticket splitting (Chafee made it to the other Senate seat in 1976), so early this year Schneider was regarded as the kind of Republican with a good shot at moving up.

But it is proving to be tricky. Pell, who speaks in a soft, aristocratic slur, a millionaire who wears worn-out suits, is an institution, someone seen as simultaneously befuddled and effective. He fathered the Basic Educational Op-

portunity Grants in 1972, "the cornerstone of federal aid to students," as Congressional Quarterly's *Politics in America* puts it. They were officially rechristened Pell Grants in 1980, and since then have been a continuing advertisement of his name. About 160,000 Rhode Islanders have had them to date.

If Schneider could find a way to do what Mondale couldn't in 1984—gently suggest that the nice old man is past it—it was thought she might pull off the trick. During a debate on August 1, she asked Pell to name the last thing he'd done for Rhode Island, and he answered: "I couldn't give you a specific answer. My memory's not as good as it should be." (He later said he thought she was talking about legislation targeted toward individuals, such as a bill to help resolve someone's immigration status.) This could have been her breakthrough, but Iraq invaded Kuwait the next day and Pell, as chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, had the heaven-sent photo oppor-

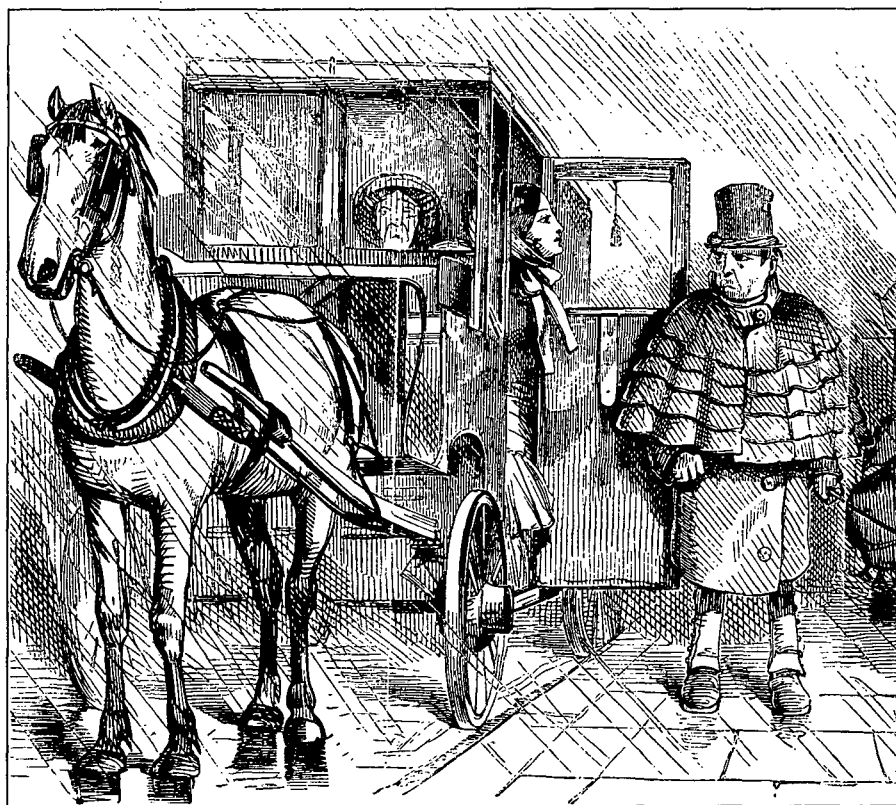
tunity to lead a congressional delegation to the Middle East. To no one's surprise, he has since found little time to debate Schneider, and she has slipped way behind in the polls. She's hired David Garth, and he's got Bob Squier, but what was supposed to be a hard-fought, if unideological, contest has turned out to be like many of his past races. Frustrated, Schneider has let slip a crack about the senator's being "out of it," but that hasn't played well. "First they were nice, then they were subtly negative, then they were negative, and now they're nice again," says Gureghian, a heavyset smoker who cast his first vote for McGovern and who, for all his ability to talk to you in press releases (Pell has been "a leader on women's and family issues in the Senate"), would probably relish a bare-knuckles fight with this sparkly woman who looks different in each picture; who was born in the steel town of Clairton, Pennsylvania, but whose conversation has a hint of New Age crys-

tal; and who has gone so far as to endorse those tapes pushed on late-night TV by Tony Robbins, the coiffed Cro-Magnon of mail-order motivation.

As far ahead as Pell seems to be on November 1, it probably *isn't* quite a done deal. No one knows for sure just how disgusted the budget fiasco has left people feeling, or whom they'll take it out on. The country could be at war by Tuesday, and Claudine Schneider has energy to burn. So the Pell strategy is, rather like the man, slow and steady. Today they've had him shaking hands at a UPS shift change and going to Blue Cross-Blue Shield at lunchtime. In a little while, he'll be getting ready for two evening fundraisers (one a "high-dollar" affair, the other a "low-dollar" one, according to Gureghian) on the same floor of the Biltmore Hotel in Providence.

At 6:00 p.m., in a room around the corner from the Bacchante Room (which, if one judges by the size of the shrimp, must be the high-dollar affair), Pell is holding a quick press conference with Sen. George Mitchell, the majority leader, and some candidates lower down the state Democratic ticket. In his shy, seigneurial way, Pell makes sure that Kathleen Connell, the secretary of state, comes up to "bask in these wonderful TV cameras," before he introduces Mitchell as someone who would make a "wonderful President of the United States."

Mitchell proceeds to show, instantly, why he would be no such thing. He speaks in the soothing, excessively sane way of a bereavement counselor. He supposedly does harbor presidential ambitions, and it is not beyond possibility that he will become the final pod-candidate for the Democrats, the terminal case of the progressive anemia that has afflicted their presidential offerings since McGovern. He talks up the Pell Grants, and says that their creator "has conducted himself with



Thomas Mallon's new novel, *Aurora 7*, will be published in January by Ticknor & Fields.

dignity and honor in a manner that has earned him the respect of every member of the Senate, Democrat and Republican." Pell, who looks like a geriatric boy, clenching and clasping his hands, says, "You make me feel very humble." He probably even means it. The secretary of state continues the tribute to his manners, noting the dignity with which he's conducted this race, even though it's been a tough one. The race, in fact, has not been tough, and the implication, that Schneider has been undignified, isn't true either, but the Democrats, who love *noblesse oblige* with a fervor beyond anything Republicans can summon, are reveling in the opportunity to gaze upon Pell as a gentle, stammering FDR.

Mitchell takes a question on the just-past budget crisis. "I'm glad it's over," he says to needlessly hearty laughter. He gets some applause when he says, "It's time the Republicans stopped soaking the middle class," and he follows that up with some sarcasm about the President's "passionate commitment" to the rich, but there is a kind of mad decorum to his thumping of these old party tubs, as if Julie Andrews were attempting to do Ethel Merman's old act.

When it's over, Pell shuffles out of the room behind Mitchell, saying—more patrician modesty—"I'll take one percent." Out in the hall, a kid in a suit, the head of Youth for Pell, says, "That was nice, huh?" to a TV reporter, before engaging some other guys, including Scott Wolf, the young not-much-of-a-chance candidate for Congress in the 1st district, in a little chatter about what a terrific guy Pell is.

The kid is Patrick Kennedy, Teddy's son, almost the youngest of the second Kennedy wave, that *tsunami* of new and future office holders. Born in 1967, Patrick is already a state rep in the Rhode Island General Assembly, from a little district up by the state house itself. Rhode Island is the small neighboring estate that the Kennedys have leased for a family baby short-changed by political primogeniture, and it is probably safe to say that few state assembly campaigns have been conducted at a higher per capita cost than was his first one back in 1988.

He is actually a nice boy; perhaps the friars of Providence College, where he went to school, put an extra coat of manners on him. He has his mother's eyes instead of the cold ones of the Kennedy males. He displays a trace of his uncles' nervous nodding, but whether this is a matter of genetic encoding or a characteristic acquired from watching videos of the republic's longest family home movie, it's difficult to say.

He stands outside the Bacchante Room, where the high-dollar fund-

raiser has begun, and talks up Senator Pell to me at a length beyond the call of duty, showing an awareness of the statistic Rhode Island politicians use to focus themselves the way an alcoholic uses the serenity prayer: the state is second in the nation in its percentage of senior citizens. "There's no one who's done more for the elderly than Pell," he asserts. "You know the COLAs? That's Senator Pell." But he'll be good for young people, too. When it comes to possible war in the Persian Gulf (where "a lot of kids from my college in the ROTC program" have gone to

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serve), Pell is a good bet because "he knows the mistakes from last time," like the Tonkin Gulf resolution.

As for the race against Schneider, Patrick offers some post-modern pol-speak ("She failed to articulate her own campaign, her own message") and the standard tut-tutting about how she "went negative." The Democratic algebra for this particular contest is clear: multiplying a negative by a negative will yield a positive. Or, more simply, make people think she's acting like a bitch, and the aging gentleman will catch an armful of boomeranged ballots.

Rhode Island's chief airport, in Warwick, is named for Theodore Green, who stayed in the Senate to a much riper age than Pell has attained. It has a fancy Briefing Room with soundproof walls and rows of swivel chairs. But the impending Friday-morning arrival of Bob Dole, who'll be campaigning today for Schneider, isn't filling them. A few minutes before things are supposed to start I'm alone in the room with Jody McPhillips of the *Providence Journal*. She talks to me about Schneider's image, and about how impressed her editor was by all the bouncing energy Claudine displayed when she announced her candidacy—on Valentine's Day. "She's 43 years old," McPhillips says she told him. "What the hell's she jumping up and down for?"

By the time Schneider and Dole arrive, the number of press has swelled to five or six. "Good morning! Afternoon! What is it?" chirps Claudine, who does at this first glance promise an exhausting perkiness. The suit she has on is blazing red, but it's cut along dress-for-success lines, a strategic

change, according to McPhillips, from the kookier outfits toward which she's more naturally inclined. Schneider announces the day's schedule and then Dole takes over for a while, saying this is still a "winnable seat" in a "volatile state." He says he's happy to respond to any questions, "except about the Red Cross." This joking reference to his wife's new job makes one wonder if Schneider won't be replacing her as secretary of labor, a reward for going up against Pell.

Schneider stresses her independence and compliments the state's voters on

theirs, noting that she ran ahead of Reagan here in '84. "I have had ten years of sticking to my guns," she says, and Dole promises it will be all right with him if, when she gets to the Senate, they don't always agree. The party needs diversity. He suspects, however, that as Republican leader he'll "be visiting with Claudine from time to time." What President Bush might call the Woman Thing plays well between Schneider and Dole, who brings up Nancy Kassebaum and notes: "I serve with two powerful women, one in the Senate and one at home." Schneider, down in polls of her own sex, contrives to make one comment "as a woman" and to answer a female reporter's question "woman to woman." A softball query to Dole, about how he would feel working with as many as five women in the Senate, a (slim) possibility after this election, is a plant: the questioner is really Schneider's field director.

Dole says he doesn't "run around attacking [his] colleagues in the Senate," and when he's asked what's wrong with Pell, the best he can come up with isn't much better than what Schneider has. You have to "look down the road ten, fifteen, twenty years."

It's been years since New York cab drivers had much to say to their passengers, but Rhode Island ones carry on the tradition of pontifical chatter. "I don't like negative campaigning," says Doug. "It turns me off." (A moment before, when I told him I wasn't sure of the address of the Cranston Senior Services center, at which I'm next supposed to find Schneider, this same sensitive soul said, "We'll find her. Just look for a tall, ugly broad.") Doug is not politically uninformed, and one gets the feeling that

he now knows what, as far as this particular race goes, the Democrats want him to know—that he is supposed to dislike Schneider's negative campaigning.

So is he voting for Pell? Not necessarily, but he's leaning that way. He didn't like Bush's original tax proposal this season, and he inveighs against "millionaires" with gusto George Mitchell should study. But he can still make a pretty even-handed assessment of the candidates. Schneider, if no beauty, is "a nice person," and he thinks she's done "a lot of good work." He also buys into one of her arguments about Pell. He "could care less about the Foreign Relations Committee," and isn't sure Pell's "done much for the state of Rhode Island in the past six years," which is Schneider's point exactly: she'll try to get on the Commerce Committee to correct that. In New York, Alfonse D'Amato is happy to be called the "pothole senator" and leave the statesmanship to Moynihan. Schneider is in fact something of a conceptualist herself, but this committee-assignment argument is one of the few wedges she has available to drive between Pell and the voters, and over the next few days she'll push on it repeatedly.

But Pell fixes potholes, too. "I've never heard of him refusing to help someone," says Doug. "I think he's a decent man, an honest man." Schneider's chief hope when Doug goes to vote is his concern that Pell "may have outlived his usefulness."

He refers to Bruce Sundlun, the Democratic candidate for governor, as "Bruce," and tells me about campaign advice he's given him between Providence and the airport. Doug has had them all in his cab, and talking with him is a reminder of how funny federalism can be. Rhode Island Senate races are fought in a state that's more like a mid-sized city, where the candidates spend each campaign tripping over one another, and where the only way to take things is personally.

"There are no strangers here," says the sign inside the Cranston Senior Services center. "Only friends we haven't met yet." At 11:00 a.m. on Friday folks at the center are waiting to meet Claudine, who will try to meet every one of them. The magic-markered schedule of activities (Billiards, Oil Painting, Ceramics, Reminiscing with Christine, Exercise with Ida, Hi-Lo Jack) makes the seniors' days seem as fully empty as the round of factory gates, shopping centers, and fundraisers now filling Schneider's. She arrives with Dole and is greeted by "Ms. Senior Sweetheart of Cranston, R.I., 1991," who wears

a purple dress, gray boots, and a tiara. The queen's proud consort tells me his wife was crowned in a regular pageant, in which her talent was singing, and that she has a year of scheduled appearances, just like Miss America.

"It's very close, so spread the word," says Claudine to a woman whose hand she shakes before bopping into a big room and joining a line of tap dancers. She gets a lot of applause, and I'm reminded of the little heel-bouncing imitation of her that Patrick Kennedy did for me last night outside the Bacchante Room. "I want you to meet Senator Dole, who's come to help campaign for me," she says in the over-explanatory way one uses with the very young. But if this place, its Halloween decorations still up, seems to infantilize the seniors, it also seems to humanize the politicians. Dole is posing with the old girls, squeezing and teasing them into photos. He seems to experience the whole thing less as the practice of politics than as a refuge from it. You wonder how he could have failed in New Hampshire.

To the tune of "Music, Music, Music" Claudine, who is in fact rather attractive, sits and chats and bops up again, clasping both hands of the ladies a head or two shorter than she is. She and Dole proceed to the Adult Day Care section and eventually upstairs, where the minority leader tells some exercisers that he uses his treadmill twenty-five minutes each day; Claudine, whose expression is never under 100 watts, determinedly connecting with everybody every second, says she's willing to join him on the treadmill of the Senate. I'm having trouble hearing in here, with the windows open and the traffic passing, and I wonder how people with three or four decades on me are managing. But Dole and Schneider are clearly making contact. "I recognize good people and good candidates when I see them," he says, proceeding to turn the Age Thing, for a moment, to Claudine's advantage: she's young and aggressive and will take care of their children and grandchildren, he insists. You wonder why she doesn't take a risk with the issue herself. The *Kansas City Star* reporter who's here following Dole tells me he's seen Pell dozing off in committee meetings. Why not bring that up with these old folks, whose perceptions of aging are likely to be a good deal less sentimental than those of Youth for Pell? Besides, what's she got to lose?

After a stop in the painting and ceramics room, Schneider says she's ready to get the show on the road. Before she can get out she greets a reporter ("I was so thrilled to get the *Warwick Beacon* endorsement") and responds to my question about one of

the very few graspable differences between herself and the incumbent: she voted against Moynihan's Social Security proposal and Pell voted for it, "without doing his homework," she says, because it was "politically expedient." But she doesn't expect it to come up again in the next Congress, so as gunpowder available for blasting open this race, it's pretty wet by now.

And she's off. The Senior Sweetheart's husband tells me he thinks

extraterrestrials, and is lucky that Schneider likes astrology, or else there might be a real Flake Factor to overcome. He responds with talk about the exceptional physical and mental feats people can sometimes perform, like reading and retaining a whole page of print in a flash. "I remember John Kennedy had that skill," he says by way of shrewdly chosen example. "I think these areas should be explored."

He gets a laugh by calling the White

Rhode Island is the small neighboring estate that the Kennedys have leased for a family baby shortchanged by political primogeniture.

Claudine "deserves a chance." She's "a worker." But he knows a lot of people will vote for Pell, because, like them, the Senator's been around a long time.

Pell is coming to Cranston, too, for lunch at the Boston Submarine Sandwich Shop, whose Back Room the owner, Joe Pashalian, has made into a kind of noontime forum in which local politicians and commentators give speeches and take questions. It's a TV-writer's dream of a blue-collar setting, although the group around the table probably includes some small businessmen and a professional or two. Pell arrives with his daughter, who tells me that she's all for his running again: "He's got the stamina of a 40-year-old combined with the wisdom of being his age." One admires her loyalty, but the truth is he looks terribly fragile.

He sits down at the long table near the six-decker ovens and the great spread of Armenian cracker bread. One feels there ought to be musical accompaniment—perhaps "What Do the Simple Folk Do?" "Senator, what will you have?" He takes a plate of tuna salad, just tomatoes, no lettuce, and a glass of water—considerably less hearty fare than people usually come here for.

Someone calls the diners to order by pounding a mallet on the podium. Pell gives a short speech after a standing ovation. He talks about a meeting a couple of days ago with President Bush, and how he helped convey the message to "go slow, go easy" in the Persian Gulf. Risking a reminder of his own advancing years, he concludes his remarks by recalling the story of a senator who dreamt he was making a speech on the Senate floor and then awoke to find that he was.

Anna Minicucci, who introduced herself to me as Joe Pashalian's "unpaid publicist" and who is more than a little reminiscent of Rhea Perlman, asks him a question about "human potential." Pell is interested in ESP and

House chief of staff Mr. Say-No-No, and thoughtful attention when he calls for a longer school year. "Some of you may have heard of the Pell Grants," he says, a little like LBJ going into a nursing home and saying, "Perhaps you've heard of Medicare." But he is not all ADA-sponsored boilerplate. There's a kind of intellectual *droit de seigneur* about him, a measure of independence that is also, one supposes, a privilege of age. "I'm sort of sympathetic to it," is his surprising answer about a proposal to make English the official language, though he's glad he's not had to make a decision on it. He's supported bilingual education in the past, but fears that if a child has it for too many years it becomes a crutch. And he was against forgiving Egypt its foreign-aid debt as a reward for its support in the Gulf crisis: there are many recipient countries supportive of the U.S., so how do you choose one and not another? On the Foreign Relations Committee he'd prefer working once more with the "reasonable" Senator Lugar as ranking minority member. Jesse Helms "is just"—he pauses, closes his eyes, shakes his hand near his head while searching for words—"very difficult to deal with." That's the highest pitch of nastiness he'll reach in the campaign.

Arlene Violet, a former Sister of Mercy, served as Rhode Island's attorney general in the mid-1980s. As a lawyer she'd gotten the nickname "Attila the Nun," but a perception of incompetence queered her re-election. Now back in private practice, she is currently filling in for Vincent "Buddy" Cianci, who has put aside his radio talk-show on 920 AM, WHJJ, to run as an independent for mayor of Providence. (Cianci was mayor from 1975 until 1984, when he pleaded no contest to a felony charge of assaulting the man he thought was his wife's lover with a fireplace log. Seventeen individuals associated with his administra-

tion went to jail for corruption. But the billboards in town tell you "He never stopped caring about Providence," and Buddy is now given an almost even shot at regaining his old job.)

Schneider does Violet's radio show from 4:00-5:00. Arlene is sympathetic to her, and uses her buzzsaw accent to fend off hostile callers: "Aaaaar you serious?" she demands of one guy.

The candidate does what pitching she can, along already familiar lines: the gently xenophobic (in a changed world, aging Rhode Islanders could use somebody on a "health-related" committee, not Foreign Relations); the feminist (her "good women's intuition" tells her it's close—and, by the way, asks Arlene, "How many women *aaar* there in the Senate?"); the independent (not every Republican "is cast in the image and likeness of the President"); and the anti-incumbent (she's for a 12-year limit on House terms, and wishes that her "altruistic [sic] belief" in the willingness of voters to get rid of the entrenched when need arises were more frequently borne out by elections).

One caller takes her to task for claiming on "Face the Nation" that she voted to override the President's veto of the civil-rights bill when, in fact, the House never voted at all. She just "misspoke," she explains; she was *prepared* to vote that way if the matter went beyond the Senate. Schneider does seem to have a tendency, beyond the ordinary one of politicians, to claim more credit than she's entitled to for certain initiatives. Clippings containing stories to that effect have even crept into her own campaign press-pak. But it's clear that a number of the hostile calls coming in are Pell-campaign plants: they're too sound-bitten to be otherwise. "Is this what we're to expect from Claudine Schneider in the Senate?" asks one of them, like the last line of an attack ad, in the course of a complaint about her supposedly "going negative." After a couple like these, Claudine and Arlene have a laugh about it. They even seem to recognize one of the voices. "It's fixed," says a sympathetic caller. "We know that," Schneider says gratefully. One wonders if it isn't a bit of karmic comeuppance for her field director's having pretended to be a reporter at the press conference with Dole.

Friday night brings a couple of hundred Democratic faithful, who have ridden behind the party mule from Deal to Frontier to Great Society and through the mostly desert country of the past twenty years, to a big hall in Pawtucket. This is a tired town, with an unusual number of funeral homes, hoping for some new life in the form of an Off-Track Betting parlor, if the

voters approve the relevant referendum on Tuesday.

In front of the state flag, which, when draped against its pole, looks like the Vatican's, Mayor Brian J. Sarault introduces Pell, who thanks him by telling the truth: "You make a much better speech than I do." Unimpressed by any need to show dynamism, Pell rambles on about the nature of compliments: "I often thought it would be fun to announce your own death, sit in the back of the church and see who comes . . ." He refers to the Republicans as "our adversaries," and advises the crowd against complacency with the example of "poor Mr. Bellotti" who lost the primary in Massachusetts to John Silber despite all the polls that said he wouldn't.

The lieutenant governor who follows Pell, Roger Begin, receives loud applause when he takes note of how the Senator never refers to his opponent by name: "that's part of the gentleman of Senator Pell." As the election nears, his *noblesse oblige* is becoming more a holy legend than a mere selling point. The way tonight's speakers go on about the Pell Grants, one would almost think they were golden guineas extracted from the velvet bag of the Senator's personal fortune. It's clear by now that the Democrats think it's ill-willed of Schneider to be campaigning at all.

On Saturday afternoon I decide to catch Schneider at a scheduled campaign stop at the Ann & Hope discount department store in Cumberland, in the northeast corner of the state. The chain, particularly its Warwick branch, is a sort of lucky spot for her, and she's supposed to arrive at three—after appearing at the Almacs supermarket in Bristol; the First Congregational Church bazaar/lunch, also in Bristol; an Episcopal church in Woonsocket; and a high-school football game in North Smithfield.

The Cumberland Ann & Hope is less a discount store than a sort of literal factory outlet: the chain uses the name of the old textile mill in which the Cumberland branch is located. But unlike Pell's headquarters in the old Davol plant, this is no piece of boutique architectural restoration. The store was simply thrown into the vast old structure, with pipes and ducts and electrical tape above your head wherever you walk. A little conveyor belt, adding to the industrial effect, takes your shopping cart from the first floor to the basement while you use a flight of stairs. The current decorations—huge red-white-and-blue signs shaped like candidates' rosettes, proclaiming "Unbeatable Values"—seem just the right

backdrop for the challenger's appearance.

But by 3:30 there's no sign of her, so I call the headquarters in Warwick. She's been delayed in East Providence, I'm told. But I thought she was com-

schedule has once more traveled with the candidate, into another dimension.

But eventually a car pulls up carrying Mrs. Nenet Cmarada, "Claudine's Mom," as her nametag says, along with Andrew Oser, a friend from Wash-

A softball query to Dole, about how he would feel working with as many as five women in the Senate, is a plant: the questioner is really Schneider's field director.

ing from North Smithfield. The aide on the other end of the phone doesn't know about that. She says the schedule has been shaky because it had to be drawn up in such a rush: they didn't know when Claudine would be allowed to escape Washington and the budget crisis. She says, twice, that the schedule "travels with" the candidate in her car; the phrase sounds like a metaphorical feat, effect backflipping over cause. But if I'd like I can probably catch her at the St. Joseph Veterans Association supper, up in Woonsocket, sometime between 6:30 and 7:00.

Woonsocket has a heavy French-Canadian population; today's local paper carries an ad for the state-legislative campaign of Rene Menard, chaired by Roger Valois. Now, a little before 6:00 on a Saturday evening, a few Saint Joseph veterans are outside their cinderblock hall, drinking beer and frying the steaks for tonight's supper. They tell me they don't know anything about Claudine Schneider showing up tonight, though she was here twice in the past week or so, for two different benefits. They let me hang around as dinner gets prepared and then underway, and I assume the

ington who's helping in the campaign. Mom has already been in Warwick and Lincoln and East Providence today, though here in Woonsocket she's in her most effective venue: a Belgian native, she's made lots of phone calls in French to the locals. A lively woman who's a great deal more youthful than Clairborne Pell, she tells me that this stuff about negative campaigning is nonsense. Claudine is "clean-living . . . a clean person." She wouldn't do that, and besides, "she and Mr. Pell were friends all the past ten years she's been in Washington." Washington has been her daughter's big problem. Being stuck there has put her under "a lot of pressure and stress. It's been a very difficult time for her, very frustrating."

Daughter arrives, in a dark dress and a long string of pearls, and plunges into the roomful of tables, greeting the diners with her usual pitch. "It's a very close race," she says, putting her hands on the backs of their chairs. "Don't cut my Social Security," one of them tells her to the whole table's laughter. "If you cut my Security, forget it."

"Not me!" says Claudine.

She's schmoozing as fast as she can. She was supposed to have left here before she even arrived. It's 7:20 now and she goes from table to table under the

blue, green, and pink ceiling lights as the tape plays "Sixteen Candles." One guy tells her he's a "Democrat, straight through."

"I thought those days were behind us," says Schneider, who here in Rhode Island likes to stress the supposedly declining significance of parties.

"I'm a hard man to kill," he responds.

She gets serious. "I'm sorry he wants to vote for the party . . ."

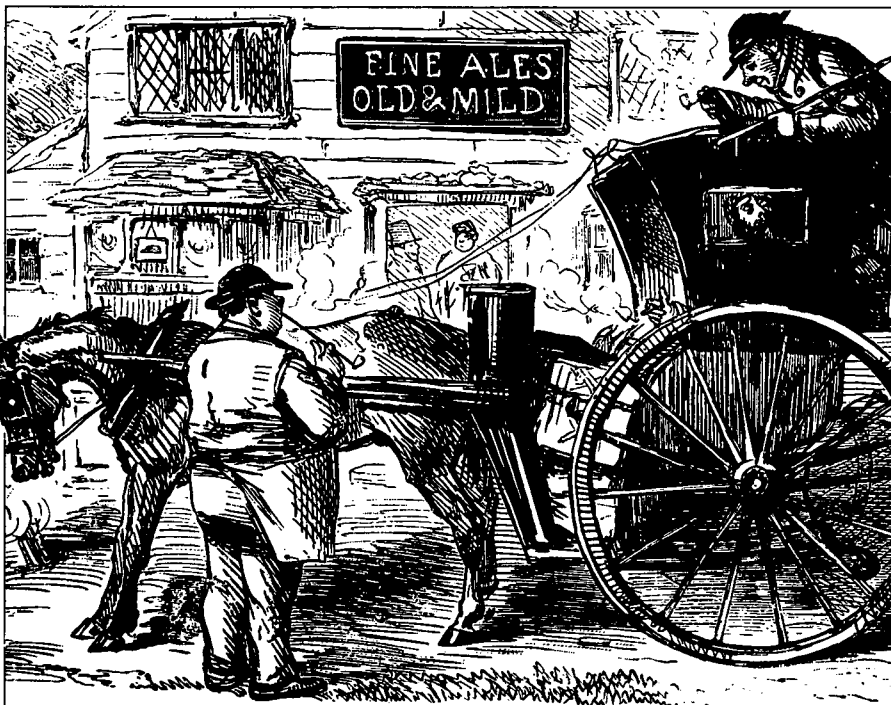
"I'm only pullin' your leg."

It's time to see massive turnovers in the Congress, she says. We all need shaking up. "We're going to be competing with eastern Europe soon," says this daughter of a Czech tailor.

I ask her about something she said to Arlene Violet yesterday, about not wanting to be in politics forever. I tell her I believe she means it, that it's more than just a convenient thing to say when trying to retire a long-time senator. And if that's the case, where does she see herself fifteen years from now, whatever happens Tuesday? "I really don't have a clue," she says, before telling me about the crisis of her adult life: a diagnosis of Hodgkin's disease when she was twenty-five. "That made me stop, look, listen, and think"—and wonder, she says in her New Agey way, about how she might leave the "planet" a better place. Recalling that time, she says: "I had prayed that I would live." She beat the disease, thereby sustaining the relevance of her old feeling that she would have several careers, "maybe four or five" during her lifetime. What they are she doesn't know, but after politics she'll have "earned an easier lifestyle." Meanwhile, "Mr. Pell should feel the same way. He's given thirty good years, and I would think he would welcome some retirement."

She'd probably welcome some sleep. But before the night is over there's still a fundraiser in Slatersville, and then a Portuguese event in Pawtucket and then another in Bristol.

The next morning Claudine Schneider is in her royal-blue Sunday best—a full-skirted dress and a wide-brimmed hat—racing into the Pond Street Memorial Baptist Church on Providence's black south side. It's 11:20 as she arrives for a service she thought started at 11:15, but worse luck—Pastor Virgil Wood actually gets underway at 11:00, and as she stands in the foyer listening to the p.a., she hears him making announcements from the altar. Senator Pell, he tells the congregation, was at a rally in the church parking lot yesterday, and he called the reverend at home last night to thank him for the use of the church's property. Pastor Wood asks the faithful to remember the Pell Grants and "to show the brother



we appreciate what he did." Before marching in, Schneider tosses me a look that combines mock-horror and *oy veh*. But she gamely enters and sits down just a few pews from the front. When Pastor Wood asks visitors to stand up and identify themselves, she goes right ahead, adding in a friendly way that she wishes he hadn't taken sides. Both the congregation and the minister, who must have given up on her coming, seem genuinely tickled, and he responds with light-hearted graciousness: "I can only tell you that some people listen to the pastor, and some people don't." The maroon-robed choir launches into "So Glad You're Here," and she claps along. It's agreed that she'll speak to the congregation at the fellowship after the service, downstairs.

That's a long time to wait to make one more speech, but she seems to enjoy the service, tapping her blue pumps to songs like "Take Me Higher" and "Pass Me Not." Pastor Wood's sermon doesn't just raise the roof; it threatens to pulverize the cinderblock walls. Schneider, who ordinarily makes up in pep whatever she lacks in eloquence, must be feeling like George Mitchell.

But downstairs at fellowship, after a very polite audience gathers in front of the coffee urn and punch bowl, she has the best fifteen minutes I see her display all week. She says that people in this congregation know what it is to be stereotyped, and she hates being stereotyped as a "cold-hearted Republican," not when her party has brought forth such heroes as Abraham Lincoln and . . . She struggles for a second name and is saved by the thought of that progressive environmentalist, Theodore Roosevelt. She talks about her fight against cancer and her "mission on this earth," proclaiming that she knows her "purpose," and praising the "unified power" people can have. She connects solidly with the most attentive audience I will hear her address. Still, I suspect that on Tuesday they will have no trouble voting against this woman they seem to like so much.

The *Providence Sunday Journal* carries an endorsement of Schneider ("Claiborne Pell's significant accomplishments are now largely behind him") and a big curious ad announcing that she has also been endorsed "By Members of Our Nation's Most Distinguished Bar Association—i.e., the cast of *Cheers*." (It's because they "share her vision for the future.") The only real campaign news of the day comes in the form of an afternoon debate among the three candidates for mayor of Providence, during which Buddy Cianci displays his brutal charm against Fred Lippitt, the septuagenar-

ian East Side WASP reformer, and Andrew Annaldo, the sleepy endomorph unaccountably nominated by the Democrats.

Annaldo is actually one of the stars of an evening rally put on by a Democratic ladies' auxiliary at Lombardi's restaurant, a big place way out on

noontime rally for the Democratic ticket, the speakers keep invoking what happened "thirty years ago today" as a motivation for victory "in thirty hours," as Scott Wolf, the not-much-of-a-chance congressional candidate, puts it.

The Democrats will no doubt have a

Pell concludes his remarks by recalling the story of a senator who dreamt he was making a speech on the Senate floor and then awoke to find that he was.

Charles Street in North Providence, past a thinly beaded string of neighborhood bars. Lombardi's actually turns out to be loud, happy, and packed ("I hope you're not taking the count for the fire department," one guy delightedly says to me when he spots my pad), and the crowd seems to be younger than the one that gathered Friday night in Pawtucket. But those are the ones standing. Sitting down at the wedding-banquet tables are the old people, sipping red wine, prepared to vote, and probably dreaming of Boca Raton. For all the noise in this room, one has to wonder why anybody would go into politics up here in Rhode Island: it seems an obsolescent industry, its market dying off as inexorably as newspaper readership.

Annaldo arrives, to the sounds of "Mack the Knife" and an absolutely mystifying show of enthusiasm: "Andrew! Andrew!" There's enough of a crush to make you worry that Senator Pell will be squeezed and broken when he tries to move from the entrance to the microphone. As he makes his way in I ask Mrs. Pell if, after thirty years, she ever gets tired of this stuff. "It's always different," she assures me. I ask her what's different this time. "Possible defeat," she says in a surprisingly spontaneous way.

Her husband makes his speech, drawing attention to the "absolutely nip-and-tuck" mayoral race, another usage whose quaintness the crowd no doubt likes. It seems so him, just as the other day he declared not that the U.S. couldn't be the world's policeman, but rather that it couldn't be its *gendarme*.

Monday, November 5, 1990: Thirty years ago today John F. Kennedy, on his way home to Hyannis to vote, addressed an election-eve rally in what was then called Exchange Place, in front of the Providence City Hall. The rally was large and memorable enough to make Exchange Place seem, several years later, the right spot to be renamed Kennedy Plaza. Now, at a tiny

good day tomorrow, but this attempt at a street rally is an almost morbid exercise in nostalgia. The big blue Teamsters truck parked on the south side of the plaza might contain a gross of respirators. At least, after days of balmy weather, it finally feels like fall, nippy even; Mrs. Pell stands near the platform in a long woollen coat. The outgoing mayor of Providence introduces Jack Reed, another congressional candidate, as honest and "smot," and Reed tells the voters to make it simple for themselves: "Democrat, Democrat, Democrat."

Teddy Kennedy, the main attraction, his complexion alarmingly red, arrives on the platform to cheers, bringing Pell up with him and upstaging the candidate for governor, who's just begun to speak but gives up the notion, saying he "can't think of a greater privilege" than to start talking when the two senators are arriving. He quickly gets off and lets young Patrick Kennedy get on with the introduction of Pell, whose best line is a promise "not to be here thirty years from now."

The elder Kennedy comes on after an introduction by his son and proceeds to mispronounce the name of the gubernatorial candidate who was so privileged to be interrupted by his arrival. But he goes on to give such a hammy, forceful presentation—a lunch-bucket speech at the top of his lungs, almost as body-slammng a performance as Pastor Wood's this time yesterday—that he almost makes you think this is a real event, almost makes you forget that his outdoor audience isn't any larger than what Pastor Wood had inside the snug Pond Street Baptist Church. Before going full-tilt he brings up his mother, Rose, 100 years old up there on the Cape, claiming he chatted with her just this morning about Claiborne Pell. It's a charming bit of blarney that doesn't bear much looking into, perhaps no more than does this senator's reference to his commitment to "minimum standards of decency."

Beyond the massive urban reconstruction going on near the state capitol stands the University of Rhode Island's College of Continuing Education, an unpretentiously inspiring place full of what are called adult learners. Schneider was supposed to arrive at 6:00, at the student center, where people are cramming in a bit of homework and eating vending-machine sandwiches before going upstairs to a night class. "If she don't show up before seven, she ain't gonna meet anybody," says one woman to another out in the hall.

A minute later she's there, looking completely fresh in her red suit, which is draped with an oversized scarf (the telltale kooky touch). She goes from table to table ("It's very close"), handing out Xeroxes of her *Providence Journal* endorsement, striking up and artfully concluding one brief conversation after another. "Hiya, Miss Schneider," says one young woman, as if she's greeting the most popular teacher at the high school. Her mother is working the tables too ("Are you her mother? You're so short!"), until she seems too tired and goes off to the side. Her daughter seems not to be tired at all—is planning, in fact, to get up at five and go greet workers at the Electric Boat factory gate.

But in the early darkness of autumn a sadness comes over the scene, over this talented woman's miscalculated enterprise, which is heading down the drain. "If she could touch everyone in the state . . .," one of her aides says to me, meaning shake every hand. In this duchy it's not so much a fantasy as a near-plausible might-have-been, if not for the budget mess. Only about three-quarters of the way through this stop does she learn that the rules do permit her to get up on the student center's stage and make a speech, and by then it seems too late. The aide doesn't think it's such a hot idea anyway, but I find myself wanting to tell her to go and do it: get up there and go positive and negative simultaneously, like a magnet. Tell them you're one of them, a kid from Clairton who's ambitious, and that there's nothing wrong with that, and if they're here on a Pell Grant, terrific, but they should remember that that money isn't his; it's their parents', and theirs, and it's been taxed out of them like anything else. Think of what Teddy Kennedy could do with this crowd, much less Pastor Wood.

But time is running out. I head back home in the dark, pretty sure she has no chance, that the conventional wisdom is this time wise. It's true that the mammoth construction I'm passing involves changing the course, literally, of two rivers that run through Providence. But while it would be a nice metaphor, I don't think it's going to apply. □

Micah Morrison

THE SWORD AND THE SHIELD

Americans in Saudi Arabia are beginning to worry that the Saudis are using them as a kind of mercenary army. Underground *imams* are warning that the presence of Western forces could undermine Wahabi Islam. And the Saudi leadership is terrified that taking its expensive weaponry out of the warehouses could leave it on the wrong end of a popular revolt. A report from the Gulf.

Saudi Arabia

The flag of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a long sword on a field of green beneath the inscription: *There is no God but Allah and Muhammed is His prophet*. There is not yet an official emblem for Operation Desert Shield, the U.S.-led effort that has put over a quarter of a million soldiers and a vast array of high-tech weaponry into the kingdom, but there are plenty of unofficial ones. Industrious G.I.s immediately began producing T-shirts emblazoned with shields and eagles, F-15s and lightning bolts. One shirt on sale in an aircraft hangar features a scowling, pint-sized Saddam Hussein in a pirate hat, clutching smoking pistols and a "Nuke Israel" flag. It reads: "From the Same Asylum That Brought You Khaddafy Duck . . . Middle East Looney Tunes Presents: Yosemite Saddam!!!"

High spirits will give way to gallows humor if a shooting war starts, but as of this writing the war remains one of troop buildups and rhetorical bluster, a war of words and symbols. But there is a second war of sorts going on, with battle lines that are invisible, for it is a war fought across time, across history and cultures. The desert kingdom is nervous and restless, unhappy not only with the Western presence but with its own rulers. A country not used to domestic dissent is hearing it now, soft but distinct. A country made comfortable—some would say lazy—by oil wealth is now being called on by internal and external forces to display some backbone, some decisiveness.

It is not the Saudi way: the monarchy historically has preferred to place its money on all bets to forestall a heavy loss. And while the future is unclear, it is certain at least that Operation Desert Shield has brought a number of players out of the shadows of silence at home and out of formerly low-key international alliances, players who are

slowly bending, if not changing, the rules of the game.

One sign of change is a modicum of press freedom. In the past, the Western press, with rare exceptions, had not been allowed into the kingdom. In the early days of the invasion, the local press could not even report it in unambiguous terms: it was referred to as "a disturbing episode" in Kuwait. Then King Fahd ibn Abd al-Aziz Al Saud eased local restrictions and reluctantly bowed to the need for the Western press to enter the country to help build international support for Desert Shield. Like many reporters who have covered the Middle East, I was intrigued by the possibility of seeing Saudi Arabia, a country typically portrayed as a xenophobic Islamic theocracy that bars Jews and atheists from its territory; bans alcohol and cinemas, pork and pornography; frowns on unveiled women and forbids all women from driving and

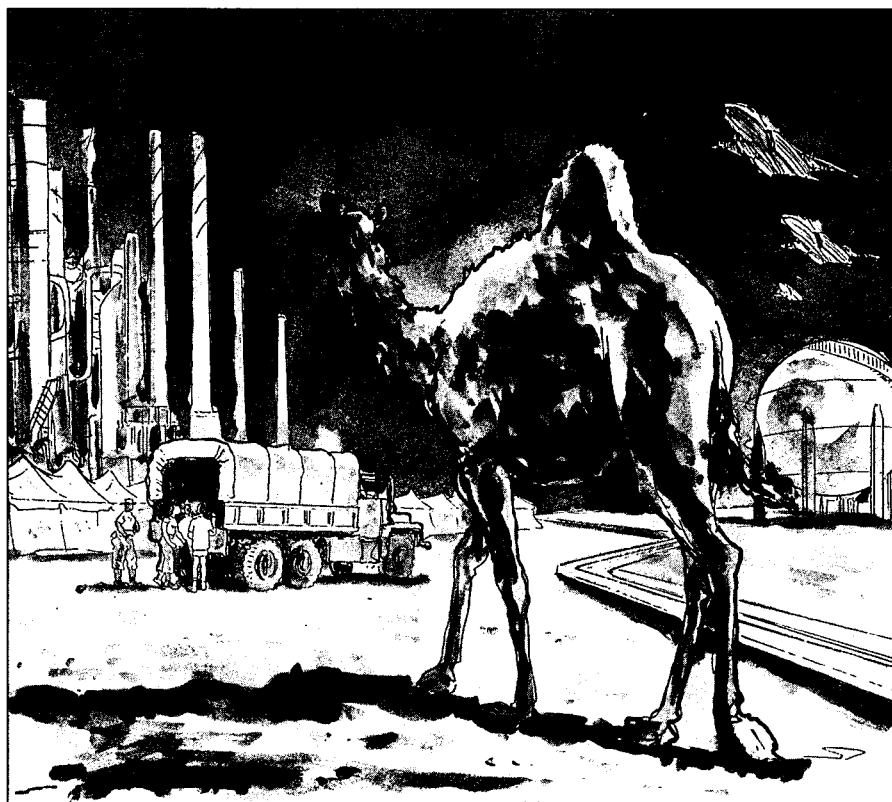
holding most jobs; chops off the hands of thieves and the heads of adulterers; and is awash in a sea of oil wealth. The Saudis allowed several hundred reporters into the Eastern Province, on the Persian Gulf side of the country, to cover the international deployment. I was not one of them, but, after weeks of entreaties at the Saudi Embassy, I managed to slip in by the back door, obtaining a visa for a brief visit to the old Red Sea port of Jeddah. From there I hoped to travel overland to the front.

Jeddah is Saudi Arabia's commercial center and gateway for the *haj*, the pilgrimage to nearby Mecca and Medina that is the duty of every Moslem who can afford it. Long before the city was a place of petro-dollars and high-stakes deals, it had thrived on the pilgrim trade. T. E. Lawrence in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, his account of the Arab revolt against Ottoman power in World War I, described Jeddah as a "white town below a blazing sky," where the noon sun, "like moonlight,

put to sleep the colors. There were only lights and shadows, the white houses and black gaps of streets." Beyond the town was an empty expanse, "the dazzle of league after league of featureless sand, running up to an edge of low hills, faintly suggested in the far away mist of heat." Today, great gleaming blocks of office towers, shopping centers, and apartment complexes, blindingly white by day and embroidered in neon by night, cover much of the sands. Scattered amid the new are reminders of pre-modern Jeddah. Goats are tethered in the shaded alleys between ruined buildings. Cocks crow at dawn, awakened by the muezzin's call to *fajr*, morning prayer. Black-veiled women flit noiselessly through the streets. Lawrence's former home on the Jeddah lagoon, beside a fancy hotel, is a yellowed wreck; Egyptian workers lounge in its broken doorways and root about in the yard. Above it, a neon Kraft Cheese sign blinks in Arabic and English, and around the steamy skyline are other signs of the new Jeddah: Pepsi, Konica, Sony, Sharp, Sanyo.

Mecca, the birthplace of the prophet Muhammed and Islam, was seventy kilometers away—as close as this non-Moslem would ever get. Non-Moslems are barred from the holy city and its environs: a special beltway around the city is popularly known as "the Christian bypass." I had heard that a respected *imam* was preaching against the American presence in Saudi Arabia. Supporters were circulating cassette tapes of his sermons, as the Ayatollah Khomeini's supporters had done in the early days of the revolt against the Shah. I could not go to the Mecca *imam* but I found another, in Jeddah, who agreed to my request for an interview.

That an *imam* would talk frankly with a Western reporter is another small sign of shifting attitudes in the country. The *imam* confirmed that some religious leaders were upset about the deployment. He insisted that Saudi



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