

North Exposure

By John Hood

Senate candidate Oliver North runs hot on populism and cold on character.

WHEN RETIRED Marine Lt. Col. Oliver North announced his candidacy for the U.S. Senate in Virginia on January 26, he didn't hold a press conference in Richmond or a political rally in Roanoke or a fundraiser in Fairfax. He went on *Larry King Live*. "The professional politicians, the insiders, that live in this city are non-responsive to the very real problems that exist out there," North told King and millions of viewers across the country (few of whom will ever have a chance to vote for him). "Quite frankly, I would not be doing this...if I had not been so encouraged by so many people who asked me to do it."

North didn't mention this, but many of those encouraging him to run (and funding his campaign) live in places like Phoenix, San Diego, and Seattle. His national fund-raising letters are simultaneously maudlin and caustic, punching the appropriate hot buttons. A recent missive refers to his 22 years of service in the U.S. Marine Corps, including four years at the National Security Council: "During that time I was concerned with protecting America overseas. Now I would like to volunteer to protect and defend America from those who would try to undermine America from WITHIN."

Some people eat this stuff up. North is "a God-fearing man," contributor Michael Scott of Corpus Christi, Texas, told *The Washington Times*. "He realizes that gov-

ernment is out of control and in trouble." Percy Harris, 71, of Cloudfcroft, New Mexico, told the *Times* that "anyone who can set those dyed-in-the-wool bureaucrats on their heads during that long Iran-Contra mess, and make them look silly, we need very badly." On the strength of numerous small contributions (averaging \$40) from people like Scott and Harris, North had already taken in over \$1.5 million by early February.

With instant celebrity status, access to the national media, and a large data base of people across the country from whom to solicit support, North is vying for more than just a chance to combat Democratic Sen. Chuck Robb in the fall campaign. "North won't just be Virginia's senator, he'll be the senator for an entire branch of conservatives," says Robert Holsworth, chairman of the political science department at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond. North is poised to inherit the mantle of stalwart conservatism currently owned by another Southern politician skilled at national organizing and fund raising. "North

seem as intent on winning Robb's seat as one might have expected. While Republican Sen. John Warner has been critical of North, no high-profile party leaders stepped up to the plate to contest the nomination. Most probably thought North was unbeatable and didn't want to make an enemy for life.

That leaves the unenviable task of challenging North's national political ascendancy to an unlikely first-time politician: Jim Miller, former head of Ronald Reagan's Office of Management and Budget. Miller has some national firepower of his own. Several prominent alumni of the Reagan administration, such as former Secretary of State George Shultz and former Attorney General Ed Meese, have endorsed Miller and attacked North's credibility and *bona fides*. And on February 17, 14 high-ranking military retirees held a press conference in Arlington to denounce North as lacking the character and integrity to serve as senator. "We can do better than Oliver North," said retired Marine Maj. Gen. Ron Beckwith.

is the new Jesse Helms," Holsworth proclaims. Of course, North Carolina's Helms—love him or loathe him—is known for telling the truth. That's not exactly North's claim to fame.

VIRGINIANS AREN'T TOO excited about their choices for Senate this year. The two likely nominees are carrying heavy baggage. North has Iran-Contra and Robb has Miss Virginia, drug parties, and staff members skilled at wiretapping. Both score high negatives in state public-opinion polls. Still, Republicans don't



The New Jesse Helms? Courting his national constituency, Oliver North announced his Senate candidacy on CNN's *Larry King Live*, not at a Virginia press conference.

Still, Miller's national endorsements will get him only so far in the nomination battle, because Virginia still holds true nominating conventions rather than primaries. The Republican convention is scheduled for June 3, so North and Miller are racing to attract the commitment of enough delegates to get the nod. The delegates are party organizers, religious activists, and local elected officials—exactly the kind of crowd North appeals to. He's campaigned for some of them and sold books and newsletters to the others.

At a meeting of Christian Republican activists in Fairfax County in early February, North and Miller struggled to get to each other's right on such issues as gun control, abortion, the National Endowment for the Arts, and home schooling. Actually, on abortion Miller has North beat: He'd make all abortions illegal except those to save the life of the mother, while North favors rape and incest exceptions. "Obviously, we've got two conservative Republicans here," said Mike Farris, last year's GOP nominee for lieutenant governor, after the forum.

IDEOLOGICALLY, NORTH IS A CLASSIC populist—blasting Washington careerists, quoting folk wisdom, endorsing term limits and other popular referenda of recent months, and manipulating power symbols such as the flag and the Marine Corps. Miller touts many of the free-market ideas you'd expect from the former chairman of Citizens for a Sound Economy, the Washington-based free-market lobby. Miller was trained in public choice economics under Nobel laureate James M. Buchanan and helped engineer declining budget deficits during Reagan's final three years in office. In a May 1989 interview with REASON, Miller proposed setting a firm limit on the size of government as a share of gross national product and requiring a super-majority of both houses of Congress to expand government spending beyond that limit. He also endorsed privatizing federal loan programs, public housing, and the U.S. Postal Service.

But campaigning for convention del-

egates requires more than good ideas and solid connections. It requires charisma, and Miller will be the first to admit he's not God's gift to the chicken-and-pea circuit. He jokes about his less-than-telegenic appearance, noting that staff members urged him to take his own picture off the campaign brochures. *The Washington Post* commented that "stylistically, Miller often sounds more like a bean counter than a politician" and frequently "lapses into academic jargon." North, on the other hand, exhibited early in his

**The conventional wisdom
is that North's solid,
unshakable core of
supporters will carry the
day in the GOP nomination.
But there's always room
for the unexpected at
nominating conventions—
and North's vulnerabilities
are legion.**

career the ability to mesmerize and persuade that many Americans first saw in the televised Iran-Contra hearings. He's just as good on the road. "He's probably the best stump speaker I've seen in a decade or more," says Holsworth, the political scientist.

The conventional wisdom is that North's solid, unshakable core of supporters will carry the day in the GOP nomination. But there's always room for the unexpected at nominating conventions. Even if North swamps Miller in local party caucuses, Miller may still secure as many as one-third of the committed delegates. Many other delegates will be uncommitted and thus open to persuasion all the way until June 3. And North's vulnerabilities are legion. In addition to retaining the taint of scandal, he may run the risk of focusing too much on the national

scene and not enough on state and local concerns, the perception of which helped to sink former Gov. Doug Wilder's political fortunes.

THEN THERE'S THE QUESTION OF CREDIBILITY. Republicans and Democrats alike are widely circulating a piece by Rachel Wildavsky of *Reader's Digest* titled "Does Oliver North Tell the Truth?" In the article, Wildavsky relates many instances in which North has claimed one thing (such as a close relationship with former President Reagan) and witnesses, most of them conservatives, have reported something else. North's problems on the character issue limit his effectiveness when he lobs charges of immorality against his probable Democratic rival (whom he calls "Charles the Robb"). Robb is "least vulnerable to North" on character issues, Holsworth says.

Miller is making the best case he can: that despite today's poll numbers and North's celebrity status, he's the candidate most likely to beat Robb. But North's stature as a conservative standard-bearer for the 1990s may insulate him from Miller's attacks during the nomination fight. Like Helms before him, North is well-suited to the task of attracting and maintaining the support of disaffected voters who don't much care what others—particularly the political establishment or the media—say about their hero. Indeed, the more extreme the criticism this kind of politician attracts, the easier it is to portray himself as victim of powerful forces scheming to "get" him.

At the Fairfax meeting of Christian GOP activists, Miller said, "If you elect me your U.S. senator, I won't make commitments to people that, to carry them out, would violate federal law." With North looking on, the crowd responded with stone-faced silence, punctuated by occasional hisses.

Contributing Editor John Hood is vice president of the John Locke Foundation in Raleigh, North Carolina, and a syndicated columnist.

Killing Kindness

By Thomas Szasz

Jack Kevorkian believes we can solve moral problems by medicalizing them.

THE ACT OF KILLING MAY BE DEEMED good or bad, depending on who kills whom and why. When a man shoots an intruder about to attack him, we condone the killing as self-defense. When a bandit shoots a bank teller, we condemn the killing as murder. However, when a person kills himself, we are confused about whether to regard his act as good or bad and instead classify it as mad.

Although priests no longer consider suicide a mortal sin, and lawmakers do not punish it as an offense against the state and hence a crime, psychiatrists now diagnose it as a symptom of a mental illness and hence incarcerate the unsuccessful or would-be suicide as a "dangerous" mental patient. Regardless of our moral judgment of the act, suicide is by definition a type of homicide. Like any homicide, we may judge suicide to be justified or unjustified, virtuous or wicked, sane or insane, depending on the circumstances and on our own values.

It is against this background that we must view Dr. Jack Kevorkian's crusade for physician-assisted suicide as a state-approved "right" and "treatment." Since Kevorkian's recent announcement that he has abandoned his campaign of law defiance, and instead has undertaken a campaign of "law reform," he is more dangerous than ever. His aim is ominous because it taps into one of our most powerful popular delusions, namely the belief that we can solve moral problems by medicalizing them. Maintaining that the so-called right (of a terminally ill patient) to physician-assisted suicide is more fundamental than our established constitutional rights, Kevorkian wants it encoded in the consti-



tution of the state of Michigan. And because this right is, in fact, a service, he wants it guaranteed—that is, provided—by expanding the medical profession's legally recognized repertoire of treatments to include doctors helping patients to commit suicide.

To grasp the threat of Kevorkian's purported compassion and the seemingly widespread popular support for it, it is necessary to remember the long history of medicine's war on freedom and self-determination. In Plato's *Republic*, he explained "that our rulers will have to make considerable use of falsehood and deception for the benefit of their subjects. We said, I believe, that the use of that sort of thing was in the category of medicine."

Before approving physician-assisted suicide as a treatment, we need to confront the ethical challenge of suicide itself. As matters stand, suicide is in a moral-legal limbo. It is a right: The act is not prohibited by the criminal law. It is not a right: Expressing the intention to commit suicide or attempting to do so is prohibited and punished by the mental-health laws (by psychiatric incarceration and involun-

tary "treatment"). In other words, suicide is a right in principle, but not in practice: The "right" is annulled by mental illness, a condition now attributed virtually automatically to the suicidal person as well as the successful suicide (which is why he is no longer refused religious burial in consecrated ground).

Next, we must distinguish between a person's assertion that he wants to die and the act of ending one's life. Speech is richly nuanced, especially in emotionally charged situations. In the final analysis, actions alone count. Unless a person kills himself—by his own hand, preferably alone—we cannot be certain he wanted to die. The potential abuses of a tax-supported service of physician-assisted suicide—especially for old people—are too obvious to require detailing.

FINALLY, WE MUST DECIDE WHETHER WE want to retain or reject the time-honored moral principle that the physician, qua physician, should not kill or assist in killing another person. If abstaining from such behavior—like abstaining from having sex with patients, except more so—is an integral part of the physician's role, then physician-assisted suicide is a contradiction in terms. On the other hand, if such behavior is deemed permissible or even praiseworthy—because of the patient's consent or request—then it is not unreasonable to entrust doctors with the task of assisting persons who want to kill themselves.

It is important to keep in mind in this connection that Kevorkian rejects the view that suicide is a basic human right. He believes that suicide is justifiable only when a person experiences intense suffering caused by a fatal illness, both the nature of the illness and the severity of the suffering being judged by the doctor. Even then, Kevorkian does not support the sufferer's right to kill himself—say,

HENRY PAYNE