

PUTTING IT IN PERSPECTIVE

By David Winston



Democrats Seem Lost in the Fog Of Political War

Politicians, basking in the afterglow of a successful election or a strong job approval rating, often forget that it's a short hop from "We're No. 1!" to "We're numb." Suffering from a bad case of delusional infallibility, Congressional Democrats are operating as if the 2006 elections were six days ago, not six months ago, and the 2008 elections are six years from now.

They seem to have lost sight of the price other politicians have paid for failing to find solutions that resonate with the American public or to act upon them. In the summer of 1991, the White House staff of George H.W. Bush simply didn't believe that a president whose job approval had topped 90 percent less than three months before could lose re-election. They thought they could coast to victory. What those earlier numbers obscured was the depth of the damage Bush's decision to break his "no new taxes" pledge had done to his relationship with voters.

In 1993, the Clintons were so enamored of their decision to nationalize America's health care system that they badly misread the American people's frustrations with health care as a green light for the wholesale dismantling of the country's private-sector-based model. It cost Democrats control of Congress in 1994 and still haunts their leading candidate for the presidency in 2008.

Today, Democrats seem lost in the fog of political war, unable to craft a strategy other than trying to keep President George W. Bush

on the defensive. While, admittedly, voters have been and continue to be unhappy with this president, Bush won't be on the ballot in 2008, but plenty of Democrats will.

Yet, after promising the American people change and an end to partisan gotcha politics, Democratic leaders have spent the past six months squandering their election victory and the confidence of the majority of the American people.

They haggled endlessly over war funding, spent crucial time investigating and interrogating Bush appointees, and twisted themselves into ideological knots trying to keep an increasingly strident and radical base placated. This is the party that pledged to end the "culture of corruption" starting with earmarks.

But House Appropriations Chairman David Obey (D-Wis.) announced an earmark "reform" package so convoluted that he was forced to give way to demands by House Republicans for more transparency, presenting the GOP with an unexpected victory. When it comes to Democrats' "Six for '06" agenda, only an increase in the minimum wage has made it to the president's desk for signature. But even there, Democratic leaders stumbled by tacking it onto the president's request for supplemental war funding, thus putting their two leading presidential contenders in the infeasible position of having to vote against the minimum wage. This kind of ineptness is beginning to take a real toll on party prospects; and time, contrary to what Democratic leaders may believe, is not necessarily on their side.

Amazingly, in four national polls released last week, NBC/Wall Street Journal, Quinipiac, Fox News/Opinion Dynamics and the Los Angeles Times, Congressional job approval

actually dipped below Bush's poor numbers to 23 percent, 23 percent, 29 percent and 27 percent, respectively. The L.A. Times poll had even more bad news.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), who began her tenure with a positive job approval, now has a 36 percent/39 percent approve/disapprove rating, according to the L.A. Times. Rubbing salt into the wound, the paper also found that people viewed Georgia Republican Newt Gingrich's Speakership in the 1990s far

a befuddled strategy.

Pelosi seems intent on continuing to bring to the floor legislation she knows the president will veto rather than finding ways to make progress on tough issues. Apparently, she is willing to waste more time to keep Bush in the role of punching bag.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) could choose to focus on domestic issues from now to September, working with Republicans to find common ground and, most importantly, to give Army Gen. David Petraeus a fair chance to succeed in Iraq. Or if he truly believes the war is lost, he could end it now by shutting off funding.

Instead, Reid chose to take verbal potshots at Petraeus' credibility, actually claiming that the battlefield commander "isn't in touch with what's going on in Baghdad." He then announced his intention of sending a barrage of anti-war measures to Bush in the coming weeks. With behavior like this, it's hardly surprising that the American people have grown disillusioned with the Democratic Congress.

What Democratic leaders have failed to grasp, much like some Republicans in 2006, is that the clock is ticking; and this election has begun even earlier. After the long August recess, the fall Congressional schedule will be tied up with appropriations bills. The likelihood of any major legislation passing Congress in 2008 is remote.

As a result, what happens this July becomes all the more critical. If Democrats continue to trade progress for politics, they will ensure there will be more at stake than the presidency next year.

David Winston is president of The Winston Group, a Republican polling firm.

While voters have been unhappy with this president, George W. Bush won't be on the ballot in 2008, but plenty of Democrats will.

more positively, giving him a 46 percent approval and 34 percent disapproval.

In 2006, the American people thought they voted for change and to get things done. For some, it was a new policy on the Iraq War. For others, it was an end to corruption or less partisanship. What voters got was more extreme partisanship, more extreme ideology and very little else. In return, the Democratic Congress has earned some of the worst job approval numbers in recent years.

While September may well be a make-or-break month for the Bush administration's Iraq War policy, July may be Congressional Democrats' equivalent moment of truth or consequences. Given their actions to date, one can only conclude that they remain wedded to



Mansfield, Louisiana

International Paper Chairman and CEO John V. Faraci and The Conservation Fund President and CEO Larry Selzer congratulate the recipients of the

2007 International Paper Environmental Excellence Awards

John Tippett, Fredericksburg, Virginia
2007 International Paper Conservation Partnership Award Recipient

Donald Sprangers, East Machias, Maine
2007 International Paper Environmental Education Award Recipient

This annual awards program honors two individuals who have achieved significant results in their commitments to conservation and environmental education through private sector partnerships, demonstrating that environmental protection and a healthy economy are clearly compatible.

Each recipient will receive a \$10,000 grant from the International Paper Foundation.

See videos of the award-winning projects on-line. Visit www.internationalpaper.com, www.conservationfund.org or www.youtube.com/InternationalPaperCo