

commentary

from other pens...

Vermont governor political dark horse

Democratic Gov. Howard Dean of Vermont travels the country these days talking to voters about his opposition to deficit spending, the need for universal health care and how to improve early childhood care.

Dean, a 53-year-old physician and governor of Vermont since 1991, is the latest in a line of political dark horses with an eye on the White House.

Never mind few people know who he is; Dean is confident he has a message that will resonate with their concerns.

"In recent months, the consideration has grown because of mismanagement of the economy," Dean said during a recent governors' meeting in Washington. "I worry about the future of this country. Somebody's got to deal with the future of this country."

Dean opposes the sharp tax cuts he thinks will sap the nation's strength and he wants to develop a system of universal health care, provide better health and development programs for the young, and improve insurance coverage for those suffering from mental illness. His political philosophy, appropriately, has a health theme — from health policies to the health of the budget to the health of the Social Security system.

Dean says when he finally makes a decision whether to run, probably a year from now, it will be based on the effects on his family and not on name recognition, geographical strategy or campaign finances.

Dean is one of the least known potential candidates in a group that includes Al Gore, the 2000 Democratic nominee; Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle; House Democratic leader Dick Gephardt; and Sens. Joe Lieberman of Connecticut and John Edwards of North Carolina.

The move from little-known outsider to front-runner is tougher than ever, say those who tried it in the past.

"It is much more difficult to do that thing now than it was in 1976," says Jody Powell, an adviser and spokesman to Jimmy Carter, a former Georgia governor who won the presidency. "I hesitate to say it's impossible, because some folks would have said it was impossible in 1976."

Carter is cited as the long shot candidate who and wins the presidency.

"Among the Democrats, Carter was the non-liberal, a nuclear engineer, a Southerner, a peanut farmer," said Pat Buchanan, another outsider who enlivened Republican presidential races in 1992 and 1996.

The key to Buchanan's burst of success was his early understanding voters were deeply concerned about the economy and his sharp eye for political opportunities to make a name for himself in early contests.

Carter campaigned on a message of morality and honesty in the years after Watergate, invested a lot of time in Iowa before winning there, then had four weeks to raise money and momentum before winning New Hampshire. Dean says he gained his inspiration for politics from Carter.

"Almost all of the changes in the nominating process have directly or indirectly made it much more difficult for a long shot and less well-known candidate to be successful," said Powell. "The front-loading of the process is chief among them."

The primary season will be abbreviated in 2004 with states allowed to crowd to early February just a week after New Hampshire's opening primary. Dean says Democrats made a mistake in squeezing the calendar.

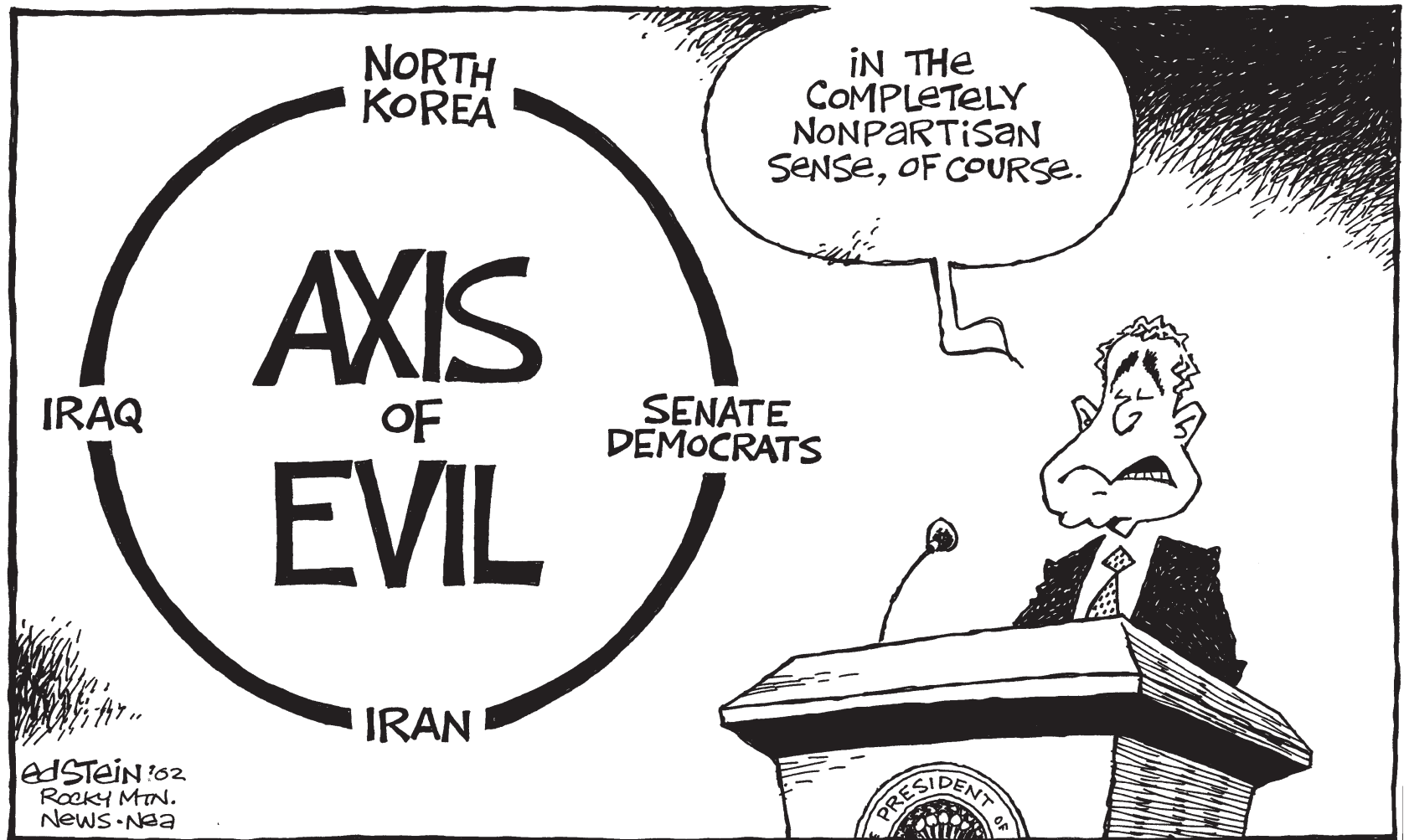
"What happens often is the person with the most money gets the nomination and then there is a period of buyers' remorse as other candidates start to win primaries," he said. Dean is spending his time traveling, getting to know constituent groups and sharing his ideas.

"This is the way you've got to begin," said Michael Dukakis, the former Massachusetts governor who won the 1988 Democratic nomination. "All of us are low profile at first, even the prominent governors."

Lamar Alexander, a former Tennessee governor and Cabinet member, tried for the GOP nomination in 1996 and came close after virtually moving to Iowa then campaigning hard in New Hampshire and Florida.

"You've got to keep your sense of humor and ego intact," said Alexander, who now teaches at Harvard University. "It's always a fine line whether you're the toast of the town or toast."

EDITOR'S NOTE — Will Lester covers politics and polling for The Associated Press.



Rocking chairs make me think about aging

I don't know about you, but all that thinking about rocking chairs last week left me in a nostalgic frame of mind.

I began thinking about aging.

Of course, I usually think of that every year around birthday time anyway.

But this year, I sat and wondered if I was getting any wiser, or just older.

Now that's a sad thing to think about.

Just what have I learned over the course of my lifetime?

I'm sure I could make a pretty long list. Yet I constantly disappoint myself and others; you'd think I'd be wiser by now.

Wisdom doesn't automatically come with age; neither does maturity. Some of us are born old, while others never grow up.

I'm not the first person to think about wisdom. Biblical writers struggled with the meaning of wisdom a lot. Try reading Proverbs.



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• commentary

One thing I've learned is not to worry.

I still have opinions on most things, but I have given up worrying about them. There are many things (and most people) I can't control; I've learned that I'm not supposed to.

I would choose different paths for some people — different from the ones they chose. But then I made a lot of mistakes too.

Living, no surviving, has taught me that.

In the past when I've complained about another birthday, there has usually been someone to remind me, "It's better than the alternative."

I've thought about that a lot. There have been

days when I certainly could not agree with that statement. However, the next day was usually brighter, and life seemed worth living — in spite of aging.

I guess one of the biggest things I've learned is that what seems a catastrophe today is usually not one in the long run. In most cases, I've learned to reign in angry thoughts without feeling a need to verbalize them.

At least I wait at least three days before replying to them. By then I'm calmer and don't feel the need to hurt back.

And I've also learned it takes a lot of energy to stay mad, and it usually isn't worth all the trouble.

Well, there are probably things I've learned that are more important.

Maybe I'll just sit back in my rocker and think about that list. Or maybe I'll wait until I have more time than I do today.

And if the list never gets made, I refuse to worry about it.

New Bible to be more politically correct

The movement to make the Bible politically correct has gained some notice with the pending publication of a new translation that departs from the ancient texts to make God's word "non-sexist."

The book, known as "Today's New International Version," has stirred a cry of protest, especially from conservative Christians.

But rewriting the Bible for political ends ought to upset a lot of us.

In the last half of the 20th century, with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and a general increase in Biblical scholarship, there was a movement to improve Bible translations.

Translators attempted to get the Bible's wording to more closely mirror the original Greek and Hebrew texts, in the process correcting some errors in the revered King James Version.

The latest translation, like some other recent texts, goes far beyond that. It alters, amends and adds words to bring passages more nearly in line with "correct" liberal thinking of today.

Supporters call this "inclusive" language, changing "brothers" to "brothers and sisters," for instance, though there is no evidence that Jesus or his disciples talked that way. Just the feeling that they should have.



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Some changes are simple, hardly noticeable: In James 1:12, "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial..." becomes "Blessed are those who persevere under trial..."

Others are a little more radical: 1 Timothy 2:5 reads like this in the original New International Version: "There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

In the new version, it becomes: "There is one God and one mediator between God and human beings, Christ Jesus, himself human."

It may be politically correct, but it's *not* what Timothy wrote.

At least the new translation avoids some of the pitfalls of a failed 1980s effort, which had the Lord's Prayer opening, "O God, Father and Mother, hallowed be your name."

Translations, of course, are never exact. If you transliterate one language to another, you wind up

with gibberish.

Even Bible translation is as much an art as a science, and certainly the King James Bible has its moments.

While the Bible may be God's word, inspired by Him, it has been set down by fallible men. They have been arguing about its nuances pretty much ever since. And as long as men are making the translations, it's not likely that any of them will be flawless.

This one has mightily offended religious conservatives, led by Colorado's Dr. James Dobson, who had brokered an agreement with translators to avoid "inclusive" translation changes. Dr. Dobson says the new version ignores that agreement.

But do we need a politically correct Bible? Christians are unlikely to agree on that any more than they agree on how to interpret existing translations.

But from here, it seems pretty silly to change a centuries-old text to fit modern convention. It'd be like updating the Declaration of Independence or the Magna Carta. Next someone will be editing the philosophers of yore to "correct" their thinking.

No, we'd be better off to leave politics out of Bible translation, stop fighting and worry about our own relationship with the Creator. That's hard enough for any man to master. Or woman.

Senator known for speaking his mind

To find out what Sen. Ed Pugh is thinking, just ask him.

In a world of politicians who make fence-straddling an Olympic sport and political-speak an art form, the self-described "beefy country lawyer" expresses his views without mincing words.

Last week, the Senate voted 32-8 to require registration of beer kegs and their buyers. Pugh, of Wamego, was the only Republican voting "no."

"It's just a bunch of political malarkey," he said after the vote.

As for his no-frills style, Pugh said, "There's no reason to speak in riddles. I like to go where it's at and deal with it."

A senator since 1997, Pugh, 52, doesn't play follow the leader and isn't a go-along, get-along kind of guy — as his vote on the beer keg bill showed.

"Sometimes I follow the leader if I like the way he's headed or if it's the thing to do to make a point," Pugh said.

It was Pugh who offered a state Senate redistricting plan that won the chamber's approval two weeks ago over the objections of Senate President Dave Kerr, R-Hutchinson, who backed another plan.

Pugh said his plan was drafted by a group of fellow conservative Republicans and the Senate's minority Democrats — and he offered it because it was a good idea.

But Sen. Tim Huelskamp, who help draft the plan, said there was another reason why it was Pugh who brought it to the floor.

"You don't take on Ed Pugh in debate unless you are absolutely certain. He can outpeak anyone in the chamber, and that's why we had him present it," said Huelskamp, R-Fowler.

Sen. Robert Tyson, R-Parker, who goes elk hunting with Pugh, said his friend is direct but often uses humor to make a point.



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• ap news analysis

"He sees life as being too short to be too serious," Tyson said.

Sometimes Pugh uses humor to make a point outside the Statehouse, too. He recalls that when his law office was gutted by an electrical fire in 1994, the fire chief asked him if he had any enemies.

"I looked at him and said, 'I'm a lawyer and a politician. What the hell do you think?'" he said with a laugh.

On biographical questionnaires, Pugh said that, as a jest, he likes to list his hobbies as "motoring" and "ballroom dancing."

Even lawmakers who don't agree with his politics give Pugh high marks, including Senate Judiciary Chairman John Vratil.

"We disagree on many issues, but he's very intelligent, very articulate and a strong advocate for the issues he believes in," said Vratil, R-Leawood. "I actually like him."

Pugh's style can be forceful — intimidating, some say. But Vratil, also an attorney, sees that style as a lawyer's advocacy technique.

"Ed Pugh is the master of intimidation to get his way," Vratil said. "He's just trying to make a point."

Although a lawmaker, Pugh would like to see fewer laws made.

"We'd be far better off if we allowed laws to be settled and let the courts interpret them. As long we keep changing them, nobody knows what they mean," he said. "The more laws you write, the less personal freedoms you have."

It's a view that fairly reflects those of many constituents in his northeast Kansas district — a healthy skepticism, if not outright distrust, of government.

"I see myself as the kind of Republican I grew up around — government should be limited and personal freedoms maximized. Government isn't the answer to everything," he said.

With a round face, bushy mustache and wire-rimmed glasses, Pugh bears more than a passing resemblance to Theodore Roosevelt.

"Oh, I've had people say that. I laugh at it, though. He was a lot more industrious than I am," Pugh said.

Pugh grew up in Wamego where his father was an attorney. As a youngster, he enjoyed hunting, fishing and camping, and worked summers on farms, at greenhouses and the elevator.

After finishing law school at the University of Kansas, Pugh returned to his rural roots, working as Pottawatomie County attorney before going into private practice.

"I went back because of the quality of life. I like the quality of the people. I get the willies after about an hour in a city," said Pugh, who is married and has three children in college and one in high school.

As he sees it, rural America is a repository of the work ethic he feels so strongly about.

"You learn to work and take responsibility," he said. "You associate with all sorts of people, and that's a valuable thing. A sense of duty and obligation gets instilled in you."

When he's not at the Statehouse or his law office, Pugh raises cattle, but stopped short of calling himself a rancher.

"I'm a lawyer who has a bunch of cattle. I don't claim to be part of the ranching fraternity. I don't know if they would accept me," he said.

"It's a good way to lose money," he added, "but you know, it has a romance to it."

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