

commentary

from other pens...

Economy could tilt political balance

Democrats hoping for a wind at their backs during this year’s congressional elections think they have the first faint breeze — that corporate corruption and a lagging economy have begun to wear on voters’ nerves. Republicans say Democrats are just imagining things. Buoyed by the popularity of President Bush and his war on terrorism, Republicans have been running about even among voters with Democrats, who are stronger on issues like Social Security and health care. But the troubled economy is threatening to tip that balance of public opinion in the remaining months before the November elections. “If the economy goes South, Democrats will almost certainly pick up some seats,” University of Virginia political scientist Larry Sabato said. But he added it’s not clear how much it would help them. While it’s an open question whether the economy will slide as the campaign heats up, economic growth has slowed from earlier this year. And the New York Stock Exchange dropped briefly below 9,000 this week before rallying.

Signs that economic concerns have been growing have shown up in a variety of recent public opinion surveys, including one by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press and another — the Consumer Confidence Index, which sank to a four-month low in June. In a Pew poll out Thursday, only a third — and only half of Republicans — said Bush is doing as much as he can to help the economy. And his approval for handling of many domestic issues, including the economy, had slipped since January. His overall job approval remained strong at 70 percent and approval of his anti-terror efforts was even higher. “The Democrats have opportunities going into the fall on the domestic side, and the Republicans have to worry that frustration with the president and Congress doesn’t turn into some kind of protest vote,” said Andrew Kohut, direct of the Pew center.

A poll out earlier in the week suggested Democrats have successfully put some distance between GOP members of Congress and the popular Republican president. GOP pollster Ed Goeas advised Republicans in Congress to align themselves closely with Bush in the coming months. And he cautioned economic troubles that didn’t hurt Bush with the public last year might be more of a problem now. “A double-dip recession becomes George Bush’s problem,” Goeas said, noting that older voters worried about retirement funds could grow angry about a weakened stock market.

“What we’re seeing is part of the reason the stock market has gone down is that people don’t trust corporate executives who lie, cheat and steal and a Congress unwilling to hold them accountable,” Democratic pollster Mark Mellman said.

Democrats have made it a goal to make corporate corruption a centerpiece of their bid to overtake the Republicans’ 11-seat lead in the House. “It could help us if we’re intelligent about it, in terms of how we present our message and if we don’t overreact,” said Rep. Adam Smith, D-Wash. While some analysts say the corporate corruption scandal could give a rebirth to a kind of “economic populism,” Smith said he doesn’t see that kind of tactic working. “I don’t think the 1930s Huey Long populism is going to work,” he said, referring to the late Louisiana governor who had great political success pitting the poor and powerless against the rich and powerful. Republicans acknowledge economic worries are growing, but they aren’t convinced those worries have become a political problem for the GOP. “There’s a difference between unease and anger and vote intention changes when you get to anger,” said Matthew Dowd, a GOP strategist. And they scoff at Democratic predictions that economic troubles could improve their election chances. “Every time an issue comes up, they claim this will bring them back control of the House,” said Rep. Tom Davis, chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee, referring to campaign finance reform, aviation security and Social Security.

EDITOR’S NOTE — Will Lester covers politics for The Associated Press.

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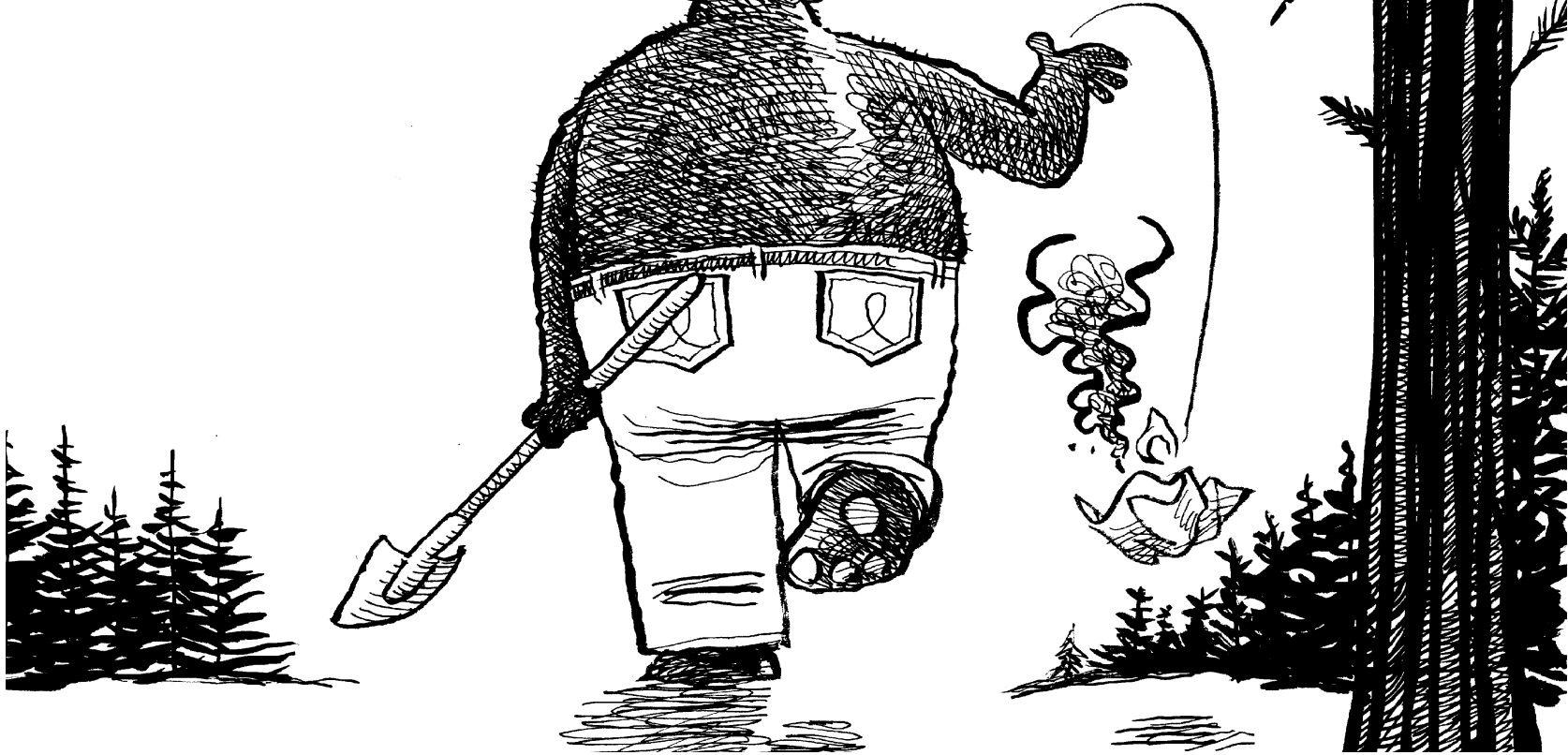
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Given a chance love can grow

I don’t know about you, but I believe love grows if you give it half a chance. There is nothing more beautiful that a senior citizen couple helping each other along. I watch them in stores and restaurants and get jealous of their relationship. Only love that has been tested by time and problems can be so beautiful. It is something I’ll never get to experience since my husband died early.

I pirated a quote off the Internet today as I was thinking about writing this column. I didn’t go searching for information; it just popped up at me: “True love is ageless. We can all learn from those who have been together for a long time!”

How true! Young people think they’re in love, but too often it is a physical attraction or a “Satisfy MY Needs” kind of love. Relationships like that won’t stand the test of time unless they deepen into something greater and more forgiving.

Life, at best, is difficult. Our attitudes and how



**lorna
g. t.**

• commentary

we handle trials determine if we get old and cranky or old and forgiving. No matter how we handle life, we’re going to get old. So we’d be better off to age with a little grace and stop expecting more from others than they can give.

Most of us moan and groan about weight or wrinkles or failing agility. We wish we were still young, or at least felt young. Realistically, we aren’t ever going to be kids again, and probably didn’t think it was so great when we were anyway. Would you really want to go through it all again?

Love is timeless. An older couple falling in love

China’s ambition to join the ‘first’ world

How do you summarize a country that sprawls across a continent, with 1.2 billion people and an ambition to join the first world?

It’s an amazing place. China today is rebuilding itself, trying to leap from the third world to the first. If the theme is respect, China would like the respect of the world, to be thought of as a major player.

Size and history give China weight, but it is a nation with a long way to go.

In China today, the mean family income in the major cities, such as Beijing and Shanghai, is approaching \$5,000 per year. But in the countryside, officials admit, it is closer to \$500.

Beijing is proud to be the chosen host for the 2008 Olympic Games. At a briefing on the preparations, we are greeted by Jiang Xiaoyu, vice president of the organizing committee and head of public affairs. He is also a high-ranking member of Beijing’s Communist Party, though only the initials CPC appear in English.

Mr. Jiang runs through the plans — new freeways, new stadiums, new subways and light rail, new hotels and dormitories. Beyond just the Olympic facilities, though, Beijing is rebuilding itself. Mud-brick slums are giving way to new high-rise offices and apartments. The streets team with cars, all new, mostly Volkswagens and French models. While General Motors has a plant here, it obviously is way behind.

The streets are jammed with traffic. The air shows the beginnings of pollution. Getting anywhere takes hours. And you notice, there are no old, beat-up clunkers on the street.

They haven’t had cars that long.



**steve
haynes**

• along the sappa

Bicycles still crowd along the curbs, carrying office workers home and construction workers to jobs. A specialty is what we come to call the “pickup,” a bike with a flat bed on the back, useful for hauling cement, bricks, wallboard or lumber.

We are briefed at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs downtown. Ramrod-straight privates from the People’s Armed Police, the army unit which guards everything from government stores to airport runways, stand at attention, saluting as we pass in. Our guide comes along for the briefing:

“I can’t miss this,” she says. “No one gets in here.”

But the conversation is on “background,” meaning that we cannot quote the “senior official” who talks with us.

At the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, we get a thorough briefing from Li Weiyl, deputy director general.

He explains how fast China is changing: In 1992, 97 percent of the economy was on the Communist “plan” system, with the smallest decisions made by state committees. Today, less than 3 percent is run by plan; the rest is all free market. Farms and apartments are being sold by the state. And the Chinese remember how to be entrepreneurs; it has only been a couple of generations under the social-

can be just as giddy as teenagers. But a couple who has stuck together through thick and thin and still has a gleam in the eye for each other is a joy to behold. Couples who are still together and helping each other with frailties can teach us a lot.

I heard a story about one such couple getting on an airport shuttle.

He has an oxygen tank and she has a walker. As other passengers watch, the couple approaches the bus step.

She lifts the oxygen tank for him. He steps up and reaches back for her walker. She grabs the railing, but will have a hard time. He looks at her and says, “Big step, baby!” The whole bus applauds at the joy on her face when she made that step.

Wouldn’t it be great to think of every married couple encouraging each other through every stage of life, through every problem, with a hearty, “Big step, baby!” and sharing the joy when the hurdle is conquered?

ist system.

The situation with Taiwan is most peculiar, Mr. Li says, as if the American South has escaped to Puerto Rico or Cuba.

“It is the result of a civil war,” he says. “They lost the civil war.”

China is China, he says.

“Both sides recognize one China. The international community recognizes the PRC as the only China.”

But policy has evolved from military might to patience, he says. Peaceful means are the way. One China, two systems, will work.

“China could be simply called China, not the ROC or PRC. My parents, who had the experience of the civil war, cannot accept this, though.”

Chinese will not fight Chinese. There can be one China, two systems.

“They can keep their army if they like. There is only one condition.

“If they want to come over and talk about state-to-state relations, no way.”

The civil war, he says, still has not ended. And if Taiwan tries to go its own way, as one officials put it, “there would be trouble.”

Meantime, China is moving ahead, moving toward a free market and, some day perhaps, toward democracy. That will take time, officials say, because China has no experience with democracy in more than 3,500 years of civilization.

“The emperor had no need for representatives,” says Mr. Li. “The dictator had no need for representatives ... but democracy is the goal.”

But not, as yet, the result.

berry’s world

