

from other pens...

Presidential game see 'who is in'

The name of the game is not, "Who will run?" but, "Who is in?" Speculation the past couple of months has given away to reality and now the number of people wanting to become president of this great land collectively includes 20 bodies.

Latest to announce formation of an exploratory committee are Kansas Sen. Sam Brownback, New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson and New York Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton. Brownback is a Republican and the other two are Democrats.

The "Run for the Oval" (as in oval office), is shaping up as either one terrific experience for the country, or one massive nightmare. Certainly, not all of those faces seriously believe they have a chance.

Right? Wrong!

They point to a little known governor from a small state who won the White House against all odds. That little known governor was Bill Clinton of Arkansas. And he served two terms.

At this point in time, Sen. Clinton is atop the Democratic roster and Sen. John McCain atop the Republican roster. But that is now...not 2008. She is being pressed by Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois. McCain hasn't necessarily been pressed by anyone until Sen. Brownback entered the picture. The Kansas senator is a true to form conservative while McCain is more moderate in his approach to issues. Of course, former Republican Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney is being closely watched, too, having served a "Kennedy" state with much acclaim.

There will be more candidates forming exploratory committees as the days roll on. What is surprising is the number of senators eyeing the presidency. History tells us that sitting senators are rarely elected president.

So, if the two major parties were holding their conventions today, who would get the nod? If you believe in polls, Sen. Clinton and Sen. McCain would be heading into the ring to battle it out for all the marbles.

Who would be their running mates? Doubtless either would choose from the ranks of opposing candidates.

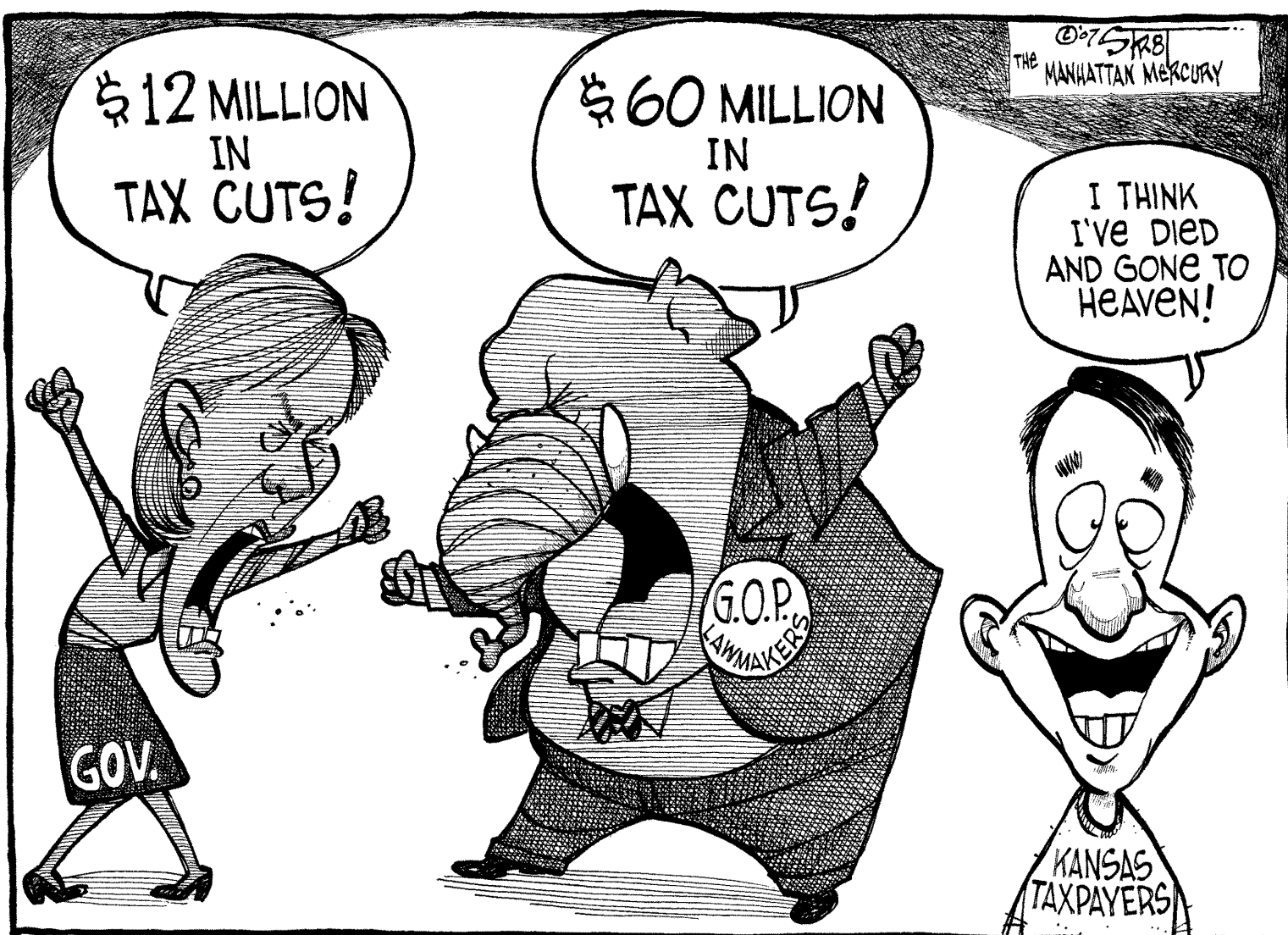
This race is going to be costly. Many, many millions of dollars will need to be raised. Sen. Clinton, according to reports, has a war chest in which she has many of those millions of dollars already stashed.

What does all this mean? It means we are getting started way too early on an election that won't be decided until November 2008.

It also means there will be a large number of people — people already elected to do a job — who won't be fully focused on that responsibility.

If you think you were tired of the bickering leading up to the November 2006 election — remember that one, just two months ago? — well, hold on tightly!

— Tom Dreiling, *The Norton Telegram*



Barack Obama can be whatever he wants

Those who deride Sen. Barack Obama's (D-Ill.) lack of experience and criticize the broad generalities and banalities that festoon his best-selling book miss the key point: His inexperience is an asset because he enters national politics as a blank canvas on which he can paint whatever he chooses. With only two years in the Senate, he is less like a politician running for president than like a general — think Eisenhower in 1952 or even the abortive candidacy of Colin Powell in 1995 — or a businessman, like Ross Perot in 1992.

It's not that he doesn't have a record. It's that the record doesn't really matter because it is so short. His Senate tenure is so abbreviated that he can be whatever he says he is, not just as a political contrivance to get elected, but genuinely to articulate a philosophy and make it his guiding principle both while seeking office and serving in it. He's that virginal.

So far, Obama seems very conscious of his liberal, party-line voting record is not a good foundation for his national ambitions. He seems aware that the country wants more of a post-partisan, embodying the consensus to which Americans have come over these recent dangerous and bitter years.

American politics alternates between periods in which we welcome partisan debate and those in which we demand consensus and conclusion. Confronted by new issues we turn to the left and to the right and ask each side to develop its ideas and flesh out its alternative for



dick morris

• commentary

our consideration. During these times, moderates and synthesizers are doomed to defeat since they seem to ignore the problem, while polarizing figures take over. But once the debate has run its course, we make our collective national decisions and are no longer in the mood for unending debate. We want our will to be done by our elected officials with no more quarreling or sniping.

Obama has the opportunity to embody the emerging consensus, a broad national agreement reached from observation of trial and error over the past half decade. The bloody futility of our efforts to build a nation in Iraq have left us still committed to aggressive efforts to hunt down terrorists but determined to extricate ourselves from the mire. The effectiveness of our homeland security efforts and our concomitant horror at instances of mistaken imprisonment and unnecessarily intrusive government investigations have led us to demand a balance between aggressive investigation and protection of civil liberties. We want terrorists caught, interrogated, and locked up, but not tortured or sadistically humiliated.

Obama's book reflects an intuitive grasp of this emerging consensus even if his voting record does not signal his agreement with it.

But if the Illinois senator decides to articulate this synthesis, the question will be whether he can find sufficient traction on the center-left to give his candidacy viability. He will have to compete for that ground with Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.), but her reputation for strident advocacy and take-no-prisoners partisanship will likely give him an edge in going after Bill Clinton's former constituents among the New Democrats. And Obama enjoys an ethnic and demographic base that can augment his converts among moderate white Democrats.

John Edwards, for all of the eloquence of his announcement statement, is ultimately running on the issue of national poverty against a woman and an African-American. That's not going to work. His campaign might have gained traction against another field of candidates, but it is unlikely that he can get it on track against these two particular opponents.

So we wait for Barack Obama to define himself. If he runs to the left, he will be a worthy successor to Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton. If he runs to the center, he might be a successor to Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. He might just make it to the White House.

Dick Morris was an adviser to Bill Clinton for 20 years.

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The reason why



michael reagan

• making sense

I allowed my abuser to take nude photos of me much against my will. He used those photos to blackmail me into silence by threatening to show them to my mother. That thought terrorized me. And it was enough to keep me silent.

I thought that if my mother saw those pictures she would know that I was what I then believed myself to be — evil. Another hold a molester has over his victim, you see, is his understanding that his victims come to believe that the molestation is their fault, and their deep shame and guilt ensures their silence.

A lot of people who are now speculating about the reason Shawn Hornbeck failed to flee are implying that he could have escaped countless times. They do not understand that his captivity did not involve being physically shackled and chained, but instead he was mentally

The media is beside itself trying to understand why Shawn Hornbeck, the youngster kidnapped four-and-a-half years ago, remained a captive despite being on his own much of the time.

All the would-be psychologists on TV and in the press have been speculating wildly, coming up with a myriad of reasons such as a case of the Stockholm syndrome, for example, as to why the youngster did not flee his alleged captivity when he had many opportunities to get away from his alleged kidnapper.

None of these people know what they are talking about. They don't have the vaguest idea of what goes on in the mind of a young boy who has been sexually abused by an adult, as I assume was the case with Shawn.

I do. Only those who have had that horrific experience can understand what undoubtedly happened to Shawn Hornbeck, and I'm one of them.

When I was eight years old I was sexually abused by a man who ran an after-school day camp. And after that first molestation, I was literally blackmailed into silence by him, making it possible for him to continue to molest me for a year without fear of being exposed.

People who wonder why child victims of sexual abuse remain silent about their experiences have to understand that after that first episode the molester takes ownership of the youngster for a variety of reasons including shame and threats to tell his parents their child is a sexual deviant.

In my case the reason why I didn't run away although this man was molesting me for a year was simply this: he owned me.

As I wrote in my book, "Twice Adopted," which I urge parents to buy and read carefully for their children's sake (you can get it at Amazon.com), "It doesn't matter if you are molested once or a thousand times; it's the first incident that does the damage. That first act solidifies the molester's ownership of you."

Although I have no way of knowing if Shawn allowed himself to be photographed in a compromising situation as I was, if that was the case with him the molester's ownership was solidly confirmed.

imprisoned by fear of the exposure of his shame. He would have seen himself not as an innocent victim of sexual molestation, but as his molester's partner in it.

That feeling of partnership grows out of the victim's belief that even if they consider that the first sexual act was the abuser's fault, they share the blame for all the subsequent acts.

And if there were photographs, as there were in my case, the threat of his parents ever seeing them and believing their son was the real guilty party is terrifying.

From my own experience, I know that it's easier to put a gun in your mouth and pull the trigger than it is to tell your mother or your father what some man has done to you.

My advice to all the amateur psychologists telling us what happened to Shawn is to just plain shut up. If you haven't been there, yourself, you don't know what you are talking about. Leave the kid alone, he's been through enough grief.

Mike Reagan, the eldest son of the late President Ronald Reagan, is heard on talk radio stations nationally. E-mail comments to mereagan@hotmail.com.

