

by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

Dear Mr. President



Welcome to Washington, President Bush. Pardon the condition of the White House. Some fresh paint will work miracles, and if you come across anything suspicious, do not

hesitate to call upon the local public health authorities. Your predecessors were unique.

I assume that you recognize that it is not owing to the recent election's aberrations that Official Washington and its Democratic eminences view your presidency as illegitimate. You are not new to politics and one of the secrets that you have cleverly maintained throughout Campaign 2000 is that you have an unusually keen political mind. You know that the dominant media's scribes and such trendsetters as Daschle and Gephardt view you as an anomaly, a transient soon to be replaced by the White House's rightful claimant, a Democrat. The liberal Democrats' long-standing prejudice against members of the opposition was explained thirty years ago by Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Democrats and liberals do not believe, Moynihan asserted, that Republicans and conservatives have any place in "the natural order of things." To them every Republican president is illegitimate.

Thus they do not recognize their impudence when they lecture us on how to be "good conservatives." They think they are merely being public-spirited when they admonish you, President Bush, against consorting with your conservative allies and friends. When they advise you to welch on your campaign promises, they think they are saving the Republic from Herbert Hoover. And far back in their minds, in that shadowy

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place where their schemes take shape, they recognize that their advice to you will ensure your demise. Conflicting impulses are as common to the liberal's mind as conflicting policies are to his political agenda. Doubtless you, as the new president, understand their weird condition.

With a smile on your face and a twinkle in your eye you will doubtless move beyond their gruesome counsel. You have Ronald Reagan's friendly demeanor. You also have another of Ronald Reagan's assets, a faculty for being underestimated by your opponents. Your aides are very loyal and very discreet, but in their private talk they unconsciously betray an important fact about the boss. En route to the White House it has been you who has made all the most important decisions. You may mangle bits of syntax but you think clearly. From your vanquished opponents one draws another conclusion. GWB is as tough a politician as one would want—and you play by the rules.

That complex of crabby elites and glum ideas that compose the political culture of Washington—the *Kultursmog*, as we believers in fresh ideas call it—will conspire to make the 43rd president's stay in Washington unpleasant. Yet, for every Republican since Richard Nixon, life in Washington has been increasingly easy. That is because Republicans have been building their own complex of political players and ideas. They have developed their own culture from their own think tanks, from industry, and with their own growing communications community. In Washington, President Bush will have plenty of talent and companionship.

Mr. President, I expect you to remain debonair, true to your ideas, and, for the most part, successful. The voices of the *Kultursmog* will forever be ambushing you with controversies, usually false controversies such as the one they raised over your coinage "compassionate conservatism." Is it some frowsy notion? Conversely, is it

inimical to conservatism? Of course, it is neither. Compassionate conservatism is precisely what the times need, a solicitude for the weak in our society that depends on a minimum of government bureaucracy and the expansion of private groups, particularly "the faith-based organizations" that are ready and willing to serve. Mr. President, you are right to call them "armies of compassion."

One of your most attractive demonstrations of character has been your loyalty to your father. President George H. W. Bush has always been an exemplary gentleman. The shabby way he was treated by Official Washington reveals how corrupt Official Washington is. The only mistake your father made in his administration was according gentlemanly deference to the perfidious remnant of a point of view that was aging badly twenty years ago. In an otherwise successful presidency, George H. W. Bush raised taxes and allowed some increased government regulation. That cost him his office, and for his efforts Official Washington depicted him as a figure from the world of P.G. Wodehouse.

Mr. President, I doubt you will make the mistake of deferring to Official Washington. You have the benefit of an additional decade of economic research showing that lowering taxes and cutting regulation frees economies to grow. Likewise, you benefit from years of research which make it clear that choices in education, health care, and social security are preferable to government monopoly. From the legal legerdemain of the last election—and, for that matter, the corruption of the Clinton Administration—you must recognize the importance of judicial appointments respectful of the Constitution and the rule of law. In sum, events of the past decade lend plenty of justification for you to make good on your campaign pledge



nd to pay Official Washington no more than a friendly wink.

That friendly wink, by the way, is very reassuring. Ever since the presidency of Ronald Reagan I have held to the conviction that disposition is important to statecraft, possibly more important than intellect. Give us a persistent, sunny, can-do chief

executive and great things can be accomplished. What is more, it makes the cantankerous elites of Official Washington even grumpier.

Welcome to town, Mr. President, but go somewhat easy on Official Washington. Do not deny us the pleasure of laughing at the grumps. ❧

for special causes can continue to harangue about how America is racist and the state illegitimate.

There was once a time when capital punishment was illustrative of condign retribution, but that day is long gone. In a society that exploits coarseness and violence in its entertainments—even in its advertisements—such niceties as retribution are lost. American society offers up vast areas of violence—admittedly, usually simulated—for the amusement of sports fans, film goers, popular music idiots. Even many television advertisements feature transmogrifications of the average Joe screeching off in some fanciful vehicle or flying through a window in pursuit of some flashy product: a new beer! an invincible deodorant!

In its hype and its pervasive materialism, all boomed with an adolescent cynicism, America does encourage a culture not about life and ebullience but about death and the repugnant. An end to capital punishment would signal a respect for life and an acknowledgment of evil.

Garza is a very bad man. A marijuana trafficker, he was convicted of murdering one person and ordering the deaths of two others in 1990 and 1991. He should remain locked away for the rest of his life and unable to kill again. He now is in a position to be celebrated as the victim of racism or elitism. Perhaps the conventional opponents of the death penalty will find something endearing about him. Maybe Norman Mailer will find he is a gifted writer. Such bizarreries are often turned up to make a brute such as Garza seem appealing.

There is nothing appealing about them. The death they have caused cannot be undone. Their deaths only add to the death. But in prison Garza has a chance to atone for his wrong, and by leaving him there for the right reason America has a chance to demonstrate its reverence for freedom and for life. ❧

Strange New Respect

News flash! When Washington's "strange new respect" nominating committee met last weekend, Dennis Hastert was immediately shortlisted for this year's award. Then came word that our own R. Emmett Tyrrell had come out against the death penalty. By a unanimous show of hands, it was agreed that Tyrrell should be the honored recipient. I gather that the historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. has agreed to preside over the award ceremony, to be held on Manhattan's East Side.

—Tom Bethell

Capital Brutality

The end of the Age of Clinton is finally upon us, and in the last weeks of his adolescent presidency the Boy President did something that etched my approval. He left the country. Unfortunately he returned. That presents independent Counsel Robert Ray with a pretty predicament. To indict or not to indict, that is the predicament. Whatever the outcome, my guess is that Bill's reputation will continue to rot. Soon he will assume that role unique to America's legalistic society, celebrity outcast. Perhaps he and O.J. Simpson will open a golf club and name it for Fatty Arbuckle.

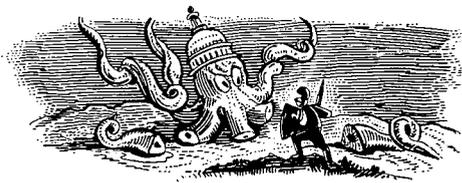
Actually, the Boy President did another thing of which I approve; though he did it for the wrong reasons, and he only went part way. In December he spared the life of the first person scheduled to be executed by the federal government in 37 years, Juan Raul Garza. As I say, Clinton only went part way. He ordered a six-month delay of Garza's execution. He should have spared his life completely and let him remain in the pen for the rest of his life. Garza is a cold-blooded murderer, but it is time to suspend capital punishment in America.

Clinton also got his reasoning wrong. He favored delaying the execution because studies, most one from the Justice Department, have found that minorities are sentenced to death disproportionately. That should surprise no one. Unfortunately, minorities commit a disproportionate number of crimes (usually against other minorities). The crimes are disproportionately more brutal. Naturally, minorities are disproportionately convicted of capital offenses. Yet it is time to end capital punishment.

The most compelling reason for ending state executions is that, though the state has a right to defend its citizenry, capital punishment merely silences life. It neither dramatizes the horror of crime nor speaks out for life. It was once thought to do both, but not in our brutal society. Capital punishment actually adds to the increasing anger and morbidity of society. America in its entertainments, its public ethics, and its culture is entailed with death. Capital punishment adds to the death.

To be sure, a government has a duty to defend its citizens against danger, but that has been accomplished with Garza behind bars. Killing him would merely make him a transient star in our witless celebrity culture. We already have too many unworthy celebrities—though not transient enough. Moreover, once executed Garza would have no chance to acknowledge his wrongs. Locked away for the rest of his life, given benefit of clergy, an ample library, plus time for solitary reflection, even a murderer such as Garza might attain contrition for his cruelty.

Once Garza is executed, society will have less chance to reflect on such a man's life of crime. The spectacle of a state execution now overshadows the heinousness of a murderer's brutality. And ax grinders



The Bush Clan's Return

Will President George W. be more than his father's son?

We welcomed a Bush presidency 12 years ago, and we do so even more today. Any doubts we felt about George Bush in 1988 were small compared to the gratitude we felt for his defeat of Michael Dukakis. Today, as we contemplate Al Gore's near win, our feeling of relief is that much greater. As the Duke of Wellington said after Waterloo, it was a close run thing.

We give a cheery wave to Ralph Nader, whose adoring press coverage of 35 years' duration came to an abrupt end in November. And we salute Supreme Court Justices Sandra Day O'Connor and Anthony Kennedy, who proved to be good Republicans when their votes were essential. As for Justice Stevens's warning, that the court's ruling will damage "the nation's confidence in the judge as an impartial guardian of the rule of law," it's time that bromide was relegated to the "civics for suckers" textbook. The federal judiciary was transformed into a political branch of government decades ago, under Earl Warren. If it takes a pro-Republican majority to get that word out—so be it. Better late than never.

The return of the Bush clan to Washington gives rise to much apprehension, nonetheless. To understand why, recall what happened a decade ago. Bush Sr., kinder and gentler, surrounded himself with moderate Republicans whose recommendations appealed to the *New York Times* and were acceptable to Democrats. Then, in 1990, he retracted his most conspicuous promise—"Read my lips, no

new taxes." His presidency was immediately undone. He seemed not to understand that the damaging advice ultimately came from people who wanted his presidency to fail.

We already see the first steps of a possible reenactment. President-elect George W. Bush promised to be bipartisan and compassionate, reaching out to address society's "deepest problems, one person at a time." As with his father, the most important item on his domestic agenda is tax policy. With the tax burden having risen to World War II levels, and with tax revenues flooding the Treasury, it's pork heaven in Washington, and has been for some time. Bush rightly sees the need to return the surplus to the taxpayers before Washington gobbles it up.

With Democratic support, Congress passed both marriage-penalty tax relief and a reduction of estate taxes last year. President Clinton vetoed both measures. George W. Bush would like to revive these tax cuts and add across-the-board income tax-rate relief. The last item immediately put the Democrats onto a war footing, however. Tax rate reductions would threaten their holy of holies: tax progressivity, class warfare, and fiscal punishment of the productive.

They found an unwitting ally in House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert, who unwisely urged that these tax proposals be considered separately. He did not seem to grasp, as the Democrats did, that if the other cuts are enacted first, the pressure for the (economically more important) reduction of income tax rates will be dissipated.

Republicans of the moderate variety are all too willing to take political advice

at face value, especially when it is phrased in the language of "doing what is right for the country." It rarely occurs to them that the advice may come from enemies rather than friends. The major news organizations and television networks certainly want Bush to fail, and he should bear that in mind whenever they press upon him this or that policy. Refreshing confirmation of this came from the columnist and TV commentator Jack Germond, who said recently that Bush would quite possibly do better than he, Germond, hoped he would.

One change is urgently needed: Republicans should stop expressing tax cuts as revenue losses. Bush's proposed tax bill is called a "\$1.3 trillion tax cut"—the supposed loss to the government. But reductions in top tax rates will certainly produce more revenue, as they did immediately under President Reagan, and as documented in Bush adviser Lawrence Lindsay's book, *The Growth Experiment*. If Bush's people are too timid to insist that this be incorporated into the Federal budget, as Republicans also were when they took control of Congress in 1995, it augurs poorly for the new administration.

No need to stress the importance of picking wisely when it comes to the Supreme Court. But I like to think that the Bushes already learned their lesson. In the tense hours before the Supreme Court ruled, the whole Bush clan had plenty of time to ponder: How on earth did the David Souter get onto the Court? How come former Sen. Warren Rudman, Souter's promoter, was given carte blanche? If the recent experience has taught George W. that judicial nominees really do matter and that crony advice is not good enough, all is not lost. Just to be sure, with future nominees, it might be best to check with Justice Antonin Scalia first. ❧

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