

**THE BLOG**

Talk Broder, Walk Gingrich

By Marty Kaplan

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If “Dress British, Think Yiddish” is a maxim for success in business, then the equivalent in politics — if Republican practice is any guide — is to talk the talk of bipartisanship, but walk the walk of Machiavelli.

Ah, bipartisanship. How quickly we forgive and forget.

The 110th Congress arose from a campaign in which the President, the Vice President, Republican candidates, and Right Blogistan accused Democrats of siding with Al Qaeda, hating America, insulting our troops, and making melba toast from the blood of aborted Christian babies.

That campaign was preceded by a Congress where nothing reached the floor unless it could be passed entirely on partisan lines, by a majority of the majority; where votes were illegally held open until enough Republicans could be strong-armed, or bribed, to toe the party line; where lobbyists secretly wrote bills, conference committees passed them in the dead of night, and members had to vote on them without reading them.

The result, in November, was an election that thumped the Bush party for being corrupt, arrogant, reckless, and belligerently partisan.

Yet today, as the new Congress gets ready to convene, President Bush takes to the Rose Garden, and to the White House organ, the Wall Street Journal op-ed page, to call for an end to “politics as usual,” to “find common ground,” to reach “bipartisan consensus,” “to come together.”

This is nothing new for W. His inaugurals and his State of the Union speeches have been marbled with similar rhetoric about changing the tone, and reaching across the aisle. Before he was The Decider, he was, don’t forget, The Uniter. Apparently he believes that the country is so beguiled by Britney’s *mons* that we have succumbed to collective amnesia about the scorched-earth record of the past six years.

The civility lobby — which now urges Democrats to bring pea-shooters to a gunfight — has strong support among Washington’s wise men, especially its media lions. Today’s Washington Post warns in its news pages of the “mounting pressure from liberal activists to chart a more confrontational course “; on its editorial page, it scolds Speaker Pelosi’s 100-hour agenda for setting “an unfortunate precedent that fairness will be offered on sufferance, when the majority finds it convenient, and not as a matter of principle. “

Yes, matters of principle — the selfsame lofty principles that doubtless will guide John Boehner and Roy Blunt in days to come. The same devotion to fairness that will now be the north star for Mitch McConnell and Trent Lott. Right. And George W. Bush is Gerald R. Ford, Dick Cheney is Edmund Burke, Karl Rove is the Marquess of Queensbury, and love is a thing that can never go wrong, and I am Marie of Rumania.

To understand the Bizarro World way that Washington wisdom defines “the center,” look no further than the two men most often dubbed Mr. Bipartisan by the MSM: Sens. John McCain and Joe Lieberman. They are lauded not because they agree with the country’s majority position on Iraq, but because they *oppose* it. Their support for Bush’s insane escalation in Iraq is anomalous, aberrant, an outlier position among voters, generals, experts and politicians of both parties; their stand is the very definition of fringe, margin, extreme — and yet they are crowned Kings of the Common Ground by the punditocracy.

Yesterday, Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens — who was appointed to the Court by Gerald Ford — gave his first network television interview. The reporter said to him, You’re regarded as the most liberal vote on the Court, and yet when you were appointed, you were regarded as a moderate conservative, weren’t you? His answer: I considered myself then, and consider myself now, a conservative.

In other words, since the Ford presidency, Republicans have moved so far to the right that the new definition of “conservative” — not even “moderate conservative” — is “liberal.” No wonder the center now looks like Zell Miller.

In today’s political reality, Bush-Broder bipartisanship is a sucker punch waiting to happen. Is that sad? Sure. But politics isn’t for crybabies. For Democrats to fall into this trap, it would be like committing unilateral disarmament.

What’s the worst that could happen if Democrats learn something from the Gingrich revolution, and stand firm for their principles?

Editorial writers will complain? They’ll complain anyway. And if Republicans have taught the nation anything, it’s the irrelevance of the chattering class to the polls.

Republican filibusters? Let them try - and let them be hoist by their own “up-or-down-vote” petard.

Bush will veto bills? Let him. Let the country see what Republican values really are.

Public unhappiness with “partisan bickering”? A Rasmussen poll after the election said that 48% of the country expects more partisan bickering in the new Congress. But look at how that breaks down. Sixty-nine percent of Republicans expect increased bickering, but only 29% of Democrats think that. Bickering is in the eye of the beholder; it’s sour grapes for sore losers. Republicans would never design a legislative strategy with the purpose of winning Democrats’ support. Why should Democrats even consider it?

As for civility, I’m all for it. Democrats should extol civil discourse at every opportunity. And as long as we’re all being so rhetorically lovey-dovey, maybe Rep. Virgil Goode could take a moment to retract Macaca 2.0, and Dick Cheney could apologize for telling Sen. Pat Leahy to “go f--- yourself” on the Senate floor. And pigs, as they say, could fly.

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