

Century Marks

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Cagle Cartoons

"We can't completely separate politics and faith. They rise from the same wellspring: the concern about the distance between what is and what ought to be."

—Tim Kaine, a Catholic and a Democrat, who was elected governor of Virginia in November (*Newsweek*, November 21).

"It is evident that continued military action in Iraq is not in the best interest of the United States of America, the Iraqi people or the Persian Gulf regime."

—Congressman John Murtha (D., Pa.), former marine and a Vietnam veteran, calling for the U.S. to immediately withdraw its troops from Iraq while maintaining a rapid-deployment force in the region (*Los Angeles Times*, November 17)

Sounds familiar: Melvin R. Laird, secretary of defense under President Richard Nixon, says that "getting out of a war is still dicier than getting into one" (*Foreign Affairs*, November/December). Nixon was elected in 1968 in part because he claimed he had a plan for getting the U.S. out of Vietnam. Laird says there was no plan other

than a statement in the Republican Party platform suggesting that it was time to de-Americanize the war. It was Laird's job to come up with a plan. Laird says South Vietnam didn't fall to the North until the U.S. pulled the plug on funding the South in 1975 while the Soviet Union continued to provide major support to the North. He blames the media for making it appear as though the U.S. was losing the war. He also says the first mistake in that war was its Americanization.

Rewriting history: The Bush administration is charging that some critics of the Iraq War—particularly those who initially supported it—are guilty of rewriting history. The administration claims, for instance, that members of Congress had access to the same intelligence the White House used to make the case for war; that a bipartisan Senate investigation found no evidence that intelligence reports on Iraq's weapons programs were manipulated; and that other nations' intelligence agencies, including those of France and Russia, reached the same conclusions the White House did about Saddam Hussein's weapons programs. But other observers note that Congress didn't have nearly the amount of intelligence the White House did and that what it had was dependent on the White House; that the Senate Committee on Intelligence hasn't finished its investigation into allegations that the administration manipulated intelligence to make its case for war; and, finally, that France's and Russia's knowledge of Iraq's weapons programs didn't lead them to justify going to war (www.americanprogress.org).

Gag rule: The U.S. House of Representatives has approved an Affordable Housing Fund, which gives priority to Hurricane Katrina victims. But many community-based nonprofit agencies will not be able to receive the funds if the Senate follows the House's lead. That's because hidden away in HR 1461 is a gag rule, the so-called Manager's Amendment, which states that no organization can receive money from the Affordable Housing Fund if it engages in voter registration, voter identification or get-out-the-vote activity, even of a nonpartisan nature; if it has engaged in such activity in the 12 months before applying for funding; or if it affiliates with any organization that engages in such activity. The Senate's version of the bill, S 190, does not contain that provision (www.ombwatch.org).

Bible tax: The American Civil Liberties Union has filed a suit contesting a law in Georgia that exempts Bibles from sales tax. A bookstore owner in Atlanta who agrees with the ACLU said, "If they're not taxing someone's holy scriptures, they shouldn't be taxing anyone's," and suggested that sale of *A Witches' Bible* should also be tax-exempt (*Chicago Sun-Times*, November 6).

Smoking and sex: A recent study shows that a primary reason children ages 10 to 14 try cigarettes is that they've seen people smoking in the movies. The study, which found smoking in 74 percent of 532 movies surveyed, concluded that 38 percent of young smokers took up the practice because of the influence of movies (*USA Today*, November 7). Another study indicates that sex-related scenes on television have nearly doubled since 1998. Of the top 20 shows watched by teens, 70 percent include talk of or depictions of sexual situations, at an average of 6.7 per hour (*Boston Globe*, November 10).

Poor taste: Winemakers in Los Angeles are trying to market a wine they call "Jesus Juice." The name is based on an unconfirmed report that singer Michael Jackson served wine to minors, telling them it is "Jesus juice." The logo for the wine features a figure resembling Christ on the cross wearing clothes like Jackson's trademark shoes, glove and hat and not much else (*Red Eye*, November 8).

Common language: New phrases added to the online edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*: "d'oh!" (Homer Simpson's catchphrase), "full monty" (total nudity, from the movie with the same name) and "bad hair day." The *Penguin Dictionary of Modern Quotations* has placed alongside classic quotes from Winston Churchill and others these lines: "I'll tell you what I want, what I really, really want" (Spice Girls lyric); "The English like eccentrics. They just don't like them living next door" (Julian Clary); "My fellow Americans, I am pleased to tell you I have just signed legislation which outlaws Russia forever. The bombing begins in five minutes" (President Ronald Reagan's comment during a microphone test); and "I've got a head for business and a body for sin" (Melanie Griffiths's line in *Working Girl*) (BBC News).

Neoconservative meets neoliberal? The Republican Party has become "the party of Sam's Club, not just the country club," say Ross Douthat and Reihan Salam. But they think the GOP is not doing enough to hold on to the working-class social conservatives who have made it the majority party. Offering advice to party leaders, they say the key is to acknowledge voters' economic insecurity. Appealing to an "ownership society" or calling for a privatized Social Security system is a political dead end when your supporters are in debt and worried about losing their jobs. The alternative: "pro-family" policies such as increasing tax credits for dependent children, subsidizing wages of low-income single men (thereby making them "more desirable marriage partners") and making health insurance universal and affordable (*Weekly Standard*, November 14).

Asian futures: One can argue plausibly that Christianity has failed to penetrate Asia. After repeated attempts at evangelization, only 2 percent of Japanese, only 6 to 8 percent of Chinese and only 8 percent of all Asians are Christians. On the other hand, one can look at South Korea, where nearly half the country is churched, and at the explosive growth of the church in China over the past two generations, and conclude that Christianity is about to sweep Asia, or at least the southeast part. Perhaps the only certain truth is that Asia, with 60 percent of the world's population (compared to North America's 6 percent), is so vast that it is impossible to generalize about it—and that what happens in Asia will shape world Christianity (*Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, summer 2005).