

Primary predictions

Bush, Gore, traditional family values will emerge victorious on Tuesday



"The word 'politics' is derived from the word 'poly,' meaning 'many,' and the word 'ticks,' meaning 'blood-sucking parasites.'"
—Larry Hardiman

Tomorrow is the famed "Super Tuesday," the day when several of the most important states hold their presidential primaries. Basically, tomorrow's winner has a smooth road ahead for his party's nomination.

As the morbidly cynical quote above implies, politicians aren't highly esteemed by Americans. But hey, at least we can decide which blood-sucking parasites get elected to office. Not all vampires are created equal.

Tomorrow is important for several reasons. First, it probably sounds the death knell for Bill Bradley in his insurgent campaign against Al Gore. Second, it's the date when Californians will vote on a highly controversial constitutional amendment to forbid recognition of same-sex marriage. Finally, it's the big showdown between George W. Bush and John McCain.

Gore vs. Bradley

Recent reports of former Senator Bill Bradley's demise have not been exaggerated. Bradley has failed to win a single primary: national polls show him losing to Gore by more than 35 percent (USA Today 2/29/00), and he trails Gore in almost all state polls (World-Herald 3/1/00).

Last week Bradley campaigned hard for six straight days in Washington, trying to gather some momentum with a win. He lost to Gore by an unexpectedly large 37 percent.

Super Tuesday is the date when 15 Democratic states will hold their primaries or caucuses, including key states like California, New York and Ohio. Because nearly a third of the delegates of the Democratic National Convention will be chosen tomorrow, Bradley needs a miracle upset victory in at least one of these big states to be in a position to win the nomination.

Bradley's done a good job on advocating campaign finance reform, a national health insurance program and reasonable gun control measures. But as much as I and other liberals like the guy, he simply doesn't have a chance tomorrow.

Five or six percent more of the vote would have won him New Hampshire — and all the corresponding momentum and media exposure such an upset would bring. Had Bradley skipped Iowa and focused on New Hampshire like McCain, he might be in a spot similar to the Republican challenger.

Still, Bradley has been good for the Democratic party. Even if he loses, he's improved that party's chances in November. Six months ago Gore was still under Clinton's shadow and viewed as a wooden lackey. While Gore still isn't exactly Alan Keyes in the charisma department, he's learned how to debate energetically, define the issues and do what needs to be done to win a contested campaign.

Bradley seems to be getting desperate, however. Last Thursday he spent over a million dollars to buy five minutes of prime time during CBS' "48 Hours" in a last-ditch attempt to appeal directly to voters.

It's really too little too late — the Democratic nomination is securely in Gore's pocket. The VP seems to know it, too. Thursday's "USA Today" headline was "Gore shifts attention to GOP candidates."

Religion vs. Equality

On Super Tuesday Californians will vote on the controversial constitutional amendment Proposition-22, the so-called "Knight Initiative." The amendment contains just 14 words: "Only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California."

Same-sex marriages aren't legally recognized in California now, but proponents of the measure hope to join 30 other states in "defending the sanctity of marriage," in case another state were to recognize gay

marriage.

The initiative has proven divisive. Supporters, including the Mormon and Catholic Church, have spent millions promoting it. In response, gays and other supporters of equality have organized a statewide coalition and raised millions to fight the measure.

The opposition seems doomed. A recent San Francisco Examiner poll found that 55 percent of voters supported the initiative, while only 38 percent opposed it.

This should be a valuable lesson for the gay community on who to focus their scant resources. If the measure fails, little is gained. If the measure passes, little is lost.

The initiative makes no difference at all until another state recognizes gay marriages; and that could be another 5 to 10 years. Even then, it will mostly come down to a Supreme Court ruling on whether the Full Faith and Credit Clause of the Constitution prohibits states from denying recognition to out-of-state same-sex marriages.

The gay community would be better off spending their money to gain small but tangible steps towards equality in the areas like nondiscrimination laws, health insurance for domestic partners and hospital visitation rights.

Bush v. McCain

Judging by the media coverage, tomorrow's primaries pit Luke Skywalker (John McCain) against Darth Vader (George W. Bush) for the soul of the GOP. In reality, the pair have remarkably similar stances on most issues besides campaign finance reform.

Still, tomorrow's race will be interesting. Super Tuesday hosts 13 Republican primaries and caucuses. Over half of the delegates needed to win the nomination are at stake.

McCain must do well if he hopes to stay in the race. Next week are the Florida and Texas primaries, containing almost 20 percent of the delegates needed to win, and both are almost certain to go to Bush.

McCain has a chance, however. Pure pragmatists are likely to notice that he matches up better against Gore (59 percent to 35 percent) than Bush does (52 percent to 43 percent) (USA Today, 2/29/00). McCain is also in a statistical dead heat with Bush in New York. (OWH 3/01/00).

However, both New York and California count only registered Republican voters. This could be a big stumbling block for McCain, since his victories in New Hampshire and Michigan depended heavily on independent and Democratic voters.

When it comes down to it, Bush is still the favorite. However, even if he wins the nomination, he won't come out of the campaign in as good as shape as he went in. Six months ago Bush was hailed as a "compassionate con-

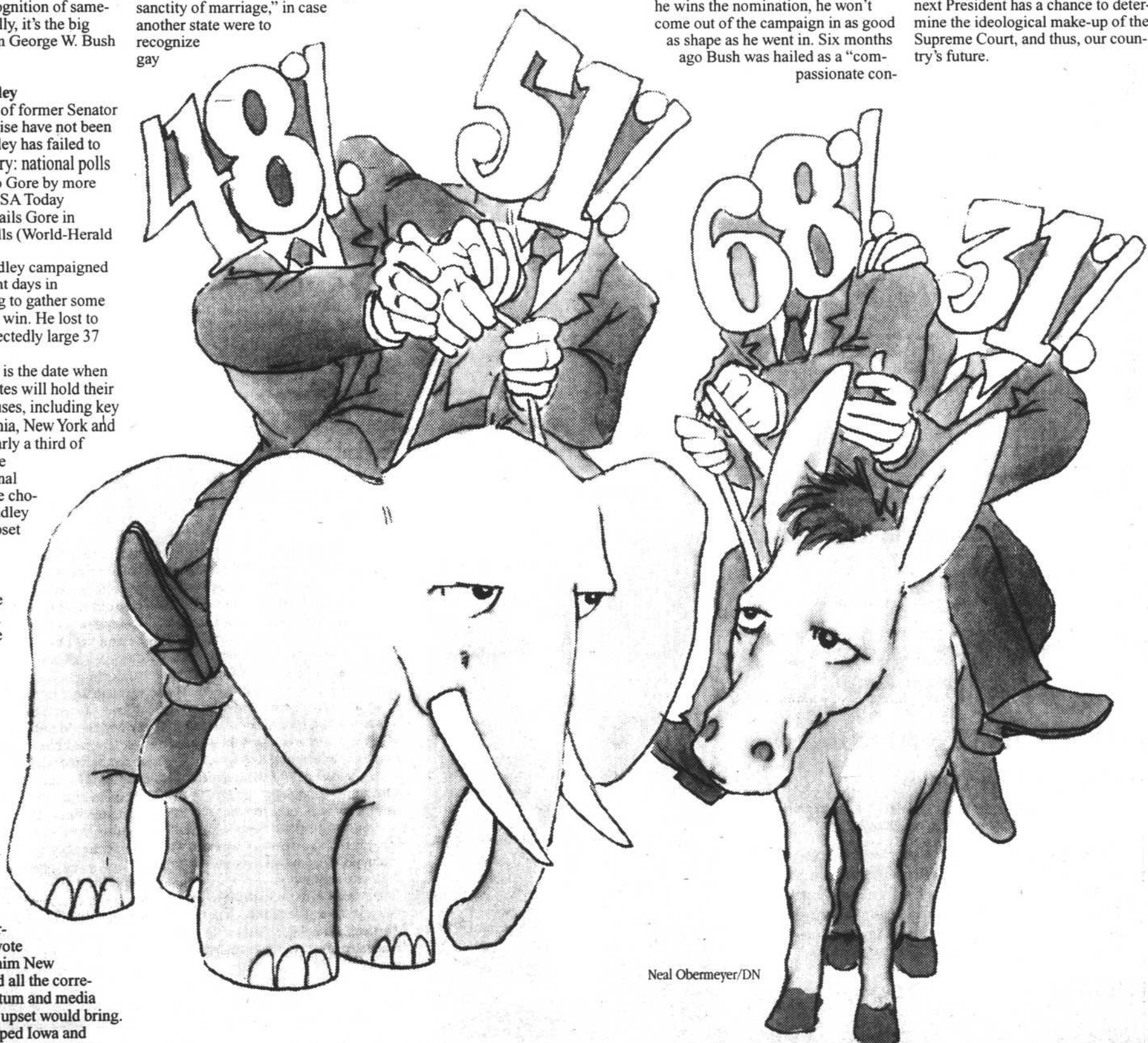
servative" able to attract moderates, women and minorities. In the face of McCain's ability to draw independents and Democrats, Bush has had to move to the right and ally himself with the religious, conservative core of the party.

Furthermore, Bush has seen his huge money advantage shrink. Some reports have pegged Bush at having spent over three million dollars a week fighting McCain. This is the same George W. Bush that set records by having raised \$70 million.

Both the push to the right and the financial drain will hurt Bush in the fall elections.

Tomorrow's results will set the stage for a showdown in November. There's still one figure waiting in the wings: Pat Buchanan. If he becomes the Reform Party candidate, Buchanan will run with a cadre of loyal followers, tens of millions of dollars in federal matching funds, and an invitation to the debates. Although he probably won't win, he'll be able to skew the results to favor one of the candidates.

The elections become even more important when we consider the Supreme Court. Chief Justice Rehnquist is 75 and likely to retire soon. Justice Scalia (another conservative die-hard) has been reported to be considering resigning if a Democrat is elected President. With other Justices nearing retirement, the next President has a chance to determine the ideological make-up of the Supreme Court, and thus, our country's future.



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