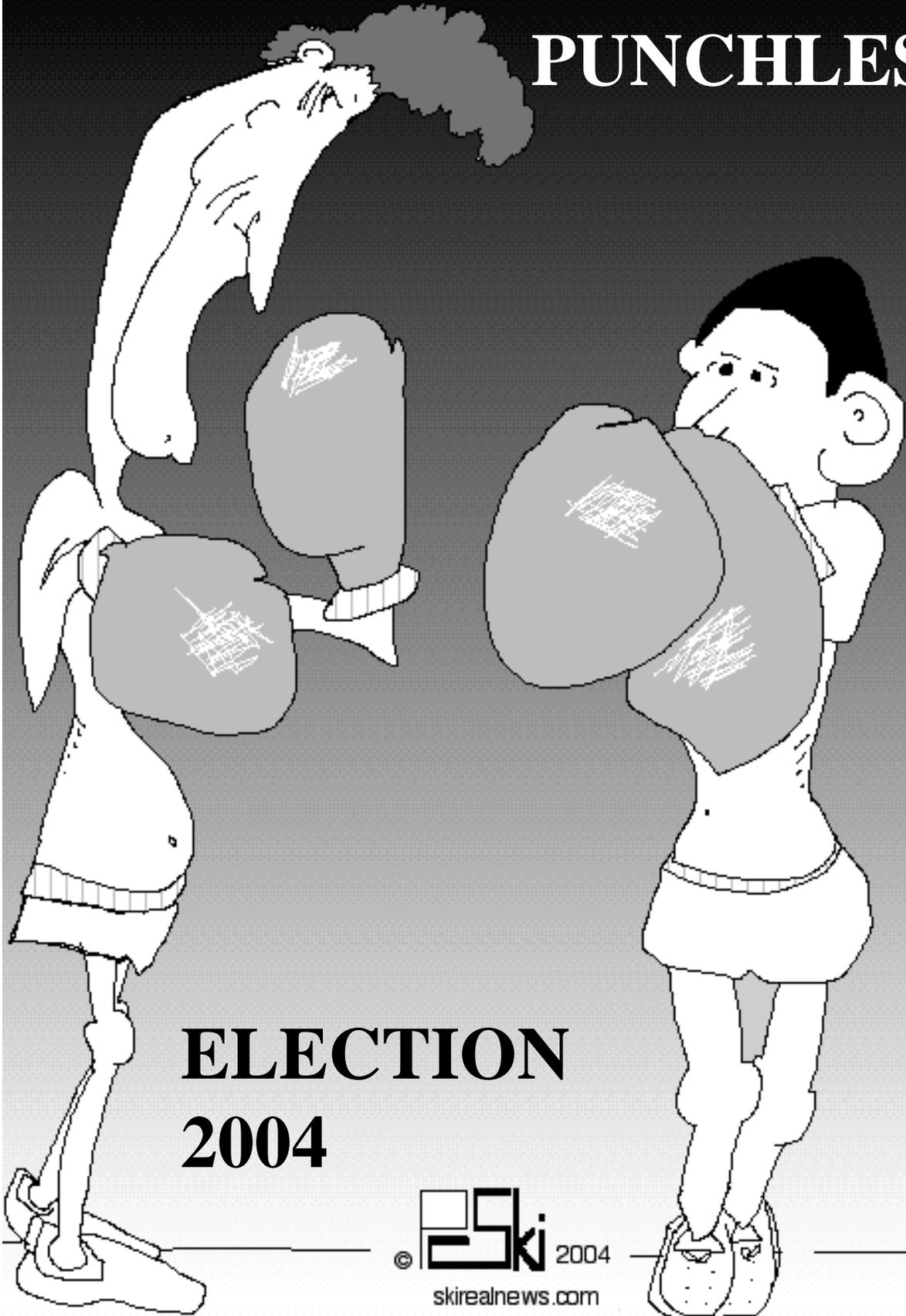


PUNCHLESS



**ELECTION
2004**

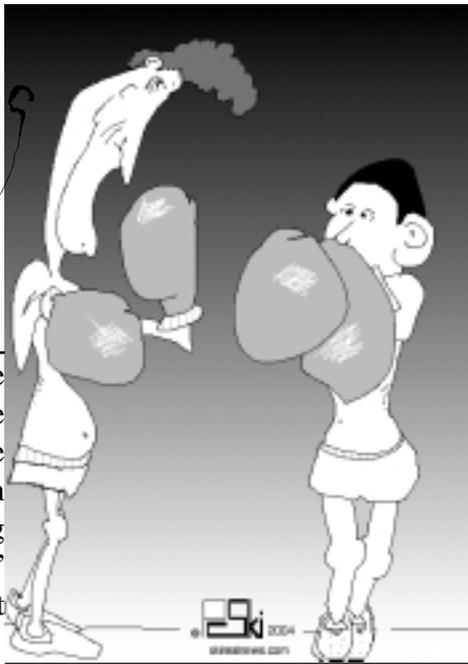
The Real News

PUNCHLESS ELECTION 2004 EDITION

I gave up at the 48 minute mark of Presidential debate Number One. It was around the time that George W. Bush stumbled over one of his “wrong war, wrong time, wrong place” soundbite mantra attack against John Kerry flip-flops on Iraq.

It really was not a debate. The debate standard in American politics is the Lincoln-Douglas oratory, where two men traveled Illinois to speak at hours in the blazing sun taking pot shots, direct shots and brutal wit at each other in the name of honest leadership positions on the issues of the day. Today’s modern politician cannot stand the strain of being under the television arch lights for more than 90 minutes without melting into a Wizard of Oz witch. The rules of the modern debate are rules of non-engagement. If the candidates were left to hone their own questions to their opponent, plus remember their stump answers, their brains would explode in a heap of rancid oatmeal.

I think the whole thing got off to a bad start when I arrived at the homestead just in time to catch a moment of the pre-game cable news junkie hype of the event. On MSNBC, there were several BADNARIK signs behind Chris Matthews and his



guests. I thought, kudos to those U of Miami students who got out of the Clintonian shackles of their university president to put in a protest and endorsement of the Libertarian Party candidate for President, Michael Badnarik. Since the third parties were once again eliminated from the debate platform by the Committee’s self serving rules that a candidate must be on an electoral majority of state ballots, be of a legitimate national party (which the Libertarian Party qualifies) and must poll at least 15% in national surveys (highly arbitrary and exclusionary.) However, it was reported this week that more than 40% of the American public would prefer in this election a viable third party candidate to vote for in lieu of Bush or Kerry. Forty percent!! That is not unheard of if one considers that 50% of the eligible electorate did not vote in the last election because they were turned off by the media major candidates. So the Badnarik signs were great.

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Like locust which come every four years to plague vast regions of the globe, so must pass the quadfarce called the American Presidential Election. This edition marks the 9th US presidential election commentary by the publisher.

A producer must have seen the signs, too because Matthews at the end of his segment turned to the crowd with gusto to complement the passionate supporters with signs for Bush and Kerry. But the signs shown on the television were neither Bush or Kerry!! It was a Badnarik sign. It was the smoking gun of the major criticism of American journalism of politics: the media sees what it wants to see. Matthews comments were directly opposite of what his own viewer had been viewing for that entire segment. In his mind, he must have had to deflect the anti-establishment signage in favor of the featured politicians who would take the stage that evening.

Just as Dan Rather was getting stitches for the mortal wounds of Memogate, the American people do not believe the coverage the national media is giving to the election. The campaigns have been massaged by polling data, demographic speeches and the ten second soundbite which neither addresses or defines a candidate’s position on any single issue. It is done on purpose: to deceive the voter into apathetic ignorance. A candidate wants to befriend every voter in order to get elected.

The first debate was one previewed as Great Non-Expectations. The Democrats had primed their patronage media army for the spin that Kerry was a more effective speaker and debater than Bush. The Republicans primed their patronage media analysts for the spin that Bush has established his record as commander in chief against the flip-flopping Kerry.

Jim Lehrer set down the rules for the debate including his discretion to allow follow-up questions. The candidates were introduced. Bush was the first on stage, making a strong bee-line directly to Kerry. It was a purposeful move to set the stage that he was in command of the arena.

The first question was a typical non-reality inquiry guised in a real issue. Lehrer asked Kerry if he was President, would he have done a better job in preventing 9/11 attacks. The question is pure speculation with no right or wrong answer. You can't be criticized for an answer to a question that has no verifiable response. The Question also presupposes that the President, one person, has the capacity to stop the 9/11 attacks. The Question also infers that the President failed to prevent the 9/11 attacks.

Kerry did not answer the question per se. He went directly to his first memorized talking point. He said repeatedly that the United States was paying 90% of the casualties and the costs in Iraq, and that he had a better plan because "we can do better."



Kerry & Bush at Debate #1

Bush's reply was also typical stump speech fodder. He said that 9/11 attacks had changed the world and America

I got home in time to see the Presidential Debate 1.0. I could only stand the first 48 minutes. I had to bail at that stumbling point in time. Unless the two candidates were willing to pull out bowie knives and cut the crap soundbite, cue-card answers, and get down to some real meat (issue or flesh, it did not matter at that point), I was gone. It was like watching sock puppets perform while you are being held down by a 50 pound lead weight in a carnival dunk tank. So 48 minutes of water torture led to serious mental bends and the express need for some Coke. (Liquid caffeine people! I have not gone that far over the edge.)

forever. That his administration takes security "seriously." When a president sees a threat, like Saddam Hussein in Iraq, a President has to act to protect America.

The first question to Bush about Iraq and 9/11 connection. Bush answered that "people know what I stand for and what I believe" in keeping the peace, fighting the war on terror, and defending America. This is a direct attack on Kerry's lack of specific leadership on the topic of national security in the post 9/11 world.

While Kerry was listening to Bush's answer, he faked writing down detailed notes in a stupid display of scribbling line after line. Kerry then replied not to what Bush had just said, but that he would not lose focus on hunting down and killing terrorists, but he said "need to be smart, Jim." In a condescending way, Kerry started his second talking point to America--- I am smarter than Bush so I would make a better president.

If there was a cut-away camera shot of Bush during these snipes, no wonder Bush would look annoyed at Kerry. Who would not look annoyed if your opponent kept on calling you "stupid" or "dumb" by exalting himself as "smarter" than you?

Lehrer asked Kerry directly to explain his statement that Bush had made "colossal misjudgments." Kerry was taken aback by the prospect of actually answering a pointed question, so he attempted to defuse it with the snippet: "where to begin?" He then said Bush lied to the American people when he said he'd follow the UN resolutions, stop the WMDs, and use war only as the "last resort." Then he said

Bush's \$200 billion in Iraq that could have been spent on police and firefighters in the US.

An frustrated Bush replied that Kerry's statements directly contradict Kerry's own public announcements on Iraq policy in 2002 and 2003. Bush said Kerry did not lie when he supported the war then (so he infers that Kerry was lying now during the debate.) Bush said Saddam had 16 resolutions to prove he given up WMD, that he went to the European leaders who did not want to join his coalition, and he did gather allies, including Britain, to disarm Iraq.

Bush also brushed aside Kerry's claim that he has lacked focus on the war on terror. Bush said "we are capable of going after both (Saddam and bin Laden)." Bush made his strong soundbite conclusion: "when Iraq is free, the United States will be stronger."

Kerry scoffs at that comment. He says the Bush plan in Iraq is not working. Kerry charged that Bush had "no plan for peace" for Iraq which is costing American lives. His campaign banner tag line he repeated: the President does not see that the situation is getting worse day by day in Iraq. He lied about WMD so he is lying about the situation in Iraq. There needs a leadership change to solve Iraq. He then went on to say that the administration is not spending money to give soldiers the body armor they need to defend themselves.

B u s h

muscled in a sur-reply. He denounced Kerry for voting against the \$87 billion appropriation which included body armor for soldiers.

Kerry also barbed that Bush has no credibility with our allies to win the peace.

The next question to Kerry was about homeland security. Kerry slammed Bush for spending billions to rebuild Iraq but no money for roads, bridges, policemen, firemen or cargo inspectors.

Bush snapped back at Kerry, saying how is he going to pay for all these new spending programs

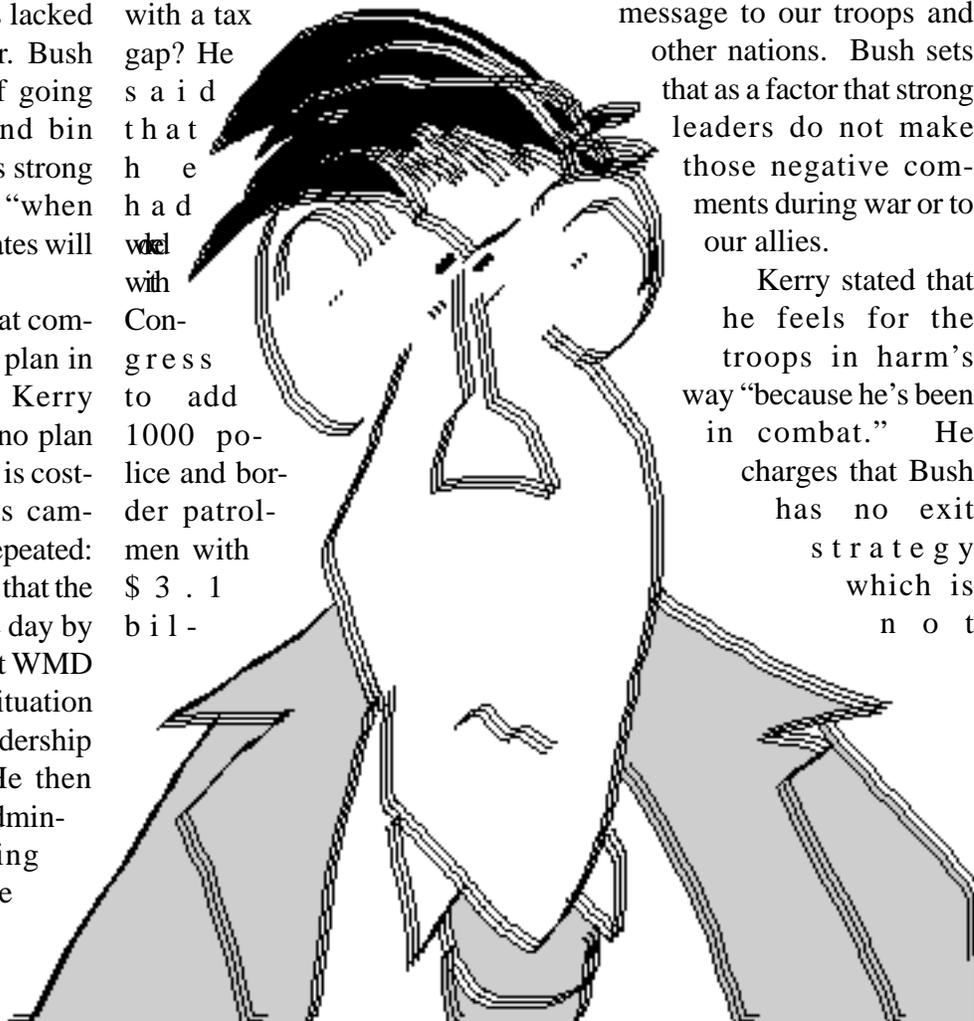
with a tax gap? He said that he had voted with Congress to add 1000 police and border patrolmen with \$ 3 . 1 bil -

lion in additional spending.

Kerry butted in a second reply by saying that the FBI culture had not changed under Bush reforms because there are 100,000 hours of tapes not translated that could prevent another terrorist attack. Bush bit back by saying "We are do our duty-- my job is to protect America every day!"

The "debate" continued with stock answers to non-questions and verbal spars for their own constituents benefit. Bush repeated that Kerry's flip flog and negativity that Iraq "was the wrong war, the wrong place and the wrong time" sends the wrong message to our troops and other nations. Bush sets that as a factor that strong leaders do not make those negative comments during war or to our allies.

Kerry stated that he feels for the troops in harm's way "because he's been in combat." He charges that Bush has no exit strategy which is not



“smart” so Bush has no credibility to continue to be president.

Kerry charged that Bush’s plan did not include traditional allies and that he overreacted to the situation. He compared it to FDR invading Mexico in response to Pearl Harbor. “Bush does not have the smarts to get (our allies) back to the table” to help in Iraq. Instead, Bush administration turned over Iraq so Halliburton would get the spoils of war.

Bush said Kerry’s comments were “totally absurd.” He defended that there were other allies fighting in Iraq. Bush says he deals with world leaders every day as commander in chief. He said that world leaders will not follow a person who keeps on saying “wrong war, wrong place, wrong time.”

So the minutes fawned on with Kerry making charges that Bush lied or has no plan for peace. Bush countered with the statement that he is winning the war, Iraq wants to be free, and a democratic Iraq will change the dynamic of the entire Middle East.

So throughout the first half of the debate, it was clear that Kerry had no specific alternative plans to the Bush administration programs for Iraq or national security. Kerry was left to trying to diminish, slam or tear down what the factors that had supported the Iraqi foreign policy and the war on terror. His solution was only that “I have a better plan” or “I will be smarter.”

Bush has his few jab

points. He still believes that Kerry’s flip flop on positions will not make him a good commander in chief or world leader. He told the viewers that people know who he is and what his position is on the issues of national security. He is playing to the fears of the soccer moms: you know me and my policy on security issues; Kerry has no security plan so don’t change horses in the middle of the race.

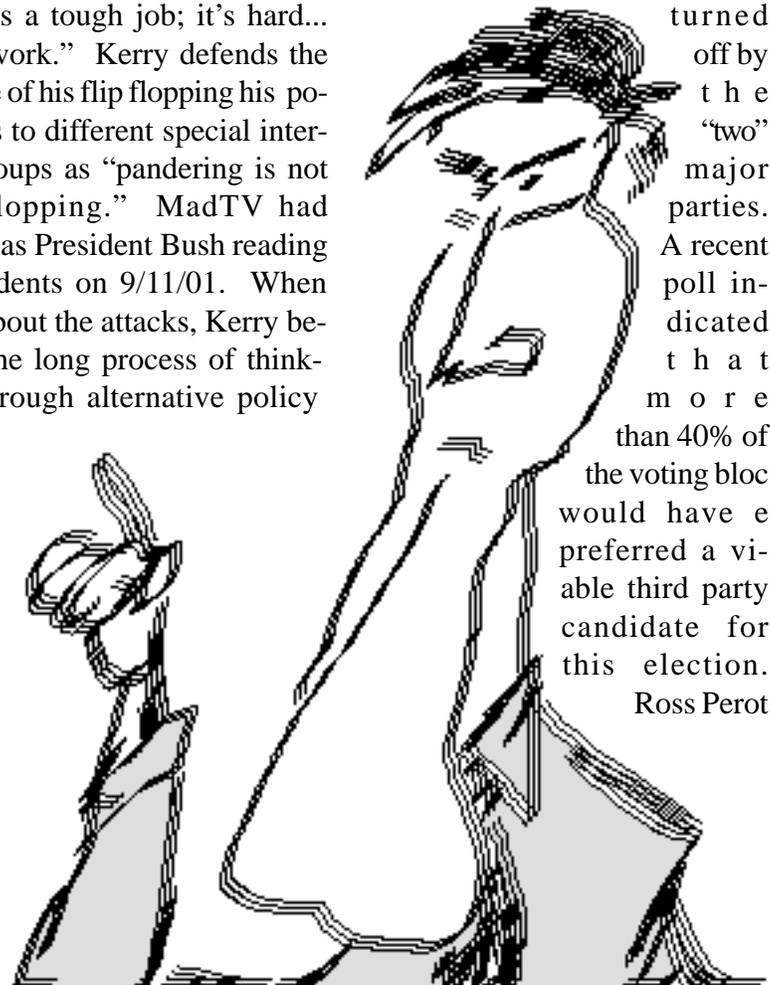
How did the political satirists digest the candidate’s performances? On Saturday Night Live, the opening skit was the debate. The telling lines were Bush mumbling and stumbling over the questions by answering “this is a tough job; it’s hard... hard work.” Kerry defends the charge of his flip flopping his positions to different special interest groups as “pandering is not flip-flopping.” MadTV had Kerry as President Bush reading to students on 9/11/01. When told about the attacks, Kerry begins the long process of thinking through alternative policy

plans, winding up 16 years later with no real response. The message was clear: Bush is attempting to slide through a second term on his reputation while Kerry has no convictions to make a stand because that would defeat his electability.

Post-debate, Kerry’s media hawks loudly proclaimed his victory, while most undecided voters said it was a boring tie. The real voter probably yearned for an alternative. In Ohio, where 66% of the voters are registered as third party or independents, Bush criss-crossed the State seeking those independent votes.

America is being more and more

turned off by the “two” major parties. A recent poll indicated that more than 40% of the voting bloc would have preferred a viable third party candidate for this election.
Ross Perot



and Steve Forbes were ahead of their growing disenfranchised voting segment. There are viable third parties in America, the Libertarians for example will be on the ballot in all states, but the media does not cover third parties because they are in partnership with the Dems and Republicans.

Politics is the cottage industry for the national press and corporate conglomerates. The big media players spend more time on lobbyists and special interest campaigning than hiring reporters to investigate political corruption. A media group that needs FCC approval, a tax bill change or some special piece of legislation to help their timber operations, will covet the political establishment not go against the grain and undermine the status quo.

The reporters telephone directories are filled with the revolving door of paid political consultants who filter feed every thing through the scope of its political implications. The debates are like Sunday afternoon football for these pundits and media commentators. This is their Game which overwhelms the coverage of any other news event.

Reporting facts has been supplanted by political opinion because the sources of news stories are spinners, not factual sources. The stories are slanted toward the agendas of the sources. Managing the news has become a high art form that editors are willing to play.

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Endorsement

It may also be the constant drumming of the same issues and faux crisis that has turned the American's voter's political awareness into cole slaw. For example, what were the major issues in 1985-1986? Massive federal deficit and a dispute of whether to increase taxes to decrease it. Muslim terrorists had hijacked planes and taken hostages. Africa and world starvation were still a problem. U.S. Soviet relations were still at a standstill in a Cold War mentality until a summit opened real peace discussions. A record \$53 farm bailout bill passed Congress. U. S. defense contractors were under criminal scrutiny for contracting abuses. The U.S. became a net debtor nation. The U.S. economy was in a high interest rate slowdown as exports dropped sharply. Central America was in midst of civil war. AIDS became a scientific/public health warning cry. Politicians vehemently debated tax reforms. Illegal drugs was a rampant problem, even in professional sports. Growing terrorism was a threat with groups using

the media to publicize for new recruits.

A review of the 1985-86 issues would lead to one conclusion: nothing has changed. The only difference is that politicians have stopped making the same promises/solutions because specifics lead to a "record" which can be used against you in the court of public opinion. Incumbents want to get re-elected and not run on their record. So incumbents and candidates speak slogans to their audience, which can change night to night. Kerry has been accused of flip-flopping on the issues. He is really attempting to buy votes by bouncing from special interest group to special interest group promising his "support" for their cause, even if it conflicts with other promises. Bill Clinton felt "everyone's pain" and got re-elected in the process. In time, a candidate cannot force feed this slop as a solution to the issues of the day, so he goes into Blame Game mode: blame your opponent for everything that is wrong in the country. So what if it is untrue? This is politics.

THE VICE PRESIDENT DEBATE



The Vice Presidential Debate was a secondary annoyance to the nationally televised Yankee-Twins playoff game. If the debate was crowded as being a bare knuckle brawl by good orators, Dick Cheney may have come with brass knuckles (factual jabs) to John Edwards' pacifier (charged slogans).

But the debate was a non-event because both sides had their victory spinmeisters on the cable television sets. Post reaction polls were split. Some said Cheney won the first half, some said Edwards won the second half, but most of America really did not care.

When the barbs back and forth between candidates do not address the issues most people face on a daily basis, voters do not have time to waste on an irrelevant academic exercise for historians, political wonks and pundits.

Cheney did better than Bush, but had several faux faux moments that the Dems gleamed onto like flies to honey. Edwards made several false charges and had a condescending attitude, but he got a pass because he was the newcomer.

NO KEY TO ILLINOIS

The national party committees gave Illinois to the Democrats early and often in the 2004 election cycle. The Republican party has imploded with the Jack Ryan alleged sex scandal which left the U.S. Senate race, a formerly highly contested affair, without a candidate. Not one state republican stepped up to the plate to answer the call to run against Democratic media darling, Barack Obama. The weak, weasel-like fetal position that the state leaders have shown is a time warp image of the last gasps of the Whig Party.

Former Gov Ryan has is awaiting trial on corruption charges. The federal government is spinning out indictments for City Hall employees like cotton candy at a carnival. The citizens of Illinois are being crushed by massive tax increases, a new governor bent on a palace coup of all state boards, and huge state and school board deficits. The entire state is a festering, septic tank sink hole.

So the state Republicans had to go out-of-state to find a replacement candidate for the U.S. Senate seat. Alan Keyes, the conservative radio talk gadfly, was an unlikely choice because (a) he never lived in Illinois; (b) he has no connection to Illinois; (c) knows nothing about Illinois politics and (d) has no "base" or campaign organization in Illinois. He was set up by party leaders to lose, and to lose badly. Why?



The state GOP leaders are delusional in thinking that one loss in an election is the death-knell to their political careers. No one wanted to run a competitive race and lose to Obama. Judy Barr Topinka, the only state elected official left in the GOP ranks, refused to step in to run because most believe she wants to run for governor. Everyone in Illinois politics wants to run for governor now. All indictments aside, it is the last free flowing pig trough of patronage hiring left in the State.

But the rout of the GOP in Illinois in November could lead the Republicans to fall to third position in clout. More than 40% of the electorate will not vote for either Obama or Keyes. If they have the knowledge or guts to vote for Jerry Kohn, the Libertarian candidate for Senate, this third party could suddenly become a real disgruntled Republican's viable choice in the future. GOP leaders abandoned their members because they have no backbone in principle to stand for any lasting principles. Only Keyes stepped up to the plate.