

OUTLOOK

Soul-searching begins for Republican Party



E.J. Dionne Jr. says unfortunately, Michele Bachmann's political tactics of accusations and paranoia likely won't leave the stage with her.

Maybe Bob Dole has more clout in the Republican Party than we think. He suggested on Sunday that the party put up a "closed for repairs" sign for the rest of the year. Then along comes Michele Bachmann declaring on Wednesday that she won't seek re-election.

On the surface, Republicans will be happy that they won't have to answer for her exquisitely inflammatory statements anymore. Democrats will be disappointed to lose a face that launched thousands of contributions their way. You might say her departure is a small repair for the GOP's image.

In fact, Bachmannism is far from finished. The Minnesota right-winger deserves to be memorialized with an "ism" because she perfected a tactic well-suited to the current media environment: Continually toss out outlandish, baseless charges, and, eventually, some of them will enter the mainstream media — if, at first, only in the form of "coverage" of what conservative radio shows, websites or Fox News is talking about. You don't have to bat 1,000 or even .350 in this game. Get just a handful of your accusations and strange takes on reality into the political bloodstream and you've won.

Bachmann's method is now common currency. And here's the beautiful thing: Even as the regular media does some of your work for you, you lambaste the very same media. This only creates more pressure on them to cover you.

"I fully anticipate the mainstream liberal media to put a detrimental spin on my decision not to seek a fifth term," she said in her eight-minute, 40-second video announcing her decision not to run. She practically invited reporters to do just that by insisting her decision did not stem from the danger she might lose re-election or because of an investigation into the finances of her 2012 presidential campaign. Is citing her denials a form of "detrimental spin"?

Her video provided choice examples of the Bachmann method and the extent to which it is now being emulated by others. She denounced "this administration's outrageous lack of action in Benghazi, Libya, and the subsequent political cover-up, which resulted in the deaths of four honorable, dedicated public servants."

Note the clever construction of that sentence. It implies that it's the administration's "political cover-up" that led to the killings in Benghazi. It's hard not to conclude that she's saying those deaths

were all about President Obama's political needs.

"I've also called out this administration and the Treasury Department," she added, "for allowing and perhaps even for encouraging partisan, selective enforcement against American citizens based upon their political beliefs that aren't in line with those of the administration."

At best, in the Bachmann formulation, Team Obama was "allowing" this political persecution to go on, which implies that the White House was fully informed of what was happening in that Cincinnati IRS office, for which there is no evidence. But she didn't stop there. Again, with no evidence, she just alleges that the administration might be guilty of "perhaps even...encouraging" the harassment of its opponents.

But hey, it's Obama, so you can suspect anything. After all, as Bachmann once said, "most Americans are wild about America, and they are very concerned to have a president who doesn't share those values."

My nominee for the ultimate in Bachmannism was her slander against the program encouraging citizens to serve the nation and each other. Opposing a bill to expand AmeriCorps, she warned that "there are provisions for what I would call re-education camps for young people, where young people have to go and get trained in a philosophy that the government puts forward and then they have to go to work in some of these politically correct forums." Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge is just around the corner.

Bachmann's retirement should foster some soul-searching about the nature of our political discourse and how easy it is for falsehood and innuendo to get treated as just one more element in the conversation — no more or less legitimate than any other. This is the very sort of relativism ("my truth" is as good as your "truth") that sound conservatives condemn. It ends in nihilism.

Bob Dole, one of those sound conservatives and a revered party warhorse, wanted his party to shut down for a while so it could "spend that time going over ideas and positive agendas." Bachmannism substitutes accusations for ideas and paranoia for an agenda. Alas, there's little reason to think it will leave the stage with her.

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Support of prep schools key to Houston's future

Education received by students now will benefit city in future

By Richard D. Kinder

The success or failure of building Houston into a leading, global city over the next twenty years is inextricably and directly linked to the education we provide Houston's neediest children now.

According to the most recent Houston Area Survey from the Kinder Institute for Urban Research at Rice University, the fastest-growing populations in our city is also the poorest and the youngest, most of whom are Latino and African-American. The level of academic and ethical education they receive today will directly affect the economic, cultural and political quality of life all of us experience tomorrow.

For more than 10 years, our city has been the beneficiary of a number of outstanding, government-funded, educational public school programs that were founded to directly address this issue and provide quality educational programs for children whose families live in low-income communities.

The KIPP and YES Prep charter school programs arose as a movement for education reform. They challenged all of us to re-imagine a brighter educational future for students living in economically depressed areas by striving for a higher caliber of teaching and better learning environments. From longer hours in the classroom, to diversified instructional practices, to parent empowerment, these two programs have altered the landscape of public school expectations, realizing higher graduation rates and college retention rates than the national average.

But in a field as complex and troubled as pre-K-12 education, there is no one approach that guarantees success and I believe it's important to "let a thousand flowers bloom."

In that context, this year marks the first graduating class of a new and unique approach to education reform, Cristo Rey Jesuit College Prep.

Four years ago, Father TJ Martinez joined a group of concerned Houstonians and led the launch of Houston's first and only non-public high school in the state of Texas to exclusively serve children living in poverty.

In a short amount of time, Cristo Rey Jesuit has captured the attention of the city by offering a private-sector solution to a critical public issue, the alarmingly

high dropout rate on the southeast side. Cristo Rey Jesuit College Prep replaced the traditional private school tuition model with a paying jobs program that serves as a tuition source and as a component of the school's rigorous curriculum.

The benefits are twofold. First, through corporate partnerships, the school creates an alternative stream of revenue. Second, students, at an early age, begin building a corporate skill set, competitive resume and strong work ethic that will benefit them now, and also benefit all of us in the future as these students become the next corporate, civic and religious leaders of Houston.

And while the Cristo Rey Jesuit innovative and unique educational story is powerful enough, the results speak for themselves.

In four years, the student population has grown from its first class of 80 students to more than 400 students.

The corporate sponsorships have grown from five businesses to 111 blue-ribbon corporations, with all students at Cristo Rey Jesuit working their way through school. These businesses represent the top companies from every industrial and professional sector of our city.

While these students earned a little bit of money in the first year to help pay for the costs of their education, four years later and despite an economic recession, the student body has earned an astounding total of \$5.9 million, all of which has been invested back into their own, college-prep program to fund competitive teachers' salaries, classroom renovations and state of the art technological resources.

And, finally, in an area of Houston where the dropout rate has soared as high as 60 percent for Latinos and African-Americans, 100 percent of Cristo Rey Jesuit students will graduate and 100 percent have been accepted into college.

Houston has become the epicenter for education reform due to programs intent on setting a high bar for educational excellence while at the same time keeping the family income-level threshold low to ensure the poorest children are receiving the highest standard of college prep instruction.

Supporting these schools is not simply an exercise in altruism, but in enlightened self-interest as students today will spearhead Houston's global city initiative and economic success tomorrow.

Kinder is co-founder, chairman and CEO of Kinder Morgan.



It's time for an open, national debate on climate change

Politicians shouldn't let special interests dictate our policies

By Ronald Sass

Writing in the Houston Chronicle this week, U.S. Rep. Lamar Smith, R-San Antonio, the new chair of the House Science and Technology Committee, began, "Climate change is an issue that needs to be discussed thoughtfully and objectively. Unfortunately, claims that distort the facts hinder the legitimate evaluation of policy options."

I couldn't agree more on both counts. Climate change does need to be discussed thoughtfully and objectively because it is without doubt the most urgent issue facing the world today. It is also the most complex one and consequently requires the best thinking and serious collaboration of everyone.

It requires not just climate scientists, 97 percent of whom believe that climate change is real and, in a large part, due to human activity, nor just those who control the economic reins of the world and

have so much at stake in our current and future ways of producing wealth, nor even just those in key political positions who have the responsibility of providing the informed leadership required to take us into a better future.

In fact, everyone who cares for and values life on Earth has a moral obligation to engage in this conversation. Yes, claims that distort the facts hinder the legitimate evaluation of policy options.

When making a policy decision, I would agree that one needs reliable predictive data. Policy makers deal in the future, and the key to the future is a sound grasp of all existing facts.

Smith purports to address the ill effect of "overheated" rhetoric about climate change on policy decisions. In fact, Representative Smith is more heavily invested in promoting the Keystone XL pipeline than he is in policy for climate change. He began his campaign promoting the Northern Route Approval Act (HR 3) when his Energy and Environment subcommittees recently held a joint hearing examining the science and environmental issues of the proposed pipeline.

Chairman Smith opened the hearing by remarking that two concerns in the debate are 1) whether we have the ability to construct and operate the pipeline safely, and 2) whether the pipeline's construction will contribute significantly to climate change.

He then declared both had been satisfactorily answered by the State Department. He went on to assure us that: "The Keystone Pipeline creates jobs and enhances our energy independence with minimal impact to the environment. This project, which has been thoroughly evaluated, should be approved immediately."

Testimony from this hearing formed the body of Smith's commentary, which included seven statements that clearly misrepresented the accepted science of climate change but lent support to the proposed pipeline. I refer you to a detailed rebuttal of these statements found on the blog, ThinkProgress.org.

Smith has made it all too clear that he favors the Keystone XL pipeline and I grant him the right to pull together whatever he needs to promote his point of view.

But, because he is a public servant, I

must admonish him to open his mind to all legitimate facts. I find it astonishing, for example, that the hearing had no witnesses from the community of nationally recognized climate scientists. I believe that by limiting the expertise of the participants in the discussion, he is distorting the facts and hindering the legitimate evaluation of policy options.

The pipeline is not the real, long-term issue. The real issue is: Can we afford to continue "business as usual" with fossil fuel energy?

We must recognize that climate change is a serious challenge to the future that needs to be dealt with immediately.

So, Rep. Smith, let's get to the real issue. I invite you to join in a national dialogue based on all the facts about what we as a country intend to do about climate change — a change that will alter our weather, challenge our food and water supply, and subject us to the greatest challenges ever faced by humans.

And in so doing, truly serve the public interest.

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