

## OpinionJournal's Political Diary

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**OPINIONJOURNAL'S POLITICAL DIARY**  
 Commentary and Analysis on U.S. Politics



**Today's Video on WSJ.com:** OpinionJournal.com's Brendan Miniter discusses why former President Bill Clinton is criticizing President Bush's decision to commute Scooter Libby's sentence.

**July 9, 2007**

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**Karl Clinton?**

The Scooter Libby case may have ended with President Bush's decision to commute the former White House aide's sentence, but attendees at the Aspen Ideas Festival in Colorado, an annual gathering of largely liberal philanthropists, still had to get some final words in.

At a Saturday question-and-answer session with Karl Rove, the White House aide came under fire for his alleged role in the revelation of CIA agent Valerie Plame's name. Mr. Rove outlined his minor role in the scandal, claimed he had cooperated fully with Special Prosecutor Patrick Fitzgerald and emphasized that the original leaker of Ms. Plame's name was found to be Richard Armitage, then a top deputy to Secretary of State Colin Powell. "Remember, the underlying offense of Armitage talking to Novak was no violation. There was no indictment," said Mr. Rove.



*Karl Rove*

At that point, Colin Powell, who was in the audience, stood up to provide his own version of the Plame affair. He agreed that no crime had been committed in revealing Ms. Plame's name and that Mr. Libby "got in trouble for an entirely different set of circumstances." Mr. Powell also expressed frustration with how the government's investigation had dragged on. "The FBI knew on Day 1 of Mr. Armitage's involvement, yet for two months after that the FBI kept investigating," he told the Aspen audience. "They kept investigating to see who else might be involved and when they finished their investigation -- they couldn't finish it. Therefore, a special counsel was brought in, Mr. Patrick Fitzgerald, who spent another two years on it.... I think this [would have better] ended early on and not dragged out the way it has been."

The crowd, which was clearly not sympathetic to the Bush administration, was polite during the discussion, in contrast to the incivility with which Mr. Rove was received by some when he appeared at the Ideas Festival last year. The change may have partly been due to his disarming manner. The White House aide began his remarks by noting he had enjoyed driving in from Denver the day before. Along the way, he stopped at an inn in the town of Twin Lakes for coffee. He noted that when a man standing in line at the registration desk was told Karl Rove was on the premises, his instant response was: "I'd like to hit that son of a bitch."

Mr. Rove then deadpanned: "I knew I was getting close to Aspen." Once in Aspen, Mr. Rove said he had another interesting encounter when he arrived at the Aspen Institute.

"There's a guy in a Land Rover, very expensive, and he's got a car full of people, and takes one look at me, a scowl on his face, and says, 'Go home.' And as he goes off, I say, 'I am home.'" Mr. Rove noted that he had been born in Denver and lived in several Colorado towns, including one very close to Aspen, during his childhood.

All in all, Mr. Rove charmed the crowd. Indeed, Ross Douthat of the Atlantic magazine thinks Mr. Rove managed to "out-Clinton" former President Bill Clinton, who also appeared at the Ideas Festival. He says Mr. Rove won over the audience with his "jokey anecdotes" which were then followed up with a presentation that "drowned the crowd in policy detail, complete with a series of PowerPoint slides on immigration and global warming."

-- John Fund

## Return of Sheehan

Liberals should be wary of some of the personalities they've pushed forward to secure temporary advantage in the debate over Iraq. Ned Lamont, the anti-war activist who defeated Joe Lieberman in a Democratic Senate primary last year but then lost to Mr. Lieberman's independent candidacy, comes to mind. So too does movie director Michael Moore, whose "Fahrenheit 9/11" energized the left-wing base but whose extreme statements (the Cuban people have "artistic freedom") often repel moderate voters, is another.

Now comes Cindy Sheehan, the eccentric mother of a soldier who died in the Iraq war and then became a symbol of resistance to that conflict. For the last two years she has held vigils against the war from a five-acre compound she purchased near President Bush's Crawford, Texas ranch. Last month, Ms. Sheehan sold her land to a Los Angeles talk-show host and moved to California where she now says she will run against House Speaker Nancy Pelosi if the Democratic leader doesn't move to impeach President Bush.



*Nancy Pelosi*

"Democrats and Americans feel betrayed by the Democratic leadership," Ms. Sheehan told The Associated Press. "We hired them to bring an end to the war." Ms. Sheehan insists that Ms. Pelosi has a moral obligation to proceed with impeaching Mr. Bush over charges he misled the country about why the U.S. invaded Iraq, allowed the torture of detainees in Guantanamo and engaged in an "inadequate and tragic" response to Hurricane Katrina. Ms. Pelosi "let the people down who worked hard to put Democrats back in power, who we thought were our hope for change," Ms. Sheehan said.

Ms. Sheehan clearly isn't going to topple the first female House Speaker in history, but she can create all kinds of headaches for Ms. Pelosi in a liberal hothouse like San Francisco. Ralph Nader's 8% showing in Ms. Pelosi's San Francisco district in the 2000 election is probably a good baseline to judge the kind of voter support Ms. Sheehan might get. But her constant drumbeat on Ms. Pelosi's failure to stop the war will certainly attract copious media coverage. President Bush and Ms. Pelosi both have good reason to want to have Iraq stabilized enough that they can start putting it in their political rear-view mirrors.

-- John Fund

## Quote of the Day

"The eight Democratic presidential candidates assembled in Washington recently for another of their debates and talked, among other things, about public education. They all essentially agreed that it was underfunded -- one system 'for the wealthy, one for everybody else,' as John Edwards put it. Then they all got into cars and drove through a city where teachers are relatively well paid, per-pupil spending is through the roof and -- pay attention here -- the schools are among the very worst in the nation. When it comes to education, Democrats are ineducable.... [N]ot a one of them even whispered a word of outrage about a public school system that spends \$13,000 per child -- third-highest among big-city school systems -- and produces pupils who score among the lowest in just about any category you can name. The only area in which the Washington school system is No. 1 is in money spent on administration. The litany of more and more when it comes to money often has little to do with what, in the military, are called facts on the ground: kids and parents. It does have a lot to do with teachers unions, which are strong supporters of the Democratic Party. Not a single candidate offered anything close to a call for real reform" -- Washington Post columnist Richard Cohen.

## Sanford Vetoes Sanford

Earlier this year South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford called on his state legislature to create "open enrollment" in public schools -- a step toward school choice. When the legislature obliged, he vetoed the bill. Good for him.

School choice advocates around the country have tended to repeat their mistakes. They outsmart themselves by tailoring reforms specifically to target the poorest students in the worst performing schools. The idea is to make reform so appealing that even state lawmakers in the pockets of teachers unions are forced to go along. But such an approach doesn't succeed for two reasons: It creates too few beneficiaries to command lasting political support. And it allows too much opportunity for bureaucrats to strangle choice in red tape when implementing the eligibility rules.

South Carolina has struggled to make good on the governor's effort to use choice to improve the lot of kids, many of them black, consigned to failing public schools. A sweeping voucher program never made it through the legislature. A smaller program aimed at helping about 200,000 poor kids also failed to pass. The program was pared back to 100,000 kids, but that was defeated too.



*Mark Sanford Jr.*

The latest attempt is "open enrollment," with the goal of creating choice at least within the public school system. The bill would have required districts to offer parents the opportunity to enroll their kids in "single-gender" or other special schools. In three years, it would have required schools to consider requests to accept transfer students from outside their districts. State Schools Superintendent Jim Rex, a Democrat, was the plan's biggest backer. But the program would have required parents to jump through too many hoops and given school bureaucrats too many opportunities to turn away students for a variety of reasons -- poor performance in their last school and special needs among them.

Though newspaper editorials called him a hypocrite on school choice or accused him of favoring progress only if it would help private schools, Gov. Sanford rightly vetoed the bill and sent it back to the legislative drawing board.

-- Brendan Miniter