

Partisan bickering leads to voter frustration

In the 1992 presidential election, H. Ross Perot proved that an independent candidate could truly make an impact in a national campaign. Even though his share of the vote trailed those of both Bill Clinton and George Bush, Perot's presence was perhaps the proverbial final nail in the coffin of Republican incumbent Bush. Perot's star has faded, his 15 minutes of fame dashed after a disastrous debate with Vice President Al Gore on CNN's *Larry King Live*. History will not forget him however, for his presence marked an era of disillusion toward our political system which not only made a dent in 1992, but will cause an epic sweep through the elections this November and in 1996.

Democrats are in more immediate danger than their Republican counterparts, since they have more to lose. It would seem logical that the party in control of the White House and Congress would be sitting pretty, but this is obviously not the case.

It is a known fact that in Washington, if the president makes an error (whether in reality or rumor), his party is punished. The Democrats not only have Clinton's failed agendas against them, but their long-time control of the House and Senate has also become a liability. The American public is sick and tired of the partisan nonsense which currently defines our political system. The

consequences for this anger are, in all likelihood, going to fall square on the shoulders of the Democrats. Since they have been in charge of the Senate and House for so long, they are going to be held accountable.

Proof can be found in the last round of primary elections. Rep. Mike Synar of Oklahoma, a long-time bleeding-heart liberal, lost his race by only 2 percent of the vote, but in decisive fashion nonetheless. Synar, a respected member of the House since 1979, got beat by a 71-year-old retired principal who spent only \$17,000 on his campaign. The main focus of the anti-Synar forces was his strong allegiance toward Clinton, and that loyalty proved to be the perfect weapon. Synar was the first major casualty of the year. Other luminaries of the Democratic party are in similar trouble.

Speaker of the House Tom Foley (D-Wash.) took only 35 percent of the vote in his primary, which pitted him against three Republicans. The runner-up, George Netherchutt, won 30 percent and will face Foley in November's general election. Taking into account that Foley's victory was by such a small margin against three opponents, a race against one could prove to be a disaster. As Speaker, he is seen as one of the figureheads of Congress. However, he is being blamed for Congress' gridlock as well.



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Along with Foley, the once indomitable Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.) is facing the toughest race of his career. The loss of these two veterans would shrink the sheer number of Democrats in Congress, and seeing two of their finest legislators fall alongside each other would be one of the most disheartening moments in the party's history. Republicans hope that this will give them enough momentum to take the White House in 1996 if (and this is a big if) they can find a worthy candidate.

Although the GOP future may look bright on paper, with massive victories predicted in November, the Republicans may in some ways be in more trouble than their Democratic counterparts. It is becoming apparent that the so-called religious right, led by Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition, is a liability. They have proved valuable in a few local races, and may even get Oliver North into the Senate, but the electorate found in small-time rural elections and in Virginia are

probably not an accurate indicator of those of the nation.

Those who truly understand the Republican party realize that the imperatives of their agenda are free trade, smaller government, the loosening of business regulation, and other similar political ideals. It seems that the more the Christian Coalition takes control of the party, the farther Republican ideology wanders from politics toward institutionalized religion. As more moderates notice this trend, they may defect to the Democrats or to independent parties, splitting the Republican party.

This could make the Perot factor an issue once again in the 1996 presidential election, not for Perot himself, but for retired general Colin Powell. Republicans have been drooling over the thought of running the retired general, but so far, Powell refuses to announce his party affiliation, even to his former boss,

George Bush. Both parties have reasons to believe that his alliance is with them, and each believes that he could be one of their heavy hitters. Powell's political future is exceptionally bright, especially considering that his approval rating was 74 percent even before his trip to Haiti. However, if a presidential victory comes to Powell, it will not be as a typical partisan politician. The public approves of him not because of his politics, but because of his lack of them.

As the Democrats' and Republicans' problems intensify before 1996, voters may look toward Powell. Whether or not he is capable of handling presidential duties, voters may see him as one who can rise from the bickering and partisan wrangling and bring something to Washington which it has not seen for years: true leadership.

Primo Fontana is a columnist for the Emerald.

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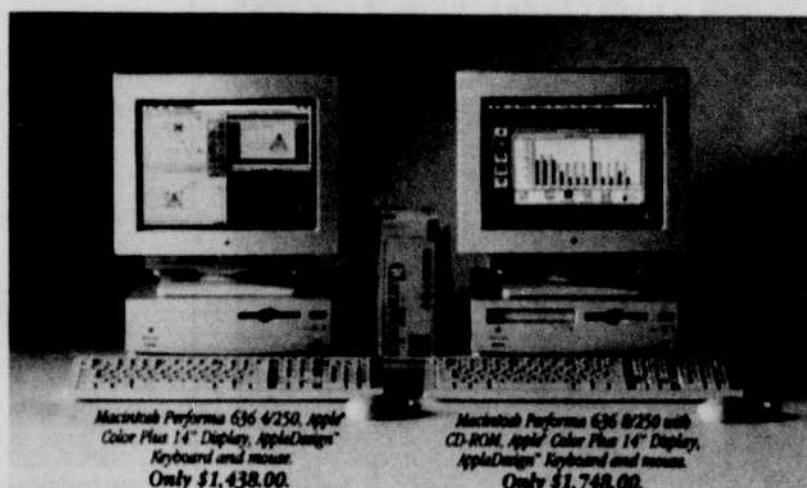
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