

VIEWPOINTS



President Bush, center, speaks with Rep. Katherine Harris, R-Fla., left, as Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, right, looks on during his arrival at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa on Tuesday. Bush's Florida travels put him in the middle of a political brouhaha involving his brother and the woman who helped the president win the White House. — AP photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais

Political gratitude in Florida

By Jules Witcover

Washington
What Harry Truman once said about Washington — “If you want a friend, get a dog” — apparently applies to politics in Florida as well.

Republican Rep. Katherine Harris, seeking election to the U.S. Senate in November against incumbent Democratic Sen. Bill Nelson, is learning that, for all she did for the presidential election of George W. Bush in her pivotal state in 2000, her party is shunning her.

Harris is the woman who, as Florida secretary of state in 2000, threw up repeated procedural roadblocks to efforts by the campaign of Democratic presidential nominee Al Gore to get fair and timely recounts in his razor-thin eventual loss of the state's electoral votes, and the election itself.

In the process, she became a Republican heroine, but also the poster girl for Democratic charges of a rigged Florida election. It was a dubious honor that did not stop her subsequently from winning a U.S. House seat in her heavily Republican district.

So when Harris announced she would try to move to the higher-visibility Senate, Democrats not only in Florida but also in Washington and around the country began to salivate at the opportunity for political payback by defeating her.

Republicans, from President Bush in the White House and his brother, Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, to party colleagues down the line might have been expected out of gratitude for her 2000 services to rally behind her. Instead, seeing her as a loser in a statewide race, they have spent

much of the past year discouraging her from running, while trying to find another Republican to challenge her.

Those efforts apparently collapsed the other day when the latest Republican being ardently wooed by the GOP, Speaker of the Florida House Allan Bense, said he would not run, on the eve of the deadline for filing. So the Florida Republicans are left with Harris, only a few short years ago the object of their affections.

The unkindest public cut of all came from Jeb Bush last Monday when he told reporters, “I just don't think [Harris] can win.”

The lack of ardor for her candidacy has been apparent almost from the outset, as Republicans from her old beneficiary in the Oval Office on down have failed to rush to her rescue. The unkindest public cut of all came from Jeb Bush last Monday when he told reporters, “I just don't think she can win.”

When President Bush arrived in Florida the next day on his campaign to urge the state's seniors to sign up for his controversial Medicare prescription drug program, Harris greeted the man who had helped put in the White House, with his brother the governor standing by.

In a midterm election year in which many Republican candidates are trying to decide whether they want help from a president whose public support has been steadily falling, Harris cannot not afford such ambivalence, and has ample reason to expect his unqualified and enthusiastic support. But he demonstrated little of it.

She told reporters later she had talked with Jeb Bush and, according to The Washington Post, was “confident that whomever is in the general election against Bill Nelson ... will have the support of Republicans across the state.”

That was hardly what you would call a ringing endorsement in a race that could be critical to the Republican Party's hopes of turning back the Democrats' well-financed bid to take control of the Senate in November. Harris is running far behind Nelson in all the prominent polls.

Compounding her woes has been the reluctance of Republicans in the state and beyond to contribute to the campaign of a personally wealthy candidate. She has been obliged to announce on television that she will spend \$10 million of her inherited fortune on her own campaign. She also has suffered internal campaign divisions and defections from it.

Harris told The Washington Post the other day that “this isn't about me,” and that she would succeed in switching the campaign spotlight onto Nelson. But clearly the election is all about her — the woman some Florida Democrats like to call “The Dragon Lady” for her 2000 behavior, and many Republicans in Florida and in the White House would rather not call at all.

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AARON KEITH HARRIS

Covered with moss

Rolling Stone magazine celebrates its 1,000th issue this week with a 3-D holographic cover in the style of the Beatles' “Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band.” Forty years of cultural icons like Bart Simpson, Art Garfunkel and Bill Clinton are crammed into the familiar tableau, with a peace symbol beaming good vibes down on them all.

Between this and the goofy, also-holographic Target ad on the back cover are a couple of hundred pages of the following: fawning coverage of the pop music scene and self-congratulatory retrospective essays; lots of really cool pictures of really cool people by really cool photographers; and lots more ads for cigarettes, booze and digital gadgets.

Not unlike the album it venerates, the millennial Rolling Stone is a just another kitschy piece of baby boomer bric-a-brac.

To be fair, Rolling Stone once fostered brilliant writers like Tom Wolfe, Hunter S. Thompson and P.J. O'Rourke. But it also fired the fine music critic Jim DeRogatis from its editorial staff for daring to submit a negative review of Hootie & the Blowfish. And it has never panned a Yoko Ono album.

Rolling Stone's treatment of new subpar albums by two of the rock era's finest artists illustrates how the magazine is desperate to perpetuate its own mythology about the '60s generation.

Bruce Springsteen fronting the E Street Band is the most powerful — emotionally and sonically — force in the history of American rock. But — with the exception of 1982's cold, raw “Nebraska” — the Boss has never been able to make a good album without them. “We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions” continues the trend.

The title is as clunky and formulaic as the performances Springsteen and his 14-piece hootenanny band turns in on 13 songs popularized by folksinger Pete Seeger. The singing is painful to hear. Springsteen again fails to out-hillbilly Woody Guthrie. His earnestness is not soulful, but a forced obligation.

Rolling Stone praises Springsteen's courage for using protest songs from “our shared past to find a moral compass for a nation that's gone off the rails.” For that, and for paying dutiful tribute to a certified liberal hero, Bruce gets a four-star (out of five) review.

Neil Young uses his own words on “Living With War,” also a four-star winner. Musically, it's typically good Neil Young, aside from strident backing vocals from a hundred-voice choir.

“It is an indictment of the sorry state of open debate in this country — and its rock 'n' roll,” writes RS reviewer David Fricke, “that the most direct, public and inspiring challenge to the Bush presidency this year has been made by a 60-year-old Canadian-born singer-songwriter.”

Nevermind that debate about Bush has consumed far too much airtime, ink and bandwidth to qualify as anything but “open.” Or that Young lives in the United States, but remains a Canadian citizen.

Young's lyrics could have been randomly generated by a computer programmed with phrases culled from “Hardball,” Katie Couric and back issues of “The Nation.” Exhibit A: “Let's impeach the president for lyin’/

Not unlike the album it venerates, the millennial Rolling Stone is a just another kitschy piece of baby boomer bric-a-brac.

Misleading our country into war/ Abusing all the power that we gave him/ And shipping our money out the door.”

Sooner rather than later, this will be nostalgia like “Ohio,” Young's 1970 yelp about the Kent State shooting.

Art misses the mark when it is not done simply for its own sake. Both Springsteen and Young have made records motivated by something other than the desire to make good music. The result is something other than good music.

Rolling Stone doesn't realize that. But I suspect that the baby boomers that pay hundreds to see Springsteen and Young perform their new material this summer will. Whether they get it or not, they want to hear at least some of the compelling music that put them on the cover of the Rolling Stone in the first place.



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