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**OPINION**

**The Smartest Man in America**

**Exclusive** commentary by John S. Pappas

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George W. Bush may be the smartest man in America. He came into office extending the olive branch of friendship to his political opponents, and has used it to knock them senseless in the political arena. In refusing to fight partisan battles in a time of war, the President has helped his political adversaries define themselves as partisans before patriots, and positioned himself for what many believe will be a landslide victory in 2004.

At his inauguration, the President proclaimed a new tone in Washington. He promised the nation that he would not participate in the politics of personal destruction, and for the first three years of his administration he has been true to his word. He has kept a civil tongue and cooperative spirit in the face of being blamed for a recession; beat up over the War in Iraq, and obstructed by Democrats in the senate. Except on the issue of tax cuts, the President has shown willingness to compromise with his adversaries.

While politicians have stood on the floor of the senate and house chambers accusing the President of everything from advanced knowledge of 9/11 to covertly planning the Iraqi war for political gain, President Bush has appeared at all times congenial, and Texas-friendly.

When Senator Jim Jeffords abandoned the Republican Party, thus handing control of it to the Democrats, Bush never said an unkind word. In the face of efforts by house and senate members to undermine President Bush's foreign policies in Iraq and elsewhere, the President has not criticized their efforts specifically. While the Democrats have opposed critical Bush nominees for the U.S. Circuit Court, the President has kept his cool.

The Democrats, whether by choice or desperation, have adopted a policy of wholesale opposition to the President and his policies. With every major policy announcement made or acted upon by the President, the nine Democrat candidates for President, Nanci Pelosi, Tom Daschle, Ted Kennedy, Robert Byrd et al run for the nearest microphone to denounce it.

Among the President's fellow Republican politicians and supporters, the new tone coupled with the President's willingness to compromise have been a source of frustration. Conservatives express dismay at the President's signing of the Campaign Finance bill, and at his intention to sign any Prescription Drug Bill. They mutter under their breath at the amount of spending coming out of Washington, where Republicans currently control the White House and both houses of Congress.

Nowhere have the frustrations of Bush supporters focused more of late, than in the Democrat's filibuster of Bush Circuit Court nominees. When Bush nominee Miguel Estrada withdrew himself from consideration of a Circuit Court appointment, after nearly two years, many complained that the President did not adequately defend his nominee by taking his case to the American people. When Republicans senators floated a "go nuclear" response to the Democrat filibuster, one that would change the rules of filibusters, they received no encouragement from the President.

Lately, many supporters have called for Bush to exercise recess appointments to fill the judicial vacancies (the U.S. Constitution grants the President the power to fill vacancies when congress is in recess, circumventing the review process), a strategy former President Clinton embraced at the end of his administration. But prudent conservatives should not look to the President for this, he is too smart.

Napoleon Bonaparte is quoted as saying; "Never interrupt your enemy when he is making a mistake." The President understands this and will do nothing to impede the Democrats attacking him. He understands that on the heels of impeachment and in the midst of war, the people have no appetite, nor patience, for the scorched earth, take-no-prisoners approach to politics of the nineties. President Bush accurately assessed the mood of the country in 2000 when he said the nation wants a government that works together, not one that constantly bickers.

The President is politically far-seeing, media disciplined, and smart enough to know that the new tone is working, and a factor in recent Republican success.

In the last three major elections, the Republicans have carried the day. From the midterm elections of 2002, to the recall election in California, to the most recent gubernatorial elections in Mississippi and Kentucky, the Republicans are winning big.

With all the new found Republican success however, much of which he helped create, the President is still perceived as being above it all, neutral.

The President is not perceived as partisan and this is because of the new tone. However, because of the new tone, the

Democrats are. The fact that the new tone has been successful for the President does not make him the smartest man in America. However, knowing it would be before he became President might.

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