

VIEWPOINT

THE BATTALION
TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

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Slouch By Jim Earle



"And how was your Valentine's Day?"

Doubt characterizes Byrd's office world

By DAVID S. BRODER
WASHINGTON — To enter the office of Senate Minority Leader Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia is to enter the world of Democratic doubt and indecision. Byrd has not moved. By indulgence of Republican Majority Leader Howard H. Baker, Jr., the veteran Democrat is still in the same luxurious quarters he occupied when he was majority leader. But the feeling of power and permanence that pervaded the place until last November's election has been replaced by a palpable sense of uncertainty.

Bob Byrd, now 63, came to the House in 1952, moved to the Senate in 1958 and became his party's leader in 1976. Except for the first two years in the House, he has always been part of the majority. Like a good many other Democrats, he thought that status was guaranteed, and he cannot believe the change can be more than temporary.

"The last election," he said the other day, "was a referendum on frustration.... People voted for a change, and it's important we Democrats give the new President a fair trial of his policies. But that pendulum will swing back. People will tire of the far-right, ultra-conservative, single-issue politics. They will see through it soon."

Maybe. But in the meantime, Byrd and his band of outnumbered Democrats must cope with Ronald Reagan and the resurgent Republican majority — a task for which the minority leader's previous experience offers little preparation.

Reagan, he confesses, is a puzzle. Byrd found the President's first speech on the economy "a masterpiece" of political communication and expects this week's State of the Union address to match it. But, like other Democratic congressional leaders who met with Reagan on the upcoming economic package, he found the President surprisingly "shallow" on substance.

When Reagan was asked, for example, about areas where he hoped to achieve large-scale savings, he told the congressional leaders his well-worn campaign anecdotes about the "welfare queen" of Chicago who was on the rolls with 100 different names, and about the welfare worker who showed other workers how to increase their income by quitting their jobs and going on the dole. As Byrd told the story, it was plain he was less impressed by the anecdotes than Reagan's campaign audiences have been.

But still the man and his mandate are facts of life, and Byrd is supposed to be a

realist. This week, Reagan will propose his tax-and-spending cuts to Congress and the Democrats will have to respond. Byrd's rehearsal efforts at a response were more than a little bit scatter-shot.

"There's no question some programs ought to be cut," he said, mentioning CETA public-service jobs, legal services and food stamps as likely targets. The Senate Democrats, Byrd says, were ahead of Reagan as economizers, voting a balanced budget last spring (in an exercise that was regarded as phony by many economists and, in any event, was quickly undercut by the 1980 recession). "We have demonstrated our commitment to a balanced-budget," he declared, "and we will work with this President because when he succeeds, we succeed."

On the other hand, Byrd said, he does not believe "the cost of government can be cut 2 or 3 percent a year for the next five years, while we're improving our defense, unless Mr. Reagan goes back on his pledge not to reduce or change some of the entitlement programs."

When asked if the Senate Democrats wish to be categorized — in the oversimplified language of us journalists — as a loyal opposition setting aside partisanship to support the President in needed economizing, or as a dogged band, striving mightily if not always successfully to protect programs needed by farmers and city-dwellers, the aged and the poor, Byrd gave a perfect political response.

"We'll do both," he said, adding, "It's not really an inconsistency. We realize that people voted for a change. We Democrats have to readjust and reevaluate ourselves. We are not going to protect a program just because it was started by JFK or LBJ."

But, he added, in yet another of the sharp swerves in the conversation, that open-mindedness does not apply, at least in this case, to the New Frontier-Great Society programs of the Economic Development Administration and the Appalachian Regional Commission, which have poured millions of dollars into West Virginia and which Reagan has reportedly ticketed for extinction.

"Those are not make-work programs," Byrd said, in explaining why he would, "resist" their destruction. "They are vital for our state to improve and progress."

It's all part of the game of touching up — but not really tackling — a popular new President. But it's a lot less fun than being majority leader of the United States Senate.

Who's sane in the rat race?

Bam, Bam, Bam!
I woke with a start. But then I didn't hear anything in the trailer house.
Bam, Bam, Bam!
This time I was sure the noise originated outside my head, so I uncovered and walked to my roommate's room.
"Barry? You having problems?"
He didn't answer.
Standing in the dark with only what's between me and my Calvin Kleins in the 60-degree temperature, I had a flood of robber-and-violence-causing-type images engulf me. Some dudes are beating the snot out of my roommate, I thought.
Bam, Bam, Bam!
What are you, a man or a mouse, I thought. Open the door and go in.
I looked in to see Barry, with his fist in the air, leaning off his bed. Bam. "Sorry mice." Bam, Bam.
"What the hell are you doing?" I asked him.
"Mice woke me up scratching on the wall," he said. "You've never heard them?"
I smiled my "I'm sane and you're not" smile, chuckled under my breath, and said I hadn't.
"You've never heard 'em scratching in between the walls? Man, they make so much noise I can't sleep sometimes. Sorry mothers," he said. "I was in the front of the trailer (14 x 65 feet) once when I heard noise

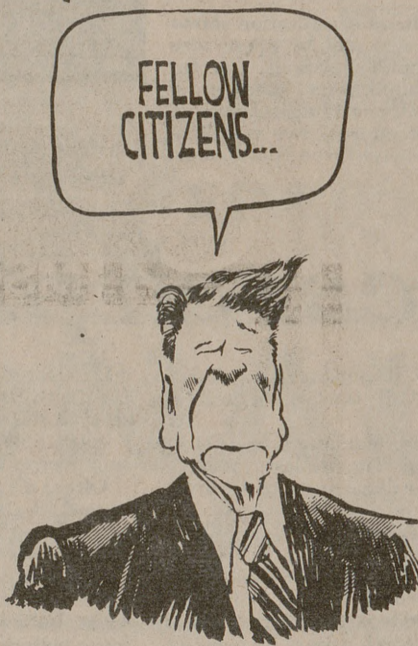
Leftovers

By Todd Woodard

from the back door. I thought someone was trying to break in. When I went back to check the door, I heard them running through the walls. I started hitting the walls to give them a shock."
I nodded in the dark, wondering what kind of esoteric drugs someone had put in his cocoa. "Right, no problem, we'll talk about it in the morning," I said.
When the morning came, Barry tried to convince me he was right before we left for the Texas A&M rat race. He told me to listen at night for the rodent rumblings. I promised I would try.
A week passed. I had heard no noise. Barry had hit the walls only a few times that week. He's coming out of it, I thought.
Sleeping peacefully Wednesday, I had a nightmare of bones being sawed. I could see the teeth passing through a femur and bone meal falling out the sides. The sawing noise woke me up. I listened. No noise now. No bam, bam, bam.

Then frenzied scratching from the beside my bed started. I touched the wall and could feel the vibrations from it. As long as they are on that side of the panelling, I'm on this side, no problem, I thought. I'm not going to beat on the wall.
But the continuing noise was so loud I had no choice. Bam, Bam, Bam.
The little beggar squealed and scurried toward Barry's end of the trailer. Hey, that was fun, I thought. Sated, I slept.
But hearing those mice at night enjoying the simulated cedar panelling, I asked Barry for ideas to combat these orally inspired fiends.
Poison 'em, I said.
Nope. They might crawl up in the wall and die. Then they would stink.
Trap 'em, I said.
Nope. How are we going to get the traps between the walls?
Radiate 'em, I said.
Nope. The nearest plutonium dump is somewhere near Utah. Besides, we don't have any dishes big enough to hold all that. We may just have to live with it, while, he said.
"But I do have a suggestion," he said. "Why don't you acquire a taste for grating cheese?"
He smiled his "I'm sane and you're sane" smile.

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It's your turn

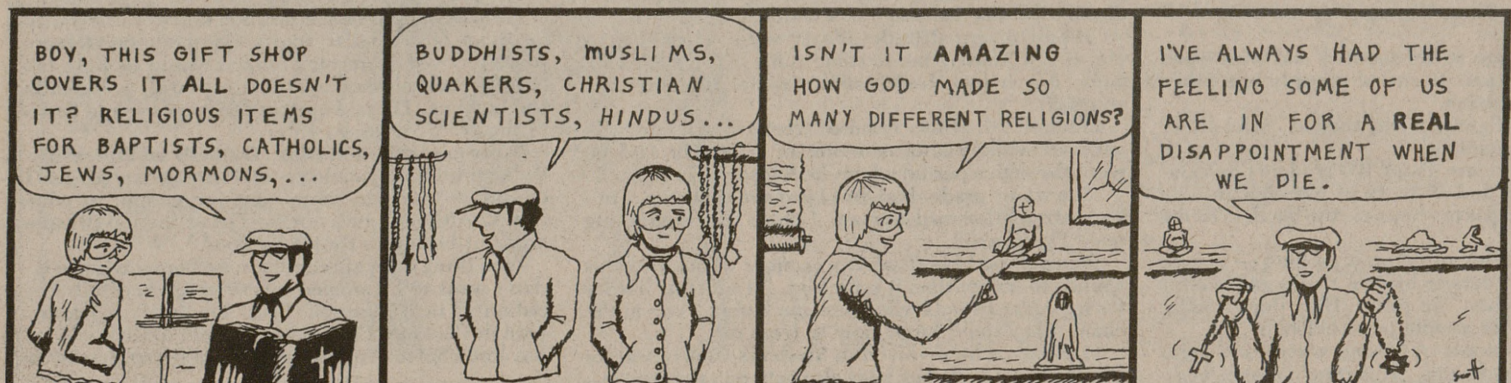
Bike collision prompts this letter

Editor:
As you can tell, my penmanship isn't the greatest. You see, I was recently involved in a two-bike collision that broke a bone in my hand. Because of this incident, there are two matters I would like to discuss.
The first matter is bicycle safety. Simple rules of courtesy should be obeyed by everyone. Generally, it is safer to fall to the right of the thorough fare, whether pedestrian, cyclist, or driver (I also consider it the duty of bicyclists to watch out for pedestrians. Most are very courteous and yield the right-of-way if they know you are there). It is also recommended that bikers use bike lanes when provided, and always ride on the right edge of the street, so that cars may pass without leaving their lane of traffic. Obeying these rules may not have saved me a broken bone, but they may save someone a wreck.
The second matter concerns the Quack Shack. When I realized that my hand might

be broken, I called the Quack Shack to see if they were open Saturdays (they are). I'm very busy with 19 hours, and don't have many time blocks of 2-3 hours open. They also said they were having a slow morning, and come on in; I would get prompt attention. I had a test two hours from that time but I went anyway.
I would have been out in 45 minutes or less (I know — a miracle), except for the patient ahead of me. It seems she's a vet student who knew a little about her disease and wanted to impress the doctor with her

knowledge. She wouldn't leave until she discussed every facet of her condition — symptoms, causes, diagnosis, development and prognosis taking up a considerable amount of time. Consequently she waited almost an hour of my time, the doctor's time, and other patients' time, needless to say.
I respect a patient's right to be informed, but in a busy clinic such as the Quack Shack where everyone is on a tight schedule, we should all be considerate of others and go overboard.
Lisa Nixon

Warped



THE BATTALION

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