

## Slouch By Jim Earle



"You see I would like to keep Friday afternoons open because I have a job at home, and Monday mornings are bad because that's my meditation period, and afternoons after three have to be open for the checkers team, and I don't concentrate well during mid-day, and..."

## Dems: no direction to take except up

By DAVID S. BRODER

WASHINGTON — It is never safe to assume that the Democrats will deliver what they have promised, but there are some signs they are gathering themselves for a second stab this fall at functioning as a serious opposition party. As the saying goes, they have no place to go but up.

In the first seven months of Ronald Reagan's reign, the Democrats have been outthrust every which way. Reagan pushed his budget and tax cuts to passage over the opposition of the Democratic leaders of the House, demonstrating time and again that the nominal Democratic control of that body was worth about as much as a Jimmy Carter campaign button.

The Democratic responses to Reagan's television speeches ranged from awful to sort-of-adequate. Except on Social Security and some of the environmental issues, they showed little ability to exploit the openings the administration provided.

Perhaps as a result, their fund-raising lagged in a serious way. A compilation by The National Journal of the mid-year reports to the Federal Election Commission showed that in the first six months of 1981, the three major GOP campaign committees collected \$43.3 million and their Democratic counterparts, \$3.5 million. That is a 12-1 ratio.

Liabilities of that size are not going to be overcome overnight. But the first step has to be for the Democrats to find their voice. And that they may finally be ready to do.

After much patient behind-the-scenes negotiating, party chairman Charles T. Manatt has obtained the necessary clearances from Democratic Senate and House leaders to go ahead with the long-promised party policy council. The announcement of its makeup and mandate will be made after Labor Day.

The council will be no bomb-thrower. Out of deference to the sensitivities of Senate Minority Leader Robert C. Byrd (D-W.Va.), the word "policy" won't even appear in its title. It will be the Democratic Strategy Council. Under the relentless pressure of the Democrats' self-conscious caucuses, it has grown in size well beyond the compact body of senior elected officials that Manatt first envisaged.

A more venturesome and probably more substantive channel for opposition party thought may be provided by the Center for Democratic Policy, a new and unofficial organization which opened its Washington office this summer. The chairman is Terry Sanford, former governor of North Carolina and now president of Duke University. The operating executives are Ted Van Dyk and Keith Haller, both veterans of past Democratic campaigns, and the board of directors includes almost every familiar Democratic name, from Cyrus Vance to Barbara Jordan.

With \$350,000 pledged toward the first-year budget, the center has begun commissioning policy papers representing a spectrum of views: Vance, Pat Moynihan and Harvard's Stanley Hoffmann on foreign policy; 10 Democratic gurus on various aspects of the economy. By fall, Van Dyk says, there will be a steady stream of papers, serving as raw material for seminars in and out of Washington. Within two years, they hope to expand to the scale of the American Enterprise Institute, the conservative think-tank that provided so many ideas and people for the Reagan administration.

The third piece of this emerging Democratic pattern involves the much-maligned House Democratic leadership. Senior staff members, still smarting over the defeats at Reagan's hands, are developing plans what they hope may be a coordinated assault on vulnerable administration policies. Their tool is one so obvious it tends to be overlooked: the committee hearing.

What they envision is something like this: A set of judiciary committee hearings one week on the wave of bankruptcies and corporate mergers. Banking committee hearings the following week on the effect of high interest rates on the housing industry and anomaly of huge lines of credit being extended to companies seeking to swallow competitors. Then, foreign affairs committee hearings on the squabbles between the State Department and the Pentagon on American nuclear policy.

Given the egos and feuds involved in all three of these ventures, they may never get off the ground. But there is at least a glimmer of life in the Democratic donkey. And these days, that's news.

## Meeting seems anti-climactic

As I sat in a small meeting room at Texas A&M University's Research and Extension Center in Dallas, I couldn't help but think it a rather inappropriate setting to appoint a new University president.

Eight regents already were seated at a conference table, a table much smaller than the one in their meeting room on the Texas A&M campus. An assortment of System administrators were milling about the meeting room and the sitting room adjacent to it.

Press people kept coming in the front door, some of them hurriedly setting up television cameras. Several persons took their seats in rows of yellow chairs lined up for guests.

The furnishings in the meeting room were attractive — a few plush chairs, sofas and wall hangings — but in no way as elegant as the regents' magnificent meeting room in College Station.

Yet this was the setting where the regents were to end their year-long search for a University president.

Minutes before the meeting began, one Texas A&M official came over to me.

"Have you ever had the opportunity to meet Dr. Vandiver?" he asked.

"No, I haven't," I said.

"He's a tremendous man. I hope that after the meeting and press conference you'll stay around to meet him."

Even before that meeting began, Dr. Vandiver had accepted the position. The whole affair was rather anti-climactic, and

## Coffee Breaks

by Jane Brust

yet there was satisfaction in that official's praise of the new president.

The regents took an hour to discuss the appointment. It took only minutes for them to reconvene in open session and make the appointment official. Those present now knew the new president's name but we all had yet to meet him.

Vandiver's entrance to the meeting room was rather anti-climactic too. He gave his official acceptance of the board's offer and expressed his appreciation shortly before his wife Renee entered the room to join him.

As she thanked the regents for her husband's appointment it occurred to me that the two of them bear a striking resemblance to Ronald and Nancy Reagan. He is tall and tan with distinguished gray hair and a healthy, bright smile. She is a petite and attractive brunette, complete with poise.

The two of them were eager to those present at the meeting, they were eager to begin their mission at Texas A&M University.

And perhaps the faculty, staff, and former students are eager for the get here, relieved that the presidential search is over.

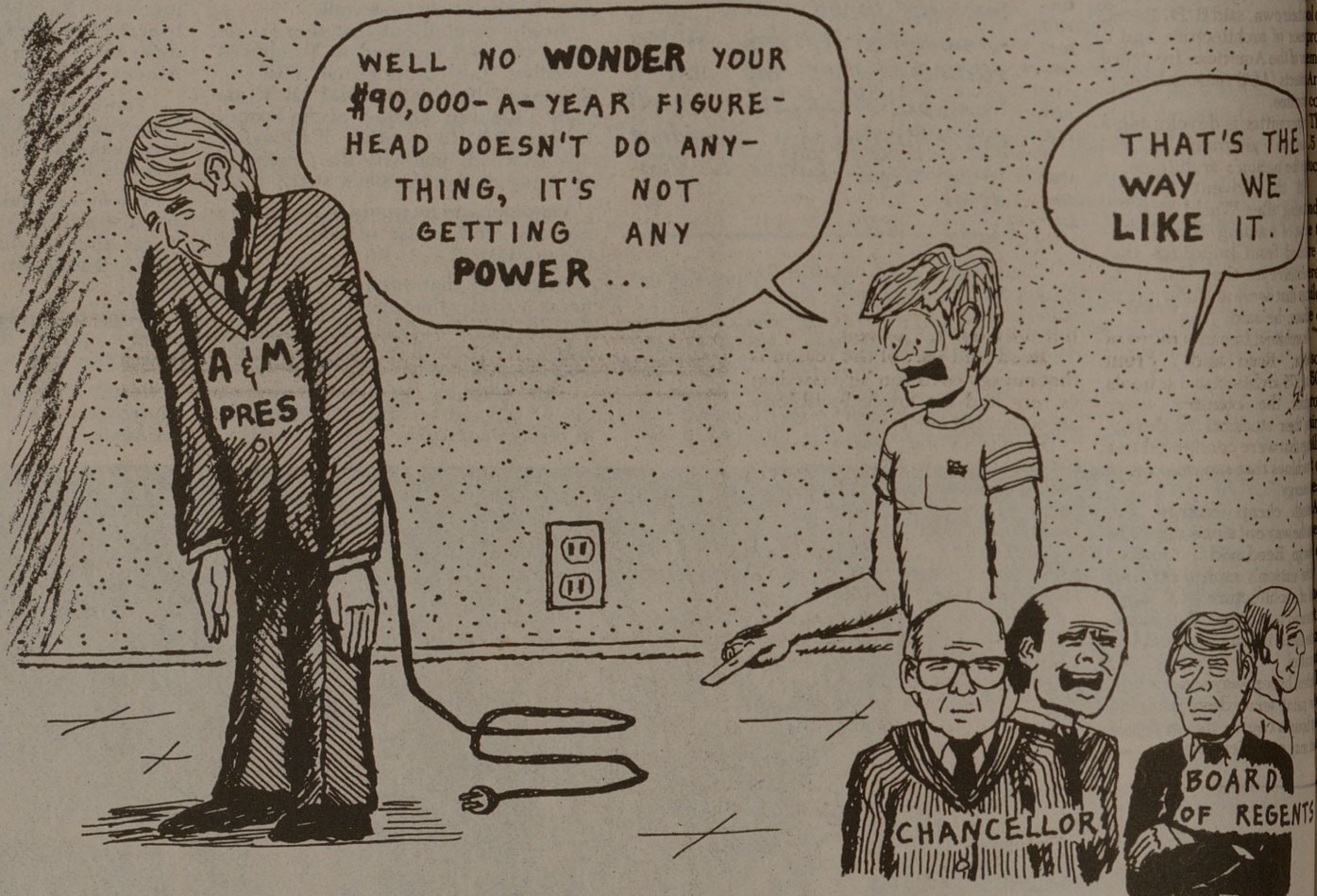
In the next few weeks, the staff, president's Coke Building office was preparing for a new boss to settle into university business. University workers were busy getting the president's mansion in order for its new residents.

In contrast to the small crowd in the small room in Dallas, there were thousands of people attending the inauguration ceremony to be held in College Station some time this fall — and many people will have a hand in planning inaugural festivities.

There wasn't a great deal of celebration at Wednesday's board meeting, and the regents took a significant step for the university. The celebration will come weeks ahead, but the significance was apparent until the new president's chance to settle into the business of the president of Texas A&M University.

The regents have completed their task of appointing a new University president, an official who spoke to me before the meeting, as well as the members of the board believe Vandiver is a tremendous person.

He is now in a position to do tremendous things for Texas A&M.



## Network news needs 'gasp track'

By DICK WEST  
United Press International

WASHINGTON — According to a recent survey, many newspaper readers and/or network news viewers suspect that editors and reporters are holding something back from them.

These findings appear to jibe with previous polls giving the news media low credibility ratings.

There probably are a number of reasons for this attitude, but I put most of the blame on television. Other types of programs have no trouble winning viewer confidence, I've noticed.

In sitcoms and the like, audiences strongly identify with the characters, coming to think of actors as real surgeons, lawyers or whatever. Yet when real reporters broadcast actual events, doubts creep in. And some of this dubiety spills over onto print journalism.

Part of the problem may be disorientation. Viewers, as we are all aware, are

accustomed to a certain amount of attitudinal coaching.

In sitcoms, for example, the laugh track lets the home audience know whether a wisecrack or a sight gag warrants a polite titter, a resonant chuckle or a full-scale guffaw. It's a valuable service.

A viewer at home would feel pretty silly falling out of his chair laughing at some line that only merited a few snickers.

Home audiences have come to depend on this external guidance, but on news programs the cues are comparatively subtle.

The relative importance of the day's events may only be indicated by the amount of air time devoted to each. Such a system is open to editorial vagaries that can leave viewers feeling a bit confused.

Although there may be technical arguments against such an innovation, I would like to see the networks experiment with a "gasp track" similar to the ubiquitous laugh track.

Why should a viewer sit before a tube in a state of perplexity, wondering whether a particular news item is so important to leave him amazed, astounded, flabbergasted, constipated, or simply a little titillated?

After each report, as I envision, producers would dub in pre-recorded sounds of people sucking in their breath, emitting low whistles, exclaiming "whiz" or muttering, "Well, I'll be darned."

Thus a viewer would know immediately whether he was expected to be amazed, agape, thunderstruck, spellbound or flabbergasted.

I can't guarantee that gasp-tracks would always leave a viewer intelligent and emotionally fulfilled, and hence my suspicion that something was being withheld.

But it should greatly reduce the hissing and smiting of the "Zounds!" when a deep sigh of relief is an appropriate response.

## Warped



By Scott McCullar

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