

## COMMENTARY

### Turmoil in both parties

By Don Rose

The primary season still hasn't signaled anything predictive about the November elections, but there's a clear pattern of ideological turmoil within both parties that may result in self-destruction in the guise of self-purification.

So which party hurts itself more?

The clearest pattern is on the GOP side, with the most conservative elements, personified by Sarah Palin and the Tea Party types pulling the Repubs ever farther to the right—so far it may blow several opportunities to pick up or even hold senate seats.

At the same time, though the internecine warfare is a bit more muted, segments of the center-left coalition that took over the Congress in 2006 and elected Barack Obama president in 2008 appear to be rattling each others' cages.

At the moment, both the Tea Partiers in the GOP and the labor-progressives of the Democratic Party can claim some measure of success in their challenges to the party establishments. The issue, of course, is whether their primary winners will ultimately prevail.

Let's look first at the Republican side, where most of the action is taking place.

The poster-child of dangerous rebellion is Sharron Angle, nominated to run against Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, a man so unpopular in Nevada that all sides were planning his political funeral until a week ago.

But the tea people gave him the gift of an opponent who opposes Social Security and Medicare, who would prefer to eliminate the sale of alcohol and even dredged up the 1950s John Birch Society campaign opposing fluoridation of drinking water. Worst of all for Nevada, she supports nuclear dumping at Yucca Mountain. Different funeral arrangements may be called for.

Angle is so far out that Kentucky's libertarian tea-sipper Rand Paul, with his marginal positions on the civil rights act, looks almost mainstream. While he seems to be well ahead in his senate race, his statements supporting BP still have the potential to do him in.

Add to this the Florida case where the far right got behind Marco Rubio in the senate race and pushed the moderate Gov. Charlie Crist out of the Republican primary. Now running as an independent, Crist has overtaken Rubio as well as the weak Democrat Kendrick Meek, who is running third. More and more Democrats are moving into Crist's camp. If elected, he may

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### Support for Kagan trails previous Supreme Court nominees



WASHINGTON--Despite her endorsement by 69 law-school deans this week, new Gallup polling data shows the level of support for pro-abortion Supreme Court pick Elena Kagan trails previous Supreme Court nominees.

Gallup's new survey released early this June, has 46 percent of Americans backing President Barack Obama's selection and 32 percent in opposition. That level of support is generally lower than Gallup polls at this point in the nomination process for the last several nominees.

Sonia Sotomayor, the first abortion advocate Obama placed on the Supreme Court, enjoyed a 54-28 percent approval last year. The two Supreme Court justices pro-life President George W. Bush put on the court also had higher

approval levels, with Samuel Alito getting 50-25 percent support in the Gallup poll ahead of his hearings. John Roberts received 59-22 percent.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the pro-abortion justice, had support of 53-14 percent, while pro-life justice Clarence Thomas scored 52-17 percent. Former nominees Harriet Miers and Robert Bork had levels of support less than Kagan has currently.

In the latest poll, Gallup found Democrats largely supporting Kagan's nomination, with 68 percent in favor and 12 percent opposed. A slim majority of Republicans, 51 percent, are opposed, with 26 percent in favor. Independents are more likely to favor than oppose her nomination.

Labor and progressive organizations did not have the same luck in Arkansas, where they poured in millions of dollars to defeat centrist Dem Blanche Lincoln. One of their mistakes here was to announce their mission too cockily, giving Lincoln the chance to play the beleaguered home-girl under attack by outside agitators.

Instead of letting it go and patching up a disagreement among friends, an anonymous White House figure taunted labor about the futility of wasting money that might better be spent elsewhere. At the same time, the Obama-Arne Duncan "race to the top" education plan is heavily promoting charter schools, a move detested by the two big teacher unions.

Are the Obamans playing with fire here, risking a serious rift with the party's mainstays—labor and progressives—the very folks who played a key role in his elections? Or do they believe those components have nowhere else to go?

Substantial segments of the progressive left already feel alienated from and disappointed in the president. Some want to organize an independent progressive movement separate from the president and his party, believing that only a powerful grass-roots movement can push Obama or any other center-seeking president into concerted action, much the way the labor and civil rights movements did in earlier decades.

This hardly seems a time for Obama, mainstream Democrats, labor and progressives to be forming a circular firing squad. But maybe they just want to out-do the Republican prototype.

### 'Don't run for President or Vice President or you will be shot too'

## FBI reveals death threats to Ted Kennedy



WASHINGTON--Sen. Edward, "Ted" Kennedy had become a target for extremist rage decades after gunmen shot down his brothers, previously private FBI documents disclosed Monday.

The FBI released 2,352 pages and posted them on its "hot topic pages."

The file is dominated by investigations of threats against Kennedy, who died last year of brain cancer at the age of 77. "These threats originated from multiple sources, including individuals, anonymous persons, and members of radical groups, such as the Klu Klux Klan, 'Minutemen' organizations, and the National Socialist White Person's Party," the FBI said.

The file also contains threats from individuals angered by Kennedy's stance on politics in Northern Ireland and allegations of an alleged Mafia plot to kill President Kennedy and Senators Robert and Edward Kennedy. In 1977, the FBI received a report that Sirhan Sirhan, who had been convicted of killing Robert Kennedy, had tried to hire a fellow inmate to kill the Massachusetts Democrat. The file doesn't say whether the claim was substantiated.

A letter sent to the Sen. Kennedy after

his brother, Robert, was assassinated, said: "Don't run for President or Vice President or you will be shot dead too." Another letter sent to Ethel Kennedy, Robert's widow, at her home in McLean, Va., said: "If Ted runs for Pres, or VP he will be killed. We hate the Kennedys. Stop him."

The release had been highly anticipated by historians, scholars and others interested in the life and long public career of America's most prominent and powerful politician.. The Associated Press and other media organizations requested the documents through Freedom of Information Act requests.

"In 1979, a stalker got into Ted Kennedy's house in McLean twice, roaming the empty house. The incident was a reminder of how vulnerable the Senator was, and it was perhaps the most serious argument against a presidential campaign," former Kennedy aide Richard E. Burke said.

"The Senator had to face the reality that someone might take a shot at him. Ethel and her 11 fatherless children, was a stark reminder of the price of being a candidate."

Burke, who started working in the mail room at the Senate office in 1973, describes the frequency of hate mail in his tell-all book, "The Senator: My Ten Years With Ted Kennedy."

"Once I opened an envelope to find a mouse leg inside," Burke said.. "Another correspondent sent the Senator a used condom. All of this aberrational material went into the box labeled HATE MAIL. If there seemed to be a truly alarming threat in the mail, the letter and envelope were turned over to the FBI and the Secret Service."

Always on the alert, the receptionist at the Kennedy office had an alarm buzzer to alert the staff to bolt the doors protecting the inner office, where Ted Kennedy sat at a desk used by John and Robert before him, Burke wrote.

Meanwhile, the FBI said Monday it had additional documents on threats to Kennedy, possibly thousands of more pages, that it plans to make public once the agency finished reviewing them. Kennedy family members were given an opportunity to review and raise objections to the documents before they were released.

Dennis Argall, assistant section chief of the FBI's record information dissemination section, said the family has no legal power to keep information withheld. But the FBI does consider privacy concerns on a case-by-case basis.

### Death row inmate to face Utah firing squad Friday

WASHINGTON -- A Utah death row inmate may know shortly whether he will have to face a firing squad for the shooting death of attorney Michael Burdell in 1985.

Lawyers, seeking a last-minute stay of execution for Ronnie Lee Gardner, have appealed to the Supreme Court on Wednesday. It is the first of what are expected to be several appeals to the justice. If they lose the appeals, Gardner would become only the third person to die by a firing squad in the United States in 33 years. His execution is set for Friday.

Gardner, 49, shot Burdell during a botched escape attempt from custody at a Salt Lake City courthouse. Among the claims he raises in his appeals is that he has been a death row inmate too long.

"Gardner asserts that executing him now, after nearly 25 years on death row in Utah, so lacks retributive or deterrent value that it violates the Eighth Amendment," Gardner's lawyer Andrew Parnes told the high court. Gardner's lawyers have launched an aggressive scramble in state and federal courts, as well as the Utah Board of Pardons and Parole, to at least postpone the execution.

A federal judge late Tuesday refused to block the execution. The parole board Monday refused to commute Gardner's sentence to life in prison,



and the Utah Supreme Court Tuesday also denied his request for a stay. He claims he is a changed man and should not be executed for his crimes.

Gardner had a long history of escapes and was slipped a gun before he fatally shot Burdell on August 2, 1985. He was at the courthouse for a pre-trial hearing in the 1984 slaying of Melvyn Otterstrom, who was killed at the Salt Lake City bar where he was working to earn extra money.