

Thank You, Mr. President by Dan Jacoby

A few weeks ago, former President Bill Clinton lambasted Fox interviewer Chris Wallace, essentially for not being “fair and balanced.” At the time, people on both sides of the political divide made the expected comments. But who would have thought that it was just the first domino?

Since then, George Allen’s macaca comment has been followed up by multiple charges, from people who knew him well, of his racist remarks. George W. Bush’s own National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) says that our invasion of Iraq has hurt our fight in the war on terror, not helped it. Bob Woodward’s book, “State of Denial,” details serious infighting in the Bush administration, including intense internal efforts to get rid of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. Then Republican Congressman Mark Foley, supposedly in a “safe” district, resigned in a pedophilia scandal.

And the hits just keep on coming. Former Secretary of State Colin Powell is about to release a book, and apparently he’s not too complimentary of his former boss either. Republicans would be circling the wagons, but they must be having a hard time figuring out which of the wagons still turn to the right.

Then came the “affairs” of Don Sherwood and Jim Gibbons. And don’t forget Mark Foley, who begat Tom Reynolds and Dennis Hastert, and Jack Abramoff, who begat Bob Ney and John Sweeney, and ... well, before you know it, Republican supporters are reduced to asking, “who’s next”?

What I want to know is, how does Bill Clinton do it?

Republicans have long hated Bill Clinton. Their hatred has clouded their judgment to the point where they even tried to kick him out of office merely for having an affair. But he has always outmaneuvered them. Now, his comments on Fox seem prescient, as if he knew all the bad news (well, bad if you’re a Republican) was about to break. After the 2000 election, Al Gore was derided for running away from his boss. Six years later, his boss seems to be riding to the Democrats’ rescue, or at least leading the charge.

What is it about the man formerly known as “slick Willie” that gives him such an uncanny sense of what to say and when to say it? Does he have some creepy clairvoyant connection? Or is it simply that Bill Clinton understands, in a way most politicians don’t, just what the American people are thinking and how to tap into those thoughts? Is it just possible that he really “does feel our pain”, and can empathize, and then capitalize, on those feelings?

Whatever the reason, it is certain that Bill Clinton may once again be the leading force in burying the Republicans, just when they thought they had a plan for victory. Until the Fox interview, the Republicans looked poised to make a comeback. George W. Bush’s poll numbers were starting to turn up. Republican strategists had figured out where to spend their money, and had a series of attack ads ready to go. Everything was set to keep control of the Senate, and maybe even the House.

Not so much any more.