

past summer for an open House seat. In his House race Hackett surprised many fans of his anti-Bush remarks by opposing a timeline for withdrawal, and he has since disturbed war critics by dismissing the Congressional push for a timeline as “absolutely ludicrous.” There is no such ambiguity with Brown. He was an outspoken foe of the 2002 resolution authorizing Bush to use force in Iraq, and since the start of the war he has written House letters demanding answers from the Administration about the misuse of prewar intelligence, co-sponsored withdrawal resolutions and regularly read letters from antiwar constituents—particularly members of military families—into the Congressional Record.

Even some Democratic incumbents are feeling the heat. Since Lieberman has emerged as the Administration’s loudest Democratic defender, he has taken criticism from grassroots Democrats and groups like Democracy for America. Lieberman is unlikely to face a substantial antiwar challenge in the Connecticut primary. But he could still face serious opposition: Former Senator Lowell Weicker, a liberal Republican turned Independent, is talking about mounting a “Bring the Troops Home” challenge come fall (see John Nichols, “Run, Lowell, Run,” at www.thenation.com).

There will be plenty of twists and turns between now and November. But if Sherrod Brown wins in Ohio, where Republican Senator Mike DeWine is vulnerable, and Independent Representative Bernie Sanders wins Vermont’s open seat, as now seems likely, two of the House’s most articulate and savvy antiwar voices will be heard in the Senate. And if they are joined by others, like Minnesota’s Wetterling, Montana’s Tester or Rhode Island’s Matt Brown, the Democratic leadership will get the message loud and clear: It’s time to get out of Iraq.

New Orleans Blues

Three months ago, after chafing from criticism over his failure to even appear to respond to the suffering in New Orleans, George W. Bush finally made it to Jackson Square to deliver his promise that “this great city will rise again.” Yet today the great city remains largely in darkness. Most citizens of New Orleans are outside its boundaries, many with no real prospect of returning. What’s rising in New Orleans are divorce and suicide rates, toxic dumps, foreclosures and rage.

The rage was evident in early December just a half-dozen blocks from Jackson Square, in Congo Square, where African-Americans performed ancestral music in the early nineteenth century, heralding a new American culture. On a recent chilly Saturday, Congo Square was the meeting point for a crowd of about 500 demonstrators who gathered to march behind the Soul Rebels Brass Band to demand the return of New Orleanians to New Orleans.

By now it should be obvious that the drowning of the city was a man-made disaster. Multiple investigations, including those sponsored by the American Society of Civil Engineers and the National Science Foundation, conclude that the sea walls and levees were poorly designed, constructed and inspected. A not-too-subtle whispering campaign quickly suggested that the fault

might lie with those gaudy New Orleanians who insist on rollicking below sea level, or with a state whose legacy of political shenanigans dates back to before “The Kingfish,” Huey Long. The city and state have much to account for, including an evacuation plan that failed to protect their most vulnerable citizens. But the ongoing campaign against New Orleans obscures the simple truth that erecting barriers against floods is a federal responsibility. The Army Corps of Engineers failed its job. The Bush Administration now has the obligation to launch a massive effort to rebuild the city that the federal government destroyed.

Bush last visited the Gulf Coast on October 11. It shouldn’t surprise anyone that the President, and many in Congress, would prefer to look the other way while New Orleans collapses. Over the past quarter-century, conservatives have waged their most effective war against “big government.” This model was advanced by Ronald Reagan and endorsed by every President since. Now, when a federally coordinated solution is required, agencies from HUD to the EPA to FEMA are flummoxed. Bush faithfully followed the script by endorsing only limited solutions like the Gulf Opportunity Zone and Worker Recovery Accounts. In doing so, he advanced government as a stop-gap for what couldn’t be handled by his private and faith-based “armies of compassion.”

Stymied by this lack of leadership and by no national call for an ambitious regional rebuilding effort, Louisiana legislators, among them Democratic Representative William Jefferson and Republican Senator David Vitter, are now fretting aloud that demands for protection from the strongest hurricanes could actually work against the city’s interests by raising hopes too high. That’s pathetic. A half-day’s drive through New Orleans—at least, through the 80 percent of it that still looks nearly exactly as it did three months ago—should reveal to anyone what happens when levees don’t hold. You can start by reading the body count still scrawled in red marker on some homes. Yet there are those who dare to offer New Orleans protection on the cheap.

In October this magazine called for a coordinated “people’s reconstruction” that would provide for a “democratically accountable, economically viable, socially just and environmentally sustainable plan for regional rebuilding.” This effort must begin with the physical reclaiming of New Orleans—an ambitious, two-step process including a re-engineered levee system capable of withstanding a Category 5 hurricane and a fully funded restoration of the coast, using the Coast 2050 blueprint. A people’s reconstruction would then address the multiple effects of urban poverty that opened like fresh wounds during those days immediately following the levee breaches. Long before Katrina entered the Gulf, far too many New Orleanians lived on dangerous streets, worked low-paying jobs in the service industry, were unable to insure their families and sent their children to bleak public schools long abandoned by the middle class. For these citizens, the desperation experienced in post-Katrina New Orleans is nothing new.

New Orleans could become the nation’s classroom. A reinvigorated dialogue about urban America is newly possible—or at least it was three months ago, when images of suffering children on Louisiana bridges and highways played across the nation’s TV screens. So far, the President has squandered this

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opportunity, just as he squandered the post-9/11 opportunity to realign the nation's energy policy. No wonder it's widely feared in New Orleans that the Katrina moment has passed.

If New Orleans is to reclaim its greatness, the scope of the solution must match the scope of the problem. Each inch of the 200 miles of levees that are supposed to keep the city dry is now suspect. The wetlands that buffer the region continue their relentless disappearing act. Bush's EPA has downplayed the effects of oil spills following the hurricane; there is no real plan to deal with the toxic refuse of the flood. The Administration does not acknowledge the science of global warming and the consequences of a warmer ocean. Many New Orleanians long to return to their homes, but it is an unsteady feeling to raise children and care for elderly parents in a city on the brink. Meanwhile, decisions about homes, neighborhoods, schools and jobs will be made in their absence and without their input.

It doesn't have to be this way. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the rhythms of Congo Square sprouted into jazz, which gave the world a soundtrack of improvisation and democracy. A hundred years later, another democratic revolution could begin in New Orleans—but its song is quickly playing out.

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Gene McCarthy

Gene McCarthy was a pure original. No other senator had the combination of endowments Gene possessed: He was a philosopher, a skilled 6' 4" baseball and hockey player, a visionary statesman, a moralist, an eloquent orator and graceful poet with a mastery of English diction and a wit equal to Shaw's that had no match in the Senate.

He, of course, was a human being with his own trademark faults. At times he seemed to retire to his lair rather than engage in battles on the Senate floor or in committee. Sometimes his wit inflicted needless pain on those less well endowed in brain or tongue. Once when I expressed admiration for the courage of a Republican colleague, Gene snorted: "He has the kind of courage of a soldier who observes the battlefield from a hill and then rides down to shoot the enemy's wounded men."

When I was elected to the House of Representatives in 1956, Gene had already been there for eight years. He accepted me as one of his freshman wards. Soon I found myself invited to be a member of a small Friday luncheon group that included Stewart Udall, Frank Thompson, Lee Metcalf and Gene. Those lunches, which usually included a martini or two, gave me a splendid introduction both to practical Washington politics and to contemporary issues. As the youngest member of the group I had the most to learn, and no freshman could have had four better teachers.

Gene went on to organize a larger group of House liberals known as McCarthy's Marauders, which blossomed into the even larger House Democratic Study Group. Big, brilliant, witty McCarthy was a hero to the liberals in the House.

There is an incident in 1957 with which I will forever associate Gene. I announced in March of that year that I would be giving my maiden speech on a certain date. My theme was the failing farm program of Agriculture Secretary Ezra Taft Benson—a high official in the Mormon Church. A number of my Congressional colleagues were present to draw me out in a series of queries. One of these exchanges angered a Congressman Hill of Colorado, who defended Benson as "a man of God." To this, Gene observed that it would be difficult to continue the debate over agricultural issues if God were against us. This prompted Hill to rebuke him for ridiculing religion. I wish, he said, that the gentleman from Minnesota had seen a drama on TV that showed "some French girl" dying at the stake for holding fast to her faith in God. "Well," said Gene, "I did see that show, but I don't think Joan of Arc went to her death in defense of flexible farm price supports!" This prompted Congressman Tom Abernathy to say, "Mr. Speaker, if we're going to debate this farm issue from a theological perspective, I ask unanimous consent to speak for the Methodists."

Gene's most fundamental historical achievement came in 1968—a decade after he left the House for election to the Senate. Urged on by some of the Vietnam War opponents, he decided to run for the Democratic presidential nomination against President Lyndon Johnson. The significance of this courageous step was that it gave the growing number of Americans who opposed our disastrous enterprise in Vietnam an appealing standard-bearer who was aiming at the White House.

Gene's campaign, with its moral and philosophical overtones, reached a broad segment of the public. He ran exceedingly well in some of the early primaries— notably, New Hampshire and Wisconsin—which prompted President Johnson not to seek re-election despite his sweeping landslide victory over Senator Barry Goldwater only four years earlier.

The ancient Roman rhetorician Quintilian defined an orator as "a good man speaking well." I give you Gene McCarthy—a good man who thought, wrote, spoke and quipped well.

And Gene, when you enter the Pearly Gates of the mystery beyond, remember Kurt Vonnegut's reassuring promise in his current book, "There is no reason good can't triumph over evil, if only angels will get organized along the lines of the Mafia."

How about a heavenly battalion of McCarthy's Marauders—God willing, of course?

GEORGE MCGOVERN

George McGovern was a US senator from South Dakota from 1962 to 1980 and the Democratic candidate for President in 1972.

The Ney Scandal Grows

Bob Ney won election to Congress in 1994, one of a bevy of Republican revolutionaries who promised to clean up Washington and reform the House of Representatives. The Ohio Congressman leapfrogged to power by raising cash for Tom DeLay's Retain Our Majority program. As chairman of the powerful House Administration Committee, which oversees everything from lawmaker mail to parking spaces, Ney became known as the Mayor of Capitol Hill. It's a fitting nickname for