

This is our time

by Victor Kamber

At the recent Take Back America Conference in Washington, 3,000 grassroots progressives were in a joyous, euphoric mood. For a quarter-century they had been on the periphery of American politics, but not now.

Having led opposition to the Iraq War, liberal Democrats have the most to crow about as their party basks in dreams of winning the White House and electing a filibuster-proof Congress next year. Think how far they had come from the Reagan landslides, how their issues of the war, social and economic justice, and universal health care now lead the national debate. And along the way, the progressive push had taken the sexism out of party politics.

Liberal Democrats have fought long and hard for gender equality, so you can imagine the excitement as the 2007 Take Back America conference got underway: their party's two most prominent leaders are women.

Hillary Clinton leads all Democratic candidates for the 2008 Presidential nomination.

Nancy Pelosi is the first woman ever elected Speaker of the House of Representatives.

So how did conference participants celebrate this triumph?

They booed them both.

Iâ€™ll confess that two of the great loves of my life are the Democratic Party and the New York Yankees and I donâ€™t know which aggravates me more. Iâ€™ll leave it up to Joe Torre and Steinbrennerâ€™s checkbook to get the Yankees back on track, but I canâ€™t ignore Democrats booing Nancy and Hillary. When liberals became infatuated with Ralph Nader in 2000 it cost Al Gore the election.

Iâ€™m a great admirer of Robert Borosage who heads up Take Back America. As he told the fifth annual conference in his opening remarks, â€œThe right has failed. Their policies are bankrupt. They still dominate

the Republican Party, but they are well on their way to turning it into a minority, regional party of white exclusion. This is our time.â€•

I could not agree more, and one of the reasons the Democratic Party is stronger today and more effective than in decades is because of leaders like Hillary Clinton and Nancy Pelosi. Liberals and moderates may disagree and show their discontent by stamping their feet or raising their voices but it wonâ€™t be â€œour timeâ€• if Democrats tear themselves apart on how to end the Iraq war. Pelosi doesnâ€™t have the votes to bring home our troops, but even those who booed her at Take Back know how superior her leadership is to Denny Hastert. And Hillary has spent a lifetime of public service on behalf of families and children, promoting the progressive agenda. Labor has no better friendâ€•she is a strong supporter of the Employee Free Choice Act (which the conference took a break to lobby for on Capitol Hill) declaring â€œto rebuild our middle class we need to restore a level playing field for unions and give them a meaningful opportunity to organize.â€•

Understandably, Democratic divisions on the war delight and give hope to the GOP opposition. Playing their favorite â€œpatriotismâ€• card, right-wing media enjoys distorting what the boos were all about. The National Review reported that the boos began after Clinton said, â€œThe American military has done its job.â€• Fox News said she was booed because she said she supports the troops. The jeers actually came after she said the Iraqi government was to blame for the continued violence.

Republican friends of mine concede that 2008 is an election they canâ€™t win â€œ that Democrats have to lose it. Which we have a talent for doing. Larry Sabato, the University of Virginia political pundit, asked â€œhow can the Democrats blow this election with all their built-in advantages?â€• He answers his own

question (as Larry is prone to do): "Everything depends on whether Democrats consider the big picture prior to voting."

The big picture is the need for Democrats, whether liberals or moderates, to understand they are the political mainstream in this country. A Pew Foundation study shows 54 percent think government should help the needy, and two-thirds want government to guarantee health insurance for all. That's why Democrats need to Take Back America. That's the big picture.

So when Democrats boo and jeer other Democrats, I want to respond like Ronald Reagan: "There they go again!"

For more than a quarter of a century, Victor Kamber has made headlines as a political consultant while writing several books and providing sound bites that resonate for network and cable talk shows. His substantial career achievements were recently recognized when he became the recipient of the prestigious PR News 2006 Hall of Fame Award for his outstanding career in labor communications and politics. Those responsibilities have included a multitude of activities including working as a consultant in more than 100 political races; establishing the award-winning communications firm, The Kamber Group; and now serving as president of Coalition Services for Carmen Group Inc. His blog can be read at www.victorkamber.com.

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