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2005 Allard Capital Conference

Senators give back their two cents at Allard conference

BY L.E. RICH
THE COLORADO STATESMAN

WASHINGTON D.C. – “You’ve paid enough taxes to have a day in Washington,” Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., told a group of 121 Coloradans who attended the eighth annual Allard Capital Conference in the nation’s capital in early June. The program, similar to one started by Sen. Tim Wirth when he was in office, is now under the auspices of Sen. Wayne Allard, R-Colo., and is co-sponsored by the University of Colorado and Colorado State University.

Some participants earn continuing education credits for the two-day seminar held in the U.S. Senate buildings, which are connected to the domed Capitol via underground tunnels. Others attend just to keep abreast of what America’s elected

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New York Sen. Hillary Clinton was one of the speakers at the eighth annual Allard Capital Conference in Washington, D.C. Standing next to her is Sen. Wayne Allard of Colorado.

If you’ve recovered from 2004, just wait until 2008

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WASHINGTON D.C. – Now that President Bush has begun his final term of office and second-in-command Cheney has pledged disinterest in moving up, what’s in store for 2008?

“Only a complete fool would make a prediction right now,” Charlie Cook, editor and publisher of The Cook Political Report, told Allard conference attendees at a CU- and CSU-sponsored dinner in the Reserve Officer’s Building on Constitution Avenue.

But perhaps Cook is just fool enough.

Known nationally as an expert on U.S. elections and political trends, the longtime wonk candidly shared his insight on elections past and future.

It’s “a pretty open contest on both sides,” Cook said, with no clear frontrunners as of yet. Of course, it may be too early to pin the tail on the donkey ... or the elephant.

“Where’s the economy? What’s going on in the war?” Unpredictable changes in these issues and others, he explained, could shift political winds in a myriad of directions in the next three years.

Regardless, 2008 comes equipped with one component many of us have not seen in our lifetimes: It will be the first presidential election in 80 years without a sitting president or vice president on the ballot. The last time that happened, Herbert Hoover and Alfred E. Smith went head-to-head.

“I’m just ecstatic about (it),” Cook said anxiously, promising it will be a fascinating and fun campaign to watch, particularly from the 50-yard line.

And it could be just as contentious as the most recent one.

“We’re in an era where people believe it matters who their president is. ... Electability now is a very big deal.”

And that begs the question: Who is electable?

On the Democrats’ side, Cook says, Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, D-N.Y., currently has it wrapped up — with theoretically about a third of the polls. On the other hand, he added, “she is certainly the most polarizing Democrat in the country.” Many Democrats either don’t care for the former first lady or don’t think she could win the White House.

And the Dems “will be absolutely desperate to win.”

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According to Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson, standing at the podium, the VA’s “current priority is to take care of those men and women who are returning from” Iraq and Afghanistan.



Sen. John Kerry, 2004 Democratic candidate for president, told conference participants that he doesn’t think President Bush is taking into account the cost of the war in the national debt.

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leaders are doing on Capitol Hill and the chance to hobnob with household names like Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, D-N.Y., and Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board Alan Greenspan.

Regardless of why they attend, Coloradans from all walks of life are welcome, Allard reminded the group the first morning of the event, as everyone waited to hear from 15 U.S. senators, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson, Senate Sergeant at Arms Bill Pickle and Charlie Cook of The Cook Political Report — all in one day.

The following day would bring together Greenspan, Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Douglas J. Feith, and Architect of the Capitol Alan Hantman.

It's a chance for people with differing viewpoints to discuss the country's current concerns. "That was by design," Allard explained. Though Colorado's senior senator is a Republican, the annual conference is meant to be bipartisan.

And it was. Five of the 15 senators who participated are Democrats, and several, no matter what political bent, spoke to the same concerns.

Topping the list — at least that week — was the confirmation of judges who have been the target of filibusters, the Senate energy bill, health care, education, homeland security and the budget.

While most of the senators pointed to America's current struggles — the war in Iraq, the costs of health care and prescription drugs, the solvency of Social Security, border security and independence from foreign oil, and the declining numbers of American-educated engineers — the elected leaders nevertheless remain positive that the system works.

"We're at a very challenging period in the House and the Senate," said Clinton, who emphasized that they try not to let that interfere with bipartisan work. And it's possible — she spoke of teaming up with former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich on developing health information technologies and, likewise, Graham talked about how he and Clinton have worked on a bill that would give members of the Guard and Reserve one year of TRICARE health coverage for every 90 days of active duty.

"She has been a joy to work with and she has been very helpful on this bill," Graham said.

Allard and newly elected Sen. Ken Salazar, D-Colo., also have a good working relationship, Colorado's former attorney general said. The two meet once a month for breakfast in the Senate dining room.

"He also was a Democrat at one time," Salazar reminded Allard's Washington guests.

Still, "there's a lot more tension and a lot more wrangling than at other points in time" with certain issues, Clinton noted. "There are differences that can't always be bridged over by compromise."

"Bipartisanship on most issues," such as the energy bill, said Senate Majority Whip Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., "is simply required." It's easy to get something started, he warned, "but can you finish it? ... In spite of that, I think we've had a very productive year" — including passing a budget, cutting taxes and creating points of order to reduce spending. McConnell also predicts Congress will pass an immigration bill.

But all of these things take time. "If you're in the majority, you're impatient for success."

The fact that several judges who were originally filibustered received up or down votes that week "shows the system works" for Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, R-Tenn. Graham was

equally optimistic.

So was Sen. Trent Lott, R-Miss. "I've lived the American dream."

Longtime Virginia Sen. John Warner, a Republican colleague of Allard's, advised conference attendees to use their time in Washington wisely.

"Shake your fist and have at the two of us," Warner offered before taking questions.

FILIBUSTERING OF JUDGES

If there's one thing U.S. senators can agree on, it's that the issue of filibustering judicial nominations has taken up way too much of their time.

Some are happy with the compromise reached in late May that has allowed up-or-down votes on three of President Bush's controversial nominations while halting the Republican leadership's attempt to use what is known as "the nuclear option" to end a filibuster. The bipartisan compromise, brokered by 14 senators including Salazar, Graham and Warner, still allows Democrats to invoke the filibuster in extraordinary circumstances.

Others think it's just a temporary fix.

"I'm very sorry we're at that point now where we're right back where we started," said Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M.

McConnell concurred. "We'll probably end up right back where we were several weeks ago at some point. ... I wish otherwise. In the meantime, we're getting a lot of judges confirmed."

Graham and Warner feel somewhat differently.

"I was part of the agreement. Some Republicans don't like it, some Democrats don't like it. It's a chance to start over," Graham said, adding that "I hope the filibusters stop."

He says he is more concerned about focusing on what's best for the country, not about partisan power plays. "We all benefit from an independent judiciary. ... You're turning the place over to special interest groups on the right and on the left."

In the law, he continued, it is "in theory and it should be in practice (that) we park our political differences at the courthouse door. The courthouse is not about 50 plus one."

"We've got to get partisanship out of it," emphasized Frist, who says the "tiger" of the filibuster has devoured nominees such as Miguel Estrada.

Frist predicts, however, that a Supreme Court nominee will be filibustered.

Warner, whose eldest daughter lives in Colorado, explains his part in the compromise this way: "Another federal judge has been added to the bench."

Salazar promised "to take one judge at a time. My standard is fairly simple" — a nonpartisan review of judges who will be fair and uphold the rule of law.

According to Warner, the Constitution's Senate advise and consent rule is very clear: "to bring the new members onto the bench."

Otherwise, he said, courts are left with empty seats.

SOCIAL SECURITY

"Will the American promise to have a Social Security plan be there for you?" Domenici said in reference to his eighth-grade granddaughter. "Frankly, if we don't do something, I can tell you there's one promise we won't keep."

Most of the Republican senators agreed.

Because the demographic pyramid of the United States has flipped itself on its head with the aging of the Baby Boomer generation — coupled with increases in life expectancy — almost all of the senators underscored the need to examine the long-term solvency of the social insurance program begun by President Roosevelt 70 years ago.

"We're going to overwhelm the



Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-MI, is secretary of the Senate Democratic Conference. She was one of the speakers at the conference, which featured bipartisan viewpoints.

system," Graham stated.

But questions still remain on what should be done.

There needs to be a "bipartisan meeting of the minds," Clinton said. "There are a lot of potential solutions, depending on what you are trying to solve."

If it's long-term solvency, she added, there are ways to lift the cap and increase the retirement age. If, however, the idea is to try to increase private wealth and private security, she doesn't believe Social Security is the vehicle for that.

Throwing ideas onto the table, Clinton offered, "We could make 401(k)s mandatory instead of optional" or require that tax refunds go into savings.

"The problem is we're mixing apples and oranges. What is our problem? How do we define it?"

Clinton also warned that Social Security is a social insurance system against disability as well as for survivors of breadwinners. "These two elements are often not talked about."

Domenici sang a different tune. "We ought to start fixing Social Security and do it now. I think it will be fixed. I don't know if the president will get his personal accounts. But I think it's a good idea."

Graham, who is for raising the cap, also thinks personal accounts could work, but he acknowledged that there are a variety of ideas being put forth. "All I ask is that you guys pick one of them, other than no."

"That's good to fight drugs. That's lousy to save Social Security."

IRAQ AND HOMELAND SECURITY

Sens. John Kerry, D-Mass., and Domenici disagreed on whether President Bush is taking into account the cost of the war in the national debt.

"The interest is in there (in the budget)," Domenici said, explaining that "the president has decided that the cost of this war is not reoccurring" and is waiting until the end of the year to factor it in.

Regardless of which side of the fence they are on, several senators placed the war and homeland security as top priorities for the country.

"There's a great sense of change going on in our world," Salazar said, with the seeds of democracy taking root in countries such as Iraq.

"I thought we should have went to Iraq," Graham said. "I also think we've made mistakes. ... We did not

have enough troops. We assumed the best and did not plan for the worst."

Leaving prematurely also would be a mistake, he added, saying that the United States should stay the course and empower moderate forces in the country.

On the other hand, "the Reserves and the Guard are going to break."

According to Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson, the VA's "current priority is to take care of those men and women who are returning from" Iraq and Afghanistan. One way to do that, Graham said, is provide health and dental benefits to Guardsmen and Reservists as laid out in the bill he and Clinton have sponsored.

Warner warned, however, that there must be a distinction separating the Guard and the Reserve from the full-time military.

But if things go bad in Iraq, it's bad for everyone, Graham said.

McConnell agreed, saying the United States hasn't been attacked since Sept. 11, 2001 because of the president's policies. "The principal reason we're all safer now is because we've been on (the offense)."

It's "for our own self-interest to promote the world's prosperity," Sessions added.

Border control was also a recurring theme.

"My own personal view on that is we aren't doing enough," said Salazar, who called immigration "a very complex and tough issue — it's an issue that cries out for attention."

Sharing about 5,000 miles of border with Canada and 2,000 with Mexico, Sen. Thad Cochran, R-Miss., depicted both as essentially open borders.

"We haven't done what we need to do on border security," McConnell noted. "The citizens are going down there and basically doing the job for us. ... We're going to try to do something significant on that this year."

According to Sessions, "When Mexico is booming economically, it helps us." When it's sinking, it hurts us. "That's a fact."

When asked about the extradition of Raul Garcia-Gomez, who's wanted for the murder and attempted murder of two Denver police officers, the senator from Alabama and former prosecutor had an unequivocal message for our southern neighbors:

"We expect you to extradite murderers to our country. And that's a fair request of you."

It's a good thing these officials have day jobs

By L.E. RICH
THE COLORADO STATESMAN

WASHINGTON D.C. — They may be serious about politics, but that doesn't mean they don't have a sense of humor. While sharing insights from Capitol Hill during the eighth annual Allard Capital Conference, America's elected officials and political leaders managed to laugh at themselves — and others.

VOTED OFF THE ISLAND

2004 was a big win for President Bush, according to Charlie Cook, editor and publisher of The Cook Political Report. The president managed to garner a majority of the popular vote and the Republicans expanded their majorities in both the House and the Senate.

"Going into your second term with majorities and expanded majorities, that's a big deal."

But how did he do it — what with being unable to tie Sept. 11 to Saddam Hussein, failing to find weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and struggling with a sluggish economy and limited job growth?

The Bush campaign, under the guidance of Karl Rove, was "well conceived and well executed" in our evenly divided country.

But another factor was President Bush's opponent, Cook says.

"I don't know anyone who voted for John Kerry. ... I think he kind of got the default Democratic vote."

Just picture this: Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., at a working class family's barbecue.

He sounds "too much like Thurston Howell the Third."

HARD TO KEEP A GOOD WEASEL DOWN

With the rise of 527s, PACs are now "some of the cleanest money in politics," says Cook.

So will there ever be a solution that effectively removes financial influence from elections?

For anyone who still thinks so, Cook suggests a good game of whack-a-mole.

SPEEDING AHEAD WITH TECHNOLOGY

"I was pretty skeptical," says Sen. Wayne Allard, R-Colo., of when he first heard about hydrogen-fueled vehicles, a technology being promoted by the president.

But Allard test-drove a hydrogen car the Monday before his annual capital conference.

He's now a lot less skeptical, though Colorado's senior senator noted that "hydrogen comes from natural gas, which doesn't help our natural gas problem."

And he still has questions about how well such a vehicle operates at high altitude.

"I told them I want you to bring it

to Colorado and I want you to drive it on Mount Evans" where there is less oxygen in the air available for the reverse electrolysis.

Still, Allard says he was impressed with the car.

"It'll go up to 100 miles an hour. I didn't personally test (that)," he added with a wry smile.

DAWNING RECOGNITION

Former presidential candidate John Kerry reminded conference attendees of his Aurora birthright after being introduced by Allard, who praised his colleague for his war service and military decorations.

"Thanks for the introduction," Kerry said. "It's nice to know that I actually did serve in Vietnam."

But life has been different for the Massachusetts senator since Nov. 3. He no longer is questioned about his military record and he no longer has a Secret Service detail following him wherever he travels.

Recently at the airport, someone yelled out to him: "Hey you, anybody tell you you look like that Kerry guy?"

"They tell me that all the time," Kerry responded.

"Kind of makes you mad, don't it?"

NOT EVEN GOOD IN A RED SAUCE

The second-ranking member in the U.S. Senate, Sen. Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., was unanimously reelected majority whip by his GOP colleagues last November.

So what exactly does a whip do?

"The term comes from England" and the Irish and British Parliaments, McConnell explained, and derives from the "whipper-in" of a foxhunt who directs the hounds during the chase.

The term was carried over to the United States by the country's founding fathers and refers mainly to



Lamar Alexander, R-TN, is a former presidential candidate.

the task of gathering votes on major issues.

McConnell, however, doesn't think the term is quite apropos.

"This job would better be titled 'the wet noodle.'"

SO MANY CONGRESSMEN, SO LITTLE TIME

In 1972, when he was a practicing lawyer in Jackson, Sen. Thad Cochran, R-Miss., was approached with the idea of running for the U.S. House of Representatives.

"We were totally in the Democrat column back in those days," he said of his home state of Mississippi. When asked to run as a Republican, "I laughed."

Of course, Cochran, who was elected to the Senate in 1978, had to run it by his wife, Rose, first.

How would you feel about being married to a United States congressman, he asked.

"And she said, 'I don't know. Which one?'"

COCK AND POL STORY

"I was a really green senator," says Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, D-N.Y.

So when she was approached by Allard to be a co-sponsor of a bill to ban cockfighting in the United States, she followed her conscience and jumped on board — not thinking of how the bill would play in the media.

"We have a really intense tabloid news environment" in New York, she noted.

That could explain how, despite 41 co-sponsors to the bill, she woke up one morning to find her face gracing the cover of a newspaper.

"On one side is me. On the other side is a fighting cock."

NO KENNEDY LEFT BEHIND?

Almost five years ago, President Bush had the support of the senior senator from Massachusetts to ensure that no child in the United States would fall through the gaps in the education system.

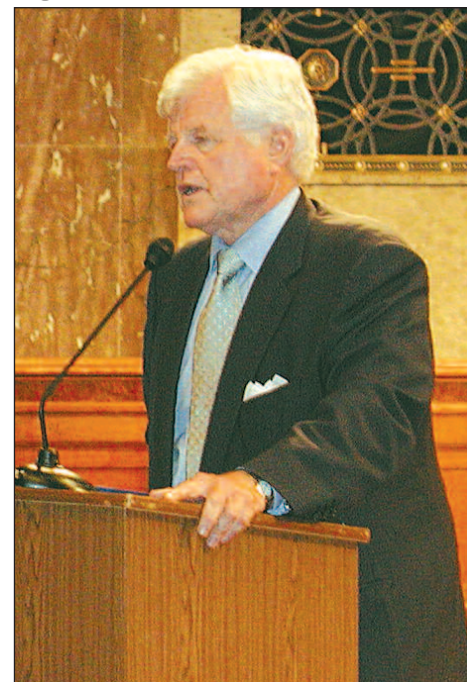
There would be state-controlled curricula, smaller classrooms, well-trained teachers, reports cards for every school, and supplementary services for non-native English speakers and students with disabilities.

The No Child Left Behind Act was "the guarantee that every child would reach proficiency," explains Sen. Ted Kennedy, D-Mass. "I'm a strong believer in every one of (those provisions)."

While Kennedy says he is impressed with the president's interest in education, "I do believe we fell short" in funding the educational mandate, which requires significant resources.

According to Kennedy, there could be no better legacy for a president than creating the very best school system.

"We have just a healthy difference"



Sen. Ted Kennedy, D-Mass., at the podium.

when it comes to funding NCLB.

Or, as President Bush would say, the senator quipped, "There's not enough money to satisfy Kennedy."

GRAHAM CRACKERS

"What do me and Ted Kennedy have in common?" Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., posed to the Colorado group with a smile. "I'm just asking — I don't know. It's a trick question."

How about he and Strom Thurmond?

In 2002, Graham replaced the long-time senator from South Carolina who was elected to the Senate in 1954. Graham was born in 1955.

But that's where the similarities end.

While Thurmond served half a century on Capitol Hill and left office at the age of 100, "genetically, I think I'm term-limited," Graham says.

Thurmond also was known for, among other things, marrying a woman significantly his junior.

If Graham were to truly follow in Thurmond's footsteps, he joked, "my wife would be born in about two years."

NO TELLING WHO HAS BETTER PARTIES

When Sen. Trent Lott, R-Miss., thinks of the Rocky Mountain state, he can't help but miss his colleague, former Colorado Republican Sen. Hank Brown. It's just not the same on the Senate floor.

But Lott knows Brown has moved on to other, perhaps greener pastures, including becoming interim president of the University of Colorado when Betsy Hoffman steps down on August 1.

With a nod to Hoffman, who attended the Allard Capital Conference, Lott gave his best to Brown.

"Boy is he in trouble now! ... That's a fun school, I hear."

...Lots cookin' in 2008, Cook tells Allard conference

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"It'll be the Clinton and the 'un-Clinton'" vying for the party's nomination, Cook predicts.

No matter who earns the top candidate position, the Democrats have additional hurdles to overcome:

"Democrats have to confront the fact they've got a problem in small town, rural America," and they also need to focus on regaining majorities in Congress, something Cook says they will not be able to do in 2006. In 2004, the Republicans gained four seats in the Senate — giving them an expanded 55 to 44 lead, with one independent — and a net gain of three seats in the House — giving them a 232 to 202 majority, again with one independent.

"Democrats basically have to run the table" in 2006. "In the real world,

that doesn't happen that often."

For the GOP, Cook notes that "bad things tend to happen to parties halfway through their second term" and that there's already "a certain nervousness Republicans have right now," particularly with the proposed changes to both bankruptcy law and class action lawsuits. Also, legislative news is being overshadowed in the media by hot topics such as the Terri Schiavo debate and the filibustering of judges.

It evokes an age-old philosophical question: "Even if you're moving the ball forward," Cook pondered, "if nobody knows it, do you have a problem?"

The field is even more wide open when trying to predict the Republican ticket. The usual suspects come to mind: former New York Mayor Rudy

Giuliani, Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, R-Tenn., former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, and former Secretary of State Colin Powell.

Being pro-choice, pro-gun control and pro-homosexual rights, however, pretty much takes Giuliani out of the running, Cook noted, because the true conservatives won't support him. Instead, the GOP needs a bridge candidate.

"I think Senator Frist is trying to be that" but isn't quite equipped for the task.

As for Powell, long a favorite of many Republicans and Dems alike, Cook says, "I just don't think he'll do it. ... If he wanted to be president, he just would have finished his second term."

"My hunch is they'll gravitate

toward McCain," he said, adding that even the Arizona senator will need to find a way to bump up his support from 40 percent to 50 percent.

But don't forget the governors, who often fare better than senators in presidential elections. Watch out for Sen. George Allen, R-Va., the former governor of Virginia whom Cook pegs as a cross between Presidents Bush and Reagan.

On the other hand, "if Hillary Clinton is the Democratic nominee, these people (the true conservatives) would back the devil himself."

And what about Colorado's senior senator?

Cook need not make predictions about Fort Collins' own Wayne Allard running for president.

"Not unless they vote alphabetically," Allard said.