

RiverOpinion

Crisis One!

By **Richard L. Hershatter**
Contributing Columnist

The number one industry in the State of Florida is tourism.

Blessed with a lush, sunny climate and the blue-green waters of the Gulf Stream, tourists from all around the world have for many years visited, fallen in love with a virtual Garden of Eden, and returned season after season.

Many have opted to purchase, some to retire immediately; others as investments with a view to future retirement.

With no state income tax and generous homesteading provisions, residents and snowbirds alike have contributed to a burgeoning economy, business-friendly and growth-oriented.

Both state and local governments have scrambled to keep up, developing new water sources and building road systems to allow easy access to all the state's attractions.

Private capital has produced world-class restaurants, and the construction industry has provided individual dwellings, condominium complexes and luxury hotels the equal of any to be found on the planet. The axiom: "Build it and they will come," has proven true, resulting in an ever-escalating increase in real estate values.

Nothing is ever perfect, however, and there have been shadows on the horizon, some of which are starting to coalesce. Like the snake in the original Garden of Eden, threats are starting to materialize that threaten to drive away the previously happy inhabitants of the State of Florida.

The first of these, "Crisis One," is the looming menace of red tide.

Visitations of the algal bloom, with their deadly effects on fish and aquatic mammals and acrid assault on human lungs, are not new. They have appeared and disappeared on our shores periodically for decades, with greater or

lesser consequences.

What is new, however, is increased virulence and staying power. The 2005 version refused to leave, decimating more sea turtles and manatees than ever before.

With humans, the elderly and infirm have been particularly afflicted, and many shoreline renters have simply opted not to return. There are also increasing signs of owners electing to sell and move to more welcoming climes.

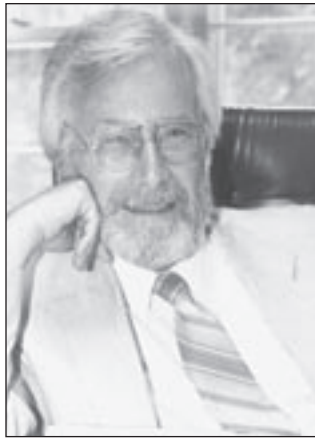
As one daily newspaper recently put it: "the real estate bubble has not yet burst, but it is starting to leak."

The primary purpose of government in a democracy is to provide for the safety and welfare of its citizens - to accomplish those things that individuals are unable to do for themselves.

Individual citizens and groups have addressed the problem, but it has proven too huge and too complicated for easy resolution.

Local governments have responded by spending literally hundreds of thousands of dollars to clean up dead fish from the beaches, but they, as well as the state and federal governments, have been absolutely miserly when it comes to contributing funds for research on causes and cures.

It has become increasingly evident that one of the reasons for the persistent virulence of red tide has been unabated run off from farms and phosphorous mines, which apparently feeds the algae and enhances its



growth.

Politicians pay lip service to the problem at election time, but once elected are often affected with amnesia.

Crisis Two!

As though the algal pestilence lapping at Florida's hundreds of miles of pristine coasts were not enough, another "snake" threatens to sully the beaches abutting the Gulf of Mexico.

U.S. Presidents going back through both Democratic and Republican Administrations have declared and enforced moratoriums against drilling for oil and gas off the shores of Florida.

Although oil rigs and pipelines exist off the coasts of California and Texas, the federal government has hitherto respected the tourist magnet that the Sunshine State's white beaches represent. Our beaches remained off limits and relatively safe from the type of man-made disaster embodied by an oil spill.

The oil industry and its lobbyists, however, have never stopped lusting after the suspected oil and gas accumulations lying deep under the blue-green waters of the Gulf.

Increased world-wide demand, coupled with the temporary hurricane-inflicted damage to the oil rigs and refineries along the Texas and Louisiana coasts by Katrina and Rita, have provided an excuse to resurrect efforts to end the moratoriums.

As this is being written, the Resources Committee of the House of Representatives has approved legislation to immediately remove the ban on off-shore drilling in the Gulf of Mexico, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and other coastal waters.

If passed, natural gas drilling would be allowed within five miles of the Florida coast.

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Bush Fumbles in Fourth Quarter

By **Tom Burgum**
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Some things, said Karl Marx, appear in history twice, first as tragedy, then as farce. Last Thursday the Bush administration sunk into farce when it tried to hold a teleconference with 10 American soldiers and one Iraqi in order to bolster confidence and give an optimistic assessment of the security for the Saturday election. Inept is not a sufficiently strong word to describe the event. First the officials staging the event briefed the soldiers and required them to rehearse their answers, then denied there had been any such scripting. What is



so incomprehensible about the denial is that the rehearsal had been conducted by satellite communications and was available to all the news media in the United States. So, when reporters challenged the alleged spontaneity of the event, all the Bush people could do was parrot the old country-western lyrics, "are you going to believe me or your lying eyes?" This attempt at spin, while not the most venial episode in recent memory, may be the stupidest since Nixon and his aides decided to turn on the tape recorder and plan a criminal conspiracy.

Problems for Bush

What is it about second terms? Less than a year ago George Bush was basking in the glow of a smashing Presidential win, a win which helped the Republicans increase their margins in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Now he is beset by problems, only some of which are his making, and missteps of the kind he did not make in his first term.

The nomination of Harriet Miers to the Supreme Court has been met with the expected opposition from the Democrats and outright and overt hostility from the President's conservative base. Had Bush nominated Barbara Streisand the outcry couldn't have been much

worse. Two of his inner-circle have become stars of a federal grand jury investigation of the alleged outing of a CIA operative. It wouldn't be too surprising if, in the near future, Carl Rove and Scooter Libby were led out of the White House in hand-cuffs with rain coats over their heads. Seemingly half the Republican politicians in Washington seem to be tied to the mess created by Republican insider and lobbyist Jack Abramoff. He is now the subject of two investigations by the Senate Indian Affairs Subcommittee and a multi-agency federal task force. Whether Abramoff committed any crimes has yet to be proven but he should hang his head in shame for talking three Indian tribe clients into buying season tickets for a team named the "Redskins."

Bad News, Bad Polls

Aside from the missteps and the scandals, the political and economic news is not good. The war in Iraq is currently supported by less than 40% of the voters; consumer prices shot up by 1.2%, the biggest increase in more than a quarter-century, and the public is deeply worried about energy prices and the economy. Bush's approval rating in the African-American community has fallen to 2% despite concerted efforts to reach out to that community. Here the President is advised to be realistic. The only way the Republicans will ever get significant African-American support will be if Democratic National Committee Chairman Howard, "The Scream," Dean appears at the Million Man March garbed in a Ku Klux Klan robe. While the chance of this happening is remote, with Howard one never does know, does one?

Common sense suggests Bush's second term should be smoother and more successful than his first. He now has the benefit of experience, a stable of trusted advisors, and he no longer has to worry about reelection. Forget common sense, as yet it just isn't working out. Historian Doris Kearns-Goodwin believes it goes just opposite; "Second terms," she notes, "have been less successful than first terms." Richard Nixon resigned rather than face impeachment after having won a landslide victory over George McGovern in 1972. Nixon's downfall was likely due to overactive paranoia, but historians point to arrogance as the Achilles heel of second terms.

Second Term Problems Common

This was most likely the case in Franklin Delano Roosevelt's fall from grace in 1937. He had won a remarkable landslide victory in 1936 but was frustrated by the Supreme Court's rejection of major New Deal legislation. Roosevelt asked congress to pass a "judicial reform act" which would have appointed six more Supreme Court justices immediately increasing the size of the court to 15 members. A Congress dominated by Democrats undoubtedly would have appointed judges friendly to Roosevelt and his New Deal agenda. The measure was defeated 70 to 20 by a combination of Republicans and conservative Democrats. The "court packing" plan was widely unpopular and when the country began to slide back into depression Roosevelt's approval ratings slipped badly. He recovered sufficiently to win a third term in 1940. Nixon's Watergate cover-up and Reagan's Iran-Contra problems also seem to stem from a bit of hubris, both having won landslide elections for their second terms. Dwight Eisenhower was blamed for extending the 1957 recession by refusing to lower taxes. It is ironic that his Democratic successor, John Kennedy, did reduce taxes in 1961 and is given credit for bringing the country out of a nagging recession. Lyndon Johnson was driven from office by the unpopularity of the Viet-Nam War, again after he had an overwhelming victory in 1964. Clinton had a tumultuous second term but he was undone by his penchant for White House Interns rather than a bad economy or foreign wars.

It is far too early to write off the second term of the Bush presidency. The economy is still robust, gasoline prices probably will fall and Iraq shows signs of stabilizing. But Bush and his close advisors must regain the political smarts that marked the first term. Bush survived a bad economy, the 9-11 attack, and his inability to speak in complete sentences because many people believed he had character and was a serious adult. But, as Thomas Macaulay observed, "The measure of a man's character is what he would do if he knew he would not be found out." Given the administrations' recent Iraq interview escapade, many people may well wonder what the Bush administration might do if they believe they won't be found out.