

Entering Massachusetts: Please Don't Hug the Republicans

by Con Chapman

Tonight, in a break from long-standing tradition, members of Congress will sit next to each other without regard to party affiliation as they listen to the President's State of the Union address. It promises to be a historic occasion, like the lion lying down with the lamb in the Book of Isaiah. I won't cast aspersions on the members of either party by comparing them to lions or lambs—you make the call, according to own your political persuasion.



Peaceable Kingdom, by Edward Hicks

Everybody's trying to play nice in the wake of the Tucson shootings, but the whole thing seems transparently factitious, like the friendly handshakes at mid-field before the coin toss at the Super Bowl. Just seconds later, the two herds of behemoths are slamming their helmets into each other, trying to push a leather ball across lines of demarcation that are defended as jealously as the

39th parallel, the latitude that separates North from South Korea right through the middle of their negotiating table. For pure unadulterated duplicity, the only thing comparable is pretending you didn't punch your kid sister who scooped onto your half of the back seat during a long vacation drive.



North is north, and South is south.

To borrow a phrase from some unknown lush, whiskey and water spoils two good things. In Catholic grade schools and Jewish Orthodox synagogues, males and females are separated. Some things are just better off kept apart. That's the way we do it here in Massachusetts, where a Democrat who hugs a Republican runs the risk of stiff sanctions.

What's that you say? Is this one of those crazy laws you read about in Reader's Digest, like "It is illegal to walk a salamander after dark in Keokuk, Iowa"? Nope—it's for real. Here in the bluest of blue states, a Deputy Legislative Counsel for the Massachusetts Democratic Party was charged with assault and battery for hugging a female lawyer as he exclaimed "My favorite Republican!"

Well, it's a slippery slope. If you let Democrats hug Republicans, pretty soon they'll go after independents or Libertarians or Green Party members. Better to nip this sort of thing in the bud, the way Rudy Giuliani's "broken windows" approach to crime prevention curtailed serious violations by adopting a zero tolerance policy for the small stuff. When it comes to public policy clarity, you want your opponent lined up across from you in a three-point stance, *a la* the

Packers and Steelers, not wandering in your backfield, waiting—just waiting—to hug you.

That's more like it.

We take extraordinary protective measures here because Republicans are an endangered species in this state. In the recent mid-terms, which President Obama characterized as a “shellacking” nationally, Democrats won all statewide offices and all Congressional races here. Republicans gained 25 seats in the state legislature, but they're still a distinct minority in both houses.

It wasn't always thus. The standard operating procedure has historically been for Republicans to provide adult supervision through the governor's office, sending extravagant spending items or cockamamie affronts to freedom back to the Democratic-controlled legislature. If they succeeded in overriding the veto, fair enough, they won. It was like a tennis match.



Lord Acton

When the governor and the legislature are both Democratic, things tend to get out of hand. Our last three Speakers of the House of Representatives have been indicted by federal authorities, and not all for your typical garden variety public corruption charges. One lied under oath about his role in a gerrymandering scheme that *reduced* minority representation in the legislature, giving the lie to the state party's claim to be the ones who keep the interests of such voters uppermost in its mind. Then there's the wife of a Democratic congressman who will go to jail for laundering \$7 million for a brother who set up an illegal off-shore gambling operation. And the former Senate President who receives a \$200,000 tax-free annual pension, even though he helped his fugitive brother escape prosecution for assorted crimes including murder. Piddly stuff like that.



A safe place to put your money.

Or consider the Democratic pol caught on videotape stuffing bribes into her bra. I have a personal connection to this former state Senator, who will go to jail shortly. She once gave me a lecture on fiscal probity when a charter school whose board I served on ran a deficit. I call no fair—she gets to deposit petty cash in her foundation undergarments, I don't!



Lather, rinse, repeat. Lather, rinse, repeat. Lather, rinse . . .

I omit the names not to protect the innocent—there aren't any—but because you've got better things to think about in the run-up to the Super Bowl, like does anybody ever pull Troy Polamalu's hair in a pile-up?

It has been said that a Massachusetts Republican would be a Democrat somewhere else, and this is perhaps true; the first and only black U.S. Senator from this state—Edward Brooke—was a Republican; the first female elected to Congress—Margaret Heckler—was a Republican; the first and only female governor of the state—Jane Swift—was a Republican. Republicans have nominated at least two gay men for statewide office here—Democrats none. Politics ain't bean bag, said Finley Peter Dunne's Mister Dooley, and my adopted state's Democratic Party is heavily populated by Italian and Irish men who play for keeps; for them, running for political office isn't a matter of *noblesse oblige*, it's a fight for the best job many of them will ever have.



Finley Peter Dunne

A man whom I met in the twilight of his career as a public works contractor told me that the founder of his firm, upon returning from Europe at the conclusion of World War II, decided to set up offices in Missouri, Illinois and Massachusetts. Why those places, I asked, noting coincidentally that I'd lived in all three. Because they're the easiest states to rig bids in, he said. Take *that* Louisiana!

I'm sure that if the numbers were different and Republicans had as many opportunities for graft and corruption as Democrats here the number of local miscreants would be more evenly balanced

between the two major political parties. As Lord Acton said, however, power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. And “Too rich to steal” rarely works as a campaign slogan, so such a balance is unlikely anytime soon.



Massachusetts Republi—raccoon caucus.

If we don't allow people to hug our Republicans without a legitimate reason, it's for reasons of sustainability, not necessarily a lack of pulchritude. Back when Michael Dukakis was first thinking of parlaying the soon-to-evaporate “Massachusetts Miracle” into a run for the Presidency—and I was beginning to doubt the wisdom of voting a straight “D” ticket every election cycle—I met with a lanky blonde Republican political operative to hand over the results of some tedious research into public transportation. “Don't you hate it when you stay out all night and forget to bring a change of underwear to the office?” she said, all girlish but slutty innocence. “Yeah—right,” I mumbled. “I *detest* that icky feeling the next day.” Maybe I was missing out on some good parties by not being more—bipartisan.

So please, if you come to visit our state, don't feed the raccoons, and don't hug the Republicans. The population of the former will

only increase, and the number of the latter could get even smaller.
If that's mathematically possible.

