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# POLITICS

Election  
Countdown  
**286 Days**

THURSDAY, JANUARY 22, 1998

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## SHOP TALK

By Amy Keller

**B**ig Brother? The Republican National Committee is considering a controversial plan to place poll watchers at key precincts on Election Day to crack down on hijinks this November.

According to the Los Angeles Times, which acquired a 17-page memo on the plan, the "ballot integrity" strategy was laid out in secret at the RNC's membership meeting last week.

"The poll-watch plan...calls for party leaders in each state to battle 'vote tampering' by recruiting poll watchers and 'challengers' to 'target precincts,'" the newspaper reported.

The national plan still has to be approved by each state before it is implemented.

Democrats have already said that they would fight any such initiative — particularly if Congress tries to write it into law.

Republicans will have to be careful with

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## Out and In

**Dems. We'll Keep Stokes's Seat, Try To Reclaim Parker's**

By John Mercurio  
and Rachel Van Dongen

Democrats figure they can easily hold onto the seat of retiring 15-term Rep. Louis Stokes (D-Ohio). Taking back party-switching Rep. Mike Parker's (R-Miss) seat, however, is another story.

Stokes and Parker announced last week end that they'll leave the House at the end of the 105th Congress.

Their departures bring to nine the number of Appropriations Committee members who are leaving office this year. Stokes is the top Democrat on the Appropriations subcommittee on Veterans Affairs, Housing and Urban Development, and independent agencies. Parker serves on subcommittees covering Energy and water development as well as military construction.

In Ohio, the action will be in the Democratic primary in the solidly Democratic, Cleveland-based 11th district, which Stokes has represented since 1968.

Stokes was the first African-American to be elected to the House from Ohio, and he is likely to be replaced by another African-American in this majority-black seat.

"It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for somebody," said Ohio Democratic party Chairman David Leland. "There hasn't been an opportunity like this in this district for 30 years."

The most prominent of the would-be Democratic contenders is Cuyahoga County Prosecutor Stephanie Tubbs Jones, who many Democrats said would be the front-runner if she makes the race, but the name of Stokes's daughter, Cleveland Municipal Court Judge Angela Stokes, has also been

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## Picking Up Fallen Standard Is a Tradition



Photo by Maureen Keating

The Bonos visited the Capitol in 1991, as the then-mayor of Palm Springs contemplated a 1992 Senate candidacy.

## Mary Bono Will Likely Run for Sonny's Empty Seat

By Norah M. O'Donnell

**M**ary Bono is likely to announce this week that she will be a Republican candidate to replace her late husband, Rep. Sonny Bono (R-Calif.), in the special election scheduled for April 7.

Bono would become the second widow in California to run in a House special election this year — Lois Capps (D) has advanced to the runoff on March 10 to replace the late Rep. Walter Capps (D). The 33-year-old Bono will also be following in the footsteps of more than 30 women who have been elected to replace a spouse in the House.

"If I can do it and be a great single mom and do a great job as a Member of Congress, then I'd like to do it," Mary Bono said in an interview on "Larry King Live" Monday night. GOP sources told Roll Call that since that interview, Bono is leaning toward a run.

"If [some details] can be put in order, the prospects for being a candidate is very very high," said Rep. Jerry Lewis (R-Calif.), the dean of the Golden State delegation. "I

wouldn't be surprised if we had an announcement early today or the next day."

There is only one known instance in which a widow has lost a special election to fill the seat of her husband: In all, one-fifth of the 165 women who have served in the House were elected to fill their late husband's seat.

One reason for widows' electoral success is that the party helps clear the field. In fact, when Republican National Committee Chairman Jim Nicholson introduced Bono at the winter meeting in Palm Springs, he said, "All the other Republicans have stepped aside for her. We hope she will run."

The most recent and prominent widows to serve in Congress — including Reps. Lindy Boggs (D-La), Cathy Long (D-La), Beverly Byron (D-Md), and the only current widow in Congress, Rep. Jo Ann Emerson (R-Mo) — all suggested in interviews that Bono would have a natural advantage as a political wife and expressed support for her candidacy.

From her residence in Vatican City as the US ambas-

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Mary Bono and family at Jan. 9 funeral.

AP Photo

## PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE

By Morton M. Kondracke

### Medical Research May Be Only Health Issue Parties Can Agree On

Republicans and Democrats are set to do battle over four health policy issues this year—HMO regulation, Medicare expansion, malpractice reform, and tobacco—but they ought to be able to agree on one: medical research.

In fact, it's conceivable that doubling the budget of the National Institutes of Health and other research agencies is the only health policy they can agree on.



The White House thinks it is playing a winning hand on all the contentious issues and that Republicans are so worried about making election-year mistakes

that they will cave in to the Democratic agenda.

But a counterattack is being organized by business and insurance groups that is likely to stiffen the spine of Republicans, so the result could be a stalemate on health policy.

Here's a rundown on the struggles ahead: The White House is convinced that the public wants the government to regulate health maintenance organizations.

A year ago, a poll by the National Coalition on Health Care showed that 74 percent of US adults believe that "quality care is often compromised by insurance companies to save money," although 57 percent said their own care was the best care they could want.

The White House is further encouraged by the fact that a conservative Republican Rep. Charles Norwood (Ga.) has attracted



Conservative Rep. Charles Norwood is proposing an even tougher HMO regulatory bill than the White House's.

70 GOP colleagues and 210 total House Members to co-sponsor an even tougher HMO regulatory bill than the White House is advocating.

Clinton acknowledges that, having failed to pass comprehensive health reform in 1994, he is trying to do it incrementally. Norwood's bill takes a big leap in that direction.

One lobbyist who follows health care said, "A measure of the popularity of this issue is that Norwood's Senate co-sponsor is Alfonse D'Amato [R-NY], who has an uncanny sense about what the average Joe wants."

Although Republican Congressional leaders oppose both Norwood's and Clinton's plans, Democrats anticipate that the GOP will be forced to come up with a watered-down alternative.

But various health insurance, HMO, and business groups—including those that successfully defeated "Clintoncare" in 1994—are launching vigorous campaigns against HMO regulation.

The Health Insurance Association of America, which sponsored the famous "Harry and Louise" ads in 1994, declared that the issue at stake "is whether the public interest is best served by federal regulation and control of health care, or by the changes that are taking place in the private sector as it responds to the demands of consumers."

Besides frontal opposition, Republicans have a stealth plan to stymie HMO regulation—attaching malpractice reforms, such as limits on liability and on lawyers' fees, to any measure that comes along.

The idea is to make Democrats choose whether to make political hay with consumers at the price of enraging the powerful trial lawyers' lobby, a major contributor to Democratic campaigns. Some Republicans think that, to please the trial lawyers, Clinton might veto his own health care Bill of Rights.

Meanwhile, Clinton's idea of making Medicare available to people who retire between 55 and 64 is getting bad press on the grounds that it will hasten the insolvency of the Medicare system.

Still, the White House thinks the idea is a political winner, forcing Republicans once again to touch the legendary "third rail" of American politics, where they've been electrocuted before.

This time, though, Republicans have a handy argument: A bipartisan commission has just been appointed to study Medicare long-term. Why not wait till the commission reports before tinkering with the system? That case probably will prevail.

Meantime, the national tobacco settlement presents a morass of issues and jurisdictional claims in Congress, including Clinton's plan for big new federal taxes, liberals' objections to releasing tobacco companies from liability in future lawsuits, and the cut that trial lawyers will get from the deal. There's every reason to think that, with only 95 legislative days to work this year, Congress won't be able to process the pact.

All of this amounts to a stalemate. But expanding the federal medical research budget

*The White House is convinced the public wants the government to regulate HMOs.*

offers an opportunity for bipartisan accomplishment.

Republicans such as Sens. Connie Mack (Fla.) and Arlen Specter (Pa.) and Reps. John Porter (Ill.), Newt Gingrich (Ga.), and George Gekas (Pa.) are strongly in favor of doubling the budget over five years. So are Democratic Sens. Tom Harkin (Iowa) and Ted Kennedy (Mass.) and Reps. John Dingell (Mich.) and Henry Waxman (Calif.).

Clinton reportedly will include a 21st Century Biomedical Initiative in his State of the Union message, but provide much less than adequate funding in his budget—dependent on a tobacco tax.

That presents Congressional Republicans and Democrats with a golden opportunity this year: Find the money for NIH—less than \$30 billion over five years—to avoid the charge that Washington has just been playing politics with the nation's health and do something big to conquer disease.

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