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Star-Telegram Molly Ivins

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A nice bunch of appointees

By Molly Ivins
Creators Syndicate

AUSTIN - Sometimes you look at the people whom President Bush appoints to high public office, and the only possible response is, "What were they thinking?"

Zalmay Khalilzad for U.S. ambassador to Iraq? Why not just send Richard Perle?

Khalilzad is a second-rank neocon with all the same issues as the rest of those bozos: pre-emptive war, world hegemony, Project for the New American Century -- the whole stinking lot of it. Plus, he's been a big booster for Iran's ayatollahs, the Afghani mujahedeen and the Taliban, not to mention an oil company consultant. Isn't that just jim-dandy?

What this tells us is that the administration has learned exactly nothing from the past three years of insurgency in Iraq. The 1,700-plus-American-military-dead, \$1 billion-a-week mistake will continue to be run in exactly the same way we have already proved doesn't work.

We'll keep trying to put out a growing insurgency with too small an army as the country drifts ever closer to civil war. It's like Ben Franklin's definition of insanity -- doing the same thing over and over, expecting different results.

As one who has long argued that Bush is not stupid, I must admit that not learning from your mistakes is a prime signal of stupidity. But of course, in order to learn from your mistakes, you have to recognize that you made them.

The president assured us just last week that he is "heartened" by what is happening in Iraq, and "I am pleased with the progress." The vice president says there is "major progress" and the insurgency is in its "last throes." These folks are in such deep denial.

Chris Cox -- now there's an appointment of near-genius level. Hey, is this the man *you* would put in charge of the Securities and Exchange Commission to protect investors from greedy, capitalist crooks? Cox, a Republican from Orange County, Calif., helped produce the Enron mess and subsequent scandals in the first place. Just the guy for the job!

Cox led the fight in 1995 to pass the "Private Securities and Litigation Reform Act," which provided extensive legal protections to corporate executives, accountants and lawyers who make misleading statements. The law paved the way

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for corporate executives to lie without fear of being sued -- it's the Ken Lay Protection Act.

In 2002, Cox said he "rejected the notion that Enron's meltdown should cause Congress to rethink deregulation." The guy's home state was ripped off for \$10 billion by Enron. Here's another one who can't learn from his mistakes.

Of course, the fact that he's gotten more than \$640,000 in campaign money from the very people he will now be regulating has nothing to do with his views.

On announcing the Cox appointment, Bush said, "As a champion of the free-enterprise system in Congress, Chris Cox knows that a free economy is built on trust."

Trust? How about trust-but-verify?

While working for the law firm of Latham & Watkins, Cox himself was sued, according to the *Los Angeles Times*, for work that involved him in a business scheme that robbed nearly 8,000 investors of approximately \$136 million. The scheme cheated customers out of their retirement nest eggs by enticing them to invest in phony mortgages. High-level officers of the company pled guilty.

The charge against Cox was that he helped write a deceptive plan to sell mutual fund shares. Cox claimed ignorance and said he was only distantly involved, but The Associated Press later uncovered documents that showed him to be more involved with the convicted dealer than he previously let on.

And a new development in the most ludicrous nomination yet: John Bolton, Mr. Diplomacy, for ambassador to the United Nations. It turns out that in addition to trying to get American intelligence analysts who disagreed with him fired, Bolton axed an international civil servant for having the temerity to do his job.

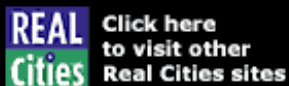
In 2001, Jose Bustani, head of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), says Bolton "telephoned me to try to interfere, in a menacing tone, in decisions that are the exclusive responsibility of the director-general." Bolton was opposed to Bustani's effort to get Iraq and other Arab countries involved in the OPCW.

Bustani aide Bob Rigg of New Zealand said: "Why did they not want OPCW involved in Iraq? They felt they couldn't rely on OPCW to come up with the findings the U.S. wanted."

Bolton then arranged to have Bustani fired in a way that a U.N. tribunal has since said was "unlawful." I'll bet they just can't wait to see Bolton's moustache up at the United Nations. How could we possibly make more friends there?

As I'm sure Chris Cox can tell us, in business, "good will" is considered an asset.

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