

Bradley's campaign will challenge Gore

by Edward Spannaus

Shortly after the disastrous 1994 mid-term elections, Senator Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) gave a speech criticizing Democrats for abandoning the principles of the party, and warning that if Democrats became simply pale carbon copies of the Republicans, then they would deserve to lose. "The last thing this country needs," Kennedy said in that Jan. 11, 1995 speech, "is two Republican parties."

Senator Kennedy had followed up his 1995 speech with his "Quiet Depression" speech a year later; soon after this, Senators Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) and Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.) issued their "high-wage task force" report, and then the Democratic Policy Committee issued its report on "Who Is Downsizing the American Dream?"

These initiatives abruptly came to a halt in the summer of 1996, when Dick Morris and Al Gore induced President Clinton to sign the GOP welfare bill, with disastrous effects for the Democratic Party's standing among its traditional constituencies.

On Feb. 6, former Sen. Bill Bradley delivered what was billed as his first major speech of his Presidential campaign, to the annual fundraising dinner of the Virginia Democratic Party in Richmond. The speech was met with a standing ovation—along with some *sotto voce* grumbling about Al Gore's having declined an invitation to appear. And with Gore, meanwhile, campaigning as a virtual carbon copy of his New Age buddy Newt Gingrich, it was refreshing to hear Senator Bradley begin to resurrect some of these themes from the short-lived 1995-96 resurgence of the Democratic Party.

Bradley noted that one out of four children in America currently lives in poverty, and 3 million children live in deep poverty, and he stressed the importance of aiding working families, especially those families where both parents have to work. "In the 1980s, downsizing took its toll on America," he said. "But Americans didn't complain. When things went bad, Americans reacted in character. We went out and got a job—or *another* job, or *another* job. Last year, family income was up in America. But the reason was obvious: more and more people in the family were working."

Also on the question of the economy, Bradley said: "Too often we recite the mantra of the economy, as if the only reason for being—as if all we have to do is just make sure the books tally and the markets rally, and everything is going to be OK. But we can keep America on the path of economic growth and we can keep creating jobs. But a robust economy

is not the end, it's a means to an end. And that end is an America that is as strong socially as it is economically."

And, he added, in another jab at those who worship the magic of the marketplace: "We are not only a market—vast and great as it is—we're also a country. And those in the market to whom we sell, or from whom we buy, are not just salesmen and customers, but also fellow citizens. We should remember also that this citizenship belongs equally to those on the margins of the market—and those shut out altogether."

Political principle

Bradley talked about how Americans have grown skeptical of political parties . . . and criticized the emphasis on the mechanics of winning elections.

"Political principle is tart in many mouths, and vagueness tastes like honey. Compromise that offends no one and gives everyone something, might help us win in the short term, but our party will cease to have any long-term meaning or content at all. If holding power is our greatest aspiration, we'll have broken a promise that we've made to ourselves and to our country. . . . We need an honest conversation with the American people, even if, for a while, it endangers our standings in the polls.

"There will be opposition to this thought. The cynics will tell you the big challenges that face the nation are unsolvable, the days of big ideas are over, and what the American people need, and what they are looking for, is someone who doesn't rock the boat.

"We need a new kind of leadership . . . leadership that recognizes that the American people are a *good* people, leadership that sees our brighter moments—Social Security, the Marshall Plan, the Voting Rights Act—and then shows us how we can be that good, again."

Bradley departed from his prepared text to tell a story about three stonecutters in the Middle Ages, who were building a giant cathedral. Each one was asked what he is doing. The first said, "Me, what am I doing? I'm cutting a stone, one foot by one foot, by one foot and three-quarters, and I put the stone next to another stone next to another stone. . . . I do the same thing over and over, day after day; I'm frustrated and I'm bored."

The second said, "I'm cutting a stone one foot by one foot and three-quarters . . . and with those stones I build a wall, and I'm paid to build that wall, and with that money I take care of my family, and I have a wonderful family life."

The third said: "Me? I'm building a holy lighthouse that will last for a thousand years."

Bradley then asked the audience: "Which kind of stonecutter are you?"

"If we are to treat our roles as party leaders, as if we are building a holy lighthouse that will last a thousand years, we cannot allow power to replace conviction. We must not back away from the things we believe. We must not just want to win, but to lead."