

ROLL CALL Around the Hill

News and personalities in the Capitol community

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2007

BOOKSHELF

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TOP 5 BOOKS

The following were the best-sellers last week* at Trover Shop on Capitol Hill:

1. "Politics in America 2008,"
CQ Press
2. "The 2008 Almanac of American Politics,"
Michael Barone and Richard E. Cohen
3. *Congress at Your Fingertips*,"
Capitol Advantage
4. "Blacklisted By History: The Untold Story of Senator Joe McCarthy and His Fight Against America's Enemies,"
M. Stanton Evans
5. "The Innocent Man,"
John Grisham

*Through Dec. 2



Douglas Graham/Roll Call

Store manager Jordan Kessler helps a customer at Fantom Comics. The store recently expanded to Union Station, where a collection of comics and graphic novels on politics and foreign affairs challenges the notion that comics are best-suited for kids.

BOOKS CALENDAR

TODAY

Lecture: "The Case of Abraham Lincoln: A Story of Adultery, Murder, and the Making of a Great President." Historian Julie M. Fenster discusses her book on Abraham Lincoln's work on the 1856 Anderson murder case and how his time as a circuit lawyer influenced him as a politician.

7 p.m.; Olsson's Penn Quarter,
418 Seventh St. NW; 202-638-7610

WEDNESDAY

Film and Discussion: "The Coldest Winter." Olsson's will present a short film about Pulitzer Prize winner David Halberstam's "The Coldest Winter: America and the Korean War." The movie will capture the voices of Joan Didion, Neil Sheehan, Bob Woodward, Anna Quindlen and veterans of the Korean War interviewed by Halberstam. The event is free.

7 p.m.; The Lyceum, 201 S. Washington St.,
Alexandria, Va.

THURSDAY

Lecture: "Fair Game: My Life as a Spy, My Betrayal by the White House." Valerie Plame Wilson will discuss the story behind the leak that blew her CIA cover, as well as her life at the intelligence agency before her identity was revealed. There is a fee for this event. Books will be sold by Olsson's.

12 p.m.; Nathan's Restaurant,
3150 M St. NW; 202-338-2000

Reading: Poets James Tate and Jorie Graham. Poet Laureate Charles Simic will introduce this reading by Pulitzer Prize winners James Tate and Jorie Graham. Tate won the Pulitzer in 1992 for his "Selected Poems" and the National Book Award in 1994 for "A Worshipful Company of Fletcher's." Graham won the Pulitzer in 1996 for "The Dream of the Unified Field." The event is free and tickets are not required.

6:45 p.m.-8 p.m.; Montpelier Room,
James Madison Building, Library of Congress;
202-707-1308

Send calendar items to
calendar@rollcall.com

Mixing Comics and Politics

New Store at Union Station Attracts More Professionals Than Teenagers

By Daniel Jackson
ROLL CALL STAFF

In 2005, Matthew Klokel left the libertarian Cato Institute to open a comic book store in Tenleytown. He opened his second Fantom Comics store on Nov. 14 in Union Station. With its location just blocks from the Capitol, Klokel has been seeing quite a few political types again.

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Photo Courtesy The Lindsey Group

Former Bush Advisers Brief the Next President

By Daniel Jackson
ROLL CALL STAFF

On Jan. 20, 2009, all of Washington will be out for the festivities surrounding that grandest of Washington celebrations, the presidential inauguration. But two former Bush economic advisers, Lawrence Lindsey and Marc Sumerlin, will not be among the throngs of people.

They'll be breaking into the Oval Office. Not to steal anything, of course, or to remove any of the keys off the White House computers. They'll be leaving a copy of their book, "What A President

Should Know ... but Most Learn Too Late," on the Oval Office desk.

That, at least, is the plan described in the first chapter of the book, written as a kind of crash course on the presidency and due out Dec. 28.

Lindsey and Sumerlin served President Bush as assistant and deputy assistant to the president for economic policy, respectively; they are now in business together as The Lindsey Group, an economic advisory firm.

Lindsey and Sumerlin's book shifts between two formats: memorandums to the new president (all dated Jan. 20, 2009) and narrative for the reader ("We thought a 200-plus page memo might be little long," Sumerlin said). It covers everything from how to decide whether to go

Presidents should beware of becoming too insulated inside the West Wing, authors Lawrence Lindsey and Marc Sumerlin, left, caution in a briefing for Bush's successor.

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Shop Seeks to Keep Adults Reading Comics

COMICS, from page 47

During a recent visit to the new location, business was fairly slow, but it was clear the store's collection and clientele were unique.

On the gray Monday morning, a man in shirt, tie and black raincoat piped up at Klokel's mention of renowned comic book author Alan Moore. A woman in a green coat wandered in and crouched near the back wall to get a good look at *Super Spy*, a graphic novel with a female spy clad in a sweater and plaid skirt on the cover.

A few minutes later, a mustached man in a dark sweater inquired about gift cards. The gift cards are new, and activating this one proved problematic. After a few phone calls failed to

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Matthew Klokel
Owner, Fantom Comics

solve the problem, Klokel asked the man if he could come back in the afternoon and promised to add "a little extra" to the gift card for the inconvenience.

There were no college kids to be seen; store manager Jordan Kessler probably came the closest, having graduated from American University earlier this year. No teenagers, either. Klokel said that while he's "still learning" the Union Station demographic, it's obviously different from the Tenleytown store, which, with its proximity to American University, attracts "a lot of college kids rediscovering what they left behind in high school."

"We're getting think tank people, people in government offices and a lot of government lawyers" perusing the new shop's stock of comic books and graphic novels, Klokel said. "We get far more lawyers than high school students."

With the Union Station store's more profes-

sional clientele, Klokel is particularly sensitive to the "negative stigma" that keeps adult readers from exploring the comic book world. The negative stigma, he said, stems largely from the perception that comics are just about the traditional, iconic superheroes, such as Superman and Batman, and that comics targeted at adults tend to be sexually oriented, such as certain types of Japanese manga.

The selection in the Union Station store seems geared toward challenging that perspective. Indeed, one of Fantom's stated goals is to "introduce these under-appreciated art forms to the public at large." While Batman, Superman and the Fantastic Four still take up their fair share of shelf space, several of the graphic novels — as opposed to traditional comic books — along the back wall focus on politics and foreign affairs.

For example, along the back wall, there's "Eagle: The Making of an Asian-American President," by Kaiji Kawaguchi. "Pride of Baghdad," another graphic novel, visually explores the Iraqi capital through the eyes of a group of lions that escaped from the Baghdad Zoo during Operation Iraqi Freedom bombing raids. "Persepolis," a French-language graphic novel translated into English, is an autobiographical look at author Marjane Satrapi's childhood in Khomeini's Iran. A film version of the book received a Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival. And the graphic-novel version of the 9/11 commission report is available, too — and sells well, Klokel said.

This is not to say that the traditional comic books don't have their fans among the powerful. Veteran Alaska Sen. Ted Stevens (R) Incredible Hulk tie is well-known on Capitol Hill. And Senate Judiciary Chairman Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) is scheduled to make his second appearance next year in the Batman movie "The Dark Knight." Leahy has written a foreword for an archive of Batman comics, also titled "The Dark Knight" (and available at Fantom). In the foreword, he explains his lifelong love of Batman, saying that he thinks people can relate to Batman's flawed character.

He adds: "I have a specially drawn Batman edition provided by the brilliant folks at DC



Douglas Graham/Roll Call

While Fantom offers comics centered on public policy and politics, it has not neglected more traditional superheroes such as Batman, a favorite of Sen. Patrick Leahy.

Comics. In it Batman and I discuss bedtime reading. I tell him I read Batman late at night — he says he curls up in the Batcave with the Congressional Record.

"Having read both, there are days when I think I made the better choice."

Fantom Comics is located in Union Station's West Hall.

Members of Congress Also May Glean Some Advice

NEXT PRESIDENT, from page 47

to war "[O]ne word of purely personal advice about going to war: DON'T.") to how to tackle "big issues" in a way that may actually leave the country a better place.

And while the book focuses on the president, Members of Congress might come away with some tips, too.

If he had to choose one particular chapter to give to the president, though, Sumerlin would go with Chapter 2: "The Corrupting Walls of the West Wing." This doesn't mean corrupting in the way that turns someone into a crook, but in the way that creates a kind of alternate reality that can make truly informed decision-making difficult.

"There's a natural bubble around the West Wing," Sumerlin said in an interview.

The West Wing originally was created because President Teddy Roosevelt's wife, Edith, was sick of advisers hanging around the residence, the book recounts. Originally, the Oval Office was in the center of the West Wing, connected by doors to the other office to ensure easy access to the president.

But under President Franklin Roosevelt, the Oval Office was moved to limit access. The

position of chief of staff was created to centralize the "gatekeeper" role.

Today, gaining access to the president is difficult in the extreme, and not all those who have the president's ear are experts. Some might be policy experts, while others are "persuaders" who might argue "one side of a case vigorously while ignoring opposing facts," the book states.

"Generally, to get a memo to the president, you need the signatures of 16 assistants to the president," Sumerlin said. "When the important decisions are being made, most of the people in the room don't have expertise; you have a lot of persuaders in the room."

Sumerlin compared it to going into surgery, only to realize that the doctor has the head of hospital billing in the room.

Much of the book is informed by the authors' service in the Bush White House — though Lindsey also served under presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. Based on their experience working with current President Bush during both his first and second terms, Lindsey and Sumerlin write that Bush — like most two-term presidents — has been the victim of the "eight-year cycle."

This leads to a bit of advice that "is doubtless the least welcome but may be the most important," Lindsey and Sumerlin write: Don't stay too long. Retiring after a single term is often better for the party, they write, and better for the president when he's judged by the history books.

One-term presidents Harry Truman and Gerald Ford, for example, are generally well-regarded by history, they write, despite being unpopular during their time in office. In contrast, presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon — both of whom comfortably won reelection — had their reputations tarnished by events in their second terms. In Nixon's case, of course, the re-election campaign itself was the source of the problem.

In the end, Lindsey and Sumerlin write, presidents will be judged by history based on three questions: "1) Is the country at least as secure today as it was four years ago? 2) Were our essential liberties preserved? 3) Is the nation's economy and social fabric at least as strong as when you took office?"

The book also has a message for Members of Congress who deal with the White House, Sumerlin said: Be patient, and realistic.

"Members are always saying, 'Support my bill,'" Sumerlin said. "Or they'll call up and say, 'Why didn't you do this?'"

Members' focus on re-election campaigns, Sumerlin noted, means that often only the most immediate issues can keep their attention. They need to understand that cooperating with the president's long-term agenda — especially if the president is from their own party — is in their best interest if it can forestall crises later, he said.

"They really need to look down the road," he said. "Take the housing crisis. We knew as early as 1998 that something like this might happen. But politicians don't do anything until the crisis is here."

And Members of Congress — or others — mulling presidential bids of their own need to understand what the presidency really entails, Sumerlin added.

"The book tries to convey how the presidency changes you, ages you, hardens the outer shell," he said. "It's not for the meek ... hopefully it won't scare people away, but rather make people think harder about what it's like, and allow them to go in with eyes open."