

Reality Check: Psychic-Free Predictions - Safe Bets For 2003

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As much a part of New Year's as confetti and crystal are the supermarket tabloids spilling off the racks with stories of psychics sharing their sensationalized sooth-saying for the coming year. Though the skeptical squawk annually about near-zero accuracy rates, they're still fun to read. Besides Michael Jackson usually ends up doing something weirder than any Amazing Amanda or Psychic Samantha could ever conjure up in their most frenzied forecasting.

Pundits, political and otherwise, also peddle predictions, making a more sincere stab at serious trend spotting. Since I wouldn't look good wearing a Jeanne Dixon purple pillbox with barn red lip gloss, I'm going to throw my two cents in with the more serious seers and offer a few psychic-free predictions for 2003. Let's start off in Washington.

1. History will repeat itself in the Bush White House. However, the history that repeats will include a fall in presidential popularity that parallels that which George W.'s father suffered in the aftermath of the previous war with Iraq.

The military maneuvering and political rhetoric all point to armed conflict with Saddam before the last snowflakes fly in Wisconsin this winter. Military logistics experts say late February or early March. Rumsfeld, Cheney et. al. likely will unseat the very same dictator on whom they personally authorized billions of our tax dollars to set up just a decade and a half ago. The folly of it all is not lost on anyone who actually understands the history of the Reagan years.

Other factors exist as well. Most tellingly, the economy is in its worst recession since Bush I. Three successive years of stock market drops have whittled away significant chunks of Baby Boomer pensions. Deferred dreams make voters testy. Like it or not, history shows pinched pockets are blamed on the man at the top. It's how a Democrat third-stringer like Bill Clinton was able to get himself elected in 1992. It was the economy then, stupid, and it will be again.

Moreover, George W.'s arrogant double whammy of re-nominating Charles Pickering to a lifetime federal judgeship before Trent Lott's bigoted body had completely cooled and his handing billionaire buddies tax breaks on their dividends just days later appear to have awakened moderate America from its collective slumber. The voting public seem to have realized November's Republican ballot bust now appears to have left them with a heck of a hangover - two years of one party rule not to be led by those promised compassionate conservatives but by hard right types. The GOP is now living up to every stereotype the Left has parroted since their fall from power in 1994.

I also need to mention the public's reaction to hypocritical handling of that other spoke of Evil on George W.'s Axis: North Korea. You know, the country with the genuine weapons of mass destruction (not counting us of course). Bombs for Saddam and privately-built power plants for Kim? Another beloved Republican's words now echo in the electorate's ears: Lincoln's oft-quoted lines about fooling the people all of the time.

To top it off Buss the Lesser's plunging popularity polls (an effective 15% drop just last week) are happening just at the time Daddy Bush's were peaking during Gulf War I. And Son of A Bush has yet to feel the full economic impact of the war he so desperately wants and will wage.

2. The U. S. Supreme Court Will Overturn the Texas Sodomy Law. My bet is that not only will 1987's misguided Bowers vs. Hardwick precedent will be overturned but the majority opinion will reaffirm 1996's Romer vs. Evans decision that overturned Colorado's anti-gay

Amendment 2. Personal privacy and equal protection under the law are two cornerstones in U. S. civil rights that no Bible-based bigotry can upset.

The decision likely will come down in a flurry of late June decisions similar to the flood two years ago that gave us the James Dale/Boy Scout loss simultaneously with the Kansas State School Board's victory over Creationism. You can also expect an anguished dissent from Justice Anthony Scalia AKA Captain Catholic. And speaking of Catholics,

3. The priestly sex-abuse scandal in the Roman Catholic Church will sap the sect both financially and politically. Vatican gay-baiting aside, the truth of both the scope of the abuse and its concomitant cover-up by bishops nationwide is coming into media light of day. Laurie Goodstein's meticulously-researched, front page feature in the January 12 edition of the New York Times documents that only sixteen Latin Rite dioceses of the 177 established in the U. S. have escaped the scandal, one which is now suspected to go back centuries and involves nearly 2% of the entire priesthood.

Though the revelations have slowed, the tide of lawsuits is rising and the faithful are falling away in numbers that make the early post-Vatican II 1970's seem like a trickle by comparison. The increasing financial drain caused by litigation and jury awards combined with the decline in revenue from the collection plates will seriously hinder the church's ability to successfully minister to its members.

The pervasiveness of the cover-up also has shaken the denomination's moral voice and its political impact nationally. Despite the homo-hating fundamentalist fuming that the entire scandal was caused by gay priests, the 75% of non-Catholics who populate the country realize full well that such a long-term, systemic problem could only have occurred with the complicity of those in charge, no matter what the cause.

And for my final prediction, let's look toward. Madison

4. Wisconsin's budget crisis will result in no progress on statewide LGBT rights issues in 2003. Whether you voted for him or not, you have to give our new Governor credit. Jim Doyle appears to be as solely fixated on solving the state's budget mess as a horny gay man in a chat room looking for a date. He's worked out a compromise with the Republican-led legislature to eliminate all non-budgetary items - in other words, conservative social engineering - from the upcoming fiscal process.

The good news is there should be no religious wacko time-bombs like the marriage counseling fiasco that slipped by in the late 90's. Indirectly, that's good news for the LGBT community.

However, Doyle's overt financial single-mindedness and his apparent distancing from his socially progressive running-mate Barbara Lawton sends a much less friendly signal for those concerned with moving forward on LGBT issues such as transgender inclusion and domestic partnership. Even though more moderate leadership in the GOP appears to be running the Assembly and Senate, moving such legislation through the state house to the governor's mansion would be a tough task. However, Doyle also appears to be telling us "no" as well. Such a seeming "bipartisan consensus" suggests stasis for social progress on issues with the possible exception of education.

Doyle's early posturing against non-budgetary issues suggests he does not wish to repeat Tony Earl's combination of tough fiscal discipline with a more liberal social policy. Earl lasted only one term. I think Doyle is eyeing a multi-term run possibly equal to Tommy Thompson's.

Staying in the center may be a good career move, but it will not help advance the equalization of civil rights for one of the Democrat's core constituencies - the gay community.

That's it for my predictions. Now its off to the family lanes at the mega-mart where I can saunter through the enquiringly-minded Psychic Sallies awaiting me there as I inch ever so slowly through the checkout line. I hear there's a hot tip about Madonna.