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### RNC Chief to Say It Was 'Wrong' to Exploit Racial Conflict for Votes

By Mike Allen

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It was called "the southern strategy," started under Richard M. Nixon in 1968, and described Republican efforts to use race as a wedge issue -- on matters such as desegregation and busing -- to appeal to white southern voters.

Ken Mehlman, the Republican National Committee chairman, this morning will tell the NAACP national convention in Milwaukee that it was "wrong."

"By the '70s and into the '80s and '90s, the Democratic Party solidified its gains in the African American community, and we Republicans did not effectively reach out," Mehlman says in his prepared text. "Some Republicans gave up on winning the African American vote, looking the other way or trying to benefit politically from racial polarization. I am here today as the Republican chairman to tell you we were wrong."

#### POLITICS TRIVIA

Which U.S. president had the largest feet?

- Warren G. Harding
- Abraham Lincoln
- James Monroe
- Bill Clinton

Check Your Answer

Mehlman, a Baltimore native who managed President Bush's reelection campaign, goes on to discuss current overtures to minorities, calling it "not healthy for the country for our political parties to be so racially polarized." The party lists century-old outreach efforts in a new feature on its Web site, GOP.com, which was relaunched yesterday with new interactive features and a history section called "Lincoln's Legacy."

Democratic National Committee Chairman Howard Dean spoke to the NAACP yesterday and said through an aide: "It's no coincidence that 43 out of 43 members of the Congressional Black Caucus are Democrats. The Democratic Party is the real party of opportunity for African Americans."

#### GOP Presses Case for Prosperity

House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Tex.) and Rep. Todd Tiahrt (R-Kan.) today will launch a House Economic Competitive Caucus (EC{+2}), which will focus on reducing barriers to job creation. DeLay plans to point to "a chance to empower small businesses, consumers, students, individual employees, investors, and families."

Worried about Congress's standing in polls, Republicans are stressing devotion to promoting prosperity. House Republican Conference Chair Deborah Pryce (Ohio) and House Majority Whip Roy Blunt (Mo.) held a news conference to claim that, as Blunt put

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it, the plans by Bush and the Congress "to grow this economy have worked, and they're paying big dividends." Half the questions were about Karl Rove. None was about the economy.

**Social Security Fades Into Fall**

House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Thomas (R-Calif.) now thinks he may not begin consideration of Social Security legislation until September, an aide said. Thomas told an Associated Press reporter yesterday that, "The issue is dealing with more time-sensitive legislation first." He said Social Security "is not time-sensitive, and we are going to pass CAFTA," the Central American Free Trade Agreement, before Congress begins its summer break. Thomas, referring to a congressional trip to Cape Canaveral, Fla., that canceled votes yesterday, said: "There's no hang-up on contents. It's just how many days we got and how many space shuttles don't get off the ground."

**Quotable**

*White House press secretary Scott McClellan, asked about a cartoon portraying reporters as sharks: "It may not look like it, but there's a little flesh that's been taken out of me the past few days."*

*Question: "Where?"*

*McClellan : "Like I said, it may not look like it. [Laughter] I can assure you that it has been."*

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