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In the Loop

Al Kamen

English, a Battleground State

By Al Kamen

Friday, August 6, 2004; Page A17

President Bush's battles with the English language are sometimes like a gift that keeps on giving, if not an antidote, then perhaps a palliative to these rather grim times.

He was in superb form yesterday, offering what may have been his best Bushism ever in a speech at a White House signing ceremony for a \$417 billion defense bill.

"Our enemies are innovative and resourceful, and so are we," he said. "They never stop thinking about new ways to harm our country and our people, and neither do we."

This stunning announcement of administration resolve lifted nary an eyebrow among the assembled Pentagon military and civilian chieftains and Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman **John W. Warner** (R-Va.). Bush then got back on message, saying, "We must never stop thinking about how best to defend our country."

White House spokesman **Scott McClellan** said Bush's misstatement "just shows even the most straightforward and plain-spoken people misspeak."

"But the American people know this president speaks with clarity and conviction, and the terrorists know by his actions he means it," McClellan said.

Whatever "it" is. Could this force **Michael Moore** to redo the ending to that movie?

Scales of Justice Weigh Naughty Words

Speaking of the beleaguered English language, the Justice Department is reported to be monitoring employee e-mail traffic for naughty words, according to an employees union.

AFSCME Local 2830 President **Stu Smith** said he learned last week that an automated device known as the "MailMarshal" blocks messages when it spots "unacceptable language, or inappropriate material." Two employees got messages from the "net nanny," Smith said, telling them: "Please clean-up or re-phrase the message and send it again."

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This electronic program also apparently gives a numerical weighting or score to each of the various bad words it discovers, he said, so that the worse the word, the higher the score.

Smith, whose union represents folks in the Office of Justice Programs, said he has asked officials what this was all about. "Is it for disciplinary purposes?" he asked. "We don't know." But it seems clear this is "not for security," he said.

Well, lots of Internet providers have smut filters so parents can protect kids from dirty words. And the Justice Department is known to be sensitive to matters of taste and morality. Attorney General **John D. Ashcroft** spent \$8,000 for a giant curtain so visitors would be protected from the sight of a statue of a woman with one bare breast.

Smith says he has also asked for a list of the "bad" words but has not received an answer. Maybe they've tried to send him the list, but for some reason it just keeps getting kicked back?

Powell in the Swallows' Nest

Talk about exporting American values . . . Secretary of State **Colin L. Powell** likes to visit with students while he's on his many trips abroad. So he scheduled a stop at the Economic High School in Sarajevo for a chat.

POLITICS TRIVIA

Friday's Question:

The Kansas primary on Tuesday officially set up a race between Republican incumbent Sen. Sam Brownback and Democrat Robert Conroy. When was the last time a Democrat won a Senate election in Kansas?

1968

1950

1932

1912

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