

ELECTIONS AND VOTING

ELECTIONS AND VOTING

DISMAL TURNOUT

Many eligible voters don't cast ballots

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

THIS CASTS doubt on whether independent issue ads on television, the emergent force of the 1996 campaign, will be as critical in 1998 as some analysts have predicted. TV of any sort "will play a less-important role" this fall, predicts Steve Owens, a Democrat running for Congress in Arizona.

Mr. Owens is stepping up his own turnout effort with visits to such prime Democratic targets as senior-citizen centers and Indian reservations, in addition to using phone banks and direct mail. Among the tools available to this year's candidates: Computer programs with names such as Turnout Advantage, Smart Select and Vote Predictor that, according to Democratic consultant Hal Malchow, enable campaigns to identify the voters who really matter by gauging "the exact probability" a person will vote.

Getting Out of Hand

Some veteran strategists fear the stress on "base" turnout is getting out of hand. "It's not as if nobody from the middle of the electorate shows up," says Geoff Garin, a Democratic pollster, who notes television advertisements' ability to affect the swing voter.

The Wisconsin House campaign Mr. Murray is running — Paul Ryan's bid for the seat being vacated by fellow Republican Mark Neumann — won't neglect TV ads. But since low turnout promises to shrink the pool of swing voters, Mr. Murray plans a well-targeted effort aimed at "turning out our types of people."

One potential boon: a referendum affirming the right of citizens in Wisconsin to keep and bear arms, which Mr. Murray says was designed by GOP state legislators to bring pro-gun Republicans to the polling booths.

A potential problem: The sophisticated voter-turnout apparatus of Republican Gov. Tommy Thompson "could hurt us," Mr. Murray says, by mobilizing "Reagan Democrats" who back Mr. Thompson's reelection bid but also favor Mr. Ryan's De-

mocratic rival, Lydia Spottswood.

Ms. Burnside, the Democratic turnout specialist, revels in the new attention to her craft. "This is like the ultimate in dirty work," she says, but after years of taking a back seat to glamorous media consultants and pollsters, "this year, we're not trailer trash."

Triggering an Avalanche

Ms. Burnside and fellow turnout ace Cathy Duvall have been credited with triggering an avalanche of Democratic voters for California Rep. Lois Capps's March special-election win in the race to succeed her late husband, Walter Capps.

But in June, they failed to roust enough Democrats to elect state Sen. Phil Maloof in a New Mexico special election for Congress.

Democrats in all of the most competitive House campaigns are using at least a bare-bones turnout program, which costs \$60,000 or so. About 20 will have the full-scale \$250,000 version, which includes a big push for absentee voters.

For this upcoming election, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee will more than quadruple its highest previous investment in the programs, which was about \$400,000.

In California, where election officials maintain detailed voter histories, Ms. Burnside begins with printouts showing how many recent elections each registered voter has shown up for.

Combined with census data on neighborhoods, the information becomes the foundation of labor-intensive efforts to contact specific voters by mail, phone, or in person.

"What you're trying to do is bring more people to the table," she says.

Not just anyone, mind you; staffers are told to contact only those preselected individuals in target households who are most likely to vote.

And if they encounter Republicans at their neighborhood rounds? "Even if they kissed me at the door," Ms. Burnside says, "I would not hand them an absentee-ballot application." ♦ 7/13/98

How to Read the Charts

These charts can help you to see how the public views the president and Congress, and how this may affect voter turnout.

The top chart contains flags that identify relevant events. The light-blue areas represent recessions. The second chart shows presidential job-approval ratings, while the third chart shows Congressional job approval. The bottom chart shows voting and voter registration based on data from the Committee for the Study of the American Electorate. The years are at the bottom.

Approval ratings are based on telephone interviews with people in the U.S., aged 18 and older, taken by the Gallup Organization.

Presidential Approval

This chart shows job-approval ratings for the presidents (shown at the top; light green for Democrats; gold for Republicans). The ratings, from 1964 to mid-September of this year, are based on the question: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way [president's name] is handling his job as president?"

The red area on the chart represents people who disapprove of the president's performance; cream is no opinion; and green is approve. The scales are on the left and right.

By looking at this chart and the one at the top of the page, you will see how certain events can affect approval ratings. Look at Richard Nixon's ratings and note the dramatic drop from January 1973 until mid-1974.

Congressional Approval

This chart shows job-approval ratings for Congress from early 1974 to mid-September of this year. The ratings are based on the question: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job?"

Red is disapproval of Congress's performance; cream, no opinion; and green, approval. The scales are on the left and right.

The names of the Speaker of the House and the Senate Majority Leader are shown at the top of the chart (light green, Democrats; gold, Republicans). From this, you can see which party controls the House and Senate.

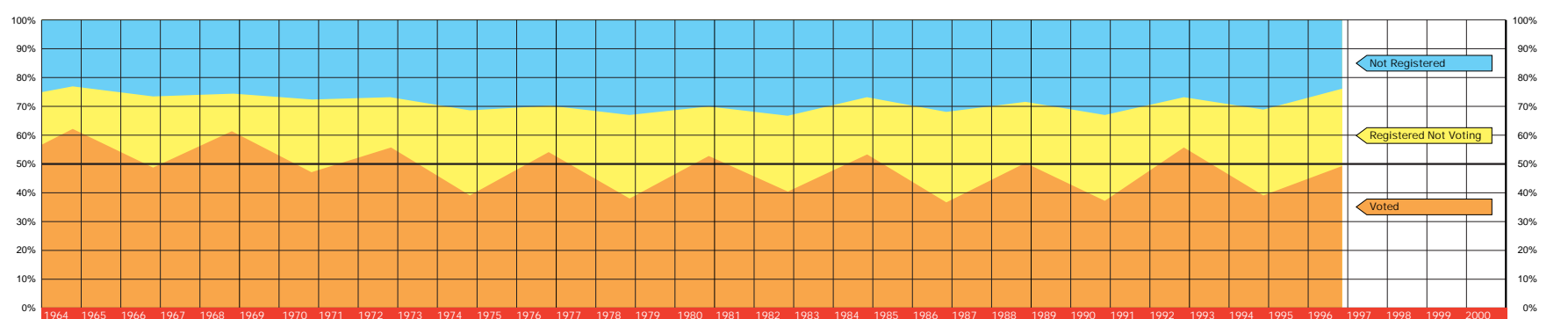
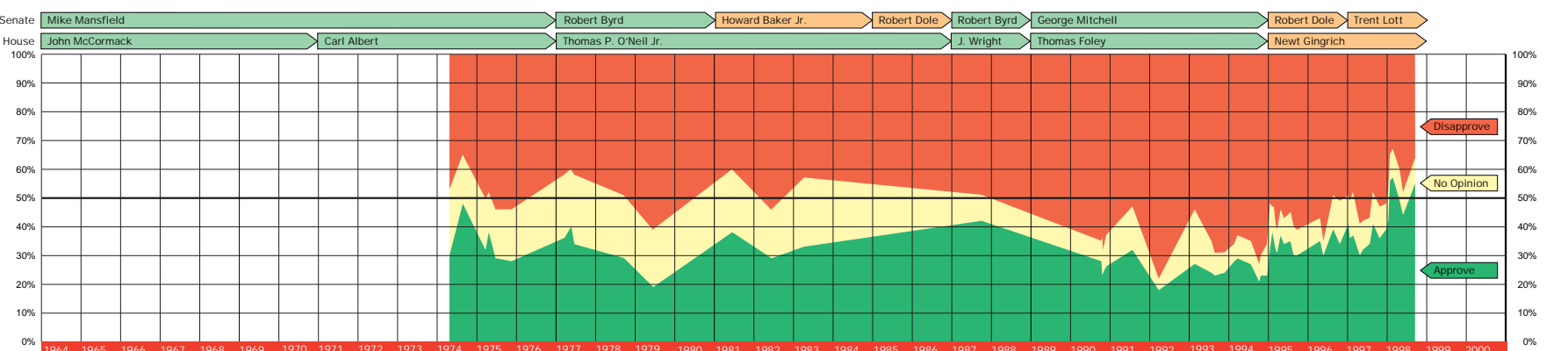
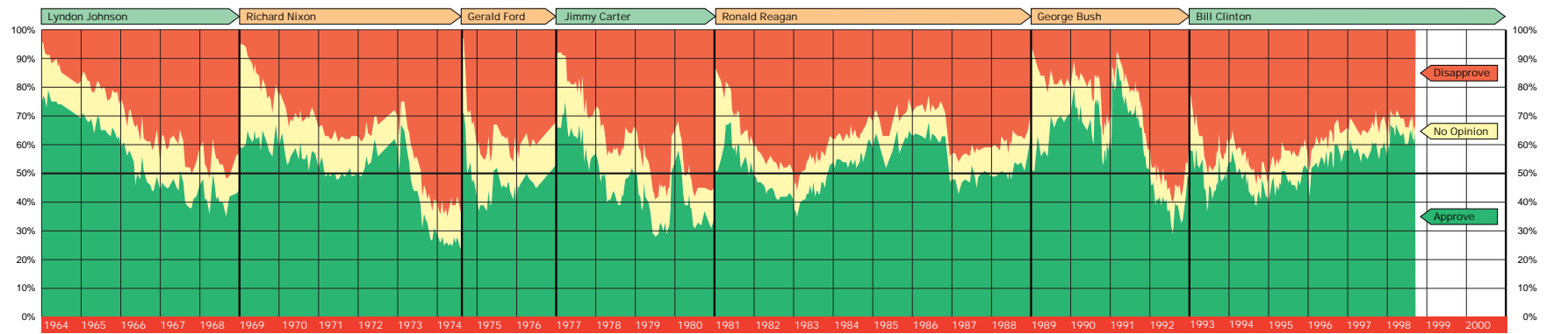
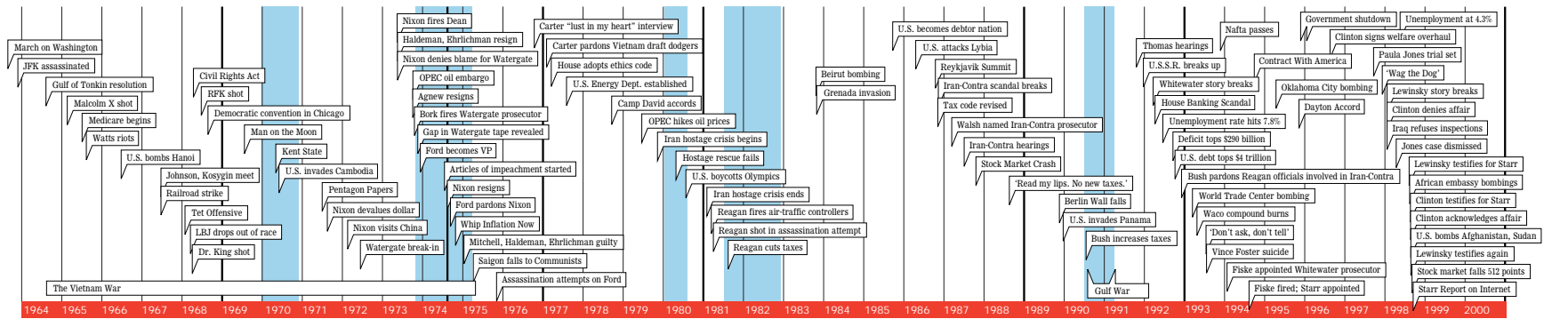
According to Gallup, the polling on Congress has been taken less frequently because it is a more-difficult branch of government for the nation to evaluate as a unit.

Registration and Voting

This chart shows registration and voting in the U.S. from 1964 through 1996.

The blue area represents the percentage of U.S. citizens who aren't registered to vote; yellow is registered, not voting; and orange is people who voted.

The highest percentage turnout for a presidential election shown on this chart was 62% in 1964 (63% turned out for the 1960 election). In 1996, the percentage was only 49%. However, 96.3 million voters turned out in 1996 compared with 70.6 million in 1964. The percentage in 1996 was smaller because there were more voting-age people in 1996 (196.5 million) than in 1964 (114.1 million).



Finding Time to Vote

NEARLY FIVE MILLION Americans say they were too busy to cast a ballot in the 1996 presidential election that pitted incumbent Democrat Bill Clinton against Senate Majority leader Robert Dole, according to a report released in August by the Commerce Department's Census Bureau.

"Among Americans who were registered but did not vote, more than one in five told us they didn't go to the polls because they couldn't take time off from work or were too busy — triple the proportion who gave us this reason in 1980," says Lynne Casper, co-author with Loretta Bass of the report, "Voting and Registration in the Election of November 1996."

"Time constraints are now the single biggest reason Americans who are regis-

tered give for not voting," Ms. Bass says. "Many people these days are finding their employers are putting so many demands on them, they can't take time off to vote."

Another reason increasingly cited by people in the report for not casting a ballot in the 1996 election: apathy about the political process.

According to the report, 17% of non-voting registered citizens in the U.S. said they didn't vote in 1996 for this reason, up from 11% in 1980; 15% reported they didn't vote because they were ill, disabled or had a family emergency; and 13% didn't prefer any of the candidates. Other reasons included: out of town (11%), forgot to vote or didn't have a way to get to the polls (4% each) and the lines were too long at the polling sites (1%). ♦