

Elephants & Donkeys by Kathleen Klenetsky

Candidate, candidate, who's got a candidate?

It's no news that the American population is singularly unimpressed by the gaggle of Democratic presidential contenders officially sanctioned by the party leadership. Poll after poll testifies that "none of the above" is the primary choice of party rank-and-file.

But it now turns out that key Democratic party kingmakers are desperately searching for a candidate who might be able to rake in more votes than pathetic Walter Mondale.

Party insiders, including Robert Strauss and ex-Virginia Gov. Charles Robb, have been meeting clandestinely to try to drum up an alternative candidate.

This revelation comes straight from the horse's mouth: Sen. Alan Cranston (D-Calif.) told reporters in Los Angeles Jan. 11 that he and other party leaders were considering designating Mario Cuomo, Sen. Bill Bradley, Sen. Sam Nunn, House Speaker Jim Wright, and House Majority Leader Tom Foley as possible new candidates. "It's clear that nobody has yet caught on with great strength or great public support both inside or outside the party," Cranston acknowledged.

The group does not appear to have reached a consensus. Robb said in an interview that he thinks it's too late for another candidate to get into the race—with one exception: Cuomo. "Many of us are close to others like Bill Bradley or Sam Nunn, but for 1988 the

only non-candidate who has positioned himself to move into a void or a deadlocked convention is Governor Cuomo."

Robb had a few nice things to say about the current crop of contenders. He praised Bruce Babbitt, for doing "the kind of job many of us find appealing" on domestic policy. Of all the Democratic candidates, Trilateral Commission member Babbitt is most rabid about slashing Americans' standard of living, in the name of fiscal responsibility.

And he lauded Sen. Al Gore—who's pinning his hopes on inheriting Nunn's putative "pro-defense" mantle—for "coming as close to the kind of agenda many of us have been talking about" in the field of foreign and defense policy.

Getting on the Gore bandwagon

Gore's getting talked up a lot these days. Democratic National Committee chairman Paul Kirk gave the 39-year-old Tennessee senator a big boost, when he told the Jan. 13 *Washington Times* that the Democrats must have a Southerner on the ticket if they hope to have a shot at the White House. Gore is the only Southerner in the race.

Once considered a very long shot, Gore has been picking up support from various factions within the party over the past month. He seems to have the same chameleon-like qualities as Jimmy Carter, being all things to all people.

For example, Carter-era Ambassador to Italy Richard Gardner, representing the party's liberal wing, says he's enthusiastically supporting Gore, because he'll be able to slash the defense budget. But Peter Rosenblatt, president of the Coalition for a Democratic Majority, which represents the party's neo-conservative social dem-

ocratic quarter, has thrown his backing to Gore in the belief that his defense policies most closely match those of Rosenblatt's preferred choice, Sam Nunn.

The discrepancy isn't actually as large as it might at first seem, since neither Nunn nor Gore could ever truly be considered partisans of U.S. national security, no matter how assiduously they've worked on conveying that image. Just one example: Nunn led the Senate fight last year to keep the Strategic Defense Initiative within the strangling confines of the so-called narrow reading of the ABM Treaty, while Gore delivered a series of Senate fulminations against the entire SDI program.

More recently, Gore named Rep. Tom Downey (D-N.Y.) as chairman of his New York campaign effort. In his commitment to destroying U.S. defense capabilities, and bending over backward to please Moscow, Downey probably ranks just slightly below Gore's chief patron, Armand Hammer.

Bush downgrades SDI in talks with Gorbachov

Adding to his Irangate woes, George Bush has now been caught bad-mouthing the SDI. An article by seasoned Washington correspondent Elizabeth Drew in the Jan. 11 *New Yorker* magazine, reports that the vice president told Mikhail Gorbachov last month that he was not convinced the SDI will work, and was not sure he would deploy it if elected.

Bush rival Jack Kemp quickly seized upon the issue. "If this published report is true," Kemp said in a statement, "I'm stunned and shocked and disappointed that in the Republican Party we have candidates who don't understand the importance to the security of the United States of the Strategic Defense Initiative."