

## COMMENTARY

# I want punditry that challenges my bias

By Arthur Alpert 5/8/09 3:15 AM



It is reassuring to read political commentary with which I agree and watch cable TV pundits whose biases I share. Reassurance, however, can be a tender trap; conversely, challenges educate.

So I appreciate the Albuquerque Journal's gift — a roster of syndicated columnists who throw righty.

Some of those writers are, of course, laughably dishonest; some cross the (admittedly thin) line from far right to insane; some are too ideological to surprise and some, the "social conservatives," express their fears hatefully.

Charles Krauthammer, however, rewards study, as does George Will.

It's hard to beat Krauthammer for professionalism; he states his thesis and builds his case logically in crystal-clear American.

So powerful are his arguments they often evoke the logo closing those old J. Arthur Rank movies — a muscular guy striking a gong that reverberates deeply. (Or is it the tool in the columnist's name that awakens the image?)

Krauthammer, reportedly respected in the Bush White House, is Hobbesian and neo-conservative both; his conclusions, therefore, mostly boggle the balanced, educated mind. He can, however, produce superb political analysis, as in last year's argument that President Clinton's legacy was "Consolidator of the Reagan revolution." Exactly.

His gift is the reminder that we erect conclusions based upon our deepest,

often unconscious, beliefs; sadly, Krauthammer's bedrock is paranoia.

George Will arrived in the 1970s as a breath of fresh air — a conservative who understood that philosophy. Also, unlike many rightists, he condemned Nixon Administration corruption.

Unfortunately, he's devolved over the years into a partisan and an apologist for corporate America (and its subsidiary, government) when he's not retailing CATO Institute dogma.

Will did criticize President Bush's Middle East policies but mildly and infrequently.

He writes a pretentious prose, crabby, inelegant. Maybe because he once edited the National Review, Will makes me miss that magazine's founder, William F. Buckley Jr.

(Buckley was a show-off, but so charming I was tempted to forgive his political leitmotif — the well born should rule.)

Will's gift? The reminder we need a better quality of conservative.

For a while, I thought David Brooks of the New York Times would fill the bill. He's likeable, a brilliant sociologist and, as he demonstrated May 4, adept at linking sociology to politics:

“Republicans are so much the party of individualism and freedom these days that they are no longer the party of community and order.”

But Brooks is clueless about the real political world; he should lunch with Tom Delay, perhaps, or read Robert G. Kaiser's new “So Damn Much Money” on the buying of government.

My eyes, meanwhile, turn toward the Times' brand-new conservative hope, Ross Douthat.

I've long read Douthat's views in the Atlantic in respectful disagreement. He makes useful distinctions and writes lucidly, as in his May 4 Times column on the Republicans' loss of “centrist” Arlen Specter.

Let's hope he draws a crowd. For the surveys suggest that just one in five Americans identifies with the GOP these days.

Perhaps there's a relationship between the state of conservative punditry and the Republicans' current disarray. Perhaps a new and improved brand of conservative commentator might help the party bury Bushian radicalism — erecting empires abroad and at home, governing for corporate America, cosseting miscellaneous true believers.

A Republican party rebuilt to house conservatives would be a gift to us all.