



QUOTE OF THE DAY

“I heard a loud boom ... The Secret Service came in and told me there had been an attack on the main gate.” – Vice President Dick

Cheney, telling reporters in Afghanistan about a bomb detonated by a Taliban suicide bomber that killed 14 people the morning after his unscheduled overnight stay at Bagram Air Force Base near Kabul

VIEWPOINTS



Baltimore's Inner Harbor is shown in 1998. - AP

Baltimore: Get over the inferiority complex

By Christian S. Johansson

Living in the Baltimore area for any length of time greatly increases your chance of contracting a geographically-rooted inferiority complex. This syndrome causes many Baltimore residents to apologize for being from an area that they, in fact, really love. Gov. Martin O'Malley used to refer to this phenomenon as "pathological modesty." Paul Grogan, author of "Comeback Cities," would probably agree. According to Grogan, residents in cities like Baltimore tend to associate more closely with past challenges than with reality.

Fortunately, the Baltimore region is very different from commonly held perceptions. Take, for example, the well-worn myth that Baltimore is an old, rust-belt city resembling Pittsburgh, St. Louis, and Cleveland. The truth is that Baltimore stands eye-to-eye with the economically and culturally desirable cities of Seattle, Denver and Minneapolis.

In terms of population growth, for example, greater Baltimore ranked 31st nationally between 2000 and 2005, with a net gain of more than 100,000 people. That put the Baltimore area just behind San Diego, but well ahead of both Cleveland (which lost more than 21,000 people) and Pittsburgh (which lost 45,000 people). St. Louis did better, gaining 79,000 people, but still ranked behind Baltimore.

The results are similar when you examine median home prices in major U.S. markets. The Baltimore region currently ranks 27th nation-

ally, with a median home price of \$286,500. While that's not as strong as Seattle (\$372,400), it compares favorably with Denver (\$253,200) and Minneapolis (\$233,500). Cities like St. Louis (\$154,400), Cleveland (\$138,500), and Pittsburgh (\$120,400) are in a totally different group. Although rising home prices create a new set challenges, they indicate a rising economy.

Over and over we debunk myths about our vibrant community. The list of areas for comparison easily continues:

Per capita personal income? Again, greater Baltimore — ranking 8th out of the top 25 largest U.S. metros at \$38,813 — looks more like Minneapolis (which ranked seventh at \$40,915) and Denver (which ranked 6th at \$40,939) than Pittsburgh (17th, \$34,735), Cleveland (20th, \$34,264), or Atlanta (22nd, \$33,838).

College education? The Baltimore region currently ranks 10th among the 25 largest U.S. metros, with a third of its population holding a bachelor's degree. That puts Baltimore just behind Atlanta (eighth, 34.3 percent) and San Diego (ninth, 34 percent), but well ahead — again — of the traditional competitors, Pittsburgh (19th, 27 percent) and Cleveland (21st, 26.6 percent). So we're smarter and higher paid than we thought. What is truly eye-opening, though, is how compelling greater Baltimore's rankings are, regardless of the statistical comparison used:

» Knowledge workers by metro area? Our greater region ranks third nationally, behind only San Francisco and New York;

» Economic strength? Baltimore currently ranks 23rd, rapidly moving up from 44th in 2004 and 36th in 2005;

» Most desirable places to relocate families? Baltimore ranks seventh, just behind Washington, D.C.;

» Top public schools? The Baltimore metro area currently ranks 3rd nationally for major U.S. metro areas;

» Downtown area? According to the well-respected nonprofit Brookings Institution, Baltimore has "one of the strongest emerging downtowns" in the United States.

I could add a plethora of statistics, but the story will not change. The point is clear: This region is highly competitive with other cities across the country.

We know we are not New York or San Francisco, and we more than likely never will be. And why shouldn't that bother us? Because the central part of our region's attractiveness is that we possess the best characteristics of both big and small-town life. This is a city and a region on the rise and the only thing standing in our way may be ourselves. So get over that inferiority complex, Baltimore—we're setting the pace and others are just trying to keep up.

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JULES WITCOVER

Al Gore has been reborn

Often among the least-revered of American politicians is the party nominee for president who has lost. With few exceptions, his public treatment ranges from dismissal to contempt.

One recent exception has been Jimmy Carter, who won in 1976 but lost in 1980, then earned the reputation of America's best ex-president for his efforts to advance world peace. And even he has been derogated recently for his book warning of "apartheid" for the Palestinians.

Some presidential also-rans who have lost narrowly, like John Kerry in 2004, Al Gore in 2000 and Hubert Humphrey in 1968, have been widely derided for "throwing away" victories they could have won.

Others who were clear losers, like Bob Dole in 1996, Michael Dukakis in 1988, Walter Mondale in 1984, George McGovern in 1972 and Barry Goldwater in 1964, afterward often found themselves the brunt of jokes and ridicule.

So it was somewhat remarkable the other night to see a relaxed and beaming Gore taking a standing ovation at the annual Academy Awards, as he joined director Davis Guggenheim receiving an Oscar for the documentary film on climate change, "An Inconvenient Truth."

Gore's singular success in lifting the issue to center stage in the nation's political dialogue has already resurrected his public image. The notion of his running for president again has graduated from a late-night television gag line to plaintive yearnings from many liberal and anti-war Democrats.

Because the former vice president has repeatedly said he doesn't intend to run in 2008, references to the possibility during the show provided no more than laughter drawn by dead-pan Gore teases.

But beyond all the playful mugging, with actor Leonardo DiCaprio playing adoring straight man, there does continue a degree of wishful thinking on the Democratic left that Gore may yet say it ain't so if the current party outlook suddenly changes.

The early conventional wisdom was that Sen. Hillary Clinton, with her huge campaign fund-raising operation already in full swing, was on her way to locking up the nomination. It has been slightly muddled in recent weeks, however, by several developments.

The most significant has been the rock-star emergence of freshman Sen. Barack Obama as an unabashed anti-war candidate with a new-generation glitz and a promising money-magnet himself. His presence makes Clinton seem somewhat less inevitable as the nominee, and their two campaigns have already been sniping at each other.

At the same time, Kerry's 2004 running mate, former Sen. John Edwards, is showing enough early foot to suggest the Democratic race may be more competitive than earlier forecast. All this fans the what-if chatter about Gore as a ready alternative if the convention-



Al Gore, left, and Davis Guggenheim pose with the Oscar for best documentary feature for the film "An Inconvenient Truth" at the 79th Academy Awards on Sunday. - AP

al wisdom goes badly off track.

Also fueling the low-level buzz is Gore's own public demeanor, in which he comes across as sincerely devoted to a private exercise devoid of personal political ambition. By and large he has shed the know-it-all manner that plagued him as a candidate in 2000, and he has upgraded a sense of humor that in the past was sometimes cloaked in public.

None of this is likely to cause great tremors among the Clinton, Obama and other campaigns, because Gore seems well-adjusted to a new career in private enterprise and public service. What may be most persuasive in this regard is that he appears wholly at peace with his situation after the darkness of the 2000 election verdict from which he has emerged.

Like Carter before him, Gore behaves like a man who has found a new rewarding and satisfying path for himself, and in doing so has boosted public approval and admiration for him.

After the Supreme Court decision of 2000 that closed the door of the Oval Office on Gore, the political resurrection in 1960 of another defeated vice president, Richard Nixon, offered an obvious road back for him. The narrowness and circumstances of Gore's loss certainly warranted another try in 2004, with President Bush's war in Iraq a promising target.

But in stepping aside then, and embarking on a new personal course, Al Gore apparently found new strength and commitment with which to cool the Potomac Fever that earlier afflicted him. And — who knows? — may still simmer within.

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