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From: Brett M. Kavanaugh (CN=Brett M. Kavanaugh/OU=WHO/O=EOP [WHO])
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HEADLINE: OUR OPINION: Democrats use wrong route to win South

BODY:

U.S. Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) brought his presidential aspirations to the South last week, promising in Alabama that he will make the national party competitive here once again.

Make competitive, he neglected to mention, a party that has positioned itself in opposition to the war in Iraq and anything other than token tax cuts, and as Democrats reminded the nation once again about the elevation of conservatives to the federal bench. While the White House may appeal to some as inside work with no heavy lifting, getting there through the South toting this party's agenda will be a task requiring Herculean labor.

Just this week, for example, Kerry's Democratic colleagues --- Georgia's Zell Miller excepted --- began to filibuster the nomination of Texas Supreme Court Justice Priscilla Owen to the New Orleans-based 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Kerry and other Democrats are already filibustering the nomination of Miguel Estrada to the District of Columbia Circuit Court of Appeals --- the first time simultaneous filibusters against judicial nominees have occurred in the U.S. Senate.

Both Owen and Estrada are superbly qualified in every respect. Yet on Owen, those who complain that a "glass ceiling" exists for women of achievement are busily constructing one to keep her in her place. And those who complain that the federal bench lacks "diversity" find Estrada to be too much diversity for their taste. He is considered to be a conservative, and the interest groups that drive the Democratic Party nationally fear Owen is, too, at least on their abortion litmus test.

The fear with Owen and Estrada is that one or both will be nominated to the U.S. Supreme Court should a vacancy occur. Senate Democrats are determined to keep off the Circuit Court bench any perceived conservative who has the credentials to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court.

Kerry, then, and the legions of presidential soundalikes who campaign with him, have to come to a region where conservatism is the mainstream to explain how reducing federal taxes is bad and cheating exemplary women and minorities of the fair hearing they have earned before the U. S. Senate because they might be conservative is good.

"I can help you wage a fight down here and rebuild this party for the long run," Kerry said in Birmingham. Republicans have carried Alabama in all but three presidential elections in the past 50 years. Jimmy Carter in 1976 was the last Democrat to carry the state. George W. Bush carried every Southern state in 2000, including Tennessee, his Democratic opponent's home state. Al Gore Jr. thought so little of his Southern prospects that he actively campaigned in just three states --- Tennessee, Florida and West Virginia.

Some Democrats, said Kerry, were "surprised" that he visited Alabama.

No surprise that he visited. The real surprise is the party baggage he hauled.

Opposition to tax cuts is comprehensible. Politicians loathe interruptions in the flow of spendable revenues. Opposition to the war is, too. Too confrontational. Angers adversaries. Provokes understandable aggression, for which we bear unexpurgated sin.

While some positions are understandable, not so their party-line opposition to Owen and Estrada. Owen, the new filibusteree, drew the American Bar Association's highest rating. She is a cum laude graduate of the Baylor University Law School who scored the top grade in Texas on the bar exam. She practiced 17 years before becoming a judge and has been widely praised for her integrity and ability. Liberal groups say, unconvincingly except when they are talking to each other and Senate Democrats, that she is anti-abortion and pro-business.

Being a neighborly people, Southerners of course welcome Kerry to visit the region and to indulge himself in its hospitality. But the senator should not indulge himself into believing that a party that opposes tax cuts and filibusters nominees such as Owen and Estrada has the slightest chance of carrying this region.

Jim Wooten is associate editorial page editor. His column appears Sundays, Tuesdays and Fridays.