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## So you say you want to run for president

by William Murchison

Phil Gramm has "a complexion so pale you want to send flowers to his next of kin"; Mario Cuomo is "constitutionally incapable of connecting words to deeds"; Bill Clinton is "our first latchkey president." And "Presidential Follies," which tosses off these deft observations at a rate of four or five to the page, handily exceeds the rigid entertainment quota political writers seem remorselessly to impose on themselves, their books and their readers.

Which isn't to imply that Ralph Z. Hallow and Bradley S. O'Leary are trying to one-up P.J. O'Rourke or the noted magazine editor John F. Kennedy Jr. They aren't. At least I don't think they are.

There is sound, if sometimes inflammatory, analysis here, from -need I belabor the point, given the authors' track record? - a conservative perspective. Ralph Hallow, political writer for The Washington Times, and Brad O'Leary, the NBC radio commentator, never met a liberal they liked - at least outside the social context.

"Presidential Follies" is one-sided and impertinent as all get-out, and yet it's also acute, knowing and percipient, not to mention wonderfully readable.

What we've got here is a series of profiles - all the 1996 presidential

contenders, plus a couple (Pete Wilson and Colin Powell) who stopped contending between copy deadline and press time; two (Jesse Jackson and Ross Perot) who have contended in the past and may again; one (Mario Cuomo) whom wild horses failed to drag into contention; and a few more (George Allen, John Engler, Tommy Thompson, Kay Hutchison and Newt Gingrich) who may be watching the present contenders with contentious thoughts of their own.

The authors do no anointing of individual candidates, though Bob Dole can claim his more-than-civil treatment by this conservative crowd as a kind of victory. The authors take seriously the prospect that a new Dole has emerged - one "who hits home runs on virtually every item on the conservatives' list of hot issues," including the social issues.

The authors concede that the old Mr. Dole - deal-maker, compromiser and fixer - makes "sporadic reappearances," but their overall appraisal is positive. Mr. Gramm gets good notices for his intelligence; the authors even impute to him a kind of inadvertent charm. They attribute to Pat Buchanan signal success at reshaping the party philosophically. "No matter who gets the Republican nomination in 1996," they say, "he'll be running on Pat Buchanan's 1992 program."

Mr. Hallow and Mr. O'Leary presumably shed no tears over Gen. Powell's bow-out from contention, which occurred after publication date. They demonstrate at length that Gen. Powell's convictions, at least on social issues, are a poor fit with conservative convictions.

Ross Perot receives friendlier treatment than one might have predicted on the basis of widespread conservative disgust with the man who elected Bill Clinton. "Perot's credibility," the authors argue, "will continue to live on, so long as there are men and women who dare to dream the impossible dream."

The take here on Mr. Clinton himself is that of a president with his "cognitive map fouled up," owing to having lived in, to put it mildly, a dysfunctional family. A lot has been written, of course, on Mr. Clinton's family experience, wherein he was frequently abandoned and left alone - the first president "not to have had the physical presence of a mother in the home during the first two critical years of his development," as the authors say.

The scary point is that Mr. Clinton "reflects today's America, where 40 percent of all children are raised in a

home where there is no father . . . There is no question that Bill Clinton and this group of children have been denied physiological, social, economic, and moral assets that the other 60 percent of American children take as their birthright."

There is also a discerning chapter on Newt Gingrich, a bulwark of 1990s conservatism, but also a man, according to the authors, who is "too eclectic intellectually to be a philosophical anything. Or too ambitious . . . a coalition-builder."

Mr. Hallow and Mr. O'Leary entertain, educate and occasionally infuriate, all between the same set of covers. Good value, I'd say, for the modest price of admission.

\*\*\*\*\* PRESIDENTIAL FOLLIES: THOSE WHO WOULD BE PRESIDENT AND THOSE WHO SHOULD THINK AGAIN

By Ralph Z. Hallow and Bradley S. O'Leary

Boru Books, \$19.95, 272 pages.

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