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News from Lake Wobegon: Keillor is a Democrat

By JEFF BAIVEN
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MINNEAPOLIS — It may be old news in Lake Wobegon, but for many shy people, Garrison Keillor has come out as an unabashed Democrat.

The host of public radio's popular "A Prairie Home Companion" has written "Homegrown Democrat: A Few Plain Thoughts From the Heart of America," a 208-page book explaining why he is a Democrat and excoriating the Republican Party as "a gang of pirates."

Keillor, who has sponsored President Bush and the GOP on his show for some time, said he's not worried about alienating Republican fans of his show.

"I think that the book is an honest piece of work," he said to the Associated Press. "You know what you're buying if you buy this book."

In "Homegrown Democrat," published in July by Viking, Keillor has "What Do Good Democrats Have Done for You?" while lamenting that Republicans have turned away from being the party of pragmatic, street-smart operators who despoiled profits and waste.

Keillor said he wanted to write a "simple, thoughtful" book, not one that's full of invective and terribly ideological. But some passages are so blunt that they surprise fans who have listened to Keillor spin folksy tales of Lake Wobegon on his radio show over the last three decades.

In one passage, Keillor writes of Republicans, "The party of Lincoln and Liberty was transmogrified into the party of hairy-backed swamp developers and corporate shills, faith-based economists, fees-through-fundamentalism, lies-through-fundamentalism, rackets with Bibles, Christians of convenience, freetrade fanatics, hobby cops, misanthropic fat boys, Hazakid rigger monkeys — and continues until calling President Bush 'their Elch A Sketch president' with a voice like a deaf one, who for almost four years has looked as if he were just about to say something smart."

Minnesota Republican Party spokesman Randy Wankle said Keillor risks losing part of his audience with the book's "vicious" tone.

"I think there are a number of Republicans out there and independents who are going to be turned away," Wankle said. Chicago Sun-Times book editor Henry Shonk called Keillor's book an "Above Average tab-thumper" in only Democratic terms, but added, "As a carrier of a paper reason to enter reluctant houses into the barn, it just will not fail."

But Keillor doesn't spare Democrats, either.

"We can be wretched, masters of 'rinky-dink' be nature. We are capable of doing dumb things in the name of the common good and sponsoring



Garrison Keillor discussed his book "Homegrown Democrat: A Few Plain Thoughts From the Heart of America," at a book signing in St. Paul, Minn., bookstore, on July 23. Afterward, he signed copies of his new book, which describes why he became a Democrat.

Keillor has spoken at Democratic functions and was a keynote figure at the Democratic National Convention in Boston, where he spoke to Minnesota delegates about the Democratic Party as "the last group of people in the country who believe, truly, in the common good." On the air, he leads his audience in singing the satirical "We're All Republicans Now."

Keillor first stumped fans in 2002 when he wrote two scathing columns for Salon.com denouncing Republican Negor Coleman as a "holier than thou" after Coleman won Minnesota's U.S. Senate race after incumbent Democrat Paul Wellstone was killed in a plane crash in the campaign's final days.

Keillor said he wasn't timing the book's release to this year's presidential campaign. "I wanted it to come out earlier," he said, but he finished the book in early May after starting "Homegrown Democrat" interviews Keillor's beliefs with a narrative about his upbringing. He describes his politics to the kindness of his aunt and traces the education he received at Anoka High School and at the University of Minnesota.

"The University of Minnesota, to me, in 1980 was a charmed place. It's difficult for me to describe what an amazing little community that was," he said. "It was a tiny, amazing microcosm they missed a sort of little island of people in the middle of the Great Lakes."

Keillor, who turns 62 on Aug. 7, recounts in his book being a freshman hearing John F.

die in ditches while it is a Republican man to drive past and pretend not to see them lying. I do not think he is kidding — he actually thinks this way," wrote Eric Olson, of Bloomington, who said his mother, a Republican not a Democrat.

Keillor said writing the book purged himself of a need to talk about politics on the radio. But he still promises salutes about John Kerry and Bush when "A Prairie Home Companion" — heard by more than 4 million listeners weekly on over 550 public radio stations — begins a new season this fall. (The first show is scheduled Sept. 22 at the Fitzgerald Theater in downtown St. Paul.)

"Having a serious, passionate political book, I know that I've gotten that off my chest. And now I can be a silly person, which I would much rather be than a Republican."

Who wouldn't?

On the Net: www.prairiehome.com; www.prairiehome.org; Minnesota.Democratic.Labor.Labor.Party.usd.org and Minnesota.Republican.Party.usd.org

Keillor on Republicans, Democrats, Conservatives and, of course, Ventura

Excerpt from Garrison Keillor's new book, "Homegrown Democrat: A Few Plain Thoughts From the Heart of America."

Republicans have perfectly nice manners, normal hair, pleasant smiles, good educations, but when it comes down to what they will do to the minimum required to sustain basic health functions, and then they will make a little paper for you. They are not a party that at all about promoting the Christian party that conceals income-generating means and is not by brilliant benefits who are striving and concealing the secret that grew up to. (Don't accuse me, I'm not a doctor, but we do stick to our guns, and before I decency and public opinions and have reduced to half our wage to sublimation and intolerance and have supported government as a necessary force for good.)

The people who call themselves conservatives stand for tax cuts, and further tax cuts, and tax cuts, the only policy they know. Get them. Use the refund to buy a gun and an attack dog to bite with you when you close your eyes and wake through the harassment of Republicans to make a busy life every territory to purchase supplies.

(President Bush's) losing the inland country, the old plank road toward Fayetteville, then in Dixie, there



The cover from Garrison Keillor's new book.

You are either a total idiot, a hypocrite, or a combination of both. This is not the America I grew up in.

In Minnesota we had an angry industrial general armed himself with a rifle and turned out to be an opportunist who had set up in office to sell the book rights. He was a troublemaker, too, and a growler and rarer and more trouble. After four years of him it was a relief to go back to politics as usual, where self-righteous people with ordinary chisel noses sit down and negotiate and get the job done.

A liberal is a conservative who's been through treatment.

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