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by John Greenya

PRESIDENTIAL FOLLIES

Those Who Would Be President

And Those Who Should Think Again

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

Boru Books. 249 pp. \$ 19.95

CLEARLY, Ralph Hallow and Bradley O'Leary know their stuff (the former is the Washington Times senior national correspondent, and the latter is a political feature writer with his own newsletter). Their book, which includes essays on all the current presidential candidates as well as a few now inhabiting the wayside, is filled with insightful observations. However, as the word "Follies" suggests, the authors have made a conscious decision to present the whole thing with humor, lots of humor, and therein lies the rub. By the end of the book I felt as if I'd been reading the transcript of a Mark Russell routine and longing for the music.

They say they wrote the book to entertain and to acquaint us with the candidates, and, in all fairness, if you can dismiss such annoyances as excessive italicizing and answering one's own rhetorical questions, then they achieve both their stated goals.

Two random examples: On Steve Forbes: "What Forbes has going for him is not that he is your basically homely but business-wiser version of the handsome former quarterback, Jack Kemp. No, it's something more basic. Forbes is filthy rich." On the difference between the speaker and the president: "Gingrich's agenda is not vague. The Left attacks it, item by item, every moment of every day, or so it would seem. The difference is that Gingrich's supporters on his left and right do not try to tear him down the way the president's supporter's on his left and right try to tear him down." Hmm, not too funny, but true.

If you want to get a good overview of all the presidential candidates, this is a fun (and fairly priced) way to do it.