

Bush 2, Conservatives 0

The president's re-election is a win for war and welfare.

By Doug Bandow

AFTER NOV. 2, the Republican Party seems to have it all: it maintained possession of the presidency and expanded control of Congress. Ironically, however, President George W. Bush's victory may represent the death of the conservatism. In gaining untrammelled power, the Republican Party and conservative movement have lost their souls.

American conservatism grew out of the classical liberal tradition that birthed the United States. Despite manifold policy differences over the years, Republicans routinely emphasized their commitment to individual liberty and limited constitutional government. They believed Washington to possess only specific enumerated powers. The most important domestic issues were matters for the states. Internationally, America needed to be strong but responsible: war was a tool to protect U.S. security, not remake the world.

Most important was conservative recognition of the limitations of political action. In his book *Conflict of Visions*, economist Thomas Sowell observed that the Right had a "constrained" view of mankind: no amount of social engineering could transcend humanity's inherent imperfections. In contrast, modern liberals held an "unconstrained" view, that is, they believed in the perfectibility of human beings and institutions. Thus, the Left advanced government policies to perfect society.

No surprise, Republican Party operatives and their conservative supporters often placed political expediency before philosophical purity. Nevertheless, most

of them formally stood for individual liberty in the face of expanding government power and were embarrassed when forced to compromise. Occasionally—during Ronald Reagan's presidency, for instance—they actually rolled back one government program or another.

In 2000, candidate George W. Bush seemed to represent this conservative tradition. He offered a clear break from the Clinton presidency, advocating tax cuts, speaking of individual responsibility, and promoting humility in foreign affairs. But his presidency failed on almost every count. Rather than acting as a classical liberal, President Bush delivered the Republican Party into the hands of modern liberalism. Today there is little practical difference between Democrats and Republicans.

Spending by the national government has raced ahead at levels more often associated with the Democratic Party. The Bush administration has pushed to nationalize local issues, expanding federal controls over schools, for instance. Republicans, like Democrats, cite increased spending as evidence of their commitment to education.

In fact, this supposedly conservative president engineered the largest expansion of America's welfare state in decades, a poorly designed but hugely expensive drug benefit under the Medicare program. And Bush's officials shamelessly lied about the program's cost to ram it through a skeptical Congress.

The administration has tried to disguise its expansion of government in virtually every area of American life by

applying the fig leaf of "empowerment." But that is true only for Social Security private accounts, which the president largely ignored when seeking a second term. Otherwise, Bushite empowerment is just another name for nanny-state regulation. Al Gore famously compared government to a grandparent. White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card declared that President Bush "sees America as we think about a 10-year-old child," requiring Washington's benevolent guidance.

Under Bush, the GOP distinguished itself by cutting taxes, but its spending excesses threaten to undo that achievement. Indeed, rather than devoting themselves to making income-tax rate cuts permanent, in October the president and Congress turned the legislative process into a caricature of special-interest policymaking by approving a corporate tax cut larded with benefits for owners of NASCAR tracks and producers of fishing-tackle boxes, among other moneyed interests employing high-priced lobbyists. The rest of us will pay for the GOP's fiscal irresponsibility.

President Bush may be a better representative of "conservative values," but most of those lie beyond the reach of government—and especially Washington. Moreover, he has turned even the best-intentioned measures into political vehicles. He sold his faith-based initiative as a mechanism to allow religious social services to compete with secular organizations for federal grants; he then treated it as a campaign tool with which administration officials lobbied grant recipients for their backing. Using Uncle

Sam's lucre to politicize the mission of religious groups is particularly shocking since the president is apparently sincere in his faith.

In international affairs, President Bush most dramatically diverged from traditional conservative policy. In the 2000 campaign, he criticized the Clinton administration for its misdirected emphasis on nation-building and spoke of greater humility in American policy abroad. He even talked of bringing U.S. forces home from garrison duty in the Balkans, an area of no security interest to America.

Over the last three years, however, George W. Bush has advanced an international agenda breathtaking in its arrogance. Instead of focusing on the necessary campaign against al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and elsewhere, he launched a preventive war based on bad (indeed, consciously distorted) intelligence and offered no apologies for his mistake.

His substitute justification, that of promoting—or really imposing—democracy on a recalcitrant Islamic society was no different from Bill Clinton's excuse for attacking Serbia in 1999. Indeed, the Iraq campaign was as ambitious as any bout of liberal war-making reaching back to Woodrow Wilson. One senior Bush aide told author Ron

“enhanced jihadist recruitment and intensified al-Qaida's motivation.”

Abandoning traditional Republican skepticism of foreign aid, President Bush advanced a program to win Iraqi hearts and minds by providing garbage trucks and creating zip codes. Such utopian social engineering was more appropriate for liberals like John Kerry than a self-professed limited-government conservative. And Bush curtly dismissed fiscally responsible members of Congress who advocated trimming the administration's Iraqi aid program and turning some grants into loans. The president demanded wide “transfer authority” as part of last year's \$87 billion Iraq budget request, allowing him to spend the money without congressional oversight.

Equally disappointing was President Bush's belief in executive prerogative. Administration supporters explicitly—and administration members implicitly—questioned the patriotism of anyone with the temerity to criticize the president's Iraq policy. No less a figure than the vice president suggested that a vote against the GOP ticket risked more terrorist incidents.

President Bush opposed a new cabinet department for homeland security until it became politically convenient,

responsibilities or restrain executive abuses. Many otherwise sober conservative activists denounce anyone who criticizes the president about anything.

Although a decent person, George W. Bush has lived up to the worst anti-intellectual caricature of conservatives, especially religious conservatives. He admits that he doesn't read or “do nuance.” If broadcaster Pat Robertson is correct, the president didn't expect casualties in Iraq. President Bush believes in presidential infallibility and exhibits an irresponsible, juvenile cockiness. (“Bring 'em on,” he said, as more than 1,100 American soldiers have been killed and more than 8,000 have been wounded in Iraq.) He holds no one in his administration accountable, even for lying to Congress and the public.

Alas, his malign influence has infected much of the Republican Party and conservative movement. Rep. John Boehner (R-Ohio) cheerfully writes that after the 1996 election, “It turned out the American people did not want a major reduction of government.” So he and his colleagues were only too happy to forget fighting for principle and give the people what they supposedly wanted: more programs, spending, and federal control. And, only incidentally, the GOP majority would enjoy the perks of control along the way.

Conservative intellectuals also want to make peace with Leviathan. *New York Times* columnist David Brooks has written about “the death of small-government conservatism”: Washington should federalize education reform, subsidize new energy technologies, and promote national service.

Some conservatives even want to embrace the nanny-state. David Frum asks why a federal tax “on calorific sodas would *not* be a good idea?” Forget individual responsibility: “Big Gulp drinks and super-sized fries are making America sick ...” Why not sue

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Suskind, “We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality.”

This is the sort of hubris highlighted in Greek tragedies—and America is less secure as a result. Iraqi guerrillas who never before gave America a thought are attacking U.S. soldiers. More ominously, reports London's International Institute for Strategic Studies, the Iraq War has

then he demagogued his Democratic opponents. He made no mention of reform in the aftermath of the greatest intelligence failure in decades until the 9/11 Commission made its report, at which point he demanded that Congress act. Proving the truth of Lord Acton's axiom that power corrupts, the GOP majority failed to fulfill its constitutional

the sugar pimps as well? The Right has become the Left in Washington just as the revolutionary pigs became the reactionary humans in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*.

American conservatism once represented a serious philosophy. Although the Republican Party often honored conservative principles only in the breach, there was a real difference between the philosophical camps and political parties. No one would mistake the governing philosophies of Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter.

That difference is no longer possible to discern. Some conservative activists say that they plan to fight for their philosophy with the election over. But the re-elected president neither shares their beliefs nor needs their support. Under President George W. Bush, modern conservatism has become a slightly fainter version of modern liberalism. Both groups hold Thomas Sowell's "unconstrained" vision of humanity, that people and their institutions are perfectible through the right application of spending, regulation, and war. Whether seen as children or grandchildren, the slightly befuddled masses need control by their kindly political elders in Washington.

The demise of traditional conservatism would matter little if it had not become the primary political repository of the classical liberal commitment to individual liberty. But President Bush's capture of both the conservative movement and Republican Party has destroyed the most effective opposition to the growth of statism in U.S. society. Embracing George W. Bush has yielded conservatives power, but they have sold their souls—along with the individual liberty that is so integral to the American experience—for a mess of pottage. ■

Doug Bandow is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute and a former special assistant to President Ronald Reagan.

Bush's Brain

The candidates' comparative IQ scores don't conform to the cliché.

By Steve Sailer

FOR A MOMENT, I thought Sen. John F. Kerry was the exception to the rule that all liberals are secretly obsessed—even though they tell each other they don't believe in it—with IQ.

The Thursday before the election, Tom Brokaw interviewed Kerry on the "NBC Nightly News" and told him, "Someone has analyzed the president's military aptitude tests and yours and concluded that he has a higher IQ than you do."

Kerry instantly dismissed this news with admirable nonchalance, "That's great. More power."

I was especially interested in Kerry's response because that "someone" who had estimated Kerry's and Bush's IQs was me.

I had long been struck by how so many liberals were convinced that Bush was an idiot compared to Kerry. For example, Howell Raines, the former executive editor of the *New York Times*, asked: "Does anyone in America doubt that Kerry has a higher IQ than Bush? I'm sure the candidates' SATs and college transcripts would put Kerry far ahead."

Yet the scarlet letters "IQ" had almost never appeared in Raines's *Times*. Ten years ago, *The Bell Curve* proved an enormous bestseller, but the backlash against the book banished IQ from the media. Still, as politically incorrect as cognitive tests have become, colleges and the military have not dropped them. They are simply too useful in sorting large numbers of applicants.

Nor have people stopped talking privately about IQ—especially liberals, who seem to believe, with deepest sincerity, both that IQ is an utterly discredited concept and that liberals are better than conservatives because liberals have much higher IQs.

Democrats constantly sneer at Republicans' IQs. Misspelling "potato" ended Dan Quayle's political career, and Google lists 225,000 web pages—few of them complimentary—that include the words "Bush" and "IQ."

In 2001, some jokers issued a prank press release claiming the (nonexistent) "Lovenstein Institute" had scientifically proven that Bill Clinton has a (Galileo-like) IQ of 182, while George H.W. Bush (who was graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Yale in 2.5 years) had a below average 98 and his son (who has degrees from Yale and Harvard) only a 91. Garry Trudeau fell for this transparent nonsense and shoved it into "Doonesbury."

Similarly, last May hundreds of liberal websites and even the august *Economist* magazine succumbed to another IQ hoax, this one claiming that the average IQ in states that voted for Gore was absurdly higher (for example, 113 in Connecticut) than in states that voted Bush (87 in Utah). Immediately following Bush's victory, this fictitious table spread over the Internet again.

In truth, I don't believe anybody has measured average state IQs since the huge post-Sputnik Project TALENT study in 1960. If you look instead at a