

Breaking Planks

Does a Giuliani win mean social conservatives lose?

By Michael Brendan Dougherty

IMPROBABLY, a twice-divorced, pro-choice, pro-civil unions gun controller who made his city a safe haven for illegal immigrants commands the lead in all national GOP polls. After Rudy Giuliani announced his intention to seek the presidency, pundits lined up to declare that his campaign could never survive the long march through the heartland where he'd face a phalanx of values voters: the rifle-totin', mega-church attendin', "we're barefoot and pregnant and proud of it" Republican base. Yet nine months later—while other candidates jump in and out of the top tier—Rudy remains on top.

Giuliani's record of promoting a mobbed-up crony to a top law-enforcement post, his habit of berating constituents, his endorsement of Mario Cuomo over a fellow Republican, his support for partial-birth abortion, even his occasional public cross-dressing haven't united the conservative movement into full opposition to his candidacy. While there are notable dissenters, many social conservatives are talking themselves into supporting Hizzoner. Others are even joining his ranks.

Giuliani frequently acknowledges his disagreements with social conservatives. He told a standing-room-only audience at CPAC that he agrees with the base about 80 percent of the time. "I'm probably describing your relationship to your spouse or your parents," he consoled.

He has sought to shift the debate to friendlier turf. Giuliani highlights his promise to make permanent a \$10,000 tax credit for adoption expenses. He

also favors the status quo, whereby federal funds can only be used to pay for abortions in "hard cases" such as rape or incest. These explicit concessions, however, are small compared to the implicit promises he and his campaign make to social conservatives.

"Rudy is an exceptional candidate for social conservatives," says Ohio GOP activist Josiah Schmidt. He founded SoConsForRudy.com—a website with a growing list of contributors—in part to soothe the fears of pro-lifers. "Giuliani has already promised to uphold the Partial Birth Abortion Ban, uphold the Hyde Amendment (which bans almost all federal funding for abortion), [and] appoint conservative judges in the mold of John Roberts and Samuel Alito and Antonin Scalia," he says. Schmidt zestfully declares that Rudy has promised "a concrete statistical emphasis on reducing abortions."

Describing the narrow powers of the presidency in terms of legislation and Giuliani's oft-repeated promise to send "originalists" to the Supreme Court, Schmidt repeats what is being whispered in many conservative circles: in his constitutionally limited role as president, "Rudy will be functionally pro-life."

But other conservatives insist that the executive branch has a broader role to play in advancing pro-life goals than Schmidt suggests. "To say the president can't do much is not accurate," says David Osteen, a spokesman for the National Right to Life Committee. As an example, he cites President Bush's diplomatic delegation that "successfully lob-

bied the UN to take an anti-human cloning position." He adds to this the long list of appointments to the Justice Department and other federal agencies that can influence abortion rights and the rights of pro-lifers. The consequences of nominating a pro-choice Republican become impossible to ignore.

The NRLC has a petition at the center of its homepage asking that Republicans choose a pro-life candidate. Though it's obviously targeted at him, the petition doesn't mention the former mayor by name, and Osteen makes only parenthetical reference to him when explaining his group's position: "Every [Republican] candidate running at this time, with the exception of former Mayor Giuliani, is pro-life."

For Osteen, Rudy's durable national lead does not guarantee a lock on the nomination. He notes, "Giuliani stays in the 20s nationwide—never breaking above 30 percent," indicating that once other candidates drop out of the race, social conservatives will coalesce around one candidate and overwhelm Giuliani. "He's had ample opportunity to evaluate and re-evaluate his position ... and he has re-affirmed his pro-abortion convictions. That's going to be pretty troublesome." Osteen believes the lay of the land will be more apparent after Fred Thompson's campaign gets running.

The hope that another candidate will emerge to challenge Rudy's national lead animates many social conservatives. Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council declared bluntly, "When people hear Rudy Giuliani speak about tax-

payer-funded abortions, gay rights, and gun control, they don't hear a choice, they hear an echo of Hillary Clinton."

Regardless of these murmurs on the Right, the Giuliani campaign has aggressively sought out social conservatives to fill staff positions as a sign of good faith. Schmidt believes Giuliani's legal team has impeccable credentials. Miguel Estrada, a conservative lawyer whose nomination to the D.C. Circuit of the U.S. Court of Appeals was frustrated by a Democrat-led filibuster, is a close adviser to the campaign. Ted Olson, former U.S. solicitor general, was an early Giuliani supporter. "I admire his character, his capacity for leadership, his instincts, and his principles," the conservative stalwart said in February. One campaign aide speculated that Olson was a likely candidate for attorney general in a Giuliani administration.

Despite Giuliani's promise to name strict constructionists to the courts, some observers believe that, should he become the nominee, Giuliani will limit conservative influence in the judiciary. Ramesh Ponnuru observed in *National Review*, "Giuliani's nomination would change everything. By moving the politics of abortion to the left, his nomination would also—regardless of Giuliani's intentions now—move the politics of judicial confirmations to the left. If the range of acceptable opinions on abortion policy narrowed, so would the range of acceptable opinions on *Roe*."

Ponnuru concluded, "His nomination would ... set back causes that most Republicans have rightly considered important, and for that very reason could weaken conservatism generally. That is reason enough to reject him."

Campaign staffers counter that a Giuliani nomination would actually strengthen the GOP by helping elect Republicans to the House, Senate, and state offices nationwide. Bill Paxton, a former New York congressman and

national co-chair of the Giuliani campaign, points out, "There will be two seats in play in New Hampshire ... and several key districts in Florida, including the Foley seat. The list goes on: Wyoming and state after state." He's certain that Giuliani's broad appeal will help Republicans up and down the ticket in these purple states. "And those are going to be conservatives," Paxton confidently states.

Giuliani's opponents have an easy retort. While his popularity and regional base may put blue states like Connecticut and New Jersey in play for 2008, his nomination could easily dispirit conservative voters in Ohio and Tennessee. The party's pro-life plank attracts many to the Republican tent who would otherwise vote for Democrats who speak more directly to their economic interests. For many Rust Belt voters, the choice between two parties that support abortion rights—one Wall Street and one blue-collar—is an easy one.

Even if the Giuliani campaign can't sell itself to conservatives on social policy or the potential for an electoral comeback, they can still market his image: Rudy will bust skulls. A law-and-order candidate can still appeal to socially conservative voters who dread Clintonian psychobabble and politically correct crime policy. "Rudy Giuliani changed New York City from a place we reviled to a place we admired," bragged one senior Giuliani campaign official.

"Tough" is the adjective of choice, in the campaign literature and on the lips of staffers. It's meant to resonate not only with war hawks but with Republican partisans. "Rudy is tough," Paxton explains. "As tough as Pelosi and Reid might think they are, Rudy Giuliani dealt with a Democrat City Council that was run like a fiefdom. He led there and dragged that city to the right. He beat them at every turn."

As the conservative movement

shifted from being a third force in American politics to being the base of the Republican Party, it has become more solicitous of the party's needs and more combative with the Democrats. The image of a New York prosecutor beating back Nancy Pelosi excites a cohort of voters who feel that Bush and other Republican leaders give in to pressure from the media and the opposition.

Giuliani makes a show of straining to earn conservative votes, referencing Reagan, dropping code words about judicial appointments, and even hiring staff to monitor and communicate with conservative bloggers. Yet his campaign straddles the fine line between working for conservatives and working them over.

There is an imperious, even arrogant quality to the campaign—undoubtedly influenced by the boss himself. Conservative allies insist that Giuliani will feel indebted to social conservatives should he win their support. But the tone from his campaign staff is reminiscent of a more unflattering New York trope: he's going to make them an offer they can't refuse. Paxton observes, "Going back to Eisenhower in '52, whoever has led the Gallup poll at this stage of the Republican nominating process has succeeded." Translation: We've already won. Cut your deals while you can.

After years of disappointment from the Bush administration, social conservatives are in desperate straits. Having lost the Republican House in 2006, and likely to sustain severe punishment in the Senate in 2008, the movement is politically bound and gagged. Giuliani's campaign claims to be the only heavy left on the street, wielding his tough-guy reputation like a baseball bat. He wants to help traditionalists out, to be a friend in despairing times.

Social conservatives have two disquieting questions to answer: Do we trust him? Do we have a choice? ■

Once More into the Breach

The neocon propaganda machine rolls toward Iran.

By Justin Logan

FORMER WHITE HOUSE chief of staff Andrew Card famously remarked that the reason the White House ramped up the case for the Iraq War in September was that “from a marketing point of view, you don’t introduce new products in August.” To judge from recent developments, Americans may look back on August 2007 as the month the country again turned toward war—with Iran.

The same network of think-tank analysts, media outlets, and government officials who brayed for war in Iraq have set their sights increasingly on Iran. Savvy as ever, they remain focused on consolidating public opinion and seem to be monitoring anti-Iran sentiment closely. *Weekly Standard* Deputy Online Editor Michael Goldfarb darkly warned in July that opponents of another Mideast war “shouldn’t be too surprised when [the] 60 percent [of Americans] opposing a war with Iran starts to dwindle—it has dropped five points in just the last six months.”

In late August, NYU professor and Afghanistan expert Barnett Rubin related that a Washington source had told him that the same neoconservative institutions that urged the country into Iraq were preparing to “roll out a campaign for war with Iran” after Labor Day. According to Rubin’s informant, “evidently they don’t think they’ll ever get majority support for this—they want something like 35-40 percent support, which in their book is ‘plenty.’” Rubin later told the *New Yorker*’s George Packer that a source at a neoconservative institution in Washington had con-

firmed that account, noting, “I am a Republican. I am a conservative. But I am not a raging lunatic. This is lunatic.”

The purportedly perfidious role of Iran in Iraq sits at the center of the case for war. One can hardly open a newspaper or political magazine without reading table-pounding condemnations of Tehran. The *Washington Post*’s editorialists declare that Iran “is waging war against the United States and trying to kill as many American soldiers as possible,” and Reuel Marc Gerecht of the American Enterprise Institute warns *Newsweek*’s readers that the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps “have long given aid to a varied list of terrorists, including, quite possibly, al Qaeda.”

The curious thing about the case against Iran, however, is that hawks have created this perception without providing so much as a Powell-at-the-UN-style dossier of evidence. Although administration officials have parroted claims against Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) for months, the charges are wholly based on inferential and nonspecific evidence that pales in comparison even to the trumped-up charges leveled against Iraq in 2002 and 2003.

A report entitled “Iran’s Proxy War against the United States and the Iraqi Government” was just published by *The Weekly Standard* in conjunction with the Institute for the Study of War, an apparently one-person think tank consisting of Kimberly Kagan, the wife of surge architect Frederick Kagan. Her prior public profile consisted mostly of

assessing the inevitable success of the surge for *The Weekly Standard*—even though she had been a participant in the group that planned the troop build-up in the first place.

The Weekly Standard report compiled nearly every press account of Iranian involvement in Iraq, gathered from dubious sources ranging from the terrorist group Mujahideen-e-Khalq to *New York Times* reporter and erstwhile Judith Miller accomplice Michael Gordon, as well as a variety of anonymous sources. The last lines of the report’s summary noted that “with [al-Qaeda in Iraq and the Sunni insurgency] increasingly under control, Iranian intervention is the next problem the Coalition must tackle.”

Emblematic of the selective reasoning in the Kagan report is one anecdote its author recounts. In describing a suspicious attack that killed five U.S. servicemen at an Iraqi base in Karbala in January, Kagan devotes two paragraphs to quoting a statement from Brig. Gen. Kevin Bergner that pointed out that the Iraqi suspects captured in connection with the attacks had implicated the Quds Force of the IRGC. What Kagan does not point out, although she cites the *Time* article that reported the information, is that the formal U.S. investigation into the attacks implicated the very Iraqi police with whom the American servicemen were embedded—not Tehran. According to *Time*, “the U.S.’s initial probe of the incident found no evidence of direct Iranian involvement. Instead, the picture that emerged cast suspicion chiefly on