

“I’m Liberated; Free at Last!”

A Talk With Pat Buchanan

by Bill Kauffman



Pat Buchanan has taken more punches than Chuck Wepner, but unlike the Bayonne Bleeder, Buchanan has a good right hook (or is it now a left?) of his own.

The year began with Buchanan defending his feisty anti-interventionist manifesto *A Republic, Not an Empire: Not since the days of Arkansas Sen. William Fulbright, the one good Bill Arkansas has minted, had a major American politician used the e-word.* Invited to join the Reform Party by the hirelings of Texas populist Ross Perot, Buchanan was sandbagged by the Perotistas when it became clear that, unlike Perot’s 1996 competitor for the Reform nomination, he would not be a sacrificial Lamb. Buchanan defeated his principal foe for the Reform endorsement, transcendental-meditation apostle John Hagelin, before being laid low by gall-bladder-related problems.

Bill Kauffman spoke with Buchanan as the convalescent candidate prepared to hit the campaign trail.

KAUFFMAN: Have you tried transcendental meditation for this gall bladder thing?

BUCHANAN (Chuckling): Well, it may be better for the stomach.

K: You get the worst press of any presidential candidate since George Wallace in ’68. Why?

B: There are a couple of reasons. One is that we really stand up against the national media establishment on all issues, not just

Bill Kauffman’s books include America First! and Every Man a King, a novel.

a few. Secondly, I’ve been a party to all of the great controversies of our time, and I’ve been on the other side from the national press in all of those controversies: Vietnam, court-ordered busing, the Supreme Court and its decisions on life and prayer. I supported the most unpopular war in American history and opposed the most popular.

In addition, I’m now challenging not only the liberal Democratic establishment, which I’ve fought all my life, but we’ve taken on also the Republican/conservative establishment. So I have no base of support whatsoever in the national media. Where I find my support is places like *Chronicles* and *Middle American News* and, to some degree, *Human Events* and *Southern Partisan*—which are, it is fair to say, not in the mainstream (Laughter).

K: You’re the first presidential candidate in 75 years, since Bob La Follette, to try to put together a left-right coalition against involvement in foreign wars. Are you still sanguine about the possibility of left-right cooperation, or are you discouraged?

B: Let’s separate Buchanan from Buchanan’s beliefs and visions. Whatever happens to me, the ideas for which we are fighting right now are going to triumph. The American people are never again going to send a great army overseas to fight some bloody war that has no direct impact on the vital interests of the United States. We are an overcommitted nation that has half of the military power it had in 1990, but with far more commitments—from Eastern Europe to the Balkans to the Persian Gulf, even to the Taiwan Straits—than we had at the end of the Cold War.

The time is coming when the bankruptcy of U.S. foreign pol-

icy is going to be exposed, and when it is, the establishment will find that there is nothing behind their commitments. The American people don't understand them, don't know about them, and are going to be unwilling to pay for them with the blood of their sons. One of the stupidest things this country ever did was to miss the opportunity at the end of the Cold War to get rid of all these commitments which were designed for a global war against a hostile empire that no longer exists.

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We're going to roll up this empire just the way the British and French did.

I'm very sanguine that we're going to win this battle one day. "America First" as a foreign policy is the only foreign policy that the American people will support over the long haul. You can get them ginned up for a crusade against the latest Hitler—Saddam Hussein in the Gulf—and you can even get them, though they were not enthusiastic, to support smashing a little country like Serbia that they don't know a thing about except what they read in the papers about them all being horrible people.

But I'll tell you, if you start taking casualties in great numbers, Americans will balk and resist.

K: Did your choice of Ezola Foster as a running mate indicate an abandonment of a left-right strategy? A lot of people expected you to take a labor Democrat.

B: We were looking over a lot of the labor Democrats, but I did make a solemn commitment that the individual would be pro-life. So when we chose Ezola Foster, it was not any abandonment of an effort to reach out to folks like the *Antiwar.com* folks, who support us primarily on foreign policy.

K: What did you learn from your dance with Lenora Fulani?

B: That alliance was basically a straight political deal where I would agree to support the campaign reforms that she recommended, and I did, and I still do, and she gave me her support.

But when the interests of her people in the various states collided with our interests, one after another, we defeated her people and tossed them out and put ours in. We were determined to get that nomination. No matter who was opposed to us, we would go in and defeat them. Because this is not a game for us and we're not going to put our future in the hands of anyone else.

I think she saw the Buchanan Brigades taking over the whole party nationally. So she came to me in New York and demanded to be chairman of the national Reform Party. I said, "Would you like some more corn flakes?" And it was all over. The *New York Times* wrote a story on it and did not even mention the fact that she had demanded to be chairman of the party.

K: They also refer to John Hagelin as a physicist.

B (Laughing): He saves a lot in airfares.

K: When you jumped to Reform, did you have any previous third-party models in mind?

B: No. I've read a great deal about third parties, and Governor Wallace was a friend of mine; I used to go visit him before he died. And I'm familiar with Norman Thomas and all the rest.

After I saw that we could move the crowd as well as I did at Ames, Iowa, but I simply couldn't afford running against seven different people, it seemed to me that I could not win the Republican Party nomination. So the question was, "Are we going to let the things we believe in die for lack of a champion, or are we going to go ahead and grab this party and try to make it an America First party?" And I said, "Why don't we just go ahead and do it?" At least the American people will have a chance to vote on these ideas.

What makes me very hopeful is that there was no majority for the war in the Balkans; the Senate barely got a majority for the war in the Gulf. NAFTA did not have majority support in this country, and neither did the Mexican bailout.

Now, because of the good economy and because everybody at least has got a job, even though they're nervous, people are saying, "Well, don't rock the boat. Buchanan may be right, but things look like they're pretty good to me. I don't like these deals either, but I've got a job." But a crunch has got to come.

And when it comes, the national establishment will find out that underneath it is an enormous hollow space. The country will not sustain the establishment. This whole damn New World Order is being put together for a lot of parasites, and the American people have no emotional interest in it; they tend to go along with it until they're going to be asked to make some major contribution to sustain it. They're going to say, "Why do we want all this stuff?" At that point, I think they'll say, "What was that guy's name back there? Buchanan."

K: In your famous interview with Norman Mailer in *Esquire* in 1996, Mailer kept urging you to quit the Republicans. The Republicans are the Corporation, said Mailer, and they'll kill you before they'll let you have the nomination. Was Norman right?

B: Yup (Laughter). Norman was right. My problem is that I am very, very loyal to institutions and things I've been attached to. And it's very, very hard for me to break. My sister has no problem with that (Laughter).

K. Some had hoped that the Reform Party would become a broad-based populist movement united around anti-globalist causes and political reform. Ross Perot might represent its center, you its right, and someone like Ralph Nader or Jerry Brown its left. Is that a possibility anymore?

B: It sure is to me. The whole New World Order: These are much stronger issues with me than they ever were with Ross. Ross was very strong on the trade issue, as I am; but in terms of bringing the troops home and defunding these global institutions like the IMF and the World Bank, I think I'm stronger.

I was out there in Seattle, and what you've got to realize is that many on the left think the IMF and the World Bank aren't generous enough. Many of them don't mind the World Trade Organization as long as it will do their will. But I'm for bringing these things down.

Folks who want to restore American independence, wherever they are on the spectrum, are welcome. Now some won't come to me because I'm pro-life. But that is simply who I am. And I am not walking away from those folks or that vision or that ideal or the idea that we ought to alter the Supreme Court and decentralize government dramatically.

States' rights: I think the survival of our country lies in this idea, where states can be different from other states, and the feds don't impose one rule upon the whole nation from the Supreme Court. Folks vote in each state as to how they want to live and what values and traditions they want respected and supported in law. That's the way it was originally intended for a great democratic republic; we would be a very diverse people. I don't mind the fact that I don't have a right to impose my values on Greenwich Village, but I don't want Greenwich Village imposing its values on me.

K: My impression is that the Buchanan Brigades are much more libertarian than is commonly believed. Maybe a third of your convention delegates, for instance, would have supported calling off the national drug war. Is there room for anti-drug war people in a Buchananite Reform Party?

B. Yup, there's room for them. I don't know that we would adopt that posture, but let me tell you, my friend Lyn Nofziger told me, when he endorsed me as a Republican, that he had gotten marijuana for his daughter, who was dying at the time, and that I ought to know that because it was common knowledge. I said, "Well, that doesn't bother me in the least." If I were a prosecutor, I would say, "That's pretty far down the list in terms of things we're going to prosecute in this office. We've got more important things to look at than that."

I understand the libertarian argument on drugs; I don't agree with it, Bill, and I'll tell you why. I went in Iowa to one of these centers for gals who had been pregnant and on drugs but had cleaned up their act. It was both a daycare center and sort of a home where they would come at night; they had jobs. These little toddlers were all slopping down their cereal. It was very funny and very pleasant.

I asked the fellow there, "Did these kids suffer any permanent damage?" And he said ten percent of the kids in Iowa are born of mothers who are drug-afflicted, and half of those kids never fully recover from the impact of that.

These little kids are simply growing up with a horrible existence. And I'm afraid if you decriminalize or legalize narcotics . . . it's not a victimless crime.

K: But the same argument was always made about alcohol during Prohibition: You're really doing it for the children, because drunkards are bad parents.

B: There's no doubt that alcoholism is a serious problem, but I know friends who have been alcoholics, and some of them are dead after 30 years; and I've known kids who have been drug-addicts, and they were dead in their early 20's.

K: Do you sympathize with the move to make marijuana legal for medical purposes?

B: That's a state-by-state decision.

K: Although as soon as a state approves legalization, the Repub-

licans want to send the feds in.

B: In violation of their states' rights precepts. On that one, if the state votes the decision, I think you have to respect it. On the federal level, although I can see what's happening down in Colombia, I just am not ready to give up on the drug war because I think the other side would be worse. Maybe I'm wrong.

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K: You mentioned *Antiwar.com*. Justin Raimondo, its editor, is one of your most eloquent and tireless champions.

B: He's wonderful. Justin nominated me.

K: Justin is a good guy. He is also openly gay. Would that fact disqualify him from a spot in a Buchanan administration?

B: No. Look, Justin is not someone who runs around the country advocating the gay-rights agenda; he's opposed to it. He believes in freedom. He's opposed to the idea of using federal power to say that people have to hire him whether they like him or not. He is a homosexual, and I don't know how people get that way, but he's a very loyal guy to me. I have two people who have been "outed" who have been very supportive of me in three campaigns, and I'm proud to have their support because it probably takes a hell of a lot more moral courage for them to support me, especially where Justin lives, than it does for folks elsewhere.

You know what he said when I issued a strong statement? He said, "Who gives a damn if I can't be ambassador to Luxembourg?" (Laughter).

K: The two parties have their Hollywood partisans: Barbra Streisand for the Democrats and Bo Derek for the Republicans, now that Efrem Zimbalist, Jr., has retired. Who are the Hollywood Buchananites?

B: Virginia Mayo . . . most of them are from the previous generation.

K: I heard that Mel Gibson was a supporter.

B: No, I wouldn't say that. Don't end *The Patriot's* career! (Laughter). I think Mel Gibson probably comes out of a traditional Catholic, pre-Vatican II upbringing, and he shares a lot of these values and beliefs and his great love of patriotism and the warrior virtues and things of the Scotch-Irish. We have a lot in common, but don't put that anchor around this guy's neck. I want to see more of his movies (Laughter).

K: How do we bust up the concentration of media ownership?

B: You have to use the antitrust laws, and I'd certainly be prepared to. Newspapers, for example, should be owned by Amer-

icans.

I'm not sure what Bill Gates did to me to be attacked by the antitrust division of the Department of Justice. As far as I know, he tried to give me a free browser. Microsoft is a national asset. If they did something wrong, fine them, and tell them, "Don't do it again." But don't smash up this company.

“*Chronicles* has been to me, in the last ten years, what *National Review* was in the very early 1960's, with this difference: *Chronicles* repeatedly comes to my defense.”

Take a look at what's far more dangerous: a concentration of power, in which a handful of companies get control of the mechanism by which ideas and information and political news are spread throughout a society of 270 million people.

I thought CNN was a great idea, and frankly I didn't like the idea of it merging with [Time-Warner], and now they're going to merge with AOL. Two or three people in the country are going to be able to decide the career, or the noncareer, of virtually every journalist and columnist and commentator in America. They'll be able to kill all but the biggest, like a Rush Limbaugh; and even there they have enormous power. So I do believe in maximum decentralization of the media.

K: What about requiring radio and TV licensees to live in the cities in which they have licenses?

B: I think that's a great idea. You should have some kind of preference in the law for folks who live in the town, because these absentee landlords sit up there and own 85 or 100 newspapers and they don't give a hoot about what's going on in Podunk, as long as the *Podunk News* makes money. They go out there and reformat it and put their bingo games in, and it ceases to be a community newspaper.

If every radio station and every newspaper were owned by people who lived in the town, it would be far better than these giant media conglomerates.

K: Have you lost any friends over your defection from the Republican Party?

B: There weren't all that many to lose, Bill (Laughter). I'm not a great socialite around D.C., never have been. I can't think of anybody who was a great personal friend who is not now.

K: Have you ever talked to Dick Lamm about his treatment by the Perot people in '96?

B: No, I have not, but somebody I know talked to him. This is one reason we've got the fight with the Perot people. We saw what was done to Lamm, and early on we picked up signs that the Dallas people, in giving us advice on whom to support and

not to support, and whether to get on the ballot as the Reform Party or as an individual, were making decisions and giving us counsel that would leave them with the capacity to take it away from us, if they so chose.

So we decided to follow our own strategy and make sure I went to Long Beach with an insurance policy of two-thirds of all delegates. We started to act deliberately and consciously in our interest, making our own decisions, doing what was best for us. When they offered advice we would say "Thanks," and we might accept it if we thought it was consistent with our interests, and if it wasn't, we would do what we wanted to do. That's why, for example, when we were asked by them to go down and get the Reform Party on the ballot in Texas, we said "No, we're going to get me on the ballot in Texas." If we had gotten the Reform Party on the ballot in Texas, I'm sure there would have been an effort to give that line to Hagelin.

This is the source of the great conflict with Dallas; it's got nothing to do with social issues. They knew exactly where I stood on those when I joined.

K: You famously threw punches at a Washington policeman as a young man, and you have a pugilistic image. Were you tempted to throw any punches during the Reform Party convention?

B: No, I was thinking of my coming surgery (Laughter). Somebody might have punched me in the stomach, and that would have been it. At the Reform Party convention, I told all our people, "Look, be sweet, be nice—no punches thrown," because we won. When you win, it's the guys that are losing that throw the first punch.

K. Do you expect that, in 2002, Reform will field Buchananite candidates for governorships and Senate and House seats and such?

B: That would be the clear plan, but we have to see how well we do and how well I am. But here's the thing: This is a long-term commitment. I'm not going back to the Republican Party: I'm liberated; free at last! (Laughter).

K: Could you see yourself supporting Reform candidates in 2002 who are with you on most issues but not abortion?

B: That's where I have a real problem. I have a problem defeating a candidate who has stood up for right-to-life, which takes great courage these days. If my guy supports life and the other Buchanan things, of course I can support him, even against a conservative Republican.

People say, "That's an impediment, Pat; you can never put together a coalition as long as you believe that." Well, if that's true, that's true, and there's nothing I can do about that. But I'm not changing.

K: What if they disagree with you on decentralist grounds, saying, "Look, there should not be a federal law against partial-birth abortion; this should be legislated at the local level."

B: Do they agree *Roe v. Wade* should be overturned?

K: Presumably.

B: If they take a stand that *Roe v. Wade* should be overturned,

and it should be returned to the states, I think that's a pro-life position.

K: What do you expect will be your place in American political history? Harbinger, gadfly . . . ?

B: I've had a phenomenal run in my life. I came into politics at just the right time. I was on the Goldwater right, an editorial writer, and in my heart I went through that whole crushing defeat. I was the first one to arrive in Richard Nixon's office in 1965. I was with Nixon in the entire run-up into the White House all the way through China and the summits and '72, and with him that very day when he left in the helicopter.

You know, I thought that my political career had ended then. And then I went into journalism, and I had a great ten-year run, and Ronald Reagan brought me into the White House. I was there at Reykjavik and all those summits, and I was in the White House during the heyday of the conservative movement. I supported Bush, I went back and had a great career in journalism, and then I almost knocked off the President of the United States in New Hampshire. I gave a memorable speech at the Republican Convention, probably the most controversial of the 20th century. And then four years later, we were the sensation of 1996, until we were overwhelmed by the Republican establishment. I'm the only journalist that ever won the New Hampshire primary.

It was a great run, and now I've taken this course. . . . You know, they've buried me ten times (Laughter). We've got a couple more lives left.

I've had a wonderful life. I'll tell you, Bill, being out there building this party from scratch and fighting all these battles in one state after another—it's a wonderful experience. I thought I was 20 years old again. It was one of the wisest and best decisions I've ever made.

Why would I want to be up there in Philadelphia, held in confinement like the rest of the conservatives in the basement somewhere at George Bush's convention? And being trotted out in front of the cameras to say "this represents the restoration of Reaganism" (Laughter). I can't do it anymore.

It's been a hell of an interesting life. I'm in tough shape physically right now, and I'm a 100-to-1 shot, but I'm in the final four (Laughter).

K: How influential has *Chronicles* been in your political evolution over the last ten years?

B: *Chronicles* has been to me, in the last ten years, what *National Review* was in the very early 1960's, with this difference: *Chronicles* repeatedly comes to my defense. Of course, the only defense I needed in the early 60's was legal (Laughter).

K: What spot will Sam Francis have in the Buchanan Cabinet?

B: I'd have him hanging around the White House (Laughter). He would be the Secretary of Heritage.

K: Maybe he can be in charge of the anti-tobacco campaign in the Buchanan administration.

B: That's right: Surgeon General!

Screech Owl in Jubilee

by David Middleton

Its crackling talons clasping icy wires
Strung taut between mimosas and an oak
Within whose hollow bole December eggs
Break open cold in January sun
While copper hums both ways with human sounds,
A brown screech owl with those straight-ahead eyes,
Flat-faced, now twists its flexible neck around
When Roman candles flare blue, green, and gold
And hissing sparklers darken like the stars
Shooting out of the limbs of Yggdrasil
And fireworks burst—a universe of light
That arcs back into blackness at its height.

And in that very night where light expires
The owl discerns still moving blind and warm
Over the frosted shadows of the grass
The star-nosed mole, pine mouse, and meadow mouse
So unaware as softest feathers spread
Descending in their silence till a beak
And talons clamped on gullet, neck, and spine
Bring prey into a nest of wide-mouthed young
That gulp down quivering bits whose dregs become
Regurgitated gristle, skin, and skull.
And not far from these things that have to be—
A sky afire—millennial Jubilee.

Bright moon-stained eyes observe the human scene:
Trayed candles hung from live oaks in the park
Wind-swung into galactic attitudes
Like those whose beer suds up in astral foam
When *Auld Lang Syne* is transposed into strains
Of endless vistas blossoming in light
Up mountain pastures rising toward the sun
Where shepherds pipe their flocks to kingdom come.
Yet there between mimosas and an oak,
Swept by the dreaded plectrum All-Must-Die,
The screech owl's quavering omen of a cry
Floats through the fluid roots of earth and sky.