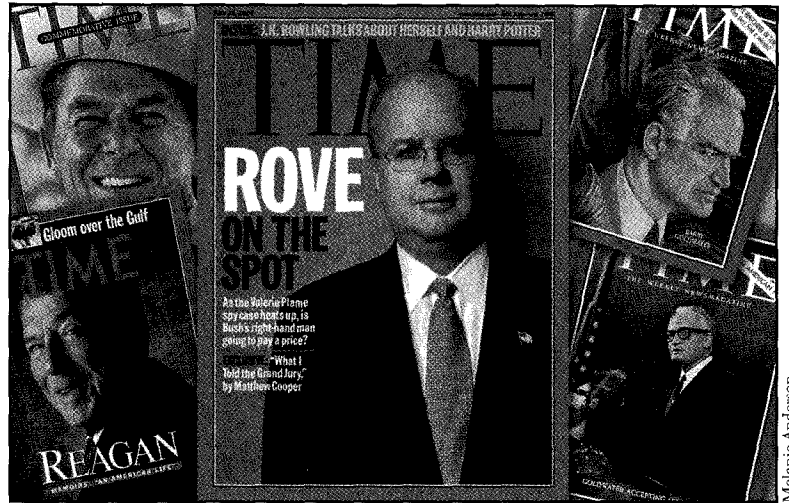


The End of the Rove Era in Republican Politics

Time to Remember the Forgotten

by Tom Pauken



A few weeks after the Republicans were routed in the November 2006 elections, a longtime Bush Republican from Texas told me that it was time for Karl Rove to go. That comment spoke volumes, for it came from someone who had worked closely with Rove ever since his early days as a political consultant in the campaigns of Texas Gov. Bill Clements.

Given the November election losses suffered by Republicans across the country and the waning influence of a lame-duck President, all of a sudden the man hailed as the “political genius” of the Republican Party does not look quite so smart. That “permanent” Republican majority Rove said he was building crashed and burned in the November debacle.

Yet Rove, intent on salvaging his political legacy as “the grand Republican strategist of our times,” has a hard time letting go. To that end, he has maintained his control over the Republican National Committee (RNC) by naming Sen. Mel Martinez of Florida as general chairman of the party and Kentucky’s Mike Duncan, longtime member of the Republican National Committee, as head of the RNC’s day-to-day operations. Both men are known Rove loyalists. They replace former Rove political deputy Ken Mehlman, who chaired the RNC the last two years.

Rove’s selection of Martinez to be the public face of the GOP is an attempt to woo two groups who deserted the party in droves this past November: Catholics and Hispanics. However, even though Martinez and Duncan are Rove’s choices to run the RNC, he will not enjoy the level of control over the Republican Party that he had when Mehlman was at the helm. While Rove will try to give orders to the new party lead-

ers, there is no guarantee that Martinez or Duncan will salute when Karl Rove gives them marching orders.

The selection of Martinez, however, is typical of Rove’s top-down approach to politics. You can almost hear his mind working: “Hey, the 2006 elections showed that we have a problem with the Catholics and the Hispanics. We’ll appoint Martinez chairman of the RNC to win both groups back.” That is the tactic Rove used when he was trying to win the support of the Christian Right for George W. Bush in 2000. Rove had former Christian Coalition head Ralph Reed placed on Enron’s payroll as a “consultant” so that Reed could deliver the evangelical vote to George W. Bush in the Republican presidential primary. In that same campaign, Rove recruited Grover Norquist of Americans for Tax Reform to get taxpayer groups behind Bush’s candidacy. Later, he tapped neoconservative Catholic convert Deal Hudson of *Crisis* to win over the Catholic vote. Rove also enlisted Washington lobbyist Jack Abramoff to work the Orthodox Jewish constituency, as well as to help with many of the Washington Beltway types. Interestingly, Rove, Reed, Norquist, and Abramoff all got their start in politics as College Republican activists.

As an early warning signal that things were not going well for the Rove machine in the 2006 election cycle, one by one, Rove and his key allies found themselves under fire for various reasons. The first two to fall were Hudson and Abramoff. Deal Hudson had to resign his position as head of Rove’s Catholic coalition after a liberal Catholic newspaper revealed that he had been fired as a Fordham professor for taking inappropriate liberties with a female student. Washington lobbyist Jack Abramoff (known as “Casino Jack” for his lobbying work on behalf of Indian gaming interests) pled guilty to bribery and influence-peddling charges. He currently resides in a federal penitentiary. Then Ralph Reed, who was paid millions of

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dollars in lobbying fees by Abramoff's firm, was defeated in his bid for the Republican nomination for lieutenant governor of Georgia. Meanwhile, Grover Norquist lost much of his credibility with conservative groups when his close ties to Jack Abramoff became public knowledge. Nor were conservatives enthusiastic about Norquist's lobbying activities on behalf of various Muslim groups, and Norquist did not help himself with social conservatives when he came out publicly in opposition to the federal Marriage Amendment. Rove had a rocky year himself, narrowly avoiding indictment for his involvement in the Valerie Plame affair.

In six short years as the White House's "political guru," not only has Karl Rove failed in his professed goal of building a permanent Republican majority, he has squandered a tremendous amount of the political capital that had been built up over three decades by Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan and their supporters. Rove has pressured Republicans to sacrifice conservative principles time and again in the name of maintaining Republican control of the White House and Congress. This consummate political pragmatist may have used the lessons he learned from Machiavelli's *Prince* to reach the pinnacle of political success. In the long run, however, it may all have been for naught. The supreme irony, of course—which the Karl Roves of the world never understand—is that


pragmatism (as a guiding political philosophy) does not work in practice.

Now that the Rove era of Republican politics is coming to an end, the real question for conservatives is whether there is any hope of recapturing a Republican Party that has drifted far afield from its core conservative principles.

I think we can.

More than 40 years ago, Barry Goldwater attracted many idealistic young people to the conservative movement and the GOP by calling for a conservatism that would represent the "forgotten Americans"—the middle-class taxpayers who did not have a lobbyist in Washington and were not looking for loopholes in the law. Although Goldwater lost his presidential campaign, Reagan took that message of representing the average citizen all the way to the White House in the 1980 election.

What Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan built over three decades has been effectively destroyed by a coterie of Machiavellian pragmatists such as Rove and the neoconservatives who have seized control of the conservative movement and the Republican Party. It is time to sweep that crowd out of power and start over again as conservatives.

We can begin by standing up for our conservative principles and start representing those "forgotten Americans" once again. If we do that, the grassroots will soon be back with us. 

The Narrows by Catharine Savage Brosman

This country is coarse cloth, folded roughly, crumpled,
crushed, or cut in pieces; I'm the needle,
threaded with desire, stitching it together by my eye,
using the center line. As I try to reason with it,
sort it out—sew Boulder Mountain to Grand Staircase,
Bryce, the Markagunt Plateau, Zion, then Nevada—

the folds resist, unyielding, multiplied; I'm barricaded,
patience, nerves, and time the only means
of plying through: creep down an anticline, straddle
backbone ridges, cross a cindered badland, climb
a checkered mesa, mole along a tunnel, skein
the switchbacks, drop into the park. It's not mirage;

I've got two days, before another desert run. What green
reward awaits? Severe, the patriarchs of sandstone
loom; great ponderosas keep their distance; piñon pine
and weathered juniper, hunkering in the upper
crevices, look petrified. In Zion Canyon, though,
beside the North Fork of the Virgin River, looping,

lolling through an ancient lake bed, meadows shimmer,
cool with reeds and willows; pools devise
ideas of emerald; manganese and iron run-offs streak
the cliffs near hanging gardens, watered
by the seepage—yellow, fuchsia, coral flowers,
leafy trains. Upstream, the walls close in, herding

cottonwoods and shadowing the current; in a round,
monolithic domes like Sacré-Coeur rise whitely.
Here, the road gives out. On foot, I reach
the buttresses and listen, cloistered, to the plain chant
of the river stones—then at the narrows, step
into the nave. Quiet and disquiet both: a cloudburst

would engulf the canyon, drowning everything; a single
rock, dislodged, contains my death; the dizzying
verticals give neck-cramps. Yet this is what
I wished to see, after the bath of barrenness,
the unrelenting light. So it is a choice of hermitage:
of sun or shade, a dry lament, a harsh and treeless

vision in the wilds, or refuge in a glade, but deepening,
and no escape save sky. Well, that's the price,
the body in its risks, its possibilities, the self alive
in antinomian illumination, always drawn
to the contrary world—as presence, passage, threshold
into being, with its wilds of sun, its dark, its vertigo.