



Bush's bash: grand old problems and some embarrassing new ones

By John B. Judis

NEW ORLEANS

VICE PRESIDENT GEORGE BUSH CAME TO the Republican convention here with two important, but potentially contradictory, tasks: to unify the Republicans behind his candidacy and to gain the upper hand on his Democratic opponent, Gov. Michael Dukakis. But he didn't fully succeed in uniting the party and, while he got the expected post-convention boost in the polls, he failed to set the political agenda for the fall campaign.

Bush's failure was most apparent on the convention's last night. He gave a stirring acceptance speech—superior in eloquence, if not delivery, to his rival's speech in Atlanta. Yet on ABC's late night news show *Nightline* the topic was not Bush's speech, but the military record of his running mate, Indiana Sen. Dan Quayle.

Bush's performance stilled doubts about whether he could deliver an effective speech. But his tilt rightward and his choice of Quayle raised questions about his judgment and his political courage that will dog him throughout the fall campaign.

Rising moderates: In dealing with the different Republican Party factions, Bush acted as if the party had not changed from 1980, when the Republican far right was on the rise and moderates had been effectively mar-

ginalized. But in 1988 the Republican right is far weaker and Republican moderates are the most rapidly growing group in the party.

At the 1980 Republican convention in Detroit, the two most important groups were traditional conservatives like Texas' John Tower, who dated their politics from Sen. Barry Goldwater's 1964 presidential nomination, and "new right" conservatives like Paul Weyrich and John "Terry" Dolan, many of whom had been heavily influenced by George Wallace's independent candidacy in 1968. At the 1980 convention Republican moderates, many of whom backed Rep. John Anderson's candidacy, were treated like crypto-Democrats.

The difference in the groups was evident in the kind of receptions they held at the time. The conservative Young Americans for Freedom rented a large storefront in Detroit and threw a lavish party for the Republicans; the moderate Ripon Society, founded to wrest the party away from the Goldwater conservatives, operated out of a hotel room, where its single representative sat on an unmade bed giving interviews to a few reporters.

This year Republican conservatives remained an important force at the convention, but some of them, like South Carolina Gov. Carroll Campbell, have begun to embrace the same kind of state economic initiatives as Southern Democratic governors. On

the other hand, the new right, who call themselves "movement conservatives," have become an embattled splinter. Some of the foremost organizations, such as Dolan's National Conservative Political Action Committee (NCPAC) are defunct. North Carolina Sen. Jesse Helms didn't even bother to come, leaving leadership of the movement conservatives to New Hampshire Sen. Gordon Humphrey. When Humphrey's Coalition for a Winning Ticket called a press conference to

To unite the party for the November 8 election, George Bush had to make many concessions to its right wing, but the vice president went far beyond what was required.

threaten Bush if he did not choose a suitably conservative vice president, only a handful of reporters showed up.

In 1980 the new right commanded the allegiance of the newly organized right-wing evangelicals, but in 1988 the evangelicals were divided among Humphrey's coalition,

Rev. Pat Robertson's delegates (who didn't mingle with the new right conservatives, most of whom had backed Rep. Jack Kemp) and Bush supporters like Rev. Jerry Falwell. In New Orleans Robertson had fewer than 100 delegates (the exact total remained unclear), about the number that Anderson had in 1980.

By contrast, Republican moderates boasted several of the party's upcoming leaders, including New Jersey Gov. Thomas Kean, U.S. Attorney General Richard Thornburgh and Kansas Sen. Nancy Kassebaum. The Ripon Society, chaired by Iowa Rep. Jim Leach, held a packed reception at the Omni Royal Hotel. And Republican feminists engaged a standing-room-only workshop in the same room where Humphrey's coalition had met. According to one poll, 35 percent of the delegates identified themselves as moderates—a significant percentage in that many young Republicans call themselves "conservatives," but identify with the moderates on social and constitutional issues.

Moderate Republicans such as Kean, Leach or Connecticut Rep. Nancy Johnson do not differ significantly from moderate Democrats. In New Jersey, for instance, Kean's politics of inclusion has attracted AFL-CIO and minority support. In 1980 these types of Republicans appeared to represent a leftover from the Rockefeller Republicans who had modelled themselves on New Deal Democrats. But in 1988 they have re-emerged as an important force in the party and as a sign of growing convergence in American politics between Democrats and Republicans. In New Orleans, however, they were shielded from public view, partly because of their own political gentility and also

because of Bush's decision to appease the right.

Rightward tilt: Bush is a political hybrid. Like his father, former Wall Street banker and Connecticut Sen. Prescott Bush, George Bush is a Yankee Republican, pro-business but also imbued with a sense of *noblesse oblige* toward the less fortunate. However, Bush, who migrated from Yale to the Texas oil lands in 1948 and eventually became a Houston congressman, also embodies the kind of *nouveaux riches* individualism ("If I made it, you can make it") that has characterized Sunbelt Republicanism. He has ties to both Goldwater conservatives (he was a Goldwater delegate in 1964) and the Ripon Republicans (Ripon's Leach chairs Bush's campaign in Iowa).

But Bush has always been distrusted by new right conservatives and evangelicals who sense in him both social disdain and Yankee cosmopolitanism. Bush has responded by keeping the right out of his campaign staff, while trying to appease it in public.

Initially the Bush campaign floated the names of several moderates as vice-presidential possibilities, including Kean and Illinois Gov. James Thompson. Bush was also said to favor pro-choice Wyoming Sen. Alan Simpson. But when the right protested, Bush withdrew the names from consideration and eventually chose someone closely identified with the new right.

It helped give Quayle his start in politics. His 1976 campaign was one of the first successful projects of Paul Weyrich's Free Congress Research and Education Foundation, and his 1980 victory over Indiana Sen. Birch Bayh was significantly aided by NCPAC's independent campaign. As a senator, Quayle has regularly championed new right causes from anti-abortion to opposing the INF treaty.

Bush also tilted right in appeasing Robertson. In key battles over whether pro-Bush or pro-Robertson state delegations would vote at the convention, Bush yielded to Robertson. After Bush won the primary in Georgia, the pro-Bush state committee appointed one delegation and a rump pro-Robertson convention selected another. To the distress of Bush's supporters in the state, his national operatives worked out a compromise giving Robertson a 27-to-21 advantage.

According to Robertson, Bush campaign operatives also gave evangelicals control over several platform planks, including that on abortion. As a result, Robertson boasted to his delegates in a closed-door meeting that the 1988 platform was "even more conservative" than the 1980 and 1984 documents (see accompanying story). The platform endorses the Human Life Amendment, which makes fetuses into legal persons and leaves any mother who aborts a fetus open to civil suits and criminal prosecution. It also makes opposition to abortion a litmus test in choosing judges. It promises federal funds for programs that counsel abstinence to teenagers, and it calls for preventing school and other programs from dispensing contraceptives without parental consent. To prevent AIDS, it counsels only sexual abstinence.

Bush's role in the GOP abortion debate sharply contrasts with Dukakis' in the debate over taxes and military spending. Dukakis did not accept any platform planks that he did not agree with, but Bush accepted the Robertson and National Right to Life Com-



In shorts: the Bush campaign is off and running...or are they standing still?

mittee's absolute opposition to abortion in spite of the fact that he advocates the right to abortion in the case of rape or incest. When Rep. Johnson argued in the platform hearings for Bush's position, Bush's representative on the platform committee, New Hampshire Gov. John Sununu, indicated that

Bush wanted the evangelicals' absolute ban in the platform. Bush also assured the National Right to Life Committee that as president he would sign legislation banning all abortions.

He also permitted the platform committee to diverge from his own view of how soon

the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) could be deployed. The committee took Bush's draft, which promised deployment "as technologies permit," removed any qualification and substituted a pledge for "rapid and certain deployment."

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Feminists and evangelicals: the movers and the shakers

The two groups that exhibited the most political energy at the Republican convention were feminists and evangelicals, groups that have virtually nothing in common politically.

Several hundred women attended a workshop sponsored by the National Women's Political Caucus, whose director, Irene Navitidad, is a Republican. The workshop was chaired by former chair of the Republican National Committee, Mary Louise Smith, and included consultants Linda DiVall and Tanya Melich, and House members Nancy Johnson and Bill Green.

Feminist Republicans argued that the gender gap is real and that Republicans must be prepared to do something about it. Republicans, DiVall contended, have to learn to address the "new family issues" like "day-care, quality of education and long-term health care." They also have to stop pandering to right-wing evangelicals. "The platform has a position on abortion that is unacceptable to women, even those who are anti-choice," Melich said. The feminists pointed out that in 1986 the only Republican senator who didn't suffer a gender gap was pro-choice Sen. Robert Packwood from Oregon.

Most Republican feminists are political moderates who identify with the moderate Ripon Society and would like to see someone like Gov. Tom Kean leading the party. At the Ripon reception, Sherry Nemmers, secretary of the Maine Republican Party, told *In These Times* what happened

when a state party committee interviewed a candidate for director. "I have to tell you that I am pro-choice," she told us. There wasn't a stir. Then she said, 'I also have to tell you that I am against funding the contras.' Again, nobody stirred, because everybody agreed with her."

The evangelicals also have their own agenda for the Republican Party. At a closed-door meeting on the convention's first day—overheard through a crack in a side door by this reporter—Robertson told his delegates that they "should do everything they can to elect George Bush." But he also told them that they should continue taking over state parties. "If Bush doesn't win, we want to see something happen in 1992," Robertson said. "If he does win, I'll still be a young man like Ronald Reagan in 1996."

Robertson explained to his delegates that he had gotten a prime-time spot for his address and significant concessions on the platform from Bush. "What they've done is make it more conservative than in 1984," Robertson said. He told the delegates that his strategy was to "appear a generous loser."

Robertson's strategy in the Republican Party is very similar to Jackson's in the Democratic Party. But they occupy different political positions in their parties. Both the strength and limitation of Jackson's movement is in its leader. Many, if not most, of Jackson's ideas are shared by his political rivals; the strength and limitation of Robertson's movement

is in its ideas. Its *Weltanschauung* is fundamentally different from that of most other Republicans.

Robertson's followers exhibit the agony and the ecstasy of the revival tent. They believe that America is going downhill and they want to save it from perdition. Most other Republicans from conservatives like Orrin Hatch to moderates like Nancy Johnson have the booster mentality of the Jaycees or the public-relations firm. They believe things are pretty good, if not fine, and will only get better. "America is not in decline; America is a rising nation," Bush proclaimed in his acceptance speech.

Robertson and his followers regard issues like abortion and school prayer as the focal points of politics. Most Republicans see these issues as secondary to the economy and foreign policy. And those feminists who share Robertson's concern with abortion take the opposite position that he does.

These differences do not deter Robertson or his followers. On the night of Tuesday, August 16, Robertson announced that he was releasing his delegates to vote for Bush, and as he spoke his delegates waved "Robertson for Bush" signs in the crowd. But the signs were written in such a way—with the "for" barely perceptible and "Robertson" looming larger than "Bush"—that they looked like they were advertising a ticket of Robertson for president and Bush for vice president.

—J.B.J.