

The Political Forum

*A review of social and political trends and events
impacting the world's financial markets*

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THEY SAID IT

“A decade after Bill Clinton pushed his party toward the center of American politics, inspiring a vibrant movement of ‘New Democrat’ followers in Congress, a liberal resurgence is sweeping the party, threatening to brush centrists to the side . . . But most troubling to some in the centrist movement, the incoming House Democratic leadership is deeply rooted in the liberal hotbeds of the two coasts. This could spell trouble for Democrats in the years ahead. If the party moves too far left, political observers say, it could alienate swing voters and complicate its efforts to win back the presidency and control of Congress in 2004.”

Article entitled “After ‘New Democrats’ Era, Party Set To Take Left Turn, *The Washington Post*, November 14, 2002

THE END OF CHANGE. I have written many stories over the past decade about political change, how the early 20th century tensions between labor and capital, the cold war disputes between hawk and dove, and more recent arguments between big government liberals and small government conservatives have all but disappeared as dividing lines between the two parties.

In story after story, I have noted how liberalism has slowly shifted its emphasis over the years away from fighting the good fight against racial prejudice and poverty and toward the less noble cause of protecting the interests of trial lawyers, union bosses, high profile civil rights “leaders,” radical feminists, the education lobby, public employees, Hollywood smut peddlers, and a hodge-podge of smaller groups that support an amazing array of extremist “causes.”

I have described how this journey has taken liberalism from the days when both its leadership and its rank and file were heavily populated with respected religious leaders to the present day when its agenda is openly antagonistic toward matters of faith, and many of its highest profile religious personages, people like Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton, are deeply immersed in scandal.

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I have also noted how conservatism has gradually drifted away from the fundamental principles that have defined it since Burke laid the foundations for a political philosophy based on respect for tradition and a deep suspicion of Jacobian zealotry in pursuit of utopian goals.

I have often addressed how in recent years those who call themselves conservatives have slowly adopted many of the traits of liberalism by seeking expansive governmental “solutions” to all sorts of problems that true conservatives would deem to be better handled personally or addressed at a lower level of government; by furiously inventing new ways for the public sector to impinge upon the privacy of citizens; by ignoring the link between good government and good character by failing to force blatant miscreants out of office; and finally, by demonstrating a woeful disregard for the sacrifices of their predecessors and the well being of their progeny by willfully spending their government deeper and deeper into debt for their own selfish political purposes under the auspices of the political slogan “compassionate conservatism.”

And I have written extensively about how both liberalism and conservatism have slowly but ever so surely become imbued with the destructive notion, based on a misconception of Adam Smith’s famous “invisible hand” theory, that what is good for corporate America is always good for America itself, an error that has led to the deeply corrupt merging of interests between big government and big business.

This week I’d like to begin to explore a new political theory of mine, a theory not about rapid change but about no change, a theory which holds that the recent extended period of sweeping political transformations has come to end, that America’s two major political parties are today what they will be for quite some time.

In and of itself, this is not a startling proposition. It was eminently predictable that the baby boomers would, as they approached political maturity, redefine the parties to reflect their own experiences and values. But the notion that the parties have completed their boomer-led metamorphoses carries with it some interesting probabilities.

Before exploring these, I should say that I am aware that long-term predictions about the future course of political events are notoriously subject to error, which is why I used the term probabilities rather than likelihoods. Invariably, as anyone who has studied the past understands, the course of history is constantly being altered by unexpected events and the sudden appearance of remarkable individuals, some good and some evil, some brilliant and some foolish.

In one of many memorable observations, Burke put this idea as follows: “The death of a man at a critical juncture, his disgust, his retreat, his disgrace, have brought innumerable calamities on a whole nation. A common soldier, a child, a girl at the door of an inn, have changed the face of fortune, and almost of Nature.”

Russell Kirk explained this passage this way: “Burke refers to the reverses of Pericles, of [Shakespeare’s] Coriolanus, of the elder Pitt, of the Constable of Bourbon. His common soldier is Arnold of Winkelried, who flung himself upon the Austrian spears at Sempach; his child is Hannibal, taking at the age of twelve his oath to make undying war upon Rome; his girl at the door of an inn is Joan of Arc. Chance, providence, or mere individual strong wills, Burke

declares, abruptly may alter the whole apparent direction of a nation or a civilization.” Not to mention the appearance of an Osama bin Laden and a series of major terrorist attacks.

Nevertheless, while acknowledging not just the possibility but the surety of such history-altering occurrences, it still seems to me that certain trends can be anticipated if I am correct in my assertion that some stability has been achieved in the ideologies, as well as the geographical and demographical bases of the two parties.

The most important of these trends is the fact that the Democratic Party is, I believe, likely to remain the nation’s minority party for a very long time, most probably slowly losing seats in both houses over the coming decade.

That the Democratic Party now has a stable ideological base was demonstrated by the easy manner in which its members accepted Nancy Pelosi as House Minority Leader, and welcomed numerous other individuals who share her ultra left wing political leanings into the hierarchy of the Party’s leadership.

There were, of course, some objections from the so-called “New Democrats,” who have vigorously challenged the left wing of the party for the past decade, advocating a host of somewhat more moderate and centrist policies. But these objections did not take the form of boisterous opposition, promising future challenges. Instead they sounded more like sighs of resignation from backers of a once promising, but now lost cause.

A harbinger of the bold and successful assertion of authority by the extreme left wing of the party came some months ago when Al Gore, a founder and one of the chief flag bearers of the “New Democrats,” delivered an uncharacteristically liberal speech, focusing on President Bush’s doctrine of preemption. This speech was widely interpreted by political pundits as an attempt by him to ingratiate himself to the extreme left of his party, and as such, a formal acknowledgement by him that this crowd was in the ascendancy.

The question at hand is whether the party’s now-dominant ultra-liberal base forms a solid foundation for expansion or acts as an anchor, holding it back from making the kind of changes and concessions that are necessary to capture a majority of the vast, all-important center of the American electorate. Needless to say, I think the latter is the case.

Pelosi argues otherwise, of course, maintaining that as one of her party’s most powerful political leaders she will set aside her personal beliefs if that is what it takes to gain centrist support. I have no doubt that she will try to do this on occasion. But a review of her voting record indicates that the list of issues on which she will have to compromise her principles in order to appear to be a “centrist” may be too extensive for her to do it convincingly.

Among other things, Pelosi opposed both the 1991 Gulf War and the authorization to use force against Iraq this year. She voted in favor of Clinton’s higher taxes and against Bush’s tax cuts. She voted against giving Bush “fast track” authority on trade, and against the welfare-reform bill that Bill Clinton signed. She is against the death penalty, but does not oppose partial birth abortion. She is against school choice of any kind, even for children condemned to illiteracy and worse by their inability to escape the inner city schools.

Her “Americans for Democratic Action” rating is 100% and her lifetime “American Conservative Union” voting record is 2%. Finally, she is a member of the “Congressional Progressive Caucus,” which is a group of 50-plus of the most radical left-wing members of Congress. You can find this crowd’s manifesto at <http://bernie.house.gov/pc> [as in “Week-End At Bernie’s”].

Steve Soukup and I wrote an article about the Progressive Caucus in November 1998 entitled “Hey Republicans, Wake Up And Smell The Nuts.” Its web address at that time was www.dsausa.org/dsa/pc/pc.causus.html. In case you are wondering, the “dsausa.org” part of the address referred to the “Democratic Socialists of America,” which describes itself on its own website as “the largest socialist organization in the United States, and the principal U.S. affiliate of the Socialists International.”

The fact that Pelosi recognizes that she will have to try to lead from the center, rather than from her own far left ideological roots, is extremely revealing, supporting my view that her party will be stuck in the minority if she fails in this endeavor. And fail she almost certainly will, given that her stated goal is at odds with the beliefs of most of her fellow radicals, who aren’t shy about their view that the party should build its future on their ideas. So even as she tries to make concessions to moderation, it is doubtful that she could get cooperation from the political base from which she gains her power.

If I am right about all of this, it is good news for the Republican Party. I am under no illusion that true conservatives will ever again dominate the GOP hierarchy. But I do believe that America’s political center is likely to move steadily toward the right in coming years as the baby boomers age, and as the war against militant Islam drags on and threatens the homeland itself. I also think that with Republicans in control of the White House and Congress, it is just a matter of time before the courts become noticeably more conservative.

Finally, all of this is surely going to spark the members of the newly reenfranchised left wing of the Democratic Party to be much more extreme in their public pronouncements, which could also help to move middle America further to the right, as they shy away from the nutcases.

Examples abound of this already happening. The November 12 issue of the *Opinion Journal’s* “Best of the Web Today” carried a virtual screed storm of them from left wing radicals like PBS’s Bill Moyers, the *New York Times’* Bob Herbert, and the *San Francisco Chronicle’s* Mark Morford, who penned the following little gem.

"This is an extremely dangerous time. Why the energy has shifted so darkly, why the wind feels so bitter and the gods are shaking their heads and popping the Valium and heading off to the spa. . . . The greedmongers and the power vipers have been loosed like never before in recent history. The center cannot hold. . . . If you are female, gay, bisexual, atheist, black, immigrant, poor, progressive, intellectual, open minded, open hearted, if you hold alternative views, dress funny, dance, enjoy sex, read seditious literature, believe in peace and funky spirituality and don't particularly care for a sneering angry self-righteous well-armed anti-everything deity, you are about to find out. The hard way. And so is everyone else."

My favorite example though, comes from the ever-entertaining Jesse Jackson, who gravely predicted to a National Press Club audience recently that the election “positions us to see the end of the second Reconstruction.” Next year, he said, “virtually every civil rights remedy . . . will be made illegal.”

Time will tell, as the saying goes whether these people will continue to wring their hands in thunder, lightening or in rain. In the meantime, Republicans can only hope so, and occasionally give a cheer for Nancy and hope that she too will say what is on her mind, clearly, loudly and honestly. Every little bit helps.

THE SOPRANOS. THE LATEST CHINESE KNOCK OFF. Late last October, I wrote an article entitled “Whither China?” which set forth the proposition that if China is to become the home of a successful, free market economy, “the torture, the killing, and the other atrocities that are commonplace” in that nation today will have to stop. I said that the most important reason for believing this is “that capitalism simply does not do well in totalitarian societies run by thugs.”

Later in the piece, I noted that nations such as China inevitably find that “high-level corruption, which is endemic to totalitarian societies, prevents a significant, successful and sustainable domestic capital base from developing.”

The article was prompted by pending changes in China’s political leadership, as well as by an ongoing visit to the United States by Jiang Zemin, who was at the time the President of the Peoples Republic of China and General Secretary of the Communist Party there.

Last week, the political changes occurred as expected at the 16th Communist Party Congress. The enigmatic Hu Jintao got Jiang’s job as Party Secretary, as well as a promise that he would be given Jiang’s Presidency next spring. But Jiang was re-elected to the Central Military Commission, guaranteeing, as the *Post* put it, that he would have “a major say in all party decisions for the foreseeable future.” Jiang also dominated the public aspects of the Congress, and behind the scenes he made sure that many of his murderous, corrupt cronies stayed in positions of power.

According to the *Post*, two of Jiang’s top allies, Jia Qinglin and Zeng Qinghong, received the biggest number of “No” votes from delegates to the Congress for positions on China’s most powerful policy decision-making body, the new Standing Committee. Yet both men acceded to the Committee anyway, taking the fourth and fifth spots, respectively. Why? Well, here’s what the *Post* said.

“Zeng got negative votes because he is feared. The 63-year-old former rocket scientist has been hailed as the best political infighter in China today. *Zeng has done away with* [emphasis added] Jiang's enemies over the years and ensured that his patron became China's undisputed leader.

“Jia, on the other hand, garnered negative votes because he is associated with the largest smuggling scandal in China's history, Chinese delegates said. Jia, the top candidate to lead the Chinese People's Consultative Conference, a powerless advisory body, was one

of the most important officials in Fujian province from 1986 to 1995, while Lai Changxin was smuggling billions of dollars of oil into Fujian's biggest port and Jia's wife, Lin Youfang, was head of Fujian's state-owned import-export company.

“Chinese sources predicted his presence on the Standing Committee of the Politburo will significantly complicate Hu's need to *give the impression* [emphasis added] the party is concerned about corruption.

“Like all new leaders, Hu will need to make a statement at the beginning of his rule with some kind of 'strike hard' campaign,” predicted a senior Western diplomat. ‘But with Jia up there, it's kind of hard to get anyone serious about it.’

“Also representing the party's darker side is Wu Guanzheng, the Shandong party secretary, who rose to prominence because he smashed the Falun Gong spiritual sect in Shandong province, resulting in scores of deaths. Wu is eighth in the party hierarchy and will lead the Central Disciplinary Inspection Committee, which deals with corruption. Another leader said to have a sinister past is Luo Gan, ninth in the hierarchy and the party's security man. A new book, *China's New Rulers: The Secret Files*, by an anonymous author who said he had access to internal party personnel files, says Luo oversaw the execution of 60,000 people for various crimes over the course of four years, far higher than even the highest previous Western estimates.”

As I said in my earlier piece, “Somewhere down the road to a free, democratic capitalist society, which everyone seems to think is in China’s future, the killing must stop.” The clear message from China’s recent Party Congress is as follows. “Don’t count on it happening anytime soon.” The second message, in my opinion, is that someone is going to lose a lot of money in that country some day.

GOOD IS NOT A LEGACY OF EVIL. It occurred to me while I was writing the opening article to this newsletter that I have probably written far too much on the subject of the last election and that when I finish that piece I should probably move on to other matters. But then, yesterday morning I was reading the *Washington Post* and came across an op-ed piece entitled “All Dough And No Mo” by that paper’s aging doyenne of liberal shtick, Sally Quinn, and I couldn’t resist offering one last thought on the subject.

The thrust of Quinn’s piece is that Democrats lost because of the Clinton legacy of moral slovenliness. She supports this thesis with quotes from a parade of Democratic bigwigs, all of whom were, to my knowledge, silent when the Clintons were converting the White House into a bawdy house and stealing anything that wasn’t nailed down on the way out the door.

But that’s beside the point. Now, at least, these people claim to have come to the realization that, in the words of Quinn, if they don’t “rid themselves of the Clinton baggage . . . voters will continue too look at the party with a jaundiced eye, convinced that Democrats have lost the high ground . . . their perceived position as the morally superior party. . . their role as the champion of the little guy . . . their identity, much as Gore lost his.”

Expanding on this revelation, Quinn added the following:

“The negative stereotype of the GOP has been of a party that is hardhearted, often narrow-minded, even ruthless. They were the end-justifies-the-means crowd. The Dems, by contrast, cast themselves as the party with the big hearts, the integrity, the inclusiveness, the compassion. They were the we-may-lose-but-we'll-still-be-able-to-look-at-ourselves-in-the-mirror crowd.

“Bill Clinton ended all that. He promoted the notion that morals didn't matter. Winning mattered. The Democrats were so eager for a big win they decided to play by Clinton's rules, and for a while it worked: Clinton out-Republicaned the Republicans; he won two elections. But his Monica antics put Gore, his natural successor, in an impossible position, unable to run with him and unable to run without him. Clinton also cemented the perception of the Dems as a win-at-any-cost party by installing McAuliffe as head of the DNC.”

And then she added the *pièce de résistance* to this through-the-glass-darkly example of weird revisionist history, declaring that “George W. Bush is one of Clinton's legacies.”

Now pardon me, but someone needs to set this strange woman straight and it may as well be me.

George Bush *is not* a legacy of Bill Clinton. George Bush is a legacy of a nation that, at one time at least, in the words of Chesterton, had “the soul of a church.”

George Bush is a legacy of a nation of citizens about whom Tocqueville once could say that they held that faith in their religion was “indispensable to the maintenance of republican institutions.”

George Bush is a legacy of a group of men who believed in God and wrote a constitution that, in the words of John Adams, was designed “only for a moral and religious people.” This great document was, Adams said, “wholly inadequate for the government of any other.”

George Bush is a legacy of a group of men who believed what George Washington said in his farewell address to Congress:

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens. The mere politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connections with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principles.”

Pardon me but George Bush is not a legacy of what Quinn herself describes as Bill Clinton's “unprincipled positions.” This morally bankrupt assertion is akin to the evil Schlepffuss' speech

in Thomas Mann's *Dr. Faustus* in which he claimed that virtue is responsible for vice, since the latter would not exist without the former.

The fact is that Bill Clinton is the legacy about which she should be speaking. He is a legacy of fifty years of relentless liberal attacks on the moral and ethical foundations of the American nation, or more specifically on the traditional Judeo-Christian belief that moral laws are not relative, but are immutable; that they are not fashioned by individuals and subject to change, but were dictated by God and are quite specific, being based as they are on the Decalogue; that they have nothing to do with political posturing, but relate exclusively to the manner in which a person conducts his or her personal life.

Quinn and her liberal friends maintain that their Party must be rid of the Clinton baggage before it can redeem itself. I think the Democrats may as well stay with the Clinton's if they are going to rely on the likes of Sally Quinn to lead them out of the darkness. Someone who has no clue as to how they got into such a mess in the first place is unlikely to know how to get out of it.

END NOTES: Go Gennifer! As we country folk say, I've been knowing Gennifer Flowers for a long time, her husband Finis and I having worked together at Prudential Securities back when Bill was still saying that he hardly knew the girl, and even if he did, he had never actually been alone with her, and even if he had he hadn't actually done anything, and even if he had he hadn't enjoyed it, all the while he and Hillary and their White House plug-uglies were doing all they could to destroy both her credibility and her career.

So I was pleased last week to read that the liberal 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco had ruled 3-0 that she would have her chance in court to prove that Clinton cronies George Stephanopoulos and James Carville conspired to discredit her claim that it was Bill not her who had a problem with the truth, a claim that shouldn't be too hard to prove today. Regardless of the outcome, the depositions should be great fun. You go girl!

Go Steve! I've been knowing Steve Moore, formerly with the Cato Institute and now President of the "Club for Growth" for so long that when I first began to quote him years ago, I use to refer to him as the "brightest young economist" in Washington. Needless to say, while Steve is still one of the brightest guys in town, he is no longer one of the brightest *young* guys in town.

In any case, Steve's "Club for Growth," which bundles donations and supports fiscally conservative politicians, supported 17 candidates for the House and three for the Senate in the recent elections, and *all of them won*. Congratulations Steve. Great job, as always.

Whadyasay, big guy? The Nov. 15 *Opinion Journal* quotes a Reuters report from India as follows: "An eight foot tall condom greeted Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates Thursday during a visit to an Indian city, a tribute to mark his generosity in fighting AIDS."

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