

The Political Forum

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

Mark L. Melcher
Publisher
melcher@thepoliticalforum.com

Stephen R. Soukup
Senior Editor
soukup@thepoliticalforum.com

Monday, October 27, 2003

THEY SAID IT

“Now human law is framed for a number of human beings, the majority of whom are not perfect in virtue. Wherefore human laws do not forbid all vices, from which the virtuous abstain, but only the more grievous vices, from which it is possible for the majority to abstain; and chiefly those that are to the hurt of others, without the prohibition of which human society could not be maintained: thus human law prohibits murder, theft and such like. The purpose of human law is to lead men to virtue, not suddenly, but gradually. Wherefore it does not lay upon the multitude of imperfect men the burdens of those who are already virtuous, viz. that they should abstain from all evil. Otherwise these imperfect ones, being unable to bear such precepts, would break out into yet greater evils . . .”

-- *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas.

THE ABORTION GAMBIT. In the 40 years that I have been watching politics for a living in Washington, I have seen a lot of grand political projects put into play by both parties. But never have I witnessed a more brilliant or successful stratagem than the one employed by the Republicans during the past decade to convert their party's anti-abortion stand from a possible political disaster to a widely respected position.

Back in the mid-1990s, conservative clients routinely asked me if I thought that the Republican leadership was ever going to wake up to the fact that the Christian right was going to destroy the GOP. This concern was, of course, always tied to the abortion issue, and invariably reflected a belief that the party was going to be reduced to permanent minority status via the loss of support among female voters, or as they put it in those days, by a “widening gender gap.”

At the same time, many female clients asked me essentially the same question, while informing me that they would love to be Republicans because they agreed with the GOP's conservative fiscal message, but simply could not brook the party's position on abortion. “Don't those dumb Republicans know that they are alienating a huge, important and rapidly growing voting block?” they would ask.

Subscriptions to The Political Forum are available by contacting:
The Political Forum

8563 Senedo Rd., Mt. Jackson, Virginia 22842
Tel 540-477-9762, Fax 540-477-3359, Email melcher@thepoliticalforum.com,
or visit us at www.thepoliticalforum.com

My response was always the same. I informed these people that they should not hold their breath waiting for the Republican Party to become an advocate of abortion rights. In support of this contention, I noted that the GOP would probably disappear as a national party if it ever abandoned its anti-abortion stance, since the Christian right represented a huge portion of the grass roots of the party. It would, I said, be as though the Democratic leaders decided that their party should abandon its traditional support for the agenda of organized labor because many voters were offended by protectionism and corruption.

I wrote several articles on this issue during those years. The most comprehensive was published in July 1994 over the opposition of one of my liberal bosses at that time, a radical feminist who said it was too controversial an issue. The piece, which was entitled “Will The Christian Right Destroy the GOP?”, can be found in the “Pre-2002 Archive” section of our website, www.thepoliticalforum.com. The opening lines explain what I mean when I say that ten years ago there was considerable concern regarding the wisdom of the GOP’s adamant pro-life stand.

Without a doubt, the question I am asked most frequently these days during the Q&A on the speech circuit is, “What is the Republican Party going to do about the Christian right?” Invariably, this question is asked by a concerned Republican who is afraid that the GOP is about to be taken over by “religious fanatics.” In the short run, the specific concern usually is that all chance of a substantial GOP victory in the November elections is about to be destroyed. Over the longer term, the fear is that the Christian right will split the party and thus assure Democratic domination of the United States for years to come.

My answer to the rhetorical question that provided the lead for the article was that much depended upon the GOP’s ability to convince the vast majority of those who make up the political center of America that the Christian right is significantly less threatening to their hopes and dreams for the nation’s future than is the ultra left wing of the Democratic Party. After all, I said, victory in the cultural war would eventually go to the side that could capture the hearts and minds of those whom pollsters call the “undecideds.”

I noted that this was particularly true in the abortion fight where polls indicate that a significant plurality of Americans have mixed feelings on the issue, not wanting to have the procedure banned completely, willing to accept restrictions on its use, and highly wary of those whom they consider to be extremists on both sides.

To succeed in doing this, I noted that it would be necessary for members of the Christian right to make a few compromises in order to demonstrate their “reasonableness.” I said that I was optimistic on this point. I noted that contrary to popular belief, the Christian right was not at all incapable of compromise; that, in fact, people “might be surprised at how ‘reasonable,’ how willing to compromise, (how ‘canny,’ if you will) much of the Christian right has become on political matters.”

In support of this contention, I cited Aquinas’ view on the necessity for gradualness when seeking virtue via the application of human law. I also noted that Christian-right groups had been active in the recent victories of Senators Paul Coverdell of Georgia and Kay Bailey Hutchison of Texas, and of Governor Christine Todd Whitman of New Jersey, despite the fact

that all three held pro-choice positions on abortion. And I pointed out that in California, the Christian right had recently significantly softened its abortion platform to help pro-choice GOP Governor Pete Wilson in his campaign against Democrat Kathleen Brown. Two years earlier, I noted, conservative Christians demanded and won a strict anti-abortion plank on the party's platform only to see their candidates widely rejected by voters.

I also called attention to the fact that two conservative think-tanks, "Project for the Republican Future," and the "Ethics and Public Policy Center," had just proposed a new political position paper for pro-life Republicans that represented a significant departure from their past, adamant efforts to include in the party's platform a call for a constitutional amendment banning abortion.

What these two organizations, headed by William Kristol and George Weigel respectively, suggested at the time was that the GOP continue to publicly declare its opposition to abortion, but shift its tactical role away from attempting to overturn *Roe v. Wade* and concentrate instead on efforts in the individual state legislatures to "curb the incidence of abortion by seeking maximum feasible legal protection for the unborn."

Gary Bauer of the adamantly anti-abortion Family Research Council greeted the proposal warmly, saying "it's desperately needed and well timed." Ralph Reed of the Christian Coalition also appeared to approve of the idea, noting that all he asked was that the GOP be pro-life and on record favoring overturning *Roe v. Wade*, which of course, the Kristol-Weigel proposal was.

I don't know how successful the effort to concentrate on the state legislatures was. What I do know is that shortly thereafter, the Republican party, with the blessing of the Christian right, shifted its emphasis in Washington away from efforts to repeal *Roe vs. Wade* in favor of a much less ambitious plan to ban a very specific abortion procedure that involves removing the body of a fully developed unborn child from the womb just far enough so that it's skull, while still inside the womb, can be crushed and its brains be sucked out.

And slowly but ever so surely, many Americans who had once thought that the anti-abortion side of the dispute was made up of a bunch of wacky religious fanatics began to think that maybe they had been wrong, that maybe the left-wingers were the nut cases, those people who were so obsessed with their "rights" that they couldn't see that this "partial birth abortion" procedure was ghoulish and wrong. "How could any decent person justify such a thing?" they began to ask.

Things moved slowly, of course. Twice, both houses of Congress passed a ban on this procedure. And twice, Bill Clinton vetoed the bill, claiming that a woman's "right to choose" was more important than outlawing this particular practice. Each time this happened, the public became more aware of the controversy. And then, last week Congress passed the bill again, and President Bush announced that he would sign it.

It is worth noting when considering Bush's promise to sign the bill, that no member of the press or the pundit community declared that this was a political act of courage on his part. Because it wasn't. Indeed, it was easy for Bush. There was no political risk whatsoever because a majority of the great center of the American electorate seems to agree with him. They now think that his opponents, those who see nothing wrong with this procedure, are the wacky ones. Imagine that.

Democrats are certainly right when they claim that concentrating on this one procedure was a ploy by pro-life Republicans to move closer to their long-term goal of eliminating abortions altogether. The interesting thing is that most Republicans involved in the effort don't dispute the charge. But this seems not to matter to the great moderate center of the nation, those individuals who pride themselves with being able to "see both sides of the issue." They appear to wonder why the left won't give a little on something that seems so wrong.

This war is by no means over, of course. And the outcome is by no means certain. The pro-life community could get cocky, go for the big prize, and lose the sympathy and support of the center, for there seems to be little question that the majority of the American public is not in favor of a total ban on abortion, even if most don't approve of partial birth abortions.

On the other hand, the abortion rights folks seem to be in a very tough position right now, for a variety of reasons. For starters, they have lost control of the language involved in the dispute, which any good political operative will tell you, is a prescription for defeat.

The coining of the phrase "pro choice" was brilliant. It allowed abortion rights activists to maintain that they were not "pro abortion;" that indeed, they disliked abortions as much as the next guy; that they were simply in favor of "a woman's right to choose."

But so far at least, they have been unable to come up with a euphemistic alternative to the term "partial birth abortion," which has put them and their friends in the liberal press in the awkward position of fighting over something for which they have no name that is acceptable to them. An illustration of this problem could be found in any number of news stories covering the abortion controversy last week. For example:

The Washington Post: "Voting 64 to 34, the Senate joined the House in passing the measure to prohibit **what abortion foes call a "partial-birth" procedure** and to punish doctors who violate the ban with fines and as many as two years in prison."

Associated Press: "The Senate on Tuesday voted to ban the **practice that critics call partial birth abortion**, sending President Bush a measure that supporters and foes alike said could alter the future of U.S. abortion rights."

Reuters: "The Senate on Tuesday easily approved a ban on **so-called 'partial birth' abortion** and sent the bill to President Bush for his signature, moving the debate from Congress to the courthouse."

Los Angeles Times: "The Senate voted 64 to 34 for a bill that prohibits a controversial **procedure that critics call 'partial-birth' abortion**, sending the measure to President Bush for his promised signature."

This compilation of quotes was provided by the James Taranto's "Best of the Web Today," which followed up the list with the following comment.

It seems the proper name for this procedure is a matter of dispute. That's not surprising; semantic conflicts are common in abortion politics, with partisans on both sides of the issue trying to claim the moral high ground by saying they favor "life" or "choice" rather than outlawing or encouraging abortion.

What's curious about the partial-birth debate, though, is that although journalists feel compelled to add the disclaimer that only "critics" or "foes" use the term "partial-birth abortion," the other side of the debate doesn't seem to have a term of its own. The *New York Times* does provide one synonym, referring to "a procedure that doctors call intact dilation and extraction but critics call partial-birth abortion." But "intact dilation" is just a clinical way of saying "partial birth"; the *Times*' formulation is the equivalent of saying "a condition that doctors call melanoma but critics call skin cancer."

So the question remains: If only critics and foes call it "partial-birth abortion," what do advocates and enthusiasts call it?

But control of the language is not the only weakness that besets the pro-choice crowd right now. As I indicated above, the principal problem they face is that they have taken a position that cannot be compromised, which means that they are at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to convincing the center that they are the reasonable ones. And this means that even if they know that the principal tactic of the opposition is to chip away at their "right to choose" argument one chip at a time, they can do very little in response except get angry, bluster publicly, and make doomsday predictions.

The pro-life movement, on the other hand, has made a conscious decision not to make the perfect the enemy of the good, which is appealing to the moderate, compromise-oriented center. Their position is not one of public anger, but more like that of the little girl who, walking the beach after a bad storm, finds it littered with starfish, which she knows will die if they are not quickly returned to sea. She is busy throwing them back into the water, one at a time, when a man comes along and tells her that she is wasting her time; that she can never save all those starfish that way. "What you are doing doesn't matter," he says. The little girl looks at the starfish in her hand and says, "It matters to this one."

MEANWHILE, ON THE HOMEFRONT. So last week, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, already one of the more polarizing figures in the Bush administration, sent a memo to four subordinates expressing concern about the progress, tactics, and overarching aspirations of the war on terror. And he was promptly rewarded for his trouble with a host of critical press clippings, an aggravated commander-in-chief, and a handful of calls for his termination and/or resignation. All this because Rumsfeld had the temerity to pose the simple question, "Are we winning or losing the Global War on Terror?"

Now, I could, I suppose, do as many of the pundits and analysts on the political right have done and dismiss this entire mess, both the memo and official Washington's reaction to it, as much ado about nothing. After all, Rumsfeld singled out no one for specific admonishment and was not, contrary to the impression given by mainstream media reports, terribly uncomplimentary of the administration's current tack. Moreover, his questions were directed specifically to those under his authority, and appeared to reflect, more than anything else, a desire to perform the

tasks delegated to him and his charges as ably as possible. So in a very real sense, those who assert that the entire incident is merely the creation of a scandal-hungry media are right; there is, indeed, “no there there.”

But to dismiss the memo entirely and, equally important, to dismiss the reaction to it, would, in my opinion, be far too simple. It would also be a mistake, for each reveals something important. One says a great deal about the relationship between the Bush administration and its critics, and the other reveals an important truth about the ultimate track of the war on terror, and the importance of people like Donald Rumsfeld to that effort.

First, it is hardly a surprise that administration critics – Democrats and Republicans alike, plus those in the media – would seize upon the opportunity provided by the leaked memo to criticize Rumsfeld. Despite the fact that much of America has been thoroughly charmed by the straight-talking, refreshingly masculine, and unabashedly sharp-tongued Secretary of Defense, much of establishment Washington despises him. In fact, many of the characteristics that have endeared Rumsfeld to the public have, at the same time, alienated official Washington.

There is a reason, after all, that his brashness and candor are so refreshing, namely that such attributes are generally not seen and generally not considered to be terribly constructive in the nation’s capital. Pliable, tactful, and accommodating are the qualities that Washington reveres, as evinced by the previous three Secretaries of Defense, Bill Cohen, William Perry, and Les Aspin (a Republican and two Democrats), all of whom were much more what Washington expects from a cabinet-level administrator than is the office’s current occupant.

Moreover, Rumsfeld has had some fairly well publicized (or well-leaked, if you will) “disagreements” with those over whom he has supervisory responsibility. It is not unusual for the military and civilian factions of the Department of Defense not to see eye-to-eye on everything, but Rumsfeld’s relationship with the military brass has, at times, been especially adversarial. Critics would undoubtedly charge that this is because Rumsfeld, like his boss, is persistently convinced that he knows best, while defenders would argue that it is because the military is stubbornly unwilling to adapt to the Secretary’s vision of a modern armed forces.

In any case, Rumsfeld has more than his share of enemies in town, and it is therefore unsurprising that many reacted so nastily to his supposed blunder of questioning the progress of the war on terror. Despite the fact that for better than two years now Democratic critics, their allies in the media, and a handful of publicity-seeking Republicans have been demanding that the administration ask some “tough questions” about the war on terror, when Rumsfeld actually did just that they feigned shock. Apparently it was not Rumsfeld whom they wanted asking the questions. Rather they would have preferred such “gallantry” come from someone not so “unappealing.” Former Bush speechwriter and current fellow at the American Enterprise Institute David Frum captured perfectly the tenure of the criticism of Rumsfeld’s memo, writing that it reminded him of a scene from the Dustin Hoffman movie “Tootsie.” He wrote:

If I remember right, Hoffman (in drag) encounters the beautiful Jessica Lange at a party. She complains about the absurd lies men tell her as they make their moves on her. “Just once,” she said, “I wish a man would come up to me, tell me he finds me attractive, and ask me to go to bed with him.”

Hoffman takes note. The next time he sees Lange, he is out of drag. He repeats the words she has told him she yearns to hear. She throws a glass of wine in his face and stomps off.

Washington is a funny town, a cynical town. And last week's affected indignation over the leaked memo was but one more rather poorly executed attempt to find any excuse to cast aspersion on one man who drives much of this town crazy.

The effort failed, though, and for that we should be thankful. For while the rending of garments and gnashing of teeth were indeed much ado about nothing, the memo itself and its leaking may well have marked an important turning point in the war on terror.

You see, Rumsfeld's memo is, to the best of my knowledge, the first time that anyone in the administration has indicated that he or she truly understands the scope and magnitude of the war on terror. Or to put this another way, this memo represents the explicit acknowledgement that in order for the war on terror ultimately to be a success, then the strategies employed must go far beyond that which we have seen thus far.

While it is fine and, indeed, important to address direct threats as they arise, it is also important to understand the impetus behind these threats, or, in the parlance of the left, to understand the "root causes." Afghanistan and Iraq represented, or will, in time, represent significant tactical victories. But if such victories are the only ones enjoyed by the United States, then the war on terror will be a long and deadly slog.

Rumsfeld apparently gets this. And he indicated so in his memo. To wit:

Today, we lack metrics to know if we are winning or losing the global war on terror. Are we capturing, killing or deterring and dissuading more terrorists every day than the madrassas and the radical clerics are recruiting, training and deploying against us?

Does the US need to fashion a broad, integrated plan to stop the next generation of terrorists? The US is putting relatively little effort into a long-range plan, but we are putting a great deal of effort into trying to stop terrorists. The cost-benefit ratio is against us! Our cost is billions against the terrorists' costs of millions.

Do we need a new organization?

How do we stop those who are financing the radical madrassa schools?

Is our current situation such that "the harder we work, the behinder we get"?

The key here, of course, is Rumsfeld's acknowledgement that the madrassas are an important variable in the equation. Mark has, in a handful of pieces over the past eighteen months, argued that there are several fronts in the war on terror. The first and most obvious one is, naturally, the one opened up against the real-time threats presented by the likes of al-Qaida, Ansar al-Islam, and Saddam Hussein. The second, as Mark wrote recently, is being manned by folks like Daniel

Pipes and Steve Emerson, who have been waging the lonely and thankless intellectual battle against radical Islam's presence in America for over a decade now, often to the detriment of their professional reputations and even to their safety. And the third front, as Rumsfeld appears to understand, is the one which must be waged against the madrassas and other comparable institutions, which preach and teach a distorted and radicalized version of Islam that fosters hate and encourages violence.

To this point, the Bush administration has, for a variety of reasons, both public and personal, avoided opening this third front in the war. And frankly, it is not difficult to understand the reticence, for to battle on the third front is also to be forced finally to deal with the war on terror's elephant in the room, the royal House of Saud. When Rumsfeld referred to "those who are financing the radical madrassa schools," he could mean no one but the Saudis, who have for years generously financed the proselytization of their radical Wahhabi beliefs to virtually every corner of the globe.

And while there is no question that addressing the issue of Saudi Arabia's role in the promulgation of radical Islam will be extremely difficult, it is also increasingly clear that it will be unavoidable. Just consider what we, who are not privy to any classified information (such as the now-infamous 28 redacted pages from last summer's Congressional report on 9/11), already know:

✍ Saudi Arabia's wealthiest families have, for years, spent billions and billions of dollars bankrolling radical Wahhabi institutions worldwide. Saudi money bankrolls Muslim charities, think tanks, and schools in this country, as well as all forms of educational and religious institutions throughout the Muslim world. Since the early 1970s, when Saudi Arabia found itself awash in oil money, Wahhabi cash has changed the entire face of Islam. Whereas the radically stern sect was once considered an anomaly, it is now considered far more mainstream and, thanks to Saudi money, is having a great impact on young Muslim men worldwide.

In a *National Interest* piece published nearly two years ago, Adam Garfinkle noted that "The Wahhabi version of Sunni Islam is neither traditional nor orthodox. It is a slightly attenuated fundamentalism that dates only from the end of 18th century . . . as recently as 50 years ago the large majority of Muslims considered Saudi Wahhabism to be exotic, marginal and austere to the point of neurotic." Nevertheless, journalist and Muslim convert Stephen Schwarz has noted that Osama bin Laden, the suicide bombers in Israel, the Egyptian terrorist responsible for the slaughter at Luxor, the radical militias in Kashmir, and the Taliban all practice Wahhabi-inspired versions of the religion. Add to that the influence of Wahhabism in fostering the conflict in Chechnya, and it is clear that Wahhabi influence (i.e. Saudi influence) is a large part of the war on terror.

✍ Osama bin Laden hails from one of Saudi Arabia's most prominent families. Fifteen of 19 September 11 hijackers were Saudi nationals.

✍ In the months prior to September 11, the wife of the Saudi ambassador to the United States, Princess Haifa al-Faisal, was reportedly sending considerable sums of money to

a Saudi national living in San Diego, Osama Bassnan. At the same time, Bassnan's close associate, another Saudi national named Omar al-Bayoumi was providing substantial financial support to two more Saudi nationals, Khalid Almidhar and Nawaf Alhazmi, who went on to become two of the September 11 hijackers.

✍ Saleh Ibn Abdul Rahman al-Hussayen, a senior Saudi official and now president of the affairs of the Holy Mosque in Mecca and the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, stayed in the same hotel in Herndon, Virginia as did three of the hijackers on the night of September 10, 2001. According to the [London] *Telegraph*:

Mr Hussayen was interviewed by FBI agents who went to the hotel after the attacks. According to allegations in an FBI file, he "feigned a seizure, prompting the agents to take him to a hospital, where the attending physicians found nothing wrong with him."

FBI agents recommended that the Saudi should not be allowed to leave until he was questioned further, but as soon as flights resumed on Sept 19, Mr. Hussayen and his wife flew home.

✍ Last month, American Muslim Council founder and former president Abdurahman Alamoudi was arrested at Dulles International Airport and charged with illegally laundering money from Libya; before that, Alamoudi was caught by the British government trying to smuggle \$340,000 into Syria. In addition to AMC, Alamoudi was associated with several Islamic "charities" many of which, like AMC, relied heavily on Saudi funding.

✍ Another group founded by Alamoudi, the American Muslim Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs Council (AMAFVAC), is, along with two other groups, the Islamic Society of North America and its Graduate School of Islamic Social Sciences, responsible for certifying Muslim chaplains for the U. S. military. All three groups have Saudi ties and reportedly receive Saudi funding. Among those chaplains "certified" by Alamoudi's AMAFVAC was Capt. James "Yousef" Yee, who was recently arrested for suspicion of espionage at Guantanamo Bay.

✍ Among the think tanks funded by Saudi money is the Middle East Institute, which, in addition to being generally pro-Saudi, is also home to "adjunct scholar" and former ambassador Joseph Wilson IV, whom columnist Mark Steyn recently described as "the fellow at the center of the Bob-Novak-published-the-name-of-my-CIA-wife scandal." Among other things, Wilson tried to debunk the accounts of two or more European intelligence agencies that Saddam Hussein had tried to buy uranium in Africa, accounts which, by the way, those intelligence agencies still defend, Mr. Wilson's objections notwithstanding. And when he failed to get the response he desired from the Bush administration, Wilson then, in the words of Steyn, "wrote a big whiny piece in the *New York Times* after the White House declined to accept his assurances there was nothing going on." The Saudis, by the way, like Wilson, opposed the war with Iraq.

Anyway, I could go on about the close Saudi connections with America's enemies in the war on terror. But the point is that the Saudis are a major problem, and it is likely that the ultimate aims of the war on terror cannot be met until this problem is addressed. And if nothing else, the Rumsfeld memo acknowledges this, which is why it represents a very important watershed in the administration's approach to the war.

This, of course, will be extremely difficult. The Saudi royal family has been a long time ally of the United States, includes many members who are personal friends with the Bush family and countless other Washington big shots, and governs America's largest supplier of oil. Additionally, Saudis have poured hundreds of billions of dollars in direct and passive investment into the United States. And there is concern that any effort to deal more directly with the Saudi terror connections could jeopardize a good chunk of that investment.

But easy or not, the United States government will eventually have to deal with this issue. At least we now know that Donald Rumsfeld, for one, understands this.

THE POLITICAL FORUM

Copyright 2003. The Political Forum. 8563 Senedo Road, Mt. Jackson, Virginia 22842, tel. 540-477-9762, fax 540-477-3359. All rights reserved. Information contained herein is based on data obtained from recognized services, issuer reports or communications, or other sources believed to be reliable. However, such information has not been verified by us, and we do not make any representations as to its accuracy or completeness, and we are not responsible for typographical errors. Any statements nonfactual in nature constitute only current opinions which are subject to change without notice.