

The Political Forum

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

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[Editor's note: When this article was first published 16 years ago it was preceded by the following paragraph, with a slight modification at the beginning.]

This is the last installment of Mark Melcher's three-part simulated interview with George Bush, prompted by his feeling that in Bush's recent interview with David Frost on PBS, Frost's questions were dumb and Bush's answers fit the questions.

This note was, of course, for the benefit of what turned out to be a surprising number of readers who were convinced that the prior week's "interview" had actually occurred. I had thought at the time that no one would fail to recognize the story for what it was— a literary device that helped me explain in an entertaining way what I thought the president really thought about the issues of the day. The first "interview" dealt with economic issues, the second with foreign policy. This one was about politics.

A CANDID INTERVIEW WITH GEORGE BUSH: PART III

Mark L. Melcher

Me: You just said you definitely will run for president again in 1992. What do you think your chances are of winning?

The President: It depends on the economy. If the economy holds together, I'll win big. If it doesn't, it'll be closer, but I'll still win.

Me: You think if the economy goes to hell between now and 1992 you could still be reelected?

The President: Well, it depends on how bad things were to get. But, the Democrats have had a propensity to run losers ever since 1972 when they ran George McGovern. I don't think that will change between now and 1992. So yes, I think I'd have a very good chance to win even if the economy were in the tank.

Me: Why are you so confident the Democrats will run another loser in 1992?

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The President: Their selection process favors losers. Following the 1968 Chicago convention in which Hubert Humphrey was nominated over the objections of the "peace" movement, the Democrats changed their rules so every conceivable minority group was given power at the expense of middle-of-the-road party stalwarts, who could and would deliver large voting blocks of Middle America during the general election.

To buy off Jesse Jackson at the convention last year, Dukakis liberalized the rules even more. Today you can't get the Democratic nomination without kowtowing to every nutso, fringe group in the nation, including transvestite quarterbacks. This costs them the most important voting block, the low to lower middle income white voters--the Joe Sixpacks and their wives, the ethnic Northern urban Catholics, the blue collar voters in the South and West. This is the great swing vote, they vote "for the man," not the party, and they won't vote for a liberal.

Me: Do the data back you up on this?

The President: According to The Gallup organization, the last Democrat who received more than half of the white vote in this country was Lyndon Johnson in 1964. Michael Dukakis took only 41% of the white vote against me in 1988. And this was the best a Democratic presidential candidate has received since Jimmy Carter who took 46% in 1976.

Incidentally, I took 18% of the non-white vote last year, which was the highest percentage any Republican has received since Richard Nixon carried 32% in 1960, when he lost to Jack Kennedy.

Me: I don't doubt for a minute that the Democrats won't be able to beat you in 1992 if the economy keeps humming along. But I still have some doubts that you could win if we are in recession then, or just coming out of one.

The President: Well, obviously, anything can happen in politics. But take a look at the Democratic track record by region. In the past five presidential elections, that is, since 1968, only eight mainland states west of the Mississippi have voted for a Democrat--Minnesota in every race (but, of course, part of Minnesota is east of the Mississippi); Texas in 1976 and 1968; Washington in 1988 and 1968; Missouri, Arkansas, and Louisiana in 1976; and Oregon and Iowa last year.

A Democratic candidate has carried the deep South only once during that time, in 1976, when Carter did it. Other than that, the South has belonged entirely to the GOP, except when Jimmy delivered Georgia for Mondale in 1980, and George Wallace carried five deep-South states in 1968, while Humphrey carried Texas.

As for the industrial Great Lakes states, they're no lock for the Democrats either. The Democrats haven't won Illinois or Indiana in twenty years. And they've won Ohio only once (in 1976) and Pennsylvania twice (in 1976 and 1968).

Entire regions of this nation simply will not vote for a liberal Democrat for president, and, as I said earlier, the Democrats are not capable of nominating a moderate.

Me: So you don't think a moderate Democrat like Senator Bill Bradley from New Jersey could get the Democratic nomination? I think someone like him might give you a very tough race.

The President: I agree with you that Bill would be a tough opponent, if he were left to his own instincts. The problem he would have is that in order to get the Democratic nomination, he would have to say things that would end up making him, in the public's eye, look like a flaming liberal. Then he'd lose.

I frankly don't think Michael Dukakis started out anywhere near as liberal as he ended up. But the fringe elements of the Democratic party put their candidates through dozens of public ideological litmus tests, which drive them further and further left as the campaign progresses. They ask their own candidates whether they believe homosexual couples should be allowed to adopt children, then excoriate them if they don't say yes. We say it's a bad idea and the majority of the public agrees with us. And we win. The funny thing is that we don't even ask them the question. They ask themselves questions like that.

The best example of this was when Jimmy Carter went to Chicago and said he thought ethnic neighborhoods were very nice. Republicans didn't say a word. We have nothing against ethnic neighborhoods. But, Jimmy's own Democrats worked him over hard, asking him to define just exactly what he meant by such a statement. He ended up apologizing for it, alienating the ethnic neighborhoods and making himself look like a damn fool. With friends like that, Carter didn't need enemies.

Me: How about drugs, crime, poverty and other social problems? What if you make no headway between now and then on those issues?

The President: Well, to be frank with you, I doubt that I'm going to make those problems disappear in the next three years. The beauty of the social issues, however, is that they hurt Democrats more than they hurt us. Democrats are seen as soft on crime, criminals and drugs. And crime, criminals and drugs get worse as poverty worsens. So if my administration makes no gains against poverty, then crime, criminals and drugs get worse and we do better. Understand?

Me: Ah, yes sir, I believe I do. How about women? Or, to put it another way, the so-called gender gap?

The President: Well, the gender gap is a myth. Hubert Humphrey, in 1968, was the last Democrat to do better with women than the GOP. He received 45% of the female vote, Nixon received 43% and George Wallace received 12%. In fact, every Republican since that race has received more than half of the women's vote except Ronald Reagan in 1980. He got 49%. Carter received 44% and John Anderson 6%.

To the degree that there is a gender gap it is that we generally do better with men than we do with women. But we still do better with women than the Democrats do.

Me: Do you think the abortion issue will change this?

The President: It could. But I don't think so. We Republicans are back peddling on this issue just as fast as we can. My golly, I hardly say a word about it myself anymore. You see, it was a great issue for us when it didn't matter. We could say what the religious right wanted to hear and most women didn't really care because they could still get abortions anyway. But, following the recent Supreme Court decision, things have changed. The little ladies are mad. So, we're backing off. Republican politicians all over the country are backing off. We'll still take a little harder line on the abortion issue than the Democrats, so we won't lose the right. But we won't be a real threat. You know what I mean?

Me: Ah . . . yes sir. I guess I do know what you mean. But, isn't that a bit hypocritical?

The President: How many homeless people does Ted Kennedy put up at his house? It's politics, boy.

Me: But . . .

The President. You have any more questions?

Me: Ah . . . well . . . ah, yes sir. Well now. Let me see. If the Republican Party is so strong all across the nation, why do you do so poorly in the House and Senate?

The President: Middle America, which is the group that decides elections, likes to have a conservative in the White House and liberals in Congress for fundamentally selfish reasons.

They like a conservative in the White House because, in their eyes, Democrats are liberals and liberal presidents tend to go overboard promoting federal programs that costs them, Middle America, more than they receive in return. However, Middle America tends to send Democrats to Congress instead of Republicans, because when it comes to having their own personal representative in Washington, they want someone who will get into the thick of the on-going wealth redistribution battle and bring home the bacon. They figure Democrats are better at this than Republicans, since they invented the game. Why send a guy to Washington to personally represent you and your district who is ideologically cool to on-going redistribution programs?

But, I think that's changing somewhat. Why, Republican legislators today are every bit as aggressive as the Democrats in promoting federal pork barrel projects for the folks back home. It's hard to tell the difference anymore between Republicans and Democrats when it comes to having their hand in the old federal cookie jar.

Me: And that's the basis for your optimism?

The President: Well no, not really. And let me clarify something here. I'm not wildly optimistic, mind you. I am moderately optimistic. I think we'll pick up a seat or two in the 1992 elections, instead of losing seats, which is what usually happens to the party in the White House during the off year elections. And I think we could do very well in 1992 because the redistricting that will follow the 1990 census should move a dozen or so House seats from Democratic states to Republican states. Also, the Democrats will be defending 20 or so seats where they won by very thin margins last time.

You see, the principle reason Democrats continue to control Congress is that they have contorted and distorted the election laws of this great country so badly that it is almost impossible now to throw out an incumbent. In each of the last two congressional elections, only six congressmen who chose to run for reelection lost. To put it another way, the reelection rate in the House in 1988 was 98%. The Politburo has a higher turnover rate.

But, I believe there is a political realignment going on across the nation. The great white middle class is not only voting Republican in the presidential races, but they finally are beginning to call themselves Republicans. This is new. They used to say they were Democrats, but vote GOP in presidential races. Nationally, some 130 elected Democratic officials have switched to the Republican party since last November. It's slow, but it's happening.

Me: Well sir, on that optimistic note, I will say thank you for your time and your candor.

The President: Thank you, Mark. Let me say that I read your work regularly and think you are clearly the most astute political observer on the scene today. Indeed I would call you brilliant.

Me: Why thank you sir. My mother certainly agrees with you.

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