

Editorials



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Linda Chavez



Republicans should unite behind McCain

The bitter squabbling on the right over the presidential nomination has entered a dangerous phase. Politics is about winning elections, not winning prizes for ideological purity. Do the conservatives who consider John McCain an apostate really believe their cause will be better served by having Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama in the White House? Their truculence at the point when Republicans should be uniting is almost guaranteed to produce that result.

To his credit, Mitt Romney was not willing to make that gamble. "I cannot let my campaign be a part of aiding a surrender to terror," Romney told a group of conservatives at the CPAC conference on Thursday. "If this were only about me, I'd go on. If I fight on in my campaign, all the way to the convention, I would forestall the launch of a national campaign and make it more likely that Sen. Clinton or Obama would win," he said.

"But I entered this race because I love America," he added. "And because I love America, in this time of war, I feel I have to stand aside for our country and our party."

Now the question is: Will the hard-line anti-McCainites do the same? Consider the alternative — what a Democrat will mean for conservative principles.

Both Clinton and Obama committed to pulling out of Iraq, regardless of the consequences. The only difference is that Obama wants to pull out immediately, and Clinton says she wants the troops out within a year of taking office.

If Clinton or Obama is president, either one will nominate judges to the Supreme Court who favor unlimited abortion rights and government funding for abortion.

A president Clinton or Obama will expand the size of government and raise taxes to pay for that expansion.

John McCain, on the other hand, is committed to winning in Iraq. He supported putting in more American troops to accomplish that goal, at a time when even some Republicans were quietly talking about exit strategies. And he understands that the fight against Islamo-fascism today is as important as the fight against communism in the 20th century.

On the signature issue of social conservatism — abortion — McCain's lifetime record speaks for itself. He sponsored the ban on federal funding of abortion in 1987. He consistently has supported parental notification for minors seeking abortions. He also opposed partial-birth abortion, voting not only to support the ban, but twice to override President Bill Clinton's veto of the legislation when he was in office. The National Abortion Rights Action League gives McCain a 0 percent rating.

And on economic issues, his lifetime record is one of opposing tax increases, favoring tax cuts and importantly, skewering even his fellow Republicans when they engaged in pork-barrel spending.

The last thing McCain should do now is to try to remake himself in order to satisfy his most vituperative critics on the right. The man endured five years of imprisonment and torture by the communists in Vietnam. Somehow I don't think hot air from Rush Limbaugh and Ann Coulter will make him repudiate what he believes in now.

And if it did, McCain would lose his strongest advantage — namely a reputation as someone with true convictions. You don't have to agree with him on every issue. But at least you know he is not willing to say anything just to get elected. In this era of poll-driven politics, it's refreshing to be able to rely on a candidate's word.

Conservatives could stay home in November — and some notable conservatives are threatening to do just that. If so, they will hand the election to the Democrats. But surely most conservatives understand that their principles and values will advance a lot further under a President McCain than a President Clinton or Obama.

There's a lot of time between now and Election Day for anti-McCain conservatives to come to their senses. But, the sooner, the better.

Linda Chavez is the author of "An Unlikely Conservative: The Transformation of an Ex-Liberal" and a columnist with Creators Syndicate.

From the Bible

"O Lord, God of our fathers, are You not the God who is in heaven? You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations. Power and might are in Your hand, and no one can withstand You."

2 Chronicles 20:6

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Cracking the tax code

To win votes, candidates highlight areas where they disagree. So throughout this election year, we're sure to hear plenty about the differences between the presidential hopefuls.

But back in Washington, politicians have an opportunity to make progress on an issue where there is actually broad consensus: tax policy.

Leaders from across the political spectrum say they want to fix the tax code. President Bush already has done some heavy lifting, muscling through much-needed tax cuts in 2001 and 2003. He also convened a panel on tax reform in 2005, although he hasn't pressed Congress hard enough to implement its recommendations. Meanwhile, Democratic Rep. Charlie Rangel, chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, says he wants to "erase" the entire tax code and come up with one that generates just enough income to fund the federal government.

As the computer programmers say, however, "garbage in, garbage out." Before we can improve the tax code, we have to make sure policymakers are getting good information. For the time being, they aren't — and the bogus data they are getting is costing taxpayers plenty.

Every year the Congressional Budget Office predicts how much the federal government will take in through taxes and how much it will spend. Lawmakers use these forecasts in deciding how much to spend — and how to pay for that spending.

There are two major problems with the CBO's crystal ball: First, it assumes that any expiring tax provisions — such as the 2001 and 2003 tax cuts — won't be renewed, although it's difficult to imagine that most, if not all, won't. At the same time, the CBO assumes that federal spending will continue at the current level even for programs that are scheduled to expire. In short, the process is set up to favor higher taxes and greater federal spending.

The error of this approach became especially clear last year when lawmakers spent months wrangling over the Alternative Minimum Tax. The AMT is a parallel tax, set up in 1969 to punish a few dozen millionaires who paid no income taxes.

However, the AMT doesn't take inflation into account — and so it's been gradually snaring more and

more people. Late last year, lawmakers finally agreed to extend a "patch" for another year to prevent the AMT from tapping the wallets of about 18 million more taxpayers this year. Good thing. The patch prevented what would have been a \$51 billion tax increase.

But because of the CBO's approach, lawmakers were told the patch would "cost" the government \$51 billion, even though this is money the federal government has never collected before. Those who say "you can't lose what you never had" obviously don't work for the CBO.

Regardless of political affiliation, lawmakers certainly can agree that they need the best, most objective information available to make their decisions. So this year, Congress should insist that the CBO change its policies and present only unbiased information.

The CBO should treat tax policies and spending policies the same way, using a consistent set of rules based on current policy assumptions. Since higher taxes tend to slow down an economy (contrast Europe's growth over the last decade with our own), we need to eliminate any bias that would wrongly encourage lawmakers to boost taxes.

During the next president's term, tax policy will become even more critical as spending on the big entitlements — Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid — grows steadily. We need to keep our economy growing so we'll have a solid tax base, built on reasonable projections, for the new president to build on. For now, though, we're geared toward higher taxes — and higher spending. That's got to change.

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Edwin Feulner



David Limbaugh



The GOP can't afford more liberal leaders

I suppose I could be accused of over-dramatizing, but I truly worry about the direction this nation is headed when contemplating a presidential race where the choices are liberal and liberal-light. If John McCain is the GOP nominee, that's what we'll be faced with, despite the Herculean efforts of some to spin it otherwise.

In that case, the presidential candidates of both parties would be willing to use the bully pulpit and governing power of the presidency to suppress political speech, punish producers, oil companies and drug companies, open wider our borders, cater to the whacko environmental movement and its junk-science-driven pseudo-consensus on global warming, nominate judges who don't "wear their conservatism on their sleeve," close Gitmo, confer constitutional civil liberties on enemy combatants, end life-saving interrogation techniques, demonize evangelical conservatives, and obstruct efforts of conservative Republican legislators.

It is also distressing that many conservative commentators are so deeply mired in rationalization in order to spin their support for John McCain.

Sure, if I'm a paid staffer for McCain or a high-school debater forced to take the affirmative side of the proposition that McCain is a conservative, I can make a colorable case — intellectual honesty be damned — that he's a conservative. But I am under no such constraints.

Getting 50 endorsements from well-placed Republican officials or even respected conservatives doesn't make McCain conservative. Being a conservative makes one a conservative. I bet, truth be told, McCain can't even stand the word.

How quickly we forget that McCain said conservative evangelicals are "agents of intolerance" and that social issues just aren't his thing.

How readily we overlook that his environmental and immigration policies alone contradict his self-identification as a budget hawk.

How quickly we forget that he really was just one of two Republican senators who actively opposed the Bush tax cuts, which, despite liberal disinformation, led to sustained economic growth.

How blindly we're willing to overlook McCain's fib that he opposed the cuts because they weren't coupled with guaranteed spending cuts. That was most certainly not the thrust of his opposition to the cuts — and he knows it. The facts are available for all to see. He opposed the cuts because he said, quite dishonestly, that they were skewed in favor of the wealthy. That, "my friend," is apparently what he means by "straight talk."

McCain has no abiding loyalty to conservative principles. His loyalty is to John McCain.

If he captures the nomination and then goes on to win the election after leading the charge for open borders and against the Bush tax cuts, can you imagine how liberally he'll govern? How long do you think it will take for him to abandon his opportunistically acquired, more restrictive immigration policy when he has already stated that he hasn't changed his position at all? It's time for Rod Serling to bring us back from the Twilight Zone.

With McCain's many liberal predispositions and his craving for approval from elitist liberal circles, how likely is it that he will be able to resist the temptation to govern so as to please The New York Times? Would the Old Gray Lady have endorsed McCain had she believed he had actually converted to the supply — er, dark side? Would this most liberal of liberal print-publication giants eulogize McCain if he hadn't established himself as a persistent annoyance to the Republican Party and conservatism?

Would the liberal commentariat in general be salivating over McCain if he'd seen the error of his quasi-liberal ways?

It would be one thing for a Democratic president to rail against capitalism, slander those as racists and bigots who want to protect the unique American culture and safeguard our national security through prudent protection of our borders and rule of law, routinely pay homage to the gods of global warming, and use the tax code as a weapon against achievement and realization of the "American dream." But for a Republican, also falsely labeled as a conservative, to do it would be tragic.

We've already gone far enough in that dangerous direction under Republican administrations. We can't afford to go any further.

No matter how freely both parties have neglected the essential principles of limited republican government established in our Constitution, and no matter how foolishly we assume our unique experiment in constitutional self-rule will thrive even if we continue to reject the constitutional principles underlying it, we can destroy ourselves just as quickly from within as our enemies can destroy us by force.

We can't ever expect the ultra-liberal modern Democratic Party to vigilantly safeguard the pillars of self-government that guaranty our liberties. We have no choice, then, but to work to bring home the GOP and its principal leaders, to conservatism.

David Limbaugh is a writer, author and attorney. His twice-weekly commentary is distributed by Creators Syndicate.

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