

Viguerie to the GOP: Fuhgedaboutit

by *Bill Berkowitz*

A GOP defeat could benefit conservatives, says New Right founding father and king of conservative direct mail, Richard Viguerie

"In the early 1990s, they talked about a culture of corruption by the Democrats and how they were abusing their power. Lo and behold, that seems to be what the Republicans have engaged in. It's very, very hard to tell conservatives that there really is a significant difference on most issues between this crowd and the Democrats." -- Richard Viguerie, San Francisco Chronicle, October 8, 2006

With the Republican Party in disarray and control of the U.S. Congress at stake in the upcoming November elections, a host of top-shelf conservative Christian leaders are still sticking with the GOP despite the Foley Scandal and the quagmire in Iraq. However, Richard Viguerie, widely recognized as one of the founding fathers of the modern conservative movement, has a different message for conservatives.

While he isn't advocating a Republican defeat in November, in interviews, in a new book and in an essay in a liberal monthly publication, Viguerie has been making the argument that defeat could be better for the conservative movement in the long term. He recently told progressive radio talk show host Laura Flanders that he has "lived long enough" so that he "no longer fear[s] defeat." In fact, Viguerie added, "Many times, if not most of the times, our best success has come after defeat."

Although Viguerie's stance isn't new, it is receiving a lot more media attention these days.

Two years ago, less than a week before the presidential election, Viguerie told Bill Moyers, then the co-host of PBS's "Now", that after George W. Bush won the election, "somewhere around... the morning after the election... the war starts for the heart and soul" of the Republican Party.

"It's gonna be a war," Viguerie predicted. A war "between the traditional conservatives, those who identify with Ronald Reagan, people like myself. And, the big government Republicans. And then also maybe the neo-cons."

Viguerie pointed out that the defeat of Republican Senator Barry Goldwater in 1964, the resignation, in light of the Watergate scandal, of President Richard Nixon in 1974, and the defeat of President Gerald Ford in 1976 "swept away most of the older Republican leaders."

Those defeats "allowed younger [leaders] like [former Speaker of the House] Newt Gingrich and Ed Feulner [the head of the Heritage Foundation] and other young conservatives to rise up to positions of leadership that normally would have taken another 20 years to happen."

Nearly two years later, in the October issue of *The Washington Monthly*, Viguerie and six other "prominent conservatives" contributed essays posted under the title, "Time For Us To Go: Conservatives on why the GOP should lose in 2006." Contributors included Christopher Buckley -- "Let's quit while we're behind"; Bruce Bartlett -- "Bring on Pelosi"; Joe Scarborough -- "And we thought Clinton had no self-control"; William A. Niskanen -- "Give divided government a chance"; Bruce Fein -- "Restrain this White House"; Jeffrey Hart -- "Ideology has taken over"; and Viguerie -- "The show must not go on."

"Of course, all of them [the writers] wish for the long-term health of conservatism, and most are loyal to the GOP. What they also believe, however, is that even if a Speaker Pelosi looms in the wings, sometimes the best remedy for a party gone astray is to give it a session in the time-out chair," the introduction to the forum maintains.

While all of these men have strong conservative credentials, none of them represent conservative evangelical Christians, who remain adamant about sticking with the president. One of the essayists who over the years successfully has bridged the gap between social and economic conservatives is Richard Viguerie.

In his essay, Viguerie maintained that: "The Big Government Republicans in Washington do not merit the

support of conservatives. They have busted the federal budget for generations to come with the prescription-drug benefit and the creation and expansion of other programs. They have brought forth a limitless flow of pork for the sole, immoral purpose of holding onto office."

"They have expanded government regulation into every aspect of our lives and refused to deal seriously with mounting domestic problems such as illegal immigration. They have spent more time seeking the favors of K Street lobbyists than listening to the conservatives who brought them to power," he argued. "And they have sunk us into the very sort of nation-building war that candidate George W. Bush promised to avoid, while ignoring rising threats such as communist China and the oil-rich 'new Castro,' Hugo Chavez."

Viguerie argued that over the past 40-plus years, when conservative candidates were soundly defeated it has invariably led to the building of the conservative movement.

The resounding defeat suffered by Goldwater at the hands of President Lyndon Johnson in 1964 "cleared a lot of dead wood out of the Republican Party...[which] made it easier for us to increase our influence on the GOP, utilising new technology, more effective techniques, and fresh ideas."

Likewise, "the Watergate scandal in 1974 eliminated more of the Republican officeholders who had stood in the way of creating a more broad-based party, ...dramatically weaken[ing] the party establishment, [without which] Ronald Reagan would never have been able to mount a nearly-successful challenge, two years later, to an incumbent president of his own party."

The defeat of Jimmy Carter showed the country that conservatives -- led by Reagan -- could win national elections, and win them big.

And, the 1992 election of Bill Clinton "led directly to the Republican takeover [of Congress] two years later."

In addition to his magazine piece, Viguerie, the chairman of American Target Advertising, Inc., and the president of ConservativeHQ.com: The Conservative Headquarters, has written a book titled "Conservatives Betrayed: How George W. Bush and Other Big Government Republicans Hijacked the Conservative Cause" (Bonus Books, 2006), which further explains his thesis that the conservative movement can sometimes end up in a better position after losing an election than it does by winning.

Not everyone, however, agrees with Viguerie's analysis. "Conservative Christians are somewhat disenchanted with Republicans," Kenyn Cureton, vice president for convention relations with the executive committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, the nation's largest Protestant denomination, recently told the Associated Press, but there is no indication that he is advocating conservatives sit out the election.

While expressing his frustration at the Republican Party during the Stand for the Family rally at the Mellon Arena in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in late-September, Dr. James Dobson, the founder of Focus on the Family, told the estimated 3,000 people in attendance that despite his misgivings, they should stick with the Republicans.

"I have flat-out been ticked at Republicans for the past two years," he said. But, "this country is at a crisis point. Whether or not the Republicans deserve the power they were given, the alternatives are downright frightening."

In 2001, when Karl Rove and Bush "came to town... they seemed to adopt a one-word strategy for government and that one-word strategy is bribery," Viguerie told Laura Flanders. "The legal theft that the Republicans have engaged is immoral."

"Forty to fifty percent of the conservative leaders that I talk to at the national and state level either want the Republican to lose in November, or are ambivalent about it."

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