

OpinionJournal

from THE WALL STREET JOURNAL *Editorial Page*

OUTSIDE THE BOX

Pursue Happiness, Vote GOP

The real reason Republicans win.

BY PETE DU PONT

Monday, November 29, 2004 12:01 a.m.

A prescient friend among serious Democrats explained last week what was wrong with his party and how it had contributed to liberalism's defeat on Nov. 2. He believes a growing majority of Americans simply don't trust Democrats because Democrats don't trust Mr. and Mrs. America to make sound decisions for themselves and their families.

Blue-collar Americans believe liberals are anti-Christian and seek to suppress all public expression of religious beliefs, including school prayer. That they are amoral--or, as Irving Kristol once said, a liberal is someone who thinks it is all right for an 18-year-old girl to perform in a porn film so long as she is paid the minimum wage.

Liberals see themselves as self appointed Robin Hoods, but they are seen by red-county Americans as taking from the productive and giving to the indolent. They look down on average Americans as misguided and

too dumb to know what is good for them and their families. Since such people are unlikely to make the right decisions, a wise government must do it for them. And of course the bigger the government, the better.

An equally serious friend on the other side of the political spectrum says the acrimony of the past four years may have been intensified by social issues, but it is the economic issues that are determining the outcome of elections. He believes the liberal left may actually be winning on the social issues--that gay rights and stem-cell research, for example, are trending in their direction--but that liberals have suffered a wholesale rout on their economic beliefs. They were wrong about communism (it was an economic failure), wrong about socialism (it didn't work either), wrong about the welfare state, wrong about high taxes and government regulation of economic matters.

But what was determinative in this election was not that one party is a religious party and the other is not; nor that one party is in favor of same-sex marriage and the other is not; nor that liberals are for raising the minimum wage and gun control and conservatives are not.

What was determinative is that the two political parties view the American people very differently. The Republican Party has become the party of individualism, believing that free enterprise, market economies, and individual choices give people the best chance of a good life; that if ordinary Americans are left alone to make their own decisions, they will generally be good decisions, so they--not the government--should have the power to make them.

Conversely, the Democratic Party is the party of centralization, believing that a wise and benevolent, best-

and-brightest, urban blue-county government can make better choices than those of rural, red-county Americans. This is not a new belief; it is the legacy of the 1930s (the New Deal) and the '60s (the Great Society). It was fully reflected in John Kerry's campaign: Taxes must rise and government must grow; trade must be regulated and limited; the 1935 Social Security system is perfect and nothing about it may be changed.

But America today is very different than in the '30s and '60s. Socialism is dying; collectivism is vanishing. Market economies have overtaken government-run ones around the globe. Life expectancy is increasing; inflation-adjusted median family income is up 24% in 20 years; 69% of American families own their own homes, and 52% own stocks, bonds or other financial instruments. Americans have expanded their vision and abilities and prospered; we have become an opportunity society where individualism is far more important than centralization. People want to be a part of that progress, to participate in the pursuit of happiness.

And so red-county Americans resent elitists, Hollywood, the establishment media and the Democratic Party telling them they can't participate:

- That taxes must always be higher, never lower, because in the words of one traditional Democrat "I want the government to have the money."
- That Americans should be protected from free trade, because lower-cost foreign goods in the marketplace interfere with higher-priced American ones.
- That you should not be allowed to invest some of your Social Security taxes in a personally owned account that will grow over your lifetime and give you some asset ownership upon your retirement, because it is a bad thing for you to have such assets.
- That allowing parents to choose the best school for each of their children is also a bad thing; you might make the wrong choice, so it is better that government make the choice for you. Or in the words of former teachers

union president Keith Geiger, why should some children be allowed to "escape" from bad public schools?



Rather than applauding Hillary Clinton's telling them last summer that their taxes must be raised because "we're going to take things away from you on behalf of the common good," they prefer Newt Gingrich's observation that the Declaration of Independence's Pursuit of Happiness includes an active verb: "Not happiness stamps; not a department of happiness; not therapy for happiness. Pursuit."

If the Democratic Party allows itself to be defined by Ted Kennedy, Michael Moore and the editorial page of the New York Times, while Republicans, their president and their strengthened congressional majorities encourage the pursuit of happiness in an opportunity and ownership society, then Mr. and Mrs. America will make sure conservatives are in power for a great many years to come.

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