

The Republican Convention Charade – *“Fool Me Once, Shame on You; Fool Me A Second Time . . . You Can’t Fool Me A Second Time”*

The more I watch the Republican convention, the more confused I get:

What do these people really stand for?

The opening invocation at the Republican convention was presented by a Muslim imam reading passages from the Holy Koran. But the official platform adopted at the Texas Republican Convention categorically states “the United States of America is a Christian nation,” which is “based on the Holy Bible.” Thus, the official Texas Republican Party platform reveals the duplicity of the convention created pretense that Republicans really believe the Holy Koran is a legitimate source of religious guidance and blessing and that adherents to the Islamic faith are welcome here. Who do these people think they’re going to fool?

At the convention I heard Laura Bush praise her husband for funding embryonic stem cell research. But the official platform of the Texas Republican Party flatly calls for a total ban on all “government funding of embryonic stem cell harvesting,” and “opposes any legislation what would allow for the destruction of human embryos for medical research.” what’s more, the platform demands that financial support and other campaign contributions be withheld from anyone who does not support that position (such as, according to First Lady Laura Bush, the President). So, are we clear on the party’s position on the funding of embryonic stem cell research?

Speaking of First Lady Bush, I also heard her commend the work being done by the Bush Administration’s Department of Education in administering the No Child Left Behind program (which, by the way, the Administration refuses to fund). Problem is, the official platform of the Republican Party of Texas calls for abolition of the Department of Education and “the prohibition of the transfer of any of its functions [such as administration of the No Child Left Behind program] to any other federal agency.” So are they for it, or agin’ it?

Mayor Guilliani lavishly acclaimed George Bush for passage of the Patriot Act. The Texas Republican Party, on the other hand, declared in its platform that “the current greatest threat to our individual liberties is the overreaching government controls established under the guise of preventing terrorism” – in other words, the Patriot Act – and acknowledged that many of that Act’s provisions “erode constitutional rights and essential liberties of citizens.” So, so-called Patriot Act – good or bad as far as Republicans are concerned?

Republican conventioneers also tout the presidential executive order which implemented some of the 9/11 Commission recommendations to improve national intelligence gathering. The platform of the Texas Republican Party, on the other hand, demands that those executive orders be rescinded.

And while insisting during the convention that President Bush was simply acting in accordance with congressional authorization (albeit, obtained under false pretense) when sending troops to invade Iraq, the Texas Republican Party “charges Congress to repeal the War Powers Act.” So is

Congress supposed to have a role in deciding whether American soldiers are ordered to conduct a “pre-emptive war” or not?

Speaking of Iraq, now why did we invade that country when we did the way we did (essentially by ourselves, thereby losing the respect of virtually the entire world). At the time we were told the reason was because there was an imminent threat that Sadaam Hussain was going to use weapons of mass destruction (it turns out he didn't have) against us. Now the Administration tells us that wasn't the real reason for this nation's first-ever “pre-emptive strike” against a sovereign nation after all – it was, instead, that Sadaam was a bad guy who needed to be gotten rid of for the sake of “liberating” the Iraqi people from the oppressive regime he headed. And the reason the Iraqi people haven't welcomed us with roses as we were promised is that our success was too “catastrophic.” Could somebody in the Republican Party please pick one story about why we invaded Iraq when we did the way we did and stick with it? Was it to eliminate the threat of WMD? Or to disrupt the non-existent support of Al Qaeda by the Iraqis? Or because the Iraqi people wanted us to free them from the repressions of Sadaam? Or because the world would just be better off without Sadaam Hussain around any more? Or was there some other reason? If you're looking for a truthful answer about why we invaded Iraq when we did as we did, at the cost of so many American casualties, our international prestige, respect, and standing, and hundreds of billions of dollars desperately needed in this country to deal with serious domestic issues (like health care, and education, and jobs creation), you haven't heard it yet at the Republican convention.

And can we win the war on terrorism or can't we? (Flip-flop; flip-flop). Has the war in Iraq been a catastrophe or a success (“Mission Accomplished”)? According to President Bush, it's both – at the same time and in the same sentence; it's been a “catastrophic success.” (My dictionary defines “catastrophic” as “disastrous; calamitous”; a “catastrophe” is “a disastrous ruin; a great calamity, disaster, or misfortune”). So far, it looks to me like Iraq has been far more “catastrophic” than “success.”

Here's another question you get conflicting answers to from this Republican bunch: is it heroic to volunteer to be shipped overseas to fight in a shooting war and there to rescue a fellow soldier while bullets are flying all around? The President (and Senator John McCain, for example) say, yes, that is service deserving of medals. Conventioneers say, no, what John Kerry did in Vietnam was unworthy of recognition.

Do Republicans honor courage as a noble value or not? The backdrop behind their stage during the convention's first night's session featured the motto “A Nation of Courage.” What reveals courage – volunteering to command a boat patrolling the treacherous waters of the Me Cong delta during a shooting war (and, for that matter, then returning from combat and publically criticizing the nation's involvement in that immoral and unwinnable war) or using political influence to get a position in an Air National Guard unit (where the prospects of being sent to fight were incalculably minuscule) and not even showing up either for duty (so far as anybody in the unit can recall) or to take a physical exam so one could fly a combat mission if called upon to do so? What does the Republican Party think “courage” means? If you're looking for a leader with indicia of “courage” on his resume, is that George W. Bush or John F. Kerry? (And by the way, how is it that 150 people can recall precisely and vividly what an at-the-time unknown lieutenant was doing on a particular day or over a couple of tours of duty in Vietnam, but not one

single person can recall even seeing George W. Bush over an eight or nine month period of time at an Alabama Air National Guard meeting? At a minimum one must conclude that the service of one of those people was sufficiently out-of-the-ordinary – outstanding – to be memorable, while that of the other was entirely unimpressive, if it occurred at all.) So which is it, Republicans, do you honor valor or don't you?

And what about amending the Constitution to make family law issues a matter of federal government control, rather than a local matter for each state to deal with as it chooses. The convention pays lip service to the principle of federalism – that is, the notion that most matters should be left to the states to decide for themselves, rather than having the federal government impose its will on everybody. But, of course, on issues of marriage (and whether victims of corporate misconduct can be compensated for the injuries they suffer) the states can't be trusted to come up with the right answer themselves, so the federal government must take over, according to Republicans. And while many in the party demand the constitution be changed to ban gay marriage in any state in the union, every Republican speaker give a prime time slot at the convention during its first three days (except maybe Laura Bush, who hasn't taken a public position on the issue) all oppose such an amendment – including the Vice-President and his wife. So who are we to believe speaks for the Republican Party – the conventioners and the party platform writers, or the people the Republican Party has put on television in prime time to explain what the Republican Party stands for? What a charade!

Republicans showcased firefighters during the convention and (deservedly) praised their heroic efforts on September 11, 2001 – but slashed federal funding for first responders, causing the closings of many fire stations and elimination of police on the streets.

Likewise, Republicans pretend to support veterans at this convention. But look at what they have done to funding for veterans programs, such as VA hospitals and veterans benefits. It's shameful.

I remember four years ago, George Bush loudly and unequivocally condemning “nation building” (that is, using U. S. troops to establish democracies in sovereign foreign countries, like Iraq and Afghanistan). Now nation building is a good thing.

And all of that is only the tip of the iceberg. I could go on and on and on with examples of Republicans saying and portraying one thing and doing and standing for just the opposite. Like what ever happened to dismay over huge budget deficits? I haven't heard one single word at the convention about the economic catastrophe we're leaving for the next generation if we don't fix that looming disaster quickly. Or about creating jobs (or the fact that more than 1.5 million jobs have been lost during the years of the Bush Administration). Is economic security part of the Republican agenda or isn't it? No answers so far from this convention. And what's this party's plan to provide health care and affordable health insurance for the 48 million Americans without it? No word so far on that one, either. Or about the environment. Not one sentence spoken about that topic, at least not that I've heard.

Well, I think I'll answer my own question: what does this convention tell us about what Republicans really believe in? They kinda told us themselves in the musical overture that followed the opening invocation (a medley of Broadway show tunes generally designed to mis-

portray what Republicans stand for, with songs like *Can Do* from *Guys and Dolls*, about the virtues of gambling, or *America* from *West Side Story*, about Puerto Ricans wanting to immigrate to the United States – now there are two ideas Republicans really embrace!); “*There’s no business like show business*” they belted out at the opening of their convention, “*Let’s go on with the show!*”

And that’s just exactly what they’ve been doing.

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