

THE ANATOMY OF MYTH

HON. FORTNEY PETE STARK

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, December 6, 2004

Mr. STARK. Mr. Speaker, much has been written and said about the role "moral values" played in the outcome of the 2004 presidential election. I'd like to recommend the attached article from Sunday's Washington Post Outlook section to my colleagues. The author, Dick Meyer, Editorial Director for CBSNews.com, writes about how this focus on "moral values" is, "a neat theory—but wrong."

As many of us seek to evaluate this past election, I urge my colleagues to read this article. I agree with the author that this moral values perspective has been greatly overblown and does a disservice to a more thorough evaluation of the election.

[From washingtonpost.com, Dec. 5, 2004]

THE ANATOMY OF MYTH—HOW DID ONE EXIT POLL ANSWER BECOME THE STORY OF HOW BUSH WON? GOOD QUESTION.

(By Dick Meyer)

Social and intellectual conventions are supposed to settle slowly, but conventional wisdom can congeal instantly and without much wisdom. That's what has happened over the past several weeks with a prevailing interpretation of this year's presidential election—the great moral values theory.

The Big Political Idea of the '04 election goes something like this: "Moral values" turned out to be the most important issue to voters, not the economy or the Iraq war or terrorism. President Bush won because a legion of "values voters"—whose growing numbers escaped the attention of an inattentive media—preferred him. The Democrats are doomed until they can woo the voters who belong to this new political force.

It's a neat theory—but wrong. How it came to be regarded as the real story of Bush's victory is a fascinating and sobering example of journalism's quest for freshness and surprise.

Here's the simple fact: The evidence that moral values determined the election rests on a single dodgy exit poll question. And it's not at all clear that more voters are preoccupied with moral values now than were fretting about "family values" on Election Day 1996, when exit pollsters included that phrase in a question about "priorities for the new administration." But in the often arid and repetitive arena of American political ideas, fun new contestants can be hard to disqualify. The myth of the moral values election is proving hard to snuff out.

The mantra was in full hum on election night. Television commentators were understandably struck by the results of the question asked of almost 7,000 voters as they left their polling places: "Which one issue mattered most in deciding how you voted for president?" The most cited issue on the list of seven options offered to those surveyed was "moral values" at 22 percent; 80 percent of these voters went for President Bush, 18 percent for Democratic nominee John Kerry. "Economy/jobs" came next on the list at 20 percent, followed by terrorism (19 percent), Iraq (15 percent) and then health care, taxes and education in single digits.

Brian Healy was the CBS News producer covering the exit polls, something he has done in many elections. He recalled that everyone was surprised that moral values topped the list as the numbers came in, but it wasn't until about 4 a.m. that someone quite innocently asked, "What exactly are 'moral values'?"

Too late. The story line was already set. And the surprise nature of the moral values result boosted its allure for the commentariat. When the newspapers could finally write definitive headlines, the notion that moral values was a synonym for various conservative positions became a given—as did its decisive effect on the outcome of the contest. "Faith, Values Fueled Win," reported the Chicago Tribune. "'Values voters' key to Bush re-election," declared the Fort Worth Star Telegram. "Moral Values Decide Election," the Tri-Valley Herald in northern California told its online readers.

From the modest experiment of one exit poll question, a Unified Theory of Election 2004 was hatched. Pundits began to spread the word. "Ethics and moral values were ascendant last night—on voters' minds, in Americans' hearts," William J. Bennett wrote in a column posted in the National Review Online at 11:09 a.m. on the morning after the election—even before Kerry's concession and Bush's victory speech.

Several days later, American Prospect Executive Editor Michael Tomasky expressed the apocalyptic Democratic interpretation in his column: "The reelection of a president such as George W. Bush for the reasons the exit polls tell us he evidently won is a culminating event in the political retreat of modernity, a condition of existence whose fundamental tenet was the triumph of scientific skepticism over what used to be called 'blind faith.'" Wow.

And on CNN's "Crossfire," co-host Tucker Carlson opened the Nov. 5 show with this categorical assessment: "Three days after the presidential election, it is clear that it was not the war on terror, but the issue of what we're calling moral values that drove President Bush and other Republicans to victory this week."

Some reporters were even apologetic for missing the big story. "Somewhere along the line, all of us missed this moral values thing," said CNN's Candy Crowley in a speech to a Florida audience.

Political reporters may have many things to atone for, but missing "the moral values thing" is not one of them. Plenty of commentators have tried to spike this dogma (including me in one of my columns), but it has proved a stubborn adversary. Let's take another swing at it.

Yes, the issues boiled down into the code phrase "moral values" were a factor in this election. There are voters passionately concerned with gay marriage and abortion, and an overwhelming number of them supported President Bush. It's also clear that gay marriage ballot initiatives energized these voters, as did Republican efforts to get out that vote.

But the size and impact of that cohort has been exaggerated. And the impact of other issues (war, terrorism) and leadership qualities was minimized. That's mostly because of oddities in the exit poll, but also because this Big Political Idea conforms to what some Republican strategists are peddling (and their interpretation has the added credibility that winners get in writing history). It also fits neatly the red/blue, "Two Americas" school of thought, which projects the country as deeply divided and at war over cultural issues.

If the national exit poll had been worded differently, moral values would not have been the top issue and this argument wouldn't be happening.

If, for example, one of the choices on the exit poll list combined "terrorism" and "Iraq," it probably would have been the top concern and nobody would be talking about moral values.

If economy/jobs and taxes were one item instead of two, it might have been the win-

ner. Who knows what the exit poll would have found if "truth in government" were an option. Or "character."

And, most, importantly, the definition of moral values is in the eye of the evaluator. Most voters probably did think moral values meant being against gay marriage, stem cell research and late-term abortion; but others undoubtedly thought it meant helping poor people or not invading Iraq. For some, moral values may have referred to character attributes of the candidates. It is a bit of a Rorschach test. Moral values are not a discrete, clear political issue to be set next to taxes or terrorism; it's public-opinion apples and oranges.

Gary Langer, the polling director for ABC News who helped design the exit poll but objected to including the moral values option on the issues list, pointed out some of these flaws in a Nov. 6 op-ed for the New York Times. He argued that "this hot-button catch phrase had no place alongside defined political issues on the list of most important concerns in the 2004 vote. Its presence there created a deep distortion—one that threatens to misinform the political discourse for years to come."

Now, to the hard question: Are there more values voters than there used to be?

In 2000, the consortium that ran the national exit poll did not list "moral values" as an option on their issues menu. At that time, it would have been seen as a question about Bill and Monica, and so pretty useless. So it's hard to know whether the slice of the electorate concerned with such matters has grown during President Bush's term.

We do know that in the 1996 question about the next administration's priorities, "family values" was tops for 17 percent (behind the winner, "health of the economy," at 21 percent), and that group largely went for Bob Dole. So you could argue that the 17 percent whose top worry was family values and went heavily Republican turned into 22 percent worried about moral values in 2004. That's a slight shift, but hardly a cultural tsunami—and remember, no one asked these voters for their definition of family values then, or moral values now.

Nonetheless, analysts have been surfing on tidal-wave conclusions. It has become a breast-beating crisis for Democrats that the values voters who were 22 percent of the electorate went for the Republican by a crushing margin, 80 percent to 18 percent. By that logic, it must follow that it's a crisis for Republicans that the 20 percent who care most about the economy and jobs went 80-18 for the Democrat.

Or perhaps it's a crisis for the Republicans that the 45 percent slice of the electorate that describes itself as moderate went for Kerry 54-45? Or that first-time voters went 53-46 for Kerry? So many crises, so few facts to support them.

Voting behavior does divvy up Americans into certain patterns. Rural residents and heavy churchgoers vote Republican. City people and church-avoiders vote Democratic. But these cleavages have persisted in several elections. Moral values didn't just seep into the drinking water.

Yet the myth persists. Sometimes it's perpetuated by partisans claiming that Democrats are hostile to values voters. "There simply aren't enough voters in Berkeley, Santa Monica, Santa Fe, Manhattan and Cambridge to offset the many concerned evangelicals, Catholics and Jews in the rest of the nation for whom moral values are a determining issue," wrote Richard A. Viguerie and David Franke in a Nov. 15 Los Angeles Times op-ed.

Sometimes it's perpetuated by those looking at the red and blue divide. Even after many debunking pieces came out, a story in

the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle about strained relations in the Christian community noted that "it has gotten stickier than ever in the aftermath of a presidential election in which moral values played a key role in keeping George W. Bush in the White House."

A Nov. 22 op-ed in *Newsday* by political scientist Laura R. Olson also took off from the fatal assumption. "The much-touted exit poll finding that moral values were the most important Election Day concern of 22 percent of voters highlights the fact that a sizable number of Americans expect political leaders to offer a prophetic vision," she wrote. I'm not picking on her; that's just one example of many I could have cited.

Other scholars have tried to put the exit poll question in perspective. Lawrence R. Jacobs, a political science professor and director of the 2004 Election Project at the University of Minnesota, wrote: "The initial conclusion of media commentators that 'moral values' determined the outcome of the 2004 presidential election was off the mark, neglecting the impacts of partisanship and the economy."

Despite the best efforts of myth-busters, the moral values doctrine has morphed from a simple poll finding to a grand explanatory theory to gospel truth. This contaminated strain of punditry needs to be eradicated before it spreads further.

REMEMBERING REED IRVINE

HON. JOE WILSON

OF SOUTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, December 6, 2004

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, as America has experienced a presidential election marred by shocking media bias, it is a sad reminder how important Reed Irvine's visionary role has been to promote fairness. Never before has the need been greater with CBS News presenting forged military records as fact, with *The New York Times* contriving an October surprise hoax to slander America's troops, with multiple news organizations gleefully producing fraudulent exit polls to influence voters, and with the Public Broadcasting System hysterically forecasting on election night a coup by Bush supporters. Despite these attacks, the voters knew better and President Bush prevailed.

Fortunately, the propaganda purveyors have been unmasked by Reed Irvine with the assistance of courageous magazines, talk radio, bloggers, and Fox News.

It is particularly fitting that the below obituary was prepared by the noted and courageous, crusading journalist John Gizzi in *Human Events* for the week of November 22, 2004.

DEATH OF A WATCHDOG: REED IRVINE (1922–2004)

(By John Gizzi)

To many liberals in the media targeted by his pointed criticisms, Reed Irvine, the founder of *Accuracy in Media*, was a tormenter. But to his legions of friends and admirers he was the "Sergeant Joe Friday of the American media."

Following his death on November 16 from complications following a stroke, the 82-year-old Irvine was remembered as the conservative movement's pioneering media watchdog.

Born in Salt Lake City, Irvine graduated in 1942, at the age of 19, from the University

of Utah. He then joined the U.S. Navy, which taught him Japanese, and became an interpreter for the U.S. Marine Corps in the Pacific theater of war and in occupied Japan. Following his discharge, he did graduate work at the University of Washington and won a Fulbright scholarship to Oxford, where he earned a master's degree in 1951.

From 1951 until he retired in 1977, Irvine worked at the Federal Reserve Board. The topic of media bias dominated a group Irvine regularly lunched with and soon he founded *Accuracy in Media* to try to keep the national press honest.

Through op-ed pieces, lectures, in-depth studies, a regular newsletter and frequent appearances on radio and TV, Irvine provided evidence that the major media indeed had a liberal bias. The grassroots following he developed provided AIM with the resources to launch national campaigns against the "gods of the antennae." In 1983, for example, an AIM crusade convinced the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) to give equal time to AIM to rebut an hour-long special, *Vietnam: A Television History*.

In 1985, Irvine started *Accuracy in Academia* to combat leftist teachings at U.S. colleges.

For those outside the movement, Irvine may be best remembered for his spirited appearances at town hall meetings hosted by Ted Koppel on ABC's "Nightline." Perhaps the most poignant tribute to Irvine came from Koppel. "Reed Irvine was, at times, a harsh critic of the television news industry and me in particular," Koppel told *Human Events*, "but throughout the many years that I knew him, he was never anything but courtly and personally gracious. Just as I would insist that all other enterprises in our society benefit from the presence of a critical and fearless press, so, too, the press benefits from being held to high and occasionally harsh standards. Reed Irvine fulfilled that function to the greater good of all."

Irvine leaves his wife of 56 years, Kay Araki Irvine, son Don (who succeeded him as president of *Accuracy in Media*), and three grandchildren.

TRIBUTE TO JOAN EAGLESON

HON. ANNA G. ESHOO

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, December 6, 2004

Ms. ESHOO. Mr. Speaker, I rise to honor Joan Eagleson, who was recently honored with the highest award of Sacred Heart Schools, the St. Madeleine Sophie Medal by the Schools of the Sacred Heart in Atherton, California.

An extraordinary educator at St. Joseph's School, Joan has said her greatest teachers are the children she works with every day. The children are her delight and lifeline. Joan believes children are grounding and one has only to listen to their truth and see their beauty. Joan's ability to really hear children draws them to her and she is always there for them.

Joan received her MA in Counseling from the College of Notre Dame. Recognizing the need for children to be heard, she spearheaded the Middle School Advisory Program and the Rainbows Program. Joan is marvelous at helping children recognize the light and love in themselves. One student said, "Have you ever noticed how good you feel about yourself after talking with Mrs. Eagleson?" What better testimony to Joan's ability to bring out the best in a person.

When Sister Ann McGowan, RSCJ hired Joan 16 years ago, she was given the opportunity to teach and run the library. Joan recalls with gratitude Sister Helen Daly's mentoring. Sister Daly saw in Joan the capacity to become a bridge where children could find consolation and support in the new and mysterious world of books and learning. Anyone who has ever walked through St. Joseph's library can feel it is a welcoming place of comfort, warmth, trust and generosity. Joan doesn't fit the stereotype of the librarian who only says, "Shh, be quiet." Joan creates an atmosphere of enthusiasm for learning, a place where children have time to discover, to be curious, to be imaginative, to know the value of not knowing and then, of asking the question and knowing how and where to find the answer. Most importantly, Joan guides children to recognize that what is essential they have within.

When asked what she hoped for the children to learn at St. Joseph's School, Joan said, "the value of simplicity and balance in life; the value of time to be; the value of being present to the moment; the value of embracing life wholeheartedly; the value of working in community; the value of human touch; the value of experiencing joy in the process of learning."

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring this great and inspiring educator, Joan Eagleson, as she is honored with the St. Madeleine Sophie Medal.

RECOGNIZING THE MCGRAW HIGH SCHOOL LADY EAGLES ON THEIR SOCCER CHAMPIONSHIP

HON. SHERWOOD BOEHLERT

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, December 6, 2004

Mr. BOEHLERT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the McGraw High School Lady Eagles for their outstanding performance and their victory in the New York State Class D Soccer Championship.

The Lady Eagles won the title match with a 1–0 victory over Chateaugay on November 20th. Under the leadership of coaches John and Kathy Rutan, they concluded an amazing undefeated season with winning the state championship. Their impressive 24–0 record was the first perfect season for the Lady Eagles, as well as the first state title in school history.

I would like to recognize goalkeeper Christy Mott, forwards Taryn Bilodeau, Jen Rutan, and midfielder Laura Buerkle for their outstanding individual achievements. Christy Mott was awarded the State Tournament Class D Goalkeeper award, as well as an Honorable Mention in the Central Counties League All-Stars. Taryn Bilodeau, in addition to being named a Central Counties League All-Star, scored her 100th career goal this season, was named to the 2nd team in the Central New York All-Star voting, and the Section III Class D All-Star Team. Along with Bilodeau, Jen Rutan and Laura Buerkle shared Central Counties League All Star positions, as well as Section III Class D All-Star honors.

Their remarkable season is a testament to their dedication and commitment to the sport and to the character of these young ladies.