



*[Re: The Grand Old Party's Old New Grand Strategy,
And the Democrats' New Old Plan to Win by Default]*

Winning with strategy or by default?

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By Terry Michael

What a difference a year can make in the Grand Old Party's grand strategy for electoral success.

At the Republican National Committee's recent winter meeting, White House political savant Karl Rove informed attendees that terrorism, tax cuts and judicial philosophy are the trifecta issue frame for GOP glory in 2006. This message was also delivered by Rove's spokesman, President Bush, during his State of the Union address Tuesday.

Contrast that with RNC Chairman Ken Mehlman's formula for a "durable Republican majority" when he was elected exactly one year earlier. "We can deepen the GOP," Mehlman told RNC members on Jan. 20, 2005, "by identifying and turning out Americans who vote for president but who often miss off-year elections and agree with our work on behalf of a culture of life, our promoting marriage, and a belief in our Second Amendment heritage."

It's hard to know how serious Mehlman was about his pro-marriage, culture-of-life plan, considering that he's never been married and his co-chair supports abortion rights.

But, the 2004 Bush campaign, which Mehlman managed, was already hedging that marriage-and-life bet months earlier, when Dick Cheney discovered his gay daughter just before the Republican convention and Bush acknowledged that civil unions were OK by him about 10 days before the November balloting. Republicans know the religious right scares the tolerant center.

Well, timing is everything in politics. And strategists certainly have a right to alter their brilliant strategies, particularly after a disastrous war, a disastrous response to a natural disaster and after other disasters named DeLay and Abramoff left the road to a "durable Republican majority" a little rocky.

A presidential election principally turns on independent voters and congressional "mid-term" races are basically about a party's base. More casual less partisan Americans tend to perform fundamental citizenship duties only in quadrennial years, while professional voters, aligned with parties, are more likely to turn out every two.

Right now, the right-leaning professionals in the Republican Party may be a little disheartened, coming off Bush's rough 2005. So it would seem that Rove wants to light a fire under his base with the time-tested formula that has worked with the Republican faithful for decades: Democrats love taxes. Democrats are soft on Commies and - now - terrorists. And Democrats are anti-family sinners that keep good conservative judges from over-turning sinful decisions of bad liberals.

Logic would dictate that Democrats, beneficiaries of one of weakest hands dealt to Republicans since Watergate, would boldly start stoking their own base.

But the Democratic congressional leadership (is that a oxymoron?) still cowers when it sees its Cold War shadow, a ghost drawn by Republicans and regularly re-inked by the Washington-based Democratic neo-conservatives who gave us John Kerry and who me-too'ed Bush on Iraq. They can't seem to understand that Democrats have won the baby boom generation-dominated electoral center on socio-cultural issues, not at all like the Depression-era center that elected Nixon and Reagan.

So, instead of boldly opposing the madness in Iraq and firing up the base with unapologetic opposition to the Talibanic wing of the GOP, Democratic leaders have brilliantly concluded they can win in 2006 by hammering away at The Hammer and his friend, Mr. Abramoff (and perhaps serving up a little of the Religion Lite poured by the two-week governor of Virginia, Tim Kaine, in his response to Bush's State of the Union address).

Wake up! Voters think both parties are dollar-dishonest, thanks to the ethics industry in Washington and its media cohorts who live to suppress moneyed political speech they don't like.

But just because about 100 percent of likely voters tell pollsters they want money out of politics, that's not what they're going to vote on 10 months from now, when Abramoff is forgotten and/or conflated into a pox on incumbents in both houses and on both parties.

While Republicans are prepared to beat the brains out of Democrats with taxes and terrorism, my party apparently intends to win by default. But what else is new?

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