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September 28, 2005
Right Loses Its Way, Now Its Mind
By [Terry Michael](#)

Republican "conservatives" have lost their way during the Bush big-spending era.

Now, they've lost their collective mind.

Pigging out at the pork barrel is nothing new for the congressional GOP. They've competed with liberal Democrats to bring home the bacon for years -- though they both went for the whole hog in this year's assault on the treasury.

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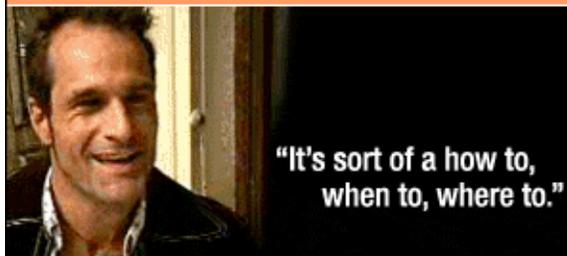
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The competition for the vote-rich middle of the electorate has turned formerly conservative Republicans into social welfare Democrats. Many in the party of Reagan apparently see no conflict between anti-government rhetoric and middle class neo-populist pandering (of the kind former Democratic Sen. John Edwards is peddling, in his perpetual presidential campaign.) A party that used to rail against socialized medicine has embraced prescription drug legislation, due to bloat an already busted-budget next January -- to satisfy both the ravenous appetites of elderly entitlement consumers and the corporate welfare aspirations of pharmaceutical manufacturers.

A party once steered by the conservative conscience of Barry Goldwater is now guided by the moral authority of electoral technologist Karl Rove.

Pandering to the center has caused the GOP to lose not only its ideological way. Now, in a transparent effort to appease its social cultural conservative base, the party has all but abandoned a principled intellectual critique of the role of government -- and lost its conservative soul. This week, the Administration's principal patronage operation, a.k.a. FEMA, announced plans for a vote-pandering outreach to "people of faith" -- apparently, faith in programmatic liberalism.

A party that once demanded an end to government welfare in favor of private charity now plans to pillage and plunder the public treasury to pacify its TV preachers, with reimbursements to "faith groups."

Not all the party's parsons wish to be bought off. The Rev. Flip Bingham, director of the anti-abortion group, "Operation Save America," was quoted in *The Washington Post* Tuesday as saying he'd never accept a dime from the federal government. "...[T]o ask for reimbursement would be like gouging for gas," he said. "That would be a crime against heaven."

The post-Katrina fumbling of the White House political operation, attempting to shore-up Bush's base by turning private charity into another government dole, may backfire. (A similar fate may be in store for the Louisiana congressional delegation's proposal for tens-of-billions in federal pork. Obscene even by Big Easy political standards, it may turn public sympathy to antipathy.)

Somewhere in heaven, with his mind restored, Ronald Reagan must be wondering how his party lost its.

Terry Michael founded and directs the Washington Center for Politics & Journalism, teaching college journalists about politics. A former Democratic National Committee press secretary, he has taught a journalism ethics-and-practice course at The George Washington University.

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