

## **DOES RUDY'S RISE REFLECT RELIGIOUS RIGHT'S DECLINE?**

**By Don Feder**

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Like the Olympics, it's a game that's played every four years. The media march out on the field in their ideologically matching blazers and try to convince the GOP to ditch social issues.

Their pitch goes something like this: Republican voters are far more moderate than their party's platform. The day of the religious right has come and gone. With pro-life, pro-marriage stands, the party alienates legions of voters who agree with it on taxes, spending and defense.

An article in the July 5 Wall Street Journal ("Giuliani Support Hints at Shift") argues, "Mr. Giuliani's lead in the polls – and the latest round of fundraising, according to new reports Tuesday – may hint at the declining clout of those voters (*religious and social conservatives*) and their issues within the Republican party, and perhaps a shift back toward a more libertarian emphasis," which would suit the Wall Street Republicans at the Wall Street Journal just fine.

"If so, Mr. Giuliani's candidacy could be helping to redefine the Republican party just as Ronald Reagan did in 1980, when pundits initially dismissed Mr. Reagan as too conservative for his party's mainstream."

How exciting. With Rudy, Republicans can redefine themselves as the party of what -- the much-married, sleeping-around, pro-gun control, gay-pandering, open-borders, personally-opposed-but-respect-a-woman's-right-to-choose? Wait a minute, the Democrats already occupy that terrain.

To support its thesis, the Journal article cites a pro-abortion Iowa state legislator who's on board the Giuliani campaign, former Iowa Congressman Jim Leach (the RINO di tutti RINOS), an Iowa state senator who describes himself as one of the "pro-life evangelicals" for Rudy (a group nearly as numerous as the Zionists for Hamas), and a computer programmer who attended a \$10-a-plate breakfast for the former mayor in Delaware and declared that the party's so-called focus on social issues in 2000 and 2004, made him very angry.

There's a real cross-section of the party for you.

I'm only surprised the Journal didn't drag out a hilarious new poll by the Republican Leadership Council, Republican Majority for Choice and the Brokeback Mountain Boys at the Log Cabin Republicans, which claims that not only do 72% percent of Republicans think "government should not control personal decisions on abortion," but that 49% want homosexuals to serve openly in the military, versus the 42% who don't want to turn Army barracks into fern bars.

Point of information: At which Manhattan cocktail party for trust-fund babies was this survey taken?

In Giuliani's lead in the Wall Street Journal/NBC News national poll, the article finds dramatic evidence that the GOP is abandoning Values Voters.

Let's see, in the poll cited, hizzoner has 29% -- compared to all of the other candidates who are actually or ostensibly pro-life (Thompson, Romney, McCain, Duncan Hunter, Tom Tancred, Ron Paul, etc) with the other 71%.

Thompson, who has yet to announce his candidacy, is only nine points behind Giuliani (20% vs. 29%). As the Journal admits, in Iowa, Mitt Romney – who claims to be a convert to the pro-life cause – beats Giuliani by almost 2-to-1 (30% to 17%).

A few things to consider in assessing the significance of pro-abortion Rudy's standing in the polls:

1. Giuliani does his best to downplay his position on abortion. He says he'll pick judges who are "strict-constructionists." In a recent Republican debate, when the candidates were asked as a group if overturning *Roe v. Wade* would be a "good thing," Rudy half-heartedly replied that "it would be okay," not "the greatest national tragedy to befall America" (as Hillary would say). But the mayor also observed that it would be okay if a "strict-constructionist judge" viewed *Roe* as a precedent (a contradiction in terms).
2. According to the Journal poll, most the Republicans (57%) don't know where Giuliani stands on abortion. This includes those who said the issue was "very important to them." So, the Journal thinks Rudy's rise reflects the waning of social conservatism among Republicans, but Republicans don't know where he stands on those issues.
3. In 2004, Protestant George Bush took a slight majority of the Catholic vote, notwithstanding his opponent's Frances Kissling Catholicism. We're 17 months away from the next election, and the Catholic bishops are already starting to savage Giuliani. Rhode Island Bishop Thomas Tobin calls the mayor's personally-opposed/but-respect-a-woman's right-to-choose stand "pathetic," "confusing" and "hypocritical."

The Journal resolutely maintains that Giuliani’s message “appeals to Republicans who fear a 2008 drubbing if the party focuses too narrowly on family-values issues, as it did in the past two presidential elections.”

That would be “the past two presidential elections” that the Republican Party *won* – as it did five of the last seven presidential elections in which it fielded a pro-life nominee against a pro-death Democrat.

The GOP was the party of perennial losers until 1980, when Ronald Reagan openly courted evangelicals (something Nixon and Ford would never have dreamed of doing).

At a Religious Roundtable rally, Reagan told thousands of assembled Southern Baptist preachers – “I know you can’t endorse me, but I endorse you.” As a result, Presbyterian Reagan got more Baptist votes than born-again Southern Baptist Jimmy Carter.

Fast forward to 2004. Evangelicals had grown to one-quarter of the electorate – the largest identifiable voting bloc in the country. Almost 80% of them voted for Bush, in a year when W. barely took a majority of the national vote. (Yup, the GOP should certainly steer clear of a group that votes as solidly Republican as welfare mothers vote Democratic.)

When he ran for reelection, Bush supported a federal defense of marriage amendment (defining marriage as the union of a man and a woman). His opponent did not.

In 2004, Bush barely carried the key battleground state of Ohio, with 51% of the vote. Had Kerry increased his margin slightly in the Buckeye state, he would have taken Ohio, had a majority of electoral votes and Al Gore would be Secretary of the Interior.

In the same election, as fate would have it, there was an anti-gay marriage amendment on the Ohio ballot – to name another issue dear to the hearts of conservative Christian voters.

It passed by 61% to 37% (versus 51% to 49% in the Bush/Kerry race). In 2004, hundreds of thousands of Values Voters went to the polls in Ohio to pass the defense-of-marriage amendment, and reelected Bush as an afterthought.

Republicans talked Values in three elections (2000, 2002 and 2004) – and won. By 2006, Values Voters were getting a little tired of a party whose rhetoric rarely matched its performance in office. Many decided Republican support for marriage and the unborn was confined to the campaign trail.

As a result, the number of conservative Christians who identified with the Republican Party fell from 74% in 2004 to 54% in 2006. In the last national election, Republicans lost both houses of Congress.

But, you don't need those "stinkin" Values Voters, the GOP's media mentors advise. You'll do just fine with Giuliani, who, as mayor, welcomed the "Gay Olympics" to the Big Apple, and opposes the Federal Marriage Amendment.

According to a 2004 Pew Research poll, 65% of voters oppose gay marriage, while 28% favor unnatural unions. Of those against same-sex marriage, 34% said they would not vote for a candidate who disagrees with them here. However, if the media has their way, voters won't have a choice on this wedge issue in 2008.

By the way, a few months ago, journalists were telling Republicans that voters would be furious if they failed to "fix"

immigration by passing another amnesty. A poll taken shortly after the amnesty bill went down in flaming defeat in the Senate showed only 22% of Americans favored the legislation. So much for the media having their hand on the public's pulse.

Instead of life, the family and marriage, the GOP's media friends recommend a renewed emphasis on economics and defense/foreign policy. Based on what – obscene budgets passed by Republican Congresses and signed into law by a Republican president, or a foreign policy that's given Bush a 26% approval rating?

Values issues are the heart and soul of the Republican Party. They are to the GOP today what opposition to the spread of slavery was to the party in 1860.

It's not how much mileage Republicans can get from an issue, but whether they can look themselves in the mirror at the end of the campaign.

Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, notes Ronald Reagan “transformed the presidency by demonstrating that conviction, rather than political calculation, would drive his decisions.” More than supply-side economics or confronting the Kremlin, the Reagan Revolution was a moral revolution.

There may be a division on issues like embryonic stem-cell research and hate-crimes legislation among Republican voters. But the party's activist base – the loyal cadre that stuffs envelopes, makes phone calls, rings doorbells, and gets out the vote – is single-minded.

Without conservative Christians, who will do the party's grunt work – country-club Republicans, denizens of the board

rooms who worship at the altar of Dow Jones or the libertarians who think a healthy economy can be built on the ruins of devastated families?

Every Republican leader claims the mantle of Ronald Reagan. Few even begin to understand him. Our 40<sup>th</sup> president had it right when he observed: “Politics and morality are inseparable. And, as morality’s foundation is religion, religion and politics are necessarily related.”

Winston Churchill said of the pragmatists of his era, who gave us Munich: “You have chosen peace over honor. You shall have neither.”

Life, the family, faith and morality speak to ultimate reality. The media would have Republicans give up the grandeur of truth for the grubby business of vote chasing. If they follow this advice, they shall have neither – votes nor truth.

*A version of this appeared at [www.GrassTopsUSA.com](http://www.GrassTopsUSA.com)*