

Is Our Red and Blue Nation Changing Colors?

Vin Weber

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This is a little different speech than I thought I was going to be giving yesterday afternoon. I'd been seeing the exit polls that had been leaked erroneously. I believe that when we explore what happened with those exit poll results that were released yesterday, we're going to find that there was an overt attempt on the part of some people in the news media—maybe in concert with the Kerry campaign—to have a last-minute impact by discouraging Republicans by leaking inaccurate results. I talked to a couple of network news reporters who privately had some concerns about the polls. They're not going to say that, but as of about 4 or 5 p.m. yesterday, the Democrats were ready to declare victory and most of the talking heads on television were ready to declare them victorious, as well. I listened to CNN and they all but said that Kerry had won the election

The answer to the question of the morning is: yes. I think the country is becoming a little bit redder. I still rankle at the notion that after leading the country to victory in the Cold War, Republicans are the Red State party, but if that's what history has dealt us, I suppose that's the way we're going to be. It looks to me as if the country is dividing at least somewhat more in our favor. Michael Barone has been making that point through the Almanac of American Politics, that we are no longer a fifty/fifty country. We may not be much more than a fifty-one/forty-nine country, but there is a decided edge coming toward conservatives and Republicans across the country, which I think was shown in this election.

The election actually added a couple of longstanding political truisms to the ash heap of history, if you will. First and foremost is the notion that a big turnout inherently disadvantages the Republican Party. Just about all of my life we have believed that Republicans pray for bad weather because the more people that vote, the worse it is. But we've had the largest turnout in thirty-six years and the president won. Republicans did as good a job of turning out new voters as Democrats did. Maybe, in some parts of the country, even a better job, and the notion that we are inherently disadvantaged, that there is a large liberal electorate out there that simply doesn't get to the polls every four

years, simply has not proven to be true. That's a big change. It says, in fact, that if we grow the electorate larger, there is as much reason to believe that it will advantage Republican candidates as to believe that it would advantage Democratic candidates. That's kind of a sea change in politics.

The second big political truism that went down last night is that it's always about the economy, that Americans vote their pocketbooks. Many people vote their pocketbooks. The economy is always an important issue. But in the polling that we saw last night, the economy was about third on people's lists of the major issues that caused them to vote. The number one issue, surprisingly to many people, were moral concerns. Twenty-two percent of the American people said that that was the primary motivating factor in causing them to cast their vote last night. Terrorism and the war in Iraq and the economy were all in there somewhere, terrorism a little bit ahead, but the American people did not go to the polls and simply vote their pocketbooks. I think if you went to the polls last night and voted your pocketbook that you should have voted for Bush, which is another issue. I think the economy is doing much, much better than portrayed by John Kerry, who repeatedly invoked the specter of the Great Depression in an economy growing between 3 and 4 percent a year. That aside, the American people basically didn't vote on the economy. They voted on a broader set of issues: national security, moral values, the war in Iraq, and things like that. The economy was very much a secondary concern.

Clearly, if you have a negative economy, a clear-cut recession, that's going to be the voting issue. That reflects, increasingly, the change in the divisions between the two parties. Most of the time, throughout my life, you could predict people's voting behavior largely based on income. As you moved up the income ladder, people became more Republican, and as you moved down the income ladder, people became more Democrat. That correlation is not entirely destroyed, but it's been shaken a great, great deal. Throughout this election you saw a lot of different measurements, things that, even as recently as when I was running for office, we would have thought kind of weird. In polling, we used to do some fairly basic demographics. We wanted to find out how people were voting by occupation. How were the farmers voting? The small-business people? The professional people? And you might ask how they were voting, of course, geographically and by a few age categories. The pollsters, this time, asked: are you a NASCAR fan? They asked about gun ownership. They asked about church attendance. And the list will probably grow as the political experts look for increasing cultural indicators, which are increasingly a better predictor of political vote and political division and partisanship than the old economic divides that we used to say were so reliable in predicting who was a Republican and who was a Democrat. Those divides seem to be helping Republicans more than Democrats. There's certainly a large vote on the other side of all those social, cultural issues, but the Republicans seem advantaged by it and I think that advantage is probably going to grow over time.

What is going to happen now, for the next four years? After the 2000 election, I was on the Lehrer News Hour with one Mario Cuomo, who—I don't think ranting and raving is too strong a term to describe Mario Cuomo—was saying that the Bush agenda was dead. Dead, dead, dead. Nothing the president talked about was going to happen because the election was so close, he lost the popular vote, we just got through litigating

Florida for a month, and Cuomo and other Democrats said that this president has no choice but to abandon his agenda and try to govern in a bipartisan manner by reaching out, which means basically adopting liberal ideas.

The president surprised them all and decided he was going to do exactly what he said he was going to do during the campaign. I never thought there was much of an alternative. The fact that you win a close election doesn't mean that you decide that everything you campaigned on is out the window and you're going to try to do something else. The president did what he said he was going to do, and he accomplished it on education and he accomplished it on tax cuts and he accomplished it on an increase in military spending, particularly military pay, after the years of neglect in the Clinton administration. My point is, this is a president who believes in bold political action. He was asked by Tom Brokaw or somebody about the main lesson he learned from his father. His answer: if you have political capital, spend it. And he spent it in the course of the last four years and did a lot of bold things. If he would do that, coming into office under the kind of cloud he did after Florida, having lost the popular vote, with the narrowest of margins in the Senate, imagine what he's going to be able to do, now that he has a stronger Republican House of Representatives and probably a 45/55 division in the Senate and, if you will, a mandate of 3.5 million-popular-vote victory. I think the president is going to pursue a very bold agenda that is going to transform American politics in a very serious way.

His presidency has already transformed politics in a lot of ways. He's transforming international politics in a very serious way, but this president's commitment to democratization in the world is almost unprecedented. It's a commitment that Ronald Reagan extended to South and Central America after decades of Americans of both political parties saying we're going to be in bed with authoritarian governments and the United Fruit Company in Nicaragua. President Reagan said, no, we're on the side of democracy. And that's taking hold. It's taken hold considerably throughout Central and South American. Not perfectly and haltingly in some cases like Venezuela, but, by and large, we've seen a transformation of South and Central America in terms of democracy, largely because of the leadership of Ronald Reagan.

This president has taken that same idea and he's applied it to the Middle East, a part of the world that everybody I talk to believes is a much harder nut to crack in terms of liberal democracy and the kind of reforms that we associate with it than any other part of the world. President Bush's commitment there has been very bold. It was disturbing to me to see in the campaign that John Kerry backed away from that. He really questioned the notion of democracy in the Arab and Islamic world. This president's commitment—and that's a big part of what's going on in Iraq and why he correctly said throughout the campaign that Iraq was vital to America's future and the future of the region—is a tremendous transformational opportunity for us and bold leadership that we have not seen in the past. It's going to mean some rough sledding in that part of the world because we've been on the side of autocrats and royal families and business interests at the expense of democracy in the past, and people in the region don't necessarily trust us on those issues, just as they didn't in South and Central America in the 1980s when Ronald Reagan committed us to democracy in that part of the world. But that's a bold transfor-

mational idea in terms of foreign policy that this president has put on the table and now has the opportunity to develop in the course of the next four years with a Congress that will back him in that.

His domestic agenda also is going to be bold and transformational. There's been a lot of talk in the course of this campaign about the next president having to be preoccupied with foreign policy and having no ability to maneuver domestically because of large budget deficits and things like that. I look at the history of this president and say, "I don't believe that's true." I think this president is going to act boldly and the two major issues that he's going to put on the agenda: the Social Security system reform and tax reform. Again, everybody says you can't do probably either one of those things because of the transition costs in Social Security, because of the difficulty of screwing around with the tax code and distribution tables will show you're favoring rich people, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. The president says he wants to do it and I think you ignore this president's commitment to do things at some peril. He has shown that he does what he says he's going to do. He ran in 2000 on the notion of reforming Social Security in the direction of allowing private accounts. Amazingly, even though that election was very, very close, the polls afterwards show that he won the debate on that issue quite handily. The first time a Republican has ever been ceded the moral high ground, if you will, on the Social Security issue, which we always thought of as the third rail of politics for a Republican. He won that debate in 2000 and for a variety of reasons the president put it on the back burner. Some people thought that meant he was abandoning it. I don't believe that at all. He maintained his commitment to that issue in the course of this campaign, even when some of his own advisers were saying, "Don't talk about it, it could reemerge as that third rail."

The president continues to talk about it and put it in the context of a broader issue, which he calls the "ownership society." I believe this is going to be an exciting opportunity in the next couple of years for a fundamental transformation of our nation's basic retirement program. That will be a transforming political issue. If you actually see all those Americans no longer looking at Social Security primarily from "how the government is going to provide more benefits" to looking at their own investment accounts, you've expanded dramatically the idea of the investor class, the ownership society, and have given the American people a stake in the entrepreneurial culture, which, benefits our side of the political divide. It's a transformational issue economically; it's a transformational issue politically. I believe that he's going to do the same thing on taxes. That's a little fuzzier in terms of what direction he actually wants to go on that, but the president says that he wants to accomplish that.

It looks to me as if the map is getting a little bit redder. I don't think that you could ever say there's never going to be another good election for the Democrats—I'm not that foolish—and we may see setbacks along the way. But over the broad span of history, the country has been becoming somewhat more conservative for about thirty or forty years. It's not uniform, it's not true quite everywhere. It certainly isn't true in the city of Minneapolis, but broadly across the country it is. And I still say that despite the fact that we were disappointed last night in Minnesota, it's still true in Minnesota. This state is moving in a more Republican direction and a more conservative direction, and it

has been doing so for thirty years. The good news about politics is there's always another election, and we have to start fighting for the next one today, but I feel pretty good about what happened yesterday. I think it was not just a great victory for the president and the Republican Party, but a real victory for the kind of ideas that this center stands for and that we've been trying to promote since you formed it, Mitch, now so many years ago.

Questions and Answers

Pearlstein: Could you expand a bit on why you think the president lost in Minnesota?

Weber: One of the phenomena of politics that we're all kind of aware of is off-year elections usually tend to go against the party in power. Not always, not in 2002, notably, but usually that's been the case. As disappointed as someone can be in losing an election, it usually doesn't take them too long to get back in the saddle. People want to get even, if you will, politically. That's why the out party usually comes back and does pretty well in the off-year election after they've been defeated. That's been true throughout most of the American political history. The Democrats were so disappointed at what happened in this state in 2002, they didn't believe it was possible. Walter Mondale defeated, Paul Wellstone dead, a Republican governor and senator, a big Republican majority in the state legislature, and the Star Tribune agonizing day after day after day that Minnesota has suddenly gone knuckle-dragging retrograde. But I do think people who lose in politics do tend to get back in the saddle; I think that helped the Democrats here. They were more motivated—even though our side was motivated and we did well. They had a somewhat higher intensity level than we did. I don't think it was a very constructive intensity level. I think the intensity on their side was all negative. It was anti-Bush, there was not really much of a Democrat agenda put in front of the country this time. But in this state, there was an added incentive, because they wanted to avenge what they thought was an unfair and unjustified and unconscionable loss in the 2002 election. That's the best thing I can say.

Jerry Reedy: Do you think that Bush will try to do something about illegal immigration, now that the election is over?

Weber: The president's personal views on immigration are "liberal views." He is in favor of immigration. And he has resisted those within the Republican Party who have asked for him to have a tough crackdown. Now, that's not necessary inconsistent with what you suggested, because nobody's in favor of illegal immigration. And I do think there is some middle ground to be worked out between a legal policy that is welcoming of immigrants—which this president desperately wants to see—and something that says we have to have tough controls on illegal immigration, both for economic and for national security reasons. But, keep in mind, one of the president's motivations is frankly political, coming out of the state of Texas. He understands that the Hispanic vote is really the key to any kind of long-term majority for the Republican Party. He is going to continue to be sensitive to that and not want to appear to be bashing Hispanic immigration into this

country. So, if you can find a way of controlling illegal immigration that makes it clear that we're not shutting the door on legal and justifiable immigrants, the president probably will do that.

Tom Prichard: What is the significance of the health care issue? And, secondly, what is the impact of the changes in the Senate on judicial nominees? Are the dynamics going to change on Supreme Court appointees?

Weber: Although I can't give you a definitive answer, the second question is a little easier than the first one. I think that that's probably pretty good news for us. You need sixty votes to do most things in the Senate these days, and that's unfortunate. But, fifty-five Republicans is a pretty good majority, and the newly elected senators are all going to be supportive of virtually anybody the president puts forward. I don't think the fight is over until it's over, but I certainly think our chances are better. Before the election, I really worried about any Supreme Court vacancy, because I didn't see how we could fill it. I don't feel that way anymore. I think now we have a serious shot at being able to confirm a Supreme Court justice if the president is prudent about the person he picks, and I'm sure that he will be. I think that's been a big movement in the right direction and probably just in the nick of time. I would hate to see Justice Rehnquist have to leave, but we're all aware of what's happened with his health in the last few weeks and that we may have to do that sooner rather than later.

I'm not very optimistic about health care, from a standpoint of our party or from a standpoint of the Democrats. The president correctly called John Kerry's approach to health care, a government takeover of our health care system. I think that's accurate. But the bad news is we sort of do the same thing, only a little bit at a time. Unfortunately, we are continuing to move, step by step, in the direction of greater and greater government involvement in the health care marketplace. The prescription drug benefit that we passed was probably accomplished in the most market-friendly, consumer choice-friendly way, but it still is the largest expansion of the Medicare program in our history. When you talk about the problem of the 40+ million uninsured in the country, there is no way of doing that without an expansion of the government's role in health care. As a free-market conservative, I'm pessimistic about where we're going on health care.

With President Bush in the White House and Republican control of the Congress, we'll do it in a way that tries to preserve a marketplace in the health care industry, but it's not easy. As costs mount and mount and mount, Congress increasingly looks at them, every few years, and says, "The one way we can save some money is to put price controls on the health care industry." We, of course, already have a degree of price control through the Medicare program and in the provision of basic services to people, and that affects the quality of medicine and the nature of the medical marketplace, but the big issue we're going to see price controls—sometime, somehow—creep in there in terms of prescription drugs.

If that happens, you have to think about what happens to medical devices. Minnesota's economy is increasingly an economy where the driving engine is the health

care economy and the medical marketplace, the medical device market. If we begin moving toward a regime where the government is going to impose price controls—directly or indirectly—we’re going to pay a price for that. It may save the government some money, but that money has to come out of the economy somewhere and it would come out of the economy in those places that are the biggest producers of medical products and treatments, and Minnesota is one of those. So, I think there’s a lot at stake on health care. It has to be handled very carefully and I’m not greatly optimistic about our ability to fend off sort of this constantly expanding government role in the health care economy.

Jim Ulland: I hate to start talking about the next election the day after the last election, but since the presidency is limited to two terms, how do you see the candidates emerging to replace him on the Republican side?

Weber: I think the Republicans will have about as wide-open a fight for their nomination as you can imagine, because of a couple of things. First, Vice President Cheney has made it clear he’s not going to run. And second, Jeb Bush has made it clear he’s not going to run. Those are the two people, notwithstanding Cheney’s health problems, who would have sort of a presumptive right to the nomination. So there’s no clear heir. There’s no clear nominee. I would expect that Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist from Tennessee will run and will begin the process as a frontrunner, but only because his name identification is going to be a little bit larger. It really is an opportunity for a new face. I think there will be a large field of people to run. I don’t know who it’s going to be, but, Rudy Giuliani wants to run. People keep talking about Bill Owens, the governor of Colorado, although he’s gone through a fairly unpleasant divorce and that may have hurt him. People talk about Norm Coleman and Tim Pawlenty as potential candidates. I don’t know if either one of them is quite ready to do that, but I wouldn’t put it out of the realm of possibility. Tom Ridge is a possibility

John Edwards has only been a senator for six years; he ran for president. Republican Chuck Hagel from Nebraska certainly wants to run. John McCain is talking about running again. Mitt Romney from Massachusetts, absolutely. We could have a large cadre of candidates.

And among the Democrats, Hillary Clinton, I think. I do not think that Edwards will be the strong candidate. If he wants to, he’ll probably run. I don’t think he added much to this ticket this time around and, certainly, they’re not going to want to be reminded of what happened to Kerry. The Democrats really wanted to win, they thought they were going to win, they’re not going to want to be reminded of that. So I don’t think Edwards will be a strong contender, but Hillary will certainly be a very strong contender. She won’t be the only one, but she’ll be pretty strong.

Democrats are going to go through a real soul-searching period after this election. After the twelve years of Reagan and Bush forty-one, the Democrats concluded that they had moved too far to the left, and President Clinton won largely because he had been one of the leaders of the Democrat Leadership Council, one of the leaders in the effort to move the Democratic Party closer to the center. A little more market- and business-friendly approach to some issues. That same dynamic is not necessarily at work today. It

will be very interesting to see what plays out in the Democratic Party after the dust has settled and the Democrats begin assessing why they lost this election. I think there's at least as great a chance that they'll conclude they lost the election because they didn't nominate a liberal enough candidate. They blurred the message on Iraq and things like that. I'm not saying I believe this. I'm just saying I can imagine them saying it. I'm not hearing anybody in the Democratic Party saying, "We've got to move to the center." Are you hearing that? I'm not hearing that from anybody. I do hear some people saying, "Well, gee, Howard Dean may have been a little crazy, but at least he had a clear message." I've heard that from a lot of people.

The Democrats are going to go through a soul-searching and reappraisal of their own situation that will be interesting to watch, and we'll see who best can capitalize on that.

Jim Lodoen: I've got a quick follow-up to the Supreme Court discussion. Is it going to be difficult to replace Rehnquist or possibly Antonin Scalia with a justice of similar position and strength, or Bush won't be able to move to the right of there? Will he lose ground and move a little bit more toward center?

Weber: There are probably lawyers in this room who can answer that question a lot better than I can, but the rule that's developed since Robert Bork is: find a nominee who hasn't expressed an opinion on anything. So you end up with the possibility of relatively less distinguished nominees and surprises, a la David Souter, who is now one of the most liberal justices on the Supreme Court, appointed by Bush forty-one. Unfortunately, there is still a bit of that at play. That the president is going to look for somebody who has not written inflammatory things—particularly on social issues like gay marriage and abortion—but I think he's pretty determined to find a conservative voice for the bench. I think he also very much wants to nominate a Hispanic to the court, part of this issue we talked about a few minutes ago. The talk about White House counsel Alberto Gonzales is a possibility. Some of my conservative friends in the Federalist Society and places like that are questioning whether or not he's really the kind of conservative that we want on the court, but I know the president has a lot of regard for him.

Jack McHugh: Why was Bush so poorly prepared for the first debate?

Weber: I don't know. They sent him out to inspect hurricane damage on the day of the debate, so he was kind of tired. I don't know why he was that poorly prepared. I was not involved in the preparation. I've been involved in the preparation for other people in the past, both Bob Dole and Jack Kemp, and I have to say, particularly from my experience with Jack Kemp, you can't put responsibility entirely on the people that are doing the preparing. You have to have a candidate who is willing to listen and be somewhat programmed, and my friend, Jack, was not. I think that there's a little bit of that. The president certainly spent enough time being prepared, but I think he went in thinking he knew what he wanted to say and he wasn't going to listen to anybody about it, and a little bit of that stubbornness showed through. I think that more than just inadequate

preparation explained what happened in that debate, but I'm not sure about that.

Annette Meeks: Two unrelated questions, Vin. The Minnesota Poll that came out on Sunday had Bush losing Minnesota by eight points. The spread turned out to be three. Is this the death knell, finally, for the Minnesota Poll? And who's likely to be the Senate Democratic leader, now that Daschle is out?

Weber: The Minnesota Poll is very consistent. They're consistently wrong and they're consistently wrong on the side of the candidates they support. That proved to be true again in this election. But do I think they're going to change? I don't know. One of my earlier experiences with the poll was as Rudy Boschwitz's campaign manager in '78. The Sunday before the election, the poll predicted a Wendell Anderson victory by one-half a point. Have you ever seen a newspaper projecting a half a point win? Talk about margin of error. Boschwitz ended up winning a big victory and they shut the poll down for three months while they brought in a team of outsiders and revamped the poll and changed everything and turned it inside out and then went back to doing exactly what they had been doing before. I expect that is going to happen again. I don't know how you change this. These people are committed to their own vision of the world and they're going to reflect that in the poll, whether it is borne out by reality or not. I'd like to see it change, but I doubt very much that it will change. In terms of the Democratic leadership of the Senate, that will be an interesting test of the point I just made about the soul-searching in the Democratic Party. Harry Reid, the senator from Nevada, very much wants to go from number two to number one in his party, but Reid, partially because he's from Nevada, is necessarily a somewhat more moderate Democrat. I wouldn't be at all surprised to see someone like Dick Durban from Illinois challenge him and say the party needs a full-throated liberal alternative to the Bush policies. I served with Harry in the House. He's a nice guy, but he's kind of a Casper Milquetoast personality. So I would look for a challenger, and Durban is the one that I hear most often

Doug McFarland: Do you think that this election sends any kind of message to other countries and even terrorist groups about American resolve?

Weber: Oh, yeah. Strong and positive. That's the message in this election that was very hard for us to deliver and whenever we sort of trotted up to it, the press said it was unfair. But everybody knew that if George Bush was defeated, it was a huge victory for the terrorists, and that's just a fact. You had a hard time discussing it politically because it sounds like you're impugning the patriotism of John Kerry and all that stuff and that's really not what you meant. But it was very clear, from Spain and elsewhere around the world that the terrorists want to show the ability to affect governments. Regardless of how Kerry would have prosecuted a war on terror, they would have loved to see George Bush defeated. It would have encouraged terrorists around the planet and made the whole world a more dangerous place to live.

That was sort of the 800-pound gorilla in the corner of the living room that we really couldn't talk about, at least not as effectively as we would have liked to in the elec-

tion. So, it sends a very positive message that the United States has shown resolve. It has to intimidate them. I agree with Bill Safire who wrote in the New York Times a few days ago that the last Osama tape actually shows the weakness of their position. He's beginning to open up to the possibility of a dialogue or something like that. We're not going to do that under this president. But, they're on the run. They are very much on the run. They're getting hunted down and the last thing that we needed was to have a change in presidents that would encourage them to think that the West wanted some kind of a dialogue with Islamic fascism, if you will. That's not going to happen now and I think it's tremendously good news for us.

Bill McGaughey: What can you say about the impact of the politics of gender and race on the election and in the period ahead?

Weber: The gender gap narrowed a lot, but there's still a gender gap. The majority of women voted for Kerry, the majority of men voted for Bush. But at times in the past, that gap has been 20 percentage points or more. That was not the case in this election. It evened up a great deal, and I think when we actually go through the entrails of the election, we going to find out that it's quite a profound change. We spent decades trying to figure out what the gender gap was, and the gender gap did come down to different approaches to a whole set of issues, not, contrary to popular mythology, the hot-button social issues. Abortion has almost nothing to do with the gender gap. In fact, women are slightly more pro-life than men. That's been shown time and time again. But, on views of health care and education and the whole domestic agenda, women did take a more liberal or socially liberal point of view, and that was accountable for the gender gap over many years. I think, when we analyze this election, we're going to find that a whole new constellation of issues has emerged. And there's probably still a certain element of that, but, also, concerns about national security.

We found out through this campaign that a lot of women react more strongly even than men to concerns about national security. As I mentioned, 22 percent of the voters said that moral concerns were their number one issue, women more so than men. What exactly that's going to mean going forward is a little less clear than it might otherwise be.

I think that the gender gap is open to renegotiation, because the issue constellation that's driven it has fundamentally changed in a very serious way. In terms of race, as I mentioned, the very good news is the president is succeeding with the Hispanic vote. In his great book *Our Country*, Michael Barone talks about ethnic comparisons. He has put forth the thesis that Hispanics are socializing and politicizing and advancing like Italians. He goes through all sorts of reasons they are similar. That's good news. The Italian vote was once a solidly Democratic vote; it's now moved into the middle class and Republicans are highly competitive with Americans of Italian background. If that's the case with Hispanics, one of the major reasons the Democrats believe they're optimistic in the long term is taken away from them. So, that result from last night is tremendously positive.

I think we got disappointed again in the African-American community. We

thought for a while that we were going to get upwards of 18 to 20 percent, which, even that's not very good, but it's a lot better than the less than 10 percent we got four years ago. My understanding is that we didn't achieve that. We're still doing very poorly in the African-American community, and that's a big disappointment.

Tim Sullivan: It strikes me that the great missed story in this election is the fact that moral concerns were actually number one. It stunned me. We heard from the Bush campaign that the election was a referendum on the war on terror and, from Kerry that it's really about the economy and outsourcing and shipping American jobs overseas. Why was the moral issue missed and what effect will it have on the policy debate on everything from stem cell research to cloning to gay marriage to abortion in the upcoming Congress?

Weber: It wasn't necessarily talked about in the mainstream media and the candidates, or at least President Bush, did not make it a full-throated thrust of his oratory, but it was talked about a lot in the alternative Christian media and a lot about by pastors, some who are in this room. I was at a few Bush events and you could just see it whenever the president even touched on the issue of marriage. Something as simple as that was the biggest applause line in the speech, repeatedly. And I went back and told my friends in Washington, watch what's happening here. There's something going on that we're not really picking up, because it's not being talked about on the front page of the New York Times or on NBC or CBS or ABC. It was a huge issue and it reflects a huge concern and it's also a difficult problem for the Democrats, because they have locked themselves in the position where they can't compromise on any of that stuff.

Another little statistic out of this election: John Kerry, the first Catholic to run for president since John Kennedy, got a smaller percentage of the Catholic vote than Al Gore did. And, speaking as a Catholic, I'm kind of proud of that, because it shows that the Catholics are discerning about this. They're not just going to vote to rubberstamp somebody because he says that he belongs to the same church as they do. They actually dug in and looked at the issues and saw where the guy stood on things that they cared around and then did not stick with him. It was a profound thing. And the Democrats, of course, think that's some illegitimate issue. I saw Donna Brazile saying this was really an illegitimate tactic on the part of the Republicans to win the White House by talking about moral issues to the exclusion of the real issues—that's the phrase she used—the real issues. But that is the mindset of the Democratic Party.

They don't think those are real issues, but they can't get past the notion that they're trying to impose their own value structure on people. They're not willing to respect that millions and millions of Americans who think those are the real issues. It's incomprehensible to John Kerry and John Edwards and Ted Kennedy and all these people that all those people out there would vote based on their view of marriage or abortion or something like that. They simply cannot accept that. So, they have a difficult time with it.

Al Elder: What do you think this administration is going to do about what seems to be a

moral problem and that is people who are outsourced out of jobs and are untrained to do those jobs which they could get? Is there any practical and compassionate way for this administration to deal with it?

Weber: That's a tough question. The Kerry campaign kept talking about outsourcing of jobs through the campaign until their primary economic adviser, Bob Rubin, went on Meet the Press about a month ago and said it's not a real issue. It's actually part of a broader phenomenon of trade liberalization, which, in Rubin's words, is a good thing. This is probably the primary economic spokesman for the Democratic Party and Kerry backed off a little bit. But it reflected reality, that as the economy—this process we're calling globalization—as it moves forward, there certainly are losers. There are people who are displaced. The churning of a capitalist economy does not produce 100 percent winners. There are some people who lose in the process. On balance, trade globalization is a very positive thing.

David Maupus had a great column in the *Wall Street Journal* talking about the fact—the good news—that the whole world is growing, which is ultimately very good news for the United States. But it is a churning process, as a dynamic economy is. So, you're right, we've got displaced people, even though, on balance, our economy has benefited by this phenomenon, and we ought to find some way to help them.

The president's emphasis is on job training and education and I think that's the only way that you can approach it. I don't think there's an artificial economic policy that is going to stop outsourcing or place all those people in government jobs or something like that, but the president has made a major effort on the education side and particularly through the community college route to try to get additional training for people who may be displaced by those jobs. But it's a difficult issue, just like free trade is a difficult issue. There are losers in free trade, but, ultimately, the whole world and the country are balanced immeasurably by a more liberal trading regime. We just have to cope with some of those difficulties.

John Kirchner: I've heard you talk about this in the past, but this kind of boastfulness of the Democrats lately of the intellectual superiority of their presidential candidates. It goes back many years, but I wonder if you could maybe touch on that a little bit.

Weber: Don't complain about it, it's our secret weapon.

Kirchner: Right. If the Democrats any time soon are going to realize that maybe writing about having what they perceive as the smartest candidate necessarily isn't the best candidate out there.

Weber: You're right on target. I believe that so strongly. In my business, I've got two partners and they're both Democrats, and I tell them constantly, the secret weapon that we've got is that you guys don't care if you win elections as long as you can tell each other that your candidate is smarter than our candidate. I refer to it as the Adlai Stevenson syndrome. If you go back and read the history of that, the 1952 and '56 elec-

tions, all the smarter-than-thou Democrats were confident that Adlai Stevenson was so much smarter than Dwight Eisenhower. The only thing Eisenhower had going for him was the country loved him. But it didn't matter. As long as the Democrats were confident that their guy was smarter than our guy—who didn't do anything more than defeat the Nazis—they were happy. Well, it's kind of the same thing now and they feel the same way. It's demonstrably not true, by the way, about this president. There's a difference between articulation and IQ. Kerry may have a greater facility with words than the president does, but the president is a very intelligent man and it was never fair or accurate to describe him as anything less than that. But, you're right, the Democrats, for some reason, put this high priority on that and it is our secret weapon, so I just hope they keep it up.

Pearlstein: Both Paul Greenberg and Bob Woodward have made the point that although the president's syntax may get a little mangled, you know exactly what he's saying. It's not just a matter of being a person of conviction, you know that, but the words make sense, although they may be in an interesting order.

Charile Mahar: How do you see Iran and nuclear weapons unfolding and what should we be doing now?

Weber: That is a huge, huge issue. And it is a little bit unfortunate that we spent so much time on Iraq in this campaign that we didn't talk about other issues. Because Iran is a big issue—North Korea, too—but Iran is an even bigger issue than North Korea. If Iran goes nuclear, you probably have reached what most of the experts call sort of the nuclear tipping point. And you've got a whole list of countries, that will decide that if Iran can become a nuclear power, they have to become a nuclear power. Brazil is right on the edge of deciding that. Another nuclear power in the Western Hemisphere would change things a whole lot. Nigeria is on the verge of deciding whether to become a nuclear power. South Africa is on the verge of deciding. And most of the experts that study this believe that if Iran actually becomes a nuclear power, most of those countries will decide they're going to follow suit and all of a sudden you can see within a very short period of time twenty or thirty countries become nuclear powers. The question is: can we prevent that and if we can't prevent that, can you manage it? It's obviously a much more complicated issue, but you have to try to manage it somewhat.

We have deferred to the European community a lot in dealing with Iran, and I don't know that there is much of an alternative to that, but it does show the limitations of the kind of multinational, multilateral, coalition-building exercises that the Democrats—and particularly John Kerry—elevated to such a high moral level in this campaign. The Europeans are simply not willing to do much. You probably need a basketful of both sticks and carrots to dangle in front of the Iranians, and the Europeans are unwilling to consider any kind of sticks or sanctions and they believe all the carrots should be supplied by us. So, it's not an easy task. I'm quite concerned about it.

There is, by the way, a military option. It's a bad option, a very risky option, I don't personally favor it, but we could conceivably go in—or, more likely, Israel could

conceivably go in—and destroy those facilities. It's not a good option. There's reason for us to be optimistic internally about Iran. The population as a whole is much more favorable to us. Democrats love to bash Bush for saying that we would be greeted with crowds cheering in the streets when we invaded Baghdad. We were greeted by crowds cheering in the streets, but they weren't in Baghdad, they were in Tehran. The young people in Iran did turn out to the streets to applaud the Americans liberating Iraq. So, internally in Iran—if we can last—we've got reason to believe there will be positive internal change. So, for us to go in there or the Israelis to go in there and bomb that country risks turning off the population at precisely the moment when they might be coming our way. I wish I were optimistic; I'm really not. ■