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# What's Next for Conservatism?

Vin Weber

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**I**n this election, we saw a marked decline in support for both capital punishment and gun control. I oppose both, and I'm glad to see that my fellow Americans are coming to the position that if we're going to shoot the bad guys in America, we don't need to get the government involved.

Kidding aside, this election is much harder to analyze, from every perspec-

tive, than the 1992 election. I'll talk about philosophical drift, but I can hardly ignore the 800-pound gorilla in the living room, that being the recount in Florida. Predictably, I'm not happy about what's going on there.

Many people have said that everything is going to be fine and that, in fact, this is going to be a good thing for America's civic health. I don't believe

that, and I don't think it is helpful to talk about it in those terms. I think that what's going on in Florida is a bad thing for the country.

The journalist Tom Friedman pointed out that we are in a unique moment in history: fledgling democracies are sprouting everywhere around the world, and wherever he goes, he said, people in the new democracies ask him how we do it in America.

Our example to those people who have not yet established the legitimacy of their own democratic forms of government is tremendously important. What's going on in this country is certainly not going to convince them to backtrack away from democracy, but it's not helpful. We should be an example to the world of how to make it work, and that's not what is happening.

The country is indeed, as some people have said, getting a civics lesson out of Florida. But in my view, it is a bad civics lesson. Essentially, what we're being told, particularly by the Gore campaign in Florida, is that the overriding issue in a close election is to determine with ever greater accuracy and precision what was on the minds of a majority of voters when they went to the polls.

That's the underlying premise, and it sounds so logical and so sensible in the world's greatest democracy that you almost can't argue with it. But it's not the case. That's not the most important thing. The most important thing in this country has always been that at the end of the process, you have a result that is respected by the popula-

tion at large and by the winners and losers alike.

The truth is that close elections are always indeterminate. You never know for sure who won a close election if your standard is to divine the intent of everybody who went to the polls. There was a piece in the *Star Tribune* this week about Minnesota's famous example of a close recount, Karl Rolvaag's 1962 defeat of Elmer Andersen for the governorship, something Minnesota should be very proud of. At the end of a three-month recount, Governor Andersen was defeated by his lieutenant governor by ninety-one votes.

Does anybody really think that precisely ninety-one more people voted for Rolvaag than for Andersen? I don't believe that. Don't you think that if we had another recount, we'd have a different outcome? The great thing about that election was that during the process, there were no allegations of fraud on either side.

Now, do you think after the example in Florida, would we go through a ninety-one-vote recount and one party would lose the governorship to the other party and no one would allege fraud in any of the eighty-seven counties in Minnesota? I don't think so. The great thing about that election was that we had a process, we respected the outcome, winner and loser alike, and Minnesota went on to be governed for the next four years by Karl Rolvaag.

Similarly, there's a piece this morning in the *New York Times* in which a historian argues fairly persuasively that

in terms of the popular vote, John Kennedy almost surely lost the 1960 election, even discounting potential irregularities in Illinois, which people have talked about for years. This person argues that in Alabama, where Democratic votes were counted, as opposed to Kennedy votes, a lot of Democratic votes went for electors who ended up voting for the racist ticket led by Senator Harry Byrd of Virginia, but had been counted in the total for John Kennedy for the past forty years, giving him a popular majority. Take that away, and Nixon won the popular majority.

Was Kennedy an illegitimate president because more people may have voted for Richard Nixon? I think not. The important thing for the American system of government is not to find additional and endless ways of divining exactly what was on the minds of a majority of the people in either of those elections. The important thing is a system that has been durable and stable in producing a respected outcome for many, many years.

That system should have certified Governor Bush as the winner in Florida. He won, a recount perfectly allowable under Florida law was mandated, and the secretary of state, now being demonized, as we might have expected, has done her job and certified that he won the election.

The problem with the Gore position is not so much that they want a recount, but how does this process end? There's always one more way to count the votes, and if your rallying cry is going to be that we must determine,

with ever more accuracy, the will of the people, we'll never get there. We had a result, it was certified on election night, it was proven by the recount, and the election officer who was duly elected by the voters of Florida to exercise responsibilities outlined by the Florida constitution is likely to certify the winner. But it looks like we're not going to respect any of those institutions.

We're not going to respect the constitutional responsibilities of the secretary of state of Florida or her office. The demonization of this woman is not limited to her legal affairs; we're seeing stories about unsupervised junkets and her expenses being subject to criticism. There's a pattern here that we've seen in the Clinton administration. The way they go after their enemies is not very attractive.

We're trashing the Florida institutions to produce an outcome that is not perfect, but that ought to be respected, consistent with that state's traditions and with the traditions of our country. Starry-eyed analysts who want to say that this is good, that it will prove the resiliency of the country, are wrong. It's going to increase cynicism. It's going to teach politicians of both parties a lesson about not accepting lightly the outcome of a narrow defeat, and teach them that we don't have a stake in the institutions of our society that serve to validate governments.

This is the oldest issue in political science and political theory. The divine right of kings was invented to stop people from choosing governments through violence. The central issue has always been how to establish

a respected, legitimate government—not how to divine, with ever more perfection, the will of the 52 percent of the people who chose to go to the polls and cast their vote. In that context, what's happening is not very good.

If I were to make a prediction, which would be pretty foolish, it looks to me like a Democratic Supreme Court in Florida is probably going to overrule the Florida secretary of state and allow the recounts to proceed, and then the key question will be whether the federal courts will take jurisdiction.

As a Republican, I am concerned that all of our good Republican judges, whether they be on the U.S. Court of Appeals or the Supreme Court, are going to fall back on the first principles of federalism and say we're going to respect the court's decision in Florida. In that case, it doesn't point to a good outcome for Governor Bush. But having judges pick our president is not the way this ought to be going anyway.

### ***Agreement on International Presence***

From the standpoint of the conservative movement, there are some good things and some bad things about the election.

One of the undiscussed, surprising things about the election, given how close it was and how bitter it was at the end, is the remarkable degree of agreement between the two candidates and the two parties on major issues.

In an election, particularly a closely contested election, the candidates naturally talk about their differences, particularly at the end of the campaign.

Those differences are not trivial, and they deserve to be debated.

The good news, from an American standpoint and from a conservative standpoint, is the number of things we didn't debate about that at some point in the past—in some cases not even the too distant past—we would have debated about a great deal.

Let's start in the international arena. I was in college during the Vietnam War, when foreign policy was a fundamental argument between the two parties. George McGovern and Richard Nixon could not have disagreed more completely.

There is no real argument between Al Gore and George Bush about America's role in the world. An exception that proves the case is the one little argument at the very end of the campaign, when Governor Bush's chief foreign policy adviser, Condoleezza Rice, suggested that we might, after consultation with our allies, remove American troops from the peacekeeping force in Kosovo—a decision with which I do not personally agree, but that's not the point.

The point is this: if that's the magnitude of the foreign policy disagreement between the two parties—or the two candidates, at any rate—that's a pretty small thing to disagree about. Both Bush and Gore, both the Republican Party and the Democratic Party, are committed to international leadership and to increasing military spending. The two parties disagreed about this within the past decade.

They may disagree on exactly where to allocate that spending or the

amount of the spending, but both Gore and Bush talked about the need to increase the military budget and maintain our international presence. That's no small thing.

### **Agreement on Economic Policy**

Next, let's look at economic policy, beginning with perhaps its most important aspect: monetary policy.

Did you hear anybody during the course of this campaign suggesting we should fire Alan Greenspan? Quite the opposite.

There is no disagreement about monetary policy. That may seem like stating the obvious, but presidential candidates and political parties in the early part of this century based their existence on monetary policy. That used to be a hard-fought issue.

As recently as the Nixon administration, you can find examples of the politicization of Federal Reserve policy by, in that case, President Nixon in order to help him get reelected in 1972. It is no small matter that we have had twenty years of bipartisan commitment to price stability. It is a tremendous triumph for the United States in terms of economic policy making.

My friend Wayne Angel, who was on the Federal Reserve Board of Governors during the Bush administration, says that Ronald Reagan's greatest achievement was the establishment of bipartisan commitment to support the Fed in pursuit of monetary policy. Prior to Reagan, presidents bashed and prodded the Fed and tried to expand the

money supply to get the election in shape for them.

Ronald Reagan, coming into office in 1982, said, "Stay the course." There was no pressure from the incumbent administration on Paul Volcker, then Federal Reserve chairman, to expand the money supply, to alleviate the recession, to help out the party in power.

To President Clinton's credit, he maintained that policy, as did President Bush before him. Twenty years of commitment to price stability has probably contributed to our economic prosperity more than any other single component of economic policy.

The fact that we're not arguing about economic policy is a big deal. The fact that we're not talking about it is the good news, not the bad news.

But there is more broad agreement than even in the area of economic policy. In an era of globalization, trade policy is a central focus of economic policy, not a peripheral one. And although you can get a difference there between the two parties, you didn't see it in this election between the two presidential candidates.

Neither candidate ran as a protectionist. Neither called for doing away with NAFTA or raising tariff barriers. We had two candidates talking about continuing trade liberalization. I am concerned that it hasn't proceeded as rapidly as it might, mainly because of Democrats in the House of Representatives, but the two presidential candidates essentially agreed that although the phenomenon we call globalization may have negative side effects, we're going to deal

with them in some way other than by erecting trade barriers. That's a significant agreement, and one that would not have existed too long ago.

Even on the basics of fiscal policy, about which the candidates argued a great deal, and appropriately so, there is also a broader area of agreement than the candidates themselves wanted to admit.

Regardless of who takes office in January, we will have a president who is committed to reducing taxes, increasing spending, and paying down debt. They disagree on the magnitude, and each says the other can't do it because his numbers don't work. But they agreed that the mix of fiscal policies ought to be some degree of tax reduction, some degree of debt pay-down, and some degree of increased spending, both on the military and on the domestic side.

Governor Bush talked about increases in spending on education and other domestic programs. Not too long ago, that wouldn't have been the case. One candidate might have been saying not that we should pay down the debt, but that we should have fiscal stimulus by running deficits. One candidate might have been saying we should increase taxes to more aggressively redistribute income through the tax code.

The fact that there is some degree of agreement is a remarkable statement about where we've come in terms of economic policy in this country.

## **Agreement on Domestic Policy**

Finally, in the area of domestic policy, in which there probably should be, and probably still is, the largest degree of disagreement in the country, there are some significant elements of agreement.

For instance, no one in this presidential election talked about reversing the single most important domestic policy achievement of the past eight years: bipartisan welfare reform. You never heard Al Gore saying he was going to undo welfare reform. Quite the opposite: to the degree that he could, he bragged about it and called it a Clinton administration accomplishment.

Welfare reform is a fundamental shift in policy. We're getting out of the welfare business in this country. The drop in the welfare rolls has been dramatic. But lest you think that this is an unalloyed conservative triumph, in other areas, we are expanding support for low-income people, and there is bipartisan agreement on that, too. Dick Armey and other House Republicans may have talked about scaling back the earned income tax credit, which was a bipartisan achievement when it was established, but to his credit, Governor Bush never talked about that. The earned income tax credit is rapidly becoming our major form of financial support for low-income workers.

This conservative reform of social welfare programs to reward rather than punish work, as the old welfare system did, has become pretty much established in a bipartisan way. Nobody

wants to go back to the old welfare system; nobody wants to get rid of the earned income tax credit.

It is also significant that both Al Gore and George Bush, in talking about new initiatives in domestic or social policy, talked about involving nongovernmental organizations in social services, and in attempts to deal with the problems of intractable poverty, which the government has been unsuccessful in addressing. Al Gore, the candidate of the more secular of the two parties, even talked about allowing faith-based institutions to get more involved in social services.

This is a remarkable degree of agreement, or at least rhetorical agreement. We don't know if the policies will actually come together or not, but there is agreement on how we ought to approach it. I think that that reflects changes that have taken place in the country's attitudes toward governance, changes in the way the country views government problem solving.

### ***Conservative Triumphs***

Agreement about international leadership, economic policy, and domestic policy reflects a larger convergence of the two parties than anybody would think based on the extraordinarily bitter rhetoric in the campaign.

Again, I want to reiterate that they did argue about serious issues. I don't want to be interpreted as saying that the disagreements about Social Security or how we should provide a prescription drug benefit are unimportant. But to understand what happened in the

election and where we are as a country and as a conservative movement, we need to understand the areas of agreement, the areas of convergence of policy, as being at least as important as, if not much more important than, the areas on which we disagree.

That's good for America. I also think, in a self-congratulatory way, that conservatives ought to feel good about it. In very significant matters, the old left has moved our way on a lot of issues: on monetary policy, on tax policy, to a certain extent on trade policy. That's why Ralph Nader was running.

I argued with Democratic friends who said what Nader was doing was wholly illegitimate. Not from his point of view, I said. From his point of view, he wants a party that the old left in this country would have loved, that rejects the notion of globalization, that favors a European-style system of social welfare. He's right: there isn't a party talking about that.

The Democrats and Republicans disagree on a lot of things, but on important issues they have converged around a set of fairly conservative values: essentially committed to market forces, to decentralization in terms of policy, to strengthening values such as work and family in social services. Those are great triumphs for conservatives.

### ***The Third Way***

But there is a qualifier, and it is something that is hard for at least some of my old friends in the Congress to live with: the traditional conservative position of questioning the role of government in a whole range of areas is

essentially off the table. George W. Bush did not talk about abolishing Cabinet agencies, as Ronald Reagan did in 1980. Quite the opposite. He bragged about the fact that not only did he not want to abolish the Department of Education, he wanted to expand its functions in some key areas. I believe that the federal role in education can be as destructive as it can be helpful.

But we've come to this convergence. It is not a total victory for conservatives. It involves acceptance that areas that we used to argue significantly about are indeed the proper function of public action, and indeed of government action. We may argue about how we're going to deliver health care to poor people and how we're going to pay for prescription drugs for senior citizens, but we're going to do it. We may argue about whether or not the proper means of dealing with the problems of poor people is the old-style welfare system or the new systems of earned income tax credits and maybe child care and that sort of thing, but we're going to provide support to those people.

My conservative newspaper editor father would editorialize that all sorts of things we're doing are not the proper function of federal government. Nobody is arguing that much anymore. That's part of the convergence as well: we're all agreed that these areas are a proper zone of public discourse and public action.

What we're really talking about is the phenomenon they refer to in Europe as the third way; Tony Blair in Britain is probably the most obvious exemplar.

We are talking about finding a way of dealing with social problems that rejects old-style, hierarchically structured, and bureaucratic liberalism, but also rejects the simple laissez-faire, not-the-role-of-government conservatism. To the extent that we can win that argument, we're going to find a whole new way of dealing with social problems that is consistent with much more conservative values.

Conservatives can feel good about some things that happened in the election that were more decisive than the outcome itself. In a strange way, Governor Bush was said throughout the campaign to be the candidate of personality, and Vice President Gore was the candidate who surely would win if only he could force the discussion to the specifics of the issues. Not entirely true.

Throughout the campaign, Governor Bush talked about education, including a low-income voucher initiative. In the 1996 election, 17 percent of the people who said that education was their most important issue voted for Dole. In this election, 44 percent of the people who said that education was their most important issue voted for Bush. We didn't quite win it, but the Republican Party and conservatives are competitive on the issue of education in a way they never have been in our lifetimes.

Bush carried the senior citizen vote in Florida. Exit polling showed that almost 60 percent of them agreed with his position on Social Security. They may not have voted for him for other reasons, but his approach to Social Security essentially carried the day.

Even on the issue of taxes, which the Gore campaign spent most of the campaign vilifying, exit polling showed that, given the choice between the two approaches to taxation—across-the-board cuts, or targeted tax cuts—a solid majority preferred the Bush approach of across-the-board tax reduction even though there is broad skepticism about the ability or desirability of any substantial tax reduction at this time.

We won pretty well on the issues agenda. As we go into this next phase of defining what, in America, is the third way, we ought to feel good about the way the public responded to the Bush campaign messages. We are in a position to win some of those arguments as we go forward.

### ***New Constituencies***

Conservatives and Republicans need to think about two broad groups of voters in terms of basic political strategy.

First, there's a group that Karlyn Bowman of the American Enterprise Institute calls the upwardly mobile strivers. This group is about a third of the electorate, ages twenty-five to forty-five, who identify themselves as having some college education, though they didn't necessarily graduate. They're middle-income, and 60 to 70 percent of them are investors. They voted for Bush, but not overwhelmingly.

As the investor class expands, its concerns become a bigger and bigger issue. They voted for Clinton twice, so to have them vote for Bush over Gore

is a substantial shift in thinking that relates to Social Security and other issues.

Second, Republicans are not going to win many elections if they don't do something different in the minority communities. After all the parading of minorities at the Republican National Convention, George W. Bush got 10 percent of the African American vote—worse than Bob Dole. He got 35 percent of the Hispanic vote, and that includes the 80 to 90 percent of Cubans in Florida who voted for him.

We lost the Asian American vote, which Dole won and President Bush won in 1992. I don't know exactly what we can do, but it has to be more than parading people in front of cameras at our national convention as examples of diversity. In view of the changing demographics in this country, Republicans have to make a serious approach to the minority community, or they simply won't be able to win elections.

The good news is that 36 percent of African Americans under the age of thirty-five describe themselves as independent voters. Traditionally, independence has been the forerunner of a shift in parties. We can't predict that that's going to happen, but there is a market there for Republicans. But, again, it can't be symbolism. It has to be based on serious policies and a serious debate within minority communities about the issues we've been talking about here.

**Following his speech, Vin Weber took questions from his American Experiment audience.**

**Ron Schutz:** If the parties have come so close together and there are not that many differences between them, does it make a difference who's going to be president? If you look down the road under a Bush administration or a Gore administration, how do you see, in each of those scenarios, the 2002 congressional elections coming out?

**Vin Weber:** I'll reiterate that I don't mean there are no important differences. In terms of the policy issues that I focus on, your question is right on target. I think it does matter a little bit less than it has at other times in our history. I am as involved in the partisan political process as anybody in this room, and I wouldn't be if I thought it didn't matter at all, but this is not Nixon versus McGovern. There are wide areas of agreement that the parties can pursue.

One of my concerns with what's going on in Florida is that we're going to destroy the ability to achieve some kind of bipartisanship. You can lose that simply because of political bitterness: the parties just hate each other because they're Republicans and Democrats.

But it does matter who wins. The Social Security issue is one of the differences between the candidates. I like what Bush wants to do. I'm not against what Gore proposed; it would expand the investor class and give low-income people the opportunity for wealth creation, not just income transfer, which I

think is important. I think what Bush wants to do is better: the huge amount of revenue generated through the FICA tax is not necessarily contributing to economic growth in this county; it could, if it were invested in equity markets by private individuals.

In terms of what's going to happen in 2002, who knows? The off-year trend usually does not favor the party in power in the White House, so what's going on now is likely to make it even harder for the party that wins the White House to win in the off-term elections.

The great victory for the Republicans in this election was in the House of Representatives, winning for the fourth election in a row. That was significant. When the dust settles, we'll all become keenly aware of the fact that control of the Senate really rests on the shoulders of two old, sick men in the Carolinas. I say that respectfully, but it is true. You could see a shift in power there, even without an election. But the 2002 election is probably going to be tough on the party that wins this. There's an opportunity, though, for bipartisanship that will do some good things.

**Mitch Pearlstein:** Does it make a difference who is president when it comes to Supreme Court appointments?

**Vin Weber:** Sure it does. Tom Daschle is saying that the Democrats aren't going to allow the Senate to organize unless they get fifty-fifty representation on committees. Can you imagine how he's going to treat

Supreme Court nominees? It's going to be very hard for the next president to find a nominee who is capable of being confirmed. The Bork case proved that you have to find someone with so limited a record that there's nothing to criticize. That's probably what we'll do.

**Rudy Boschwitz:** With eight years of prosperity, they [Democrats] should have knocked this one out of the park, the whole election. My question is this: How is the new president going to govern with such a narrow majority?

**Vin Weber:** It's going to be tough; he won't be able to do very much.

Your point about prosperity is right on target. An ongoing conference of political scientists has been working on models to predict the outcome of elections based on the popularity of the current administration and the economy, and they developed seven models that predicted a Gore victory of between 52 and 60 percent of the vote. That's probably what he had a right to expect after eight years of peace and prosperity. The fact that we had essentially a flip-of-the-coin election is significant. They've had a tough time governing.

The winning party is going to have to go to the other party and find some people to put in the administration. The vice president would have a hard time doing that because he's been part of this administration and the Republicans have an attitude about him. I think Bush has a chance—a diminishing chance based on what's going on in Florida—to put together some bipartisanship. He's done it in Texas, and he's

been away from Washington during the past eight years, when there's been so much rancor.

There has to be a very limited agenda for the next president. I hope they both understand that neither is going to come in and transform the world.

International affairs is an area I'm concerned about. If the partisanship that we're seeing continues and Gore wins, Republicans in the House could cut the foreign aid and State Department budgets in a way that cripples our ability to conduct foreign policy. If Bush wins, are we going to have every Democrat lined up behind the AFL-CIO trade policy and go through four or eight years of a Bush administration with no advances in trade liberalization? We basically promised Chile and the other South American countries that we're going to include them in the North American Free Trade Agreement. Those things need to be done on a bipartisan basis.

Maybe there's a little more ability to overcome partisan rancor if you're talking about America's place in the world than there is on some of the domestic issues, which are much more politicizing.

**Bill Fine:** Thirty-eight years ago, as I remember, in the Rolvaag-Andersen recount for governor of Minnesota, the Minnesota Supreme Court voted along party lines on two procedural questions, at which time Drew Pearson, then an important political columnist, wrote an article about it, and then the matter was settled with a three-judge tribunal selected by both parties. There

was a lot of commotion and discussion in the corridors of the state legislature after the five-month recount about whether or not there was fraud that caused the recount to result in Rolvaag's election.

My question is this: Why would Gore and the Democrats choose the son of the poster child for fraudulent election counting to be their spokesman?

**Vin Weber:** The Gore campaign went through three different leadership teams before they came up with William Daley. The vice president is said to have had a very small circle of close advisers. It may just not have been possible for them to find anybody else.

**Tom Church:** Three things that I view as very divisive for the Democrats are reparations for slavery, Ralph Nader, and gun control. Would you talk about those issues, and the major issues that the Republicans face that may divide us in the future?

**Vin Weber:** The reparations issue is hugely controversial. When I was in the Congress, I was one of the Republican leaders on behalf of reparations to the Japanese internees of World War II. It was a bitter fight, and a lot of my conservative friends were angry with me. But there, we were talking about people who were alive; we could identify living victims.

We're talking now about a much more difficult proposition. No one argues that people have not been harmed by the legacy of slavery, but how can we go back 140 years and try to quantify what that harm has been

and separate out those families that have experienced greater harm and lesser harm? That seems to me to be just reopening the racial question in a most divisive way. It won't happen, in my judgment. The American people will not stand for it happening. I think you're right that it divides the Democrats. No American can feel good about something that divides us racially again, and this seems to me to have the potential to do that.

Guns are going to be a big issue for the Democrats. Forty-eight percent of the people who voted in this election said they owned a gun. Gore, at the end, when he was asked about gun control, started talking about his devotion to hunters and sportsmen. It's a huge transformation on that issue.

Nader got something like 3 percent of the vote. Exit polling showed that, without Nader, about half of his voters would have voted for Gore, about a fourth wouldn't have voted at all, and about a fourth would have voted for Bush. You end up with a really small impact in terms of the total popular vote. It might have swayed some specific states, but it probably would not have had a big impact on the general election.

The problem for the Democrats is bigger than Ralph Nader. I don't agree with Nader on anything I can think of, but his critique of the two-party competition in this country, from his perspective, is not wrong. I know a lot of Democrats who agree with him, not Gore, even though they all voted for Gore. It's going to be a problem down the road for the Democratic Party.

I do not agree with the notion that if Nader had not run, Gore would have been elected. Nader took the left-wing cuckoos out of the Gore camp and allowed Gore to be a bit more centrist than he otherwise might have been. The majority doesn't go for the things that Nader wanted: fundamentally challenging globalization, trade protection, expansion of the social welfare system. He would have lost more in the center than he would have gained on the left. That's a problem for the Democrats, too.

The Green Party isn't going to go away, because its fundamental critique of the world is different from that of the two major parties—different enough to justify a continued movement.

The big cleavage that continues in the conservative movement and in the Republican Party, of course, is the abortion issue; it is the touchstone of the cleavage between libertarians and social conservatives. It isn't going to go away. There wasn't a magic solution eight years ago, and there isn't one now, either. On some other social issues there probably is, but not on abortion.

We might have thought at the beginning of this campaign that there was a cleavage over the Republican version of the Nader candidacy: Pat Buchanan's economic nationalism. But Buchanan never caught on at all; he got something like 1 percent of the vote. It looks to me as if that may not be nearly as strong as we thought it was.

I was worried that Buchanan would get 5 or 10 percent of the vote and every Republican congressman would

conclude that trade protection was a margin of difference in his or her election. A lot of them did that with Perot in 1992. Although the Republican Party is still basically committed to free trade in the Congress, it is not quite as universal as it was. When I was there, you could count on one hand the number of protectionist Republicans. There are more than that now, and a lot of it is because people who were elected after 1992 wanted to appeal to the Perot voters, and trade protection is one of the ways to do that.

**Doug Barr:** What about Clinton and Gore's movement toward global government and the incremental movements of giving our sovereignty over to the United Nations?

**Vin Weber:** If we're committed to freer trade and a broader globalization of the economy, it does create difficulties. There are going to be some big arguments about the extent to which organizations like the World Trade Organization should have authority internationally. My view is that we have to accept some of that. The WTO is an American idea. It was ultimately tabled by the Canadians because we didn't want to do it ourselves. We knew, though, that we would comply with trade agreements. We weren't confident that Third World and formerly communist countries would comply with free trade agreements. We wanted an international entity to make sure that we could effectively and fairly police free trade agreements. There is a fine line in terms of how far you want to go with some of those things.

The Kyoto accord, basically imposing environmental policy on this country through an international agreement, is going to be hugely controversial. I don't think that's going to go down very well. And I think there's a distinct limit to how far we're going to go in terms of allowing the United Nations control of multinational entities. President Bush was, of course, famously successful for putting together a multinational effort under the auspices of the United Nations in the Persian Gulf. But let's not fool ourselves: America dominated that effort, America called the shots, and if it had been otherwise, we probably would not have done it. I don't think we're ready to cede to the United Nations or any other multinational organization control of our international peacekeeping efforts.

**Mark Anderson:** Twenty-five years ago, you and I and probably twenty or thirty other people in this room tried to figure out how we could take over the Minnesota Legislature and bring conservative ideals to the state of Minnesota. This election was disappointing at a number of levels: local levels, some legislative races, the senate race, of course, and the uncertain outcome of the presidency. What confidence can you give us that our money was well spent in the year 2000? Where do you see the people who are interested in change and looking forward into the future? Do we start writing checks to the National Rifle Association or the American Legion, or is there some part of the Republican Party that's worthy of our support?

**Mitch Pearlstein:** Contributions to American Experiment are tax-deductible.

**Vin Weber:** I don't quite agree with you. We share the same goals for the state, but I'm more optimistic about what's happened. I think the Republican Party in Minnesota is doing well. We've had several years of good leadership.

Minnesota is a highly competitive state and maybe even leans a little bit the other way, but when I was growing up, I thought that this was a solidly Democratic state and we only won elections by accident or by mistake. We now have had the first back-to-back elections of a Republican majority in the Minnesota House of Representatives since we passed party designation. In essence, we have the first Republican legislatures in modern Minnesota history two times in a row.

I'm sorry that Senator Grams lost, but I can't blame that on the Republican Party; unique circumstances contributed to his defeat. I'm glad that Mark Kennedy won back my old seat in the Second District, even though I'm extremely disappointed that John Kline didn't quite make it in the Sixth District, which surprised me. I thought he was going to win there.

Look at the presidential level. In 1984, I was the Reagan chairman for Minnesota, and we couldn't get them to target Minnesota for Reagan. It was assumed that this state was so hopelessly Democratic at the presidential level that even a popular incumbent president couldn't carry it. Well, George W. Bush came very close.

I'll guarantee you that the Republicans are not going to write Minnesota off in the future. They're going to look at the whole Upper Midwest—Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota—and say, those states are at least as attainable as anything in the northeast or on the West Coast. That's a big change for us. We've paid a big price, as Republicans, for the fact that in five of six elections, we had a Minnesota Democrat on the national ticket. If nothing else, this election ends that legacy and the state is going to be competitive, at least presidentially, for the foreseeable future. We've done better than you think.

In terms of the kind of policy changes we want, we've still got an independent governor and a Democratic Minnesota Senate. I might criticize some things that have gone on in the legislature, but I can't fundamentally fault them. With tripartite government, progress is going to have to be marginal, but Minnesota Republicans can feel they've made significant progress. I certainly think the party is the place you ought to put your money if that's what you want to see happen. They've done a good job. ■