

# Team Bush's November Surprise

**By Bill Berkowitz**

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**F**orty years after Senator Barry Goldwater crashed and burned as the Republican Party's conservative presidential candidate, a consolidated conservative movement spearheaded by evangelical Christians carried George W. Bush to victory. The re-election of the president wasn't so much determined by Soccer Moms, NASCAR Dads, or military voters as it was by Karl Rove's army of "Values Voters" – an unwaveringly loyal bloc of Republican Party voters that marched to the polls and provided President Bush the votes necessary in a number of key states, including the pivotal battleground state of Ohio.

"They showed up. The Republican base, that is," wrote Charles Pierce in an item posted at Eric Alterman's web log, *Altercation*. "The people who believe that their marriages are threatened by those of gay people, the people who believe there were WMD in Iraq and that Saddam waved a hankie at Mohammed Atta, the people who believe His eye is on every embryo. They all showed up, and there are more of them than there are of us. This was a faith-based electorate and, for whatever reason, their belief was stronger than our reality. This is a country I do not recognize any more."

With the possible appointment of two, perhaps three, Supreme Court Justices – including a Chief Justice – and dozens of judges in lower courts, more tax cuts for the wealthy, the further evisceration of social programs, the privatization of social security, the lowering the wall of the separation of church and state, and more foreign adventures, conservative Christians have given the president the opportunity to forge a right wing legacy that could last well into this century.

Make no mistake about it: Team Bush is dead set on nothing less than reshaping America.

For the first time in many election observers' memories, exit polls found that streams of Bush voters cited their concern about terrorism and "moral values" in

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nearly equal numbers as their most important issues. “Moral values” — a phrase that has little to do with what constitutes good and evil and more to do with a set of specific social concerns expressed by conservative Christians — handily trumped concerns over taxes, education, the war in Iraq and health care issues. According to the San Francisco Chronicle, “Of those who said religious convictions were important as a quality in their leader, 91 percent voted for Bush.”

Throwing a dart to the heart of the same-sex marriage movement was a major motivating factor for the turnout of “values voters” in the eleven states where anti-same-sex marriage initiatives were on the ballot. In Mississippi, 86 percent of voters backed the state’s anti-same-sex marriage initiative; in Arkansas the number was 75; in Georgia it was 77; in Kentucky, 75; in Oklahoma, 76; in North Dakota, 73; in Utah, 66; in Montana, 66; in Ohio, 62; in Michigan, 59; and in Oregon, 58.

After twenty-five years of both under the radar organizing and open campaigning, it is surprising that so many were “surprised” by the existence of a so-called faith-based electorate. John Zogby, the head of Zogby International, and Frank Newport, the editor in chief of the Gallup Poll, maintained that they were caught napping by the emergence of such a well-organized faith-based electorate.

“When we did our polling before the election and asked people the five most important issues on their minds, moral values just never came up,” Zogby told the San Francisco Chronicle. Newport called religion, “the untold story of this election.”

Well-funded Christian right organizations were elated with the results of Tuesday’s election:

“After a long night the results are in, and it is clear that values voters have ushered President George W. Bush down the aisle for a second term,” crowed an ebullient Tony Perkins in a post election day missive from the Washington, DC-based offices of the Family Research Council.

In an online fundraising letter, Jon Garthwaite, the editor of TownHall.com, effusively wrote: “Four more years. That’s the verdict from the voters. President George W. Bush gets a second term. And we conservatives get an unprecedented opportunity to shape America’s future for generations to come.”

CitizenLink, an online publication of Dr. James Dobson’s Focus on the Family, headlined its post-election story, “Values Voters’ Make the Difference.” “For too long, liberal political pundits have been telling us that issues like marriage and life divide us as a people,” said Gary Bauer, a former Republican presidential

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candidate and president of the pro-family group American Values. “But it’s clear that while those issues may be controversial, they are not divisive.

“People reach across such boundaries as party, economic status and ethnic group to join together to support and protect the American family. This is the year of the ‘values voter.’ “

Appearing on the Southern Baptist Convention television network FamilyNet, Richard Land, the president of the SBC Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, called Bush’s victory – coupled with Republican majorities in both the House and Senate – “a testimony to the president’s ability to connect with the American people.”

Two years ago, longtime GOP activist Mark McKinnon opined on the cultural divide in the country in a conversation with journalist Ron Suskind. In Suskind’s recent New York Times Magazine piece titled “Without a Doubt,” he reported on the exchange:

“You think he’s [President Bush] an idiot, don’t you?’ I [Suskind] said, no, I didn’t. ‘No, you do, all of you do, up and down the West Coast, the East Coast, a few blocks in southern Manhattan called Wall Street. Let me clue you in. We don’t care. You see, you’re outnumbered 2 to 1 by folks in the big, wide middle of America, busy working people who don’t read The New York Times or Washington Post or The L.A. Times. And you know what they like? They like the way he walks and the way he points, the way he exudes confidence. They have faith in him. And when you attack him for his malaprops, his jumbled syntax, it’s good for us. Because you know what those folks don’t like? They don’t like you!’ In this instance, the final ‘you,’ of course, meant the entire reality-based community.”

To many who have followed the rise of the Christian Right in American politics, the mobilization of the faith-based electorate was not a surprise. Jerry Sloan, the head of Project Tocsin, a Sacramento, California-based organization founded by in 1991 “to monitor the political activities of Religious Political Extremists in Sacramento County” said in a recent e-mail: “For the past decade Democrats have ignored, fled from, and failed to address the Radical Religious Right head on. This failure has now placed our beloved Republic in dire peril.”

In the end, there was no significant October Surprise; Osama bin Laden wasn’t captured, and his well-timed video caused a major stir but only a minor blip. And there were no unseemly personal revelations about either of the candidates. The large turnout of “Values Voters” did, however, result in a “November Surprise.”