

CATO INSTITUTE POLICY FORUM

THE 2000 ELECTION AND THE POLITICS OF THE FUTURE

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Featuring:

Peter Beinart, Editor, *The New Republic*;
Nick Gillespie, Editor-in-Chief, *Reason*; and
Richard Lowry, Editor, *National Review*

The Cato Institute
F.A. Hayek Auditorium
1000 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. BOAZ: Good morning, or good afternoon, and welcome to the Cato Institute. I'm David Boaz. I'm the Executive Vice President here. And I'm pleased to have so many of you here for what I hope will be a very interesting discussion. Our forum is "The 2000 Election and the Politics of the Future." And I certainly hope that the latter topic will be more pleasant than the former.

I heard Rush Limbaugh declare this week that this is the most important election of his lifetime. And I thought, "More than Kennedy?" "More than Reagan?" "More than Clinton, who seems to be the real architect of our current politics?" It seems a dubious case to make. I guess it's the usual partisan hype to fire up the base.

There are those of us who find it hard to get excited about the choices in this particular election. I keep thinking of the Louisiana race between David Duke and Edwin Edwards, when the best bumper sticker was the one that read "Vote for the Crook. It's important." I kind of feel that way, with a slightly different twist.

In my mental file of my activities of the past few weeks, I thought of this event as three young editors of old

magazines, although the magazines aren't equally old and the editors aren't equally young. But, in any case, we certainly have three relatively new editors of magazines with different perspectives on the world. And I think that will make for an interesting discussion. In general, of course, we would identify these perspectives as liberal, libertarian and conservative, but there are other distinctions, as well.

When I first started reading political magazines, I got from National Review a sort of New York Catholic sense of life. I thought The New Republic had sort of a Washington Jewish feel to it; and I guess, with reason, I thought it had sort of a California engineering sense of life, although now that it's edited by an English lit major who lives in Ohio, that may be changing.

MR. BEINART: No. We're going more to the engineering.

(Laughter.)

MR. BOAZ: As we can see.

We will hear from our three panelists first; then we'll invite your questions; and then you're all invited upstairs for sandwiches and continued discussion in the Winter Garden. I'm going to introduce each of the panelists separately. We will go in alphabetical order, so our first discussant will be Peter Beinart, who is the Editor of The New Republic.

Peter grew up in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and attended Yale University, where I understand he was the head of the Liberal Party in the Political Union. So I guess he was bred in the bone to edit a liberal magazine. He graduated from Yale with distinction in history and political science. He won the Alpheus and Henry Snowe Prize for Leadership and Academic Excellence, the final award and thus I assume the best award presented at Yale's graduation.

He won both Rhodes and Marshall Scholarships for graduate study at Oxford University. He had to make a tough choice and chose the Rhodes Scholarship, which he did after spending a summer at The New Republic. At Oxford, he wrote for The New Republic as well as for Newsweek and the Financial Times.

After graduating from Oxford in 1995, he returned to The New Republic as Managing Editor, became Senior Editor, and then, most recently, became the Editor of The New Republic, obviously a very distinguished position. He's also a contributor to Time Magazine.

Peter.

PETER BEINART,
EDITOR, THE NEW REPUBLIC

MR. BEINART: Thank you. As you can see, I've had a life perfect for liberal backlash. If you can grow up in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and be the head of the Liberal Party at Yale and not be a neo-conservative, you must have a lot of kind of fortitude.

I will start just with my impressions from last night, which are no more deep or considered than anybody else's. But it strikes me that if George W. Bush is the next President of the United States, we'll look back to last night as the moment when he won it. I was frankly stunned by how bad Gore was. And I think that the Gore campaign made an absolutely, absolutely abysmal decision to try to make him seem soft and cuddly and passive in the second debate.

Someone in the Gore campaign told me ages and ages ago, back seven or eight up and down cycles ago, that Gore is only good when he has someone or something to attack. And it seemed to me it's not a particularly sophisticated insight, but I think it's really been borne out. And I think, unless they were seeing polls that I didn't see in the last few days coming out of this weekend, I think they wildly and disastrously overreacted to the exaggerator spin coming out of the first debate.

The reason the exaggerator spin which has been so successful obviously is, first of all, it in a sense undoes Lieberman. Because it returns this question of Clinton fatigue

back to center stage, which is what the Gore campaign had effectively gotten off center stage ever since the Democratic Convention, largely I think because of Lieberman.

But, even more than that, I think the bigger problem is that -- and again, this is not complicated counter-intuitive thinking, but Gore's advantage is that on most of the issues that people say they care most about, that he and the Democrats have the advantage, (a); and (b) whatever you say about Al Gore, he has a better command of the issues than George W. Bush. It was clear in the first debate that, in most cases, he knew Gore's plans better than -- I'm sorry -- he knew Bush's plans better than Bush did. He probably knows Bush's record in Texas better than Bush did.

By trying to avoid at all costs these gaffs, which means not talking about specifics, it seems to me the Gore campaign has entirely, entirely erased their advantage. And I fundamentally don't believe that Al Gore has to be liked by the American people to win this election. Were the economy not so great and were prescription drugs, Social Security, education, and Medicare not the biggest issues on people's minds, maybe he would. But I think all you have to do is go back to the 1988 campaign; with these kind of structural factors going his way, I don't see why they think that Gore needs to be loved.

It seems to me, my advice to them now, and it would have been my advice to them a couple of weeks ago, would be to go very, very negative; to be very, very tough. And I think it's not only good politics for Al Gore to do that; the fundamental reality is he's facing a guy who most people still know a lot less about than they do about him, and that gives him every opportunity to raise Bush's negatives. It's what George Bush did against Michael Dukakis in 1988 very effectively. I think if they don't go very, very hard and very, very tough after Texas, against Texas in the next couple of weeks, I think they will be even more crazy than I think they are now.

And I would make one more point about when I say they should be very, very tough and go very, very negative. I don't consider that an unfortunate thing for the morality of the country. I generally tend to think that negative campaigns are better campaigns. They tend to be more substantive. They tend to be more honest.

If you compare how dishonest people are when they speak about their opponents to how dishonest they are when they speak about themselves, you actually see that -- I would take the negative campaigning most of the time. And, in fact, most of Gore's attacks against Bush, except for these last couple of days of bumbling, "He's an idiot" kind of stuff, are basically fairly substantive. I mean, they have been fairly substantive attacks

on his programs, and now they will be fairly substantive attacks on his record in Texas. It would not only be in Gore's interest for him to go nuclear, I think, in the next month, it would be in the country's interest.

The second point I would make is about slightly longer term, what happens after the election. Well, actually, let me go back and make one more point before I go to my thoughts about the consequences of a Democratic and a Republican victory.

The great mystery -- now, maybe it shows how insular we are on the liberal side, that this is the way we perceive the race, but the great question for me and I think that many people in our office have been puzzling about it, is the same question that the political scientists have been puzzling about is: Why is the race so close, given the structural factors that -- given Gore's structural advantages? Obviously, the fact that people don't like Al Gore that much plays into it, although he had pretty much erased that to a significant degree up until the last week and the general question of kind of Clinton fatigue.

But I think the one factor that people haven't perhaps focused enough attention on is the underlying strength of the Republican Party, which was masked by the Perot candidacies. I think that we can't forget that the reason Clinton won a lot of States that Democrats hadn't won in a long time in '92 and '96 was the bizarre interplay of that third candidate, who took

mostly Republican votes and basically threw the politics of a lot of States haywire.

That essentially masked the strength, the underlying strength, even though many of the issues are going the Democratic Party's way, it masked the underlying strength that the Republican Party still has nationally as the party which I still think is closer to the majority party. And what you've seen without Perot in this race and with the most significant third candidate obviously drawing from Gore is that, most strikingly, Gore is not able to compete, or he's still down by a reasonable margin, in a lot of those States, particularly in the border States in the South and the interior West, that Clinton won. And I think this is part of the reason that Bush has been able to keep it so close.

On to kind of thoughts about post-Election Day. It seems to me that a loss is -- the Republicans are in worse shape the day after a Bush loss than the Democrats are the day after a Gore loss. I think the Democrats' explanation for a Gore loss is less traumatic. How do they explain the Gore loss?

Obviously, first of all, everybody hates Al Gore. Fine. That's explanation number one.

(Laughter.)

MR. BEINART: That obviously is not a problematic explanation at all.

The second explanation is, can we still hue to a fiscally conservative position in a time of surplus, not a time of deficit? That is a somewhat more problematic thing for them to deal with. Because, obviously, what they will say is that Gore swung -- perhaps because he was concerned about the base and Nader -- he swung too far left, he proposed too much spending and he ran too far left in the weeks after the Convention.

That is a more problematic argument obviously for the Democrats to deal with, because it suggests that basically they could only keep these lefty instincts in check while there was a deficit. The minute the deficit evaporated, they went back to form. But I think it's, again, it's not devastating. I think that if you look at the Democrats rising up from the grassroots, most of them are basically New Democrats.

A lot of the people running for Congress are running to Gore's right, as more centrist than Gore. I think the base of the party really has been shifted by Clinton. I don't think it will be that hard for the Democrats to moderate back a little more in the direction of, say, Clinton's '96 campaign as opposed to Gore's 2000 campaign.

It seems to me the biggest problem the Democrats have is the hardest one to understand, because it's the most speculative. But I think it's one of the key things which has happened in this race underneath the headlines. Which is that

the anti-globalization critique which, five years ago say, looked like it was a critique that might come more from the right than from the left, is now overwhelming a critique from the left. You could see that this happened, first, I think, with Seattle and the protest against the IMF, and now you see in Nader's demolition of Buchanan and the fact that Buchanan is actually running away and not even talking about these trade issues as much as he's talking about social conservative issues.

There is a cultural phenomenon on the left that is happening, that is very important, that can't be understood purely in political terms. I don't think that the press has really understood it. It has to do, I think, with the alienation of a certain group of young people from the corporate surroundings in which they've grown up. This is a factor that, if the economy tanks, is going to become a big, big problem for the Democratic Party, it seems to me.

Because the activists, the people who have passion -- not the political consultants, but the people who you actually -- I mean, I think it may be a stretch, but, in some ways, the Nader campaign reminds me of the kind of -- not reminds me, because I wasn't there but -- the kind of "Go clean for Gene" 1968 campaign. There was really something on college campuses going on, and the Democratic Party needs these people.

And if the Democratic Party is going to be a pro-free trade, essentially pro-corporate party, particularly in international affairs, and these people continue to swell in their ranks -- which they certainly will do if the economy tanks -- I think that's a long-term, big problem for the Democrats. I think that's their biggest problem. But I still think the problems pale compared to the Republicans.

The Republicans' problems are, if they run with this much more popular candidate and lose, it seems to me -- and Rich and I have a kind of a running debate about this, which I'm not always sure I get the better of, so maybe I shouldn't bring it up -- but it seems to me that if the Republicans do lose this race, the voices in the Party associated, obviously, with McCain, who say the Party can never again run a candidate with a big across-the-board income tax cut, essentially win the day. I don't see how the Republicans run another candidate who proposes the kind of Reagan-style, across-the-board tax cut.

And there will also be, I think, slightly less strong but also strong, voices saying that the Party needs to moderate even more the social issues. I mean, for goodness sake, Bush never talks about them. He underplays them as much as possible. But I think there will be increasing pressure to go even further.

And those two things, it seems to me, create a bigger problem for the Republicans. Since, it seems to me, if you pull

at those two planks in the Party, post-Cold War -- and everybody knows this, but after you don't have communism anymore, you don't have crime and welfare in the same way -- it seems to me the Republican Party has a big, big hole at its center. And I think that whether the Party could run someone who ran like McCain did, basically completely ignoring the social issues and not running on a tax cut, and keep the Christian Right and the other conservatives in check the way Bush did this year, it seems to me hard to imagine.

And I'll just close with the kind of most outrageous scenario I can imagine in kind of the next, say, five years. Which is that Gore wins, the GOP responds by abandoning either the tax cut and/or the anti-abortion plank, the economy tanks. So basically what you have, I think, is you have deep dissatisfaction on the Republican right, and the economy tanks. I think then you have perhaps equally very, very serious dissatisfaction on the Democratic left.

You essentially have party elites, political consultants, who are very, very disliked and out of touch by their party bases. The Republican Party, at its base, is still a socially conservative tax cut party. The Democratic Party, at its base, is very much an anti-globalization party. If those two things happens, Gore wins and the economy tanks, I think it's possible you throw up the deck and the whole partisan

ideologically alignment gets scrambled, and you end up seeing -- not immediately but over time -- essentially the Al Gores and George W. Bushes of the world in the same party, with the anti-globalization left on one side and the national socialist conservative right on the other.

And as I was thinking on my way over here, I actually think that that may very well place all three of us on the same side, as well; in which case you'll need some new panelists next time around.

Thank you.

(Laughter.)

MR. BOAZ: That's probably what the Buchanan people would say. We have three, more or less, Ivy League-educated, elitist editors up here, and we should have somebody from the --

MALE VOICE: Let me point out less so. I'm weighing down with less.

MR. BOAZ: Rutgers.

MALE VOICE: I think Peter is the more and we're the less, on this side of the table here.

(Laughter.)

MR. BOAZ: Nevertheless, thank you, Peter.

Our next panelist will be Nick Gillespie, who is the Editor of Reason Magazine. He joined the staff of Reason as an Assistant Editor in 1993. He served as Senior Editor and

Executive Editor, and then became Editor-in-Chief in January of this year. Along the way, he got a Ph.D. in American literature from the State University of New York at Buffalo. His work has appeared in all the major newspapers, along with Slate, Salon and the Utney Reader.

He is also a featured contributor to the satiric Web site, Suck.com, which I think Joe Lieberman wants to ban, and has contributed commentaries to National Public Radio which, come to think of it, I think I want to ban.

Reason is actually doing something fascinating. It has become a virtual magazine, as I understand it. The Editor is in Miami, Ohio; the Managing Editor is in Los Angeles; the Art Director is in Phoenix; the Chief Guru is in Dallas; and there are senior editors in New York and Washington. And I don't see how it works, but apparently it does. You can check it out for yourself if you catch one of the remaining few copies out there.

Nick Gillespie.

NICK GILLESPIE,

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, REASON

MR. GILLESPIE: Thanks.

MR. BOAZ: We have a high-tech presentation for you.

MR. GILLESPIE: Yes, we do. This is the legacy of, I guess, Reason, being, to the extent that it has any physical location, not too far from Cal Tech.

MALE VOICE: I feel like I'm in an Austin Powers movie with this screen.

(Laughter.)

MR. GILLESPIE: Just wait until I start making my demands.

(Laughter.)

MR. GILLESPIE: Reason, I think, unlike National Review or The New Republic, really doesn't function as a proxy for the Democratic Party or the Republican Party. And, as a result --

MALE VOICE: Ouch.

MR. GILLESPIE: Believe me, "proxy" is kind of a nice word.

But, in any case, as a result, I don't really have a nag in this horse race. To me, and I think I speak for most of the staff of Reason, the tragedy is not either that Gore will win and Bush will lose or Bush will win and Gore will lose, but that one of them will actually win come November.

(Laughter.)

MR. GILLESPIE: And in keeping with that, my comments are going to be a little bit more meta than Peter's were, because we don't play the partisan politics game in the same way that I

think either of my colleagues do. And I'd like to structure my brief comments today regarding the 2000 election and the politics of the future around a set of related questions. Which is, effectively, or essentially, why is the country so uninterested in the looming national election?

I mean, we're voting for a President, Congress, et cetera, in a supposedly watershed event and nobody really seems to care. Why don't we care more about who gets elected President, Senator, Representative, dog catcher, what have you? Why are we so blase and so disengaged from partisan politics and that most direct marker of democracy which is voting?

The answers to such queries, I think, tell the direction of which the politics of the future -- and it's a vague phrase and I don't expect to make it any clearer during the course of my remarks -- but the direction in which these things are headed. And I want to start out, using my slide show here, with a snapshot from the Campaign 2000 trail that I think really kind of gets at the core of how Americans are interfacing with this particular campaign.

This, as I assume some of you will recognize -- I'm not sure I do anymore -- this, as I assume some of you will recognize, is Breughel's "The Fall of Icarus." For me, this is pretty much summing up how I think America is viewing the 2000 election. You can see in the foreground various figures going

about doing their everyday business. We have a farmer, a shepherd, a guy fishing down here. And in the side ground here, if you can see, you can see the legs of Icarus just kind of kicking around, before he finally drowns and goes down for the third time. Icarus, in this scenario, is the politician. It's the political class. Essentially, we have a monumental event going on, but it's just something that, really, people don't care about.

The most visible indication of the fact that people don't care are the TV ratings for the first presidential debate, which were weak. They were about 46.6 million people that watched the debate on October 3rd, which was about .5 million more than watched the first debate between Bill Clinton and Bob Dole. And that was in a race that had a foregone conclusion. The race was over at least 15 minutes before Bob Dole even announced for presidency, much less after he went through the rigmarole of things like that.

There are other indications that people are just not interested at all in this campaign in any substantive way. The latest voter involvement poll, taken October 8th by the Vanishing Voter Project of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, found that just 37 percent of Americans, or of respondents -- and these respondents are eligible voters -- paid either a great deal of attention or quite a bit of attention to the presidential race,

while fully 63 percent claimed to pay just some, only a little, or no attention at all to the campaign.

The attitude underlying such numbers is likely to translate into a very weak showing in the polls later in November. Earlier this week, I spoke with Curtis Gans, who is the head of a thing called the Committee for the Study of the American Electorate. It's a nonprofit group that tracks voter participation and engagement with issues. And Gans assured me that the decline in presidential debates is part of a 40-year tread. Essentially, he told me, that since the first Kennedy-Nixon debate, it has been all downhill.

There have been some slight upticks. You can see in this chart, in 1980 Reagan and Carter pulled some viewers to the TV. And the first debate between Bush, Perot and Clinton did. Although that one even had low ratings relative to past debates.

These trends themselves, the lack of engagement with the issues, the lack of interest in debates, translating into a lower voter turnout, is also part of a long-observed political trend. A lot of political scientists say that. Going back to 1900, we've seen declining voter turnout. That's somewhat arguable for a variety of reasons I won't get into, but everybody agrees that, since 1960, essentially, with a few minor interruptions, there just has not been much of a voter turnout.

Now, let me ask: What are we to make of this? What are we to make of this mass evacuation, essentially, from partisan politics, from electoral politics? The typical reading of these trends is that they represent the slow dissolution not simply of democracy but of decent society in America itself. As Political Scientist Robert Putnam has put it in his recent book, "Bowling Alone," and I quote from him, "Declining electoral participation is merely the most visible symptom of a broader disengagement from community life. Like a fever," says Putnam -- or, perhaps more accurately, scolds Putnam -- "electoral abstention is even more important as a sign of deeper trouble in the body politic than as a malady itself."

He cites anti-government antipathy, the professionalization of politics and, of course, that all-purpose whipping boy television as contributing causes for the decline. And this is basically Gans' argument, as well, and virtually anybody who actually tracks voter interest and turnout in politics.

I want to suggest a different interpretation of our manifest lack of interest in politics, one that doesn't carry with it an explicit or implicit condemnation of what I would argue are relatively free individuals choosing to live their lives in ways that may or may not comport with a particular

political scientist's vision of the virtuous life. More to the point, it's one that interprets the data that we see on its face.

People participate less in politics for the same reason they don't bowl in leagues anymore -- to use Putnam's phrase -- or the way that they get married. People get married in a different way than they used to. They don't make dinner at home the way they used to. They don't, if you're a man, wear blue suits with white shirts and red ties the way they used to. The reasons for this is not because we can't do these things, but because we don't want to and we don't have to anymore. We have more options. Our flesh is not weak in this case; it's just not willing.

The center of gravity in most American's lives has shifted away from partisan politics and into other, more gratifying areas of activity, areas in which individuals have far greater hopes for gaining satisfaction, creating meaning and value in their lives. Over the past few decades, the most important trend in American life, I would argue, has been the ever-increasing proliferation of options, of choices, of identities in everyday life. Throughout American society, there is a vastly greater acceptance of a wider variety of doing things than there was 20 years ago, 30 years ago, 40 years ago.

If there has been something over that same time period, a slight turn away from a kind of command-and-control, top-down

model of government and governance, there has been something more like a whole-scale deregulation in social and cultural spheres. Virtually anything goes these days. And I'm sure I'll have some disagreement with my panelists in saying that, by and large, I think that's a good thing.

But one thing that it does is that it makes it increasingly difficult for all sorts of experts to assert authority and control over individuals. The politician certainly, the doctor, the priest, the professor, even the stockbroker. They have a weaker and weaker hold over the public mind, over the public behavior. Culture and, with it, politics are rapidly and gloriously, I would argue, moving beyond any kind of control in an old sense.

The proliferation of choices has happened for a lot of reasons. We're richer, for one. And I think the rich among us will certainly point out that they like to have things done their way, not somebody else's. We're more educated. Educated people tend to get uppity, as well. Technology has made all sorts of things possible that were just virtually inconceivable only a generation or two ago.

The bottom is that, for most people, it's easier to get what you want when you want it or to live your life on something approaching your own terms than it use to be. Simply put, there

are more ways of being in the world and there is more acceptance of variety, of difference.

This vast increase in choice is perhaps most obvious in the economic marketplace. And let me use a somewhat trivial example to stand in for a larger trend. Ten years ago roughly, the typical supermarket store stocked about 14,000 different items. Within a decade's time, that had jacked up to over 20,000 items. Not a bad range of choices, but of course it's puny compared to what bigger stores are offering all the time and at greater and greater discounts. We take such massive proliferation for granted. It was only less than a decade ago that book superstores transformed the commercial landscape for books, music, videos, CD's. We're used to stores now that stock hundreds of thousands of titles and Web sites that stock millions more.

The proliferation of choice extends, of course, and more importantly, beyond just economic matters. It extends into schooling, for instance, where more and more parents are moving their children into traditional private schools. Public and private voucher programs and charter schools, all of which maintain some element of choice to them, that was previously lacking for most Americans.

The proliferation of choice extends into our very ideas of personal identity and ethnicity, where people are more

comfortable with mixing and synthesis than they ever have been. Interracial marriage rates, for instance, continue to climb, which I think is one indication of this. This proliferation of choice extends to all sorts of other dimensions, as well -- to relationships, certainly, to gender, to work, to lifestyle. Everywhere, it seems, there are more options and acceptance of more options.

Historically, such a state of affairs has had precious little to do with government or with politics. Indeed, the sort of innovation and creative destruction that fuels such change is typically resisted by government at all levels. To be sure, and to differing degrees, politicians recognize that choice is becoming the preeminent value in American social life. That's one of the reasons why both the Democrats and the Republicans constantly pepper their rhetoric with the word "choice."

(Cellular telephone rings.)

MR. GILLESPIE: This is one of the technologies that is making life so much better for so many people.

That's why both Republicans and Democrats increasingly cast themselves as the party of choice and describe their programs in terms of that choice. The Democrats, most obviously, with abortion: "It's a woman's right to choose." But also consider Al Gore's discussion of the way that he categorizes his tuition tax credit for college. He talks about it in an odd way

for a government plan, but he is -- he said this last night, he has said it before -- "Every family should have the right to chose to send their kid to college." Choice comes up in every context.

The GOP, of course, pushes choice on certain other issues. Not abortion, but on school vouchers, Social Security privatization. Bush is always quick to talk about how young people should have the choice of investing their own money for their own retirement. And in tax cuts in general, the Republican rhetoric has been positively Libertarian in various ways, when they talk about tax cuts as returning money to people so that you can choose. You know how to choose to spend your money for your own purposes.

Such appeals, however, such appeals to choice, I think coming from either the Democrats or the Republicans, are ultimately incoherent and unconvincing at best. If anything, they underscore each party's lack of commitment to the principles of choice writ large. For instance, if you happen to choose to like violent entertainment, or what they call violent entertainment, well, then you should be a pariah and you should be put out of business or regulated or hectored in some way.

If you're gay, both parties have come to a peculiar, at least in the last couple of debates, a very peculiar understanding of choice and tolerance, where it seems to be okay

for the States to pass gay marriage acts, but the Federal Government, well, it's not a Federal issue. And, of course, the people running for President are only interested in Federal issues. And, in fact, there is a Federal law that precludes a full recognition of gay marriage. So there are gestures towards choice, but the rug gets pulled out before you quite walk through the threshold there.

This lack of commitment to choice, to truly letting people live lives according to their own likes and according to the dictates of their own pleasures and sensibilities, also suggests why, I think, politics is unlikely to become more central to the lives of everyday Americans anytime soon. Politics, as practiced by both the GOP and the Democrats, are more about control and less and less about unfettered choice.

I must admit to mixed feelings, ultimately, about this recognition; that, in fact, on the one hand, outside of the political sphere we have a greater and greater sense of choice becoming preeminent, and the fact that politics are moving further and further away from this, and, with that, less and less involvement in politics, in electoral politics and party politics. On the one hand, I find it quite appealing and inspiring that, so to speak, to bring it back to the Breughel -- and I think we can always bring everything back to the Breughel -- I find it incredibly appealing and attractive that

nobody is paying attention while Icarus, the politician, is sinking to the bottom of the ocean, that they're going about their lives and their business and they're doing things that are important to them. I think that's very bracing and it's very good.

On the other hand, however, as someone who would like to see the fundamental withering of the state, certainly a reduction of the way in which the state impinges on all sorts of lifestyle issues -- and this I think the Republicans and Democrats are equally guilty of -- I would like to see that wither away. I would like to see a state that talks about foreign policy, as the two gents did last night, I would like to see that wither away.

I'm very ambivalent about this disengagement from electoral politics. Such disengagement and imagination provides all sorts of opportunities for Icarus there to not really drown, but rather to float back to the surface and swim over to the shore and start his new plans again for his next flight of fancy. And I think that that is this tension, actually, between both a world apart from politics, where people actually do things and live their lives versus a world of politics, which is very much against the idea of choice in any real meaningful way, is the tension that's reflected in Reason and I think in the sensibilities that shape the magazine.

Let me stop there.

MR. BOAZ: Thank you Nick.

We can bring the lights back up and we'll have our final speaker, Rich Lowry, the Editor of National Review.

Rich graduated from the University of Virginia, where he studied English and history and edited a conservative monthly magazine, called the Virginia Advocate. He joined National Review in 1992, after finishing second in a National Review young writer's contest. And I can't help wondering who finished first, but that's what is says on the bio.

MR. LOWRY: I tied for second, actually. That's the story of my life I'm afraid.

MR. BOAZ: He then became the Articles Editor, and then moved to Washington in 1994, to cover Congress out of the Washington Bureau. He was named Editor of National Review in 1997. And he too, of course, writes for Reader's Digest, major newspapers and other publications.

Rich Lowry.

RICHARD LOWRY,
EDITOR, NATIONAL REVIEW

MR. LOWRY: Thanks, David, for your kind introduction.

It's great to be here. It's great to be down in Washington. The National Review, of course, is based in New York, which is, as you probably know, a much different environment than the one here in Washington. First of all, everyone dresses like Nick up there.

(Laughter.)

MR. LOWRY: And I'm always reminded of what an interesting place New York is, because the offices of National Review in Manhattan are actually located directly above the headquarters of a rap recording studio, called Loud Records. It's very aptly named. Because when they do their thing down there, our floors will actually shake beneath our feet. And when it's spring and summer, we'll open our windows and this unmistakable odor will float up. And I regret to report that, on a lot of days, National Review is produced in the haze of marijuana smoke, which I guess a good Cato Institute audience should be able to appreciate.

(Laughter.)

MR. LOWRY: But I want to talk a little bit about what's going on in practical politics to start, and then a little bit of what I think the deeper issues that are at stake in our politics. First of all, I think we have to remind ourselves that no matter what happens next year, American politics is going to get off to a great start. Because sometime in January, Bill

Clinton and Buddy are going to drag their sorry asses onto Marine One and leave.

And it doesn't matter where they're going. They can go straight to the Dreamworks Studio for all I care. They can go down to Arkansas and run a savings and loan, whatever they want to do, as long as they're gone, which will be just a tremendous boon to American politics. Because anyone who cares about the majesty of the office has to be distressed about the way Bill Clinton has conducted himself.

And it's not just that he soiled the office, it was the way in which he did it. We loosely talk of President Clinton having an affair with Monica Lewinsky, but I think "affair" is really much too charitable a word. An "affair," we can think of JFK having an affair with Marilyn Monroe, and this would be something kind of mysterious. It would be glamorous. For the guys in the audience, it might even provoke some envy.

But, in contrast, Bill Clinton really had romantic moves on par with the average high school sophomore. When he leaves the White House, someone has to check under the bed for the Playboys and clear them out there. But one of the most important legacies of Bill Clinton will be his political legacy, where he, either through shrewd tactics or surrender, or some combination thereof, he has taken a lot of issues off the table

for conservatives and Republicans that were very effective for 30 years: crime, welfare.

He has just eliminated a lot of the Democrats' vulnerability on cultural issues, and, in this post-deficit political environment, made American politics safe for big spending again. And I think the thing that is really delightful and beautiful about Al Gore is that he appears ready to kick this legacy away, which is just a great thing for Republicans and conservatives.

And what can you say about Al Gore? I mean, fundamentally, he's Adlai Stevenson without the charm. He's Michael Dukakis without the lively sense of fun. Everything he does is just so obvious and clumsy. My favorite example of this was, about a year ago -- the Gore people were always trying to knock down the idea that Gore is boring. So they trotted out Tipper to tell the world that Al Gore sleeps in the nude. And, for me, this was really most unwelcome news, probably the worst news since we learned that Bob Dole was on Viagra. And I was hoping it would be the low point in American politics.

But, then, lo and behold, there was the kiss at the Democratic Convention, which, gee, maybe I'm just a squeamish guy, but I'm uncomfortable when people do that in the back of movie theaters, let alone in front of millions of people. And everyone said it demonstrated his passion for his wife. For me

it demonstrated his lack of consideration for others. But it worked. And it has taken the Bush campaign a while to react and adjust to the post-Convention Al Gore.

Now, let me stipulate, lest I appear too much a partisan proxy, as some might term it, that George Bush is by no means my ideal candidate. Just to put it charitably, he has have a very steep learning curve in this election. In the early debates, in the early primary debates, he pioneered a fascinating forensic technique, which was the one word answer in debates. They would ask him, "Governor, is there enough surplus to pay for your tax cuts?" He would say "Yes." And Brian Williams or whoever it was would look a little puzzled and say, "Well, would you like to elaborate?" He would say, "No."

(Laughter.)

MR. LOWRY: And in the early debates -- we should get the Breughel back up -- because he looked a lot like Icarus drowning there. So he's not the most sterling candidate, by any means. The GOP Convention I thought was nauseating. When I left with my colleagues from Philadelphia, we all had this overwhelming urge just to at least leave one child behind. Just one.

(Laughter.)

MR. LOWRY: And, of course, Bush has continued the ongoing Republican surrender on spending. If you look at

Congress and how much they're spending and how much they're talking about lock boxes at the same time, it reminds me of a remark by Balzac, who said, "The national budget is not a safe deposit box, it's a spray can," which is certainly the situation here in Washington.

But what has happened is that Bush has adjusted the post-convention Gore, because, for the longest time, the Bush campaign was focused on linking Gore to Clinton. And this was inherently implausible, I thought, because they're such different people in so many different ways and you could find any example of this.

One of my favorites is I just read the David Maraniss biography of Gore. And he was on the football team in high school. And the team had an awful losing streak that distressed Gore. So he showed up one Saturday morning at his coach's doorstep to tattle on his teammates for smoking and drinking and breaking the rules. And there's just no way you can imagine Bill Clinton doing that. He would be making it with the cheerleaders if he was on a football team. So this was inherently implausible.

So what the Bush people have done now is they have said: You know what? Gore is not like Clinton. He's a liberal. He is more liberal than Bill Clinton. And this message, over the last month, has begun to take. And what we saw last night was Al

Gore not just terrified of being himself, because he's such an ass, but he is also terrified of being identified as too liberal.

And that's why we had the extraordinary statement from Al Gore that he wants to shrink the size of government. Now I would no sooner believe that that schoolgirl is still standing in a classroom somewhere than that Al Gore wants to shrink the size of Government. But it's extremely important that he feels compelled to say that. Because Bush's critique of him as an old-style, big government liberal has really begun to take.

And, with all due respect to Peter, the idea that the issues favor the Democrats is outdated now. If you look at the Washington Post poll from yesterday, Bush is tied on education. He is tied on health care. He has a 10-point lead on taxes. And that's because he has begun to attack Gore as a liberal. And it's a charge that is plausible and that people believe.

So that's where I think kind of the practical day-to-day politics are at the moment. I do think, though, that there are deeper issues at stake in our politics and in our culture. Everyone tends to say it's a quiescent time. I don't think it is necessarily. I think, in our politics and culture, there is an effort afoot to create a new American man, a new civilizational ideal. And every great country and great empire has its civilizational ideal.

With Britain, it was the soldier and civil servant in service of the Crown. In the Soviet Union, it was the new Soviet man, all about economics. Well, we have an effort here to create a new American man.

What are the hallmarks of the new American man? He is addicted to the blandishments of the welfare state. He's content to have decisions made for him by various judicial and regulatory mandarins. And he is, generally, as sentimental and weepy as the average eight-year-old girl. In short, I think he's Alan Alda with a killer new prescription drug benefit. And I think it behooves conservatives to resist with all our fiber the creation of this new American man. And it means focusing, I think, on three areas, which I think are implicated in one way or another in this election. And I will just go over them very briefly.

One is tax cuts and property rights. The other is self-government. And the other is traditional notions of masculinity.

First, tax cuts. In the West, the battle for liberty has always been intertwined with the fight for property rights and the fight to limit the government's ability to take your property; i.e., the government's ability to tax you. And this is why tax cuts aren't just an economic issue; they're a moral issue and they're a freedom issue. And I think in this country we tolerate tax rates that, by any reasonable standards, are

confiscatory. There are all sorts of examples of this. I'll just talk about one.

I have a friend who lives in Queens, New York. Her mother is a widow. She worked her whole life as a school teacher. Her late husband was a philosophy professor. These people did not make a lot of money. They were both immigrants, she from Egypt, he came from Guatemala. But through one of those modern American miracles, they saved up a million dollars. And now she has to go through all sorts of contortions to try to give this, bequeath this money to her children.

The government wants to come back, after a lifetime of taxes, and take half of a lifetime of work and worry, half of a lifetime of toil and thrift. And that's not just bad economics; I think that's arbitrary, it's immoral, and it erodes the foundations of our liberty. And I think it's just extremely important that Bush, through his tax plan and through his Social Security reform, will marginally increase the sum of human freedom in this country.

The other area that's extremely important is self-government. And we are witnessing, make no mistake about it, a slow-motion crisis of self-government in this country. We have trial lawyers and regulators and activist judges conspiring to overturn traditions of democratic governance that have existed for centuries in Anglo-America, that were won through bloodshed,

through revolutions and civil wars, and they are being frittered away. And the battle this year over the future of the Supreme Court is fundamentally about whether free and proud democratic people in America will continue to govern themselves.

A third area that I think is important is masculinity. I think there's a war on masculinity in this country. To illustrate what I mean, I would like to go a little far afield for a second. One of my hobbies is reading an area called evolutionary psychology, where supposedly, by studying the early man and primates, you can get hints about what forces helped to form human nature. And this may be a dubious theory, but it's interesting

Traditionally, it has been dominated by liberals who get graduated degrees in anthropology and then go off to Africa and collect ape droppings for the rest of their lives. And these people, generally, they used to say that monkeys are not violent in any way. And this was an indication that violence in war is entirely a product of patriarchal cultural.

Now, this turns out now, upon further research, not to be true. Monkeys, as you would expect, are violent bastards, who have little mini-wars and fights all the time, except there's one sort of special chimp. It's called the bonobo. And the bonobo is quite remarkable. It's nonviolent. They're vegetarian. They're extremely promiscuous. They will have sex at any time.

They're all bisexuals. And it's a matriarchal society, dominated by the female bonobos.

And the first time I read this, I really realized this is the ideal liberal society.

(Laughter.)

MR. LOWRY: In fact, it's probably a pretty good description of Brown University on any given day.

(Laughter.)

MR. LOWRY: And there are liberals and feminists in this country who want to make us all bonobos, fundamentally.

And we have a cultural that has soaked and bathos and sentimentality, on par with pre-Revolutionary France. This affects even Republicans, I regret to say. In '95 and '96, we had Newt Gingrich routinely weeping at his desk during the government shutdown fight. We had Bob Dole crying, thinking about Russell, Kansas. We had Jack Kemp crying, thinking about Bob Dole crying, thinking about Russell, Kansas.

And you want to look at this and say, "Guys, please, get a grip."

(Laughter.)

[End Side A. Begin Side B.]

MR. LOWRY: -- Bush can mist up with the best of them. And it may be that Dick Cheney is the last dry eye in American politics. But I think there is a budding reaction against the

sentimentality in our politics and in our culture. And I think an indication of this was John McCain.

In Washington, we're always arguing about the meaning of John McCain. I think what was fundamental to his appeal, he went up there in New Hampshire and said, "Doggone it, I'm not going to feel your pain and I'm not going to bite my lip." And that was extremely refreshing. And if you want to understand John McCain, don't think campaign finance reform; think Jesse Ventura, and that tough, sort of manly, plain-spoken-ness.

And we tend in American politics to divide people up into Jeffersonians and Hamiltonians. McCain is something different. He is a Jacksonian; which, in a brilliant article in the National Interest a few months ago, Walter Russell Mead argued that this is an important and under-appreciated tradition in American politics.

It's associated with the Scotch-Irish heritage in this country. The Scotch-Irish, of course, settled the Frontier in America. Their slogan might have been "We came, we saw, we killed and maimed." They gleefully wiped out the Indians. They eagerly participated in all American wars. And the Jacksonian tradition, it's anti-elitist, it's concerned with self-reliance. It's a little blood thirsty. It's extremely patriotic, and it's tough.

And what I liked about Bush's performance last night was that every time he said, "The military is just for fighting and winning wars," every time he kind of merrily talked about arresting people and executing them, he was tapping into this tradition, which I think is extremely attractive and it's associated with the sterner, more manly virtues, of duty and sacrifice that I think are inherently resistant to the nanny state.

So, anyway, I think if conservatives stayed focused on freedom and property rights, self-government and defending traditional notions of masculinity, we can resist the creation of the new American man and just maybe preserve the old one, who I think was doing just fine.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. BOAZ: Thank you, Rich. When I read National Review, I've often wondered what they were smoking.

(Laughter.)

MR. BOAZ: Now I know.

Those of you who like to listen to journalists talk, I should just point out that we have another forum on Monday at noon, and we have flyers outside, in which Jim Bovard will discuss, with his usual subtlety, the Clinton-Gore years, and Tim

Noah, from Slate, will offer something of a different perspective on the Clinton-Gore years.

At this point, I want to open it up to questions. We'll bring a microphone around so everybody can be heard. So, any questions? Right here.

DR. MARSHALL: Dr. Joseph Marshall.

I would like to bring the panel back to the politics of the future, and ask you to prognosticate what's going to happen in Congress in this respect: If Bush is President, could he work favorably with a Democratic Congress as opposed to Gore working with a Republican Congress?

MR. BOAZ: Anyone?

MALE VOICE: Well, I think Bush talks about this all the time, what a bipartisan guy he is. And I don't think it's entirely spin. And he did have some success doing it in Texas. I think, temperamentally, he is someone who is better suited to getting along with other people than Al Gore is. I mean, Peter is right, Al Gore is fundamentally an attack politician, and he doesn't feel truly himself, it seems, unless he's red of tooth and claw in politics. So I think Bush probably would be better at working with a Democratic Congress, but obviously it's a very speculative proposition.

MR. GILLESPIE: I think that, actually, ultimately the real question is, how will any given victor in the presidential

campaign actually run the country in conjunction with whoever ends up winning Congress? And it's I think instructive to consider how Clinton's relationship with the Republican Congress played out

And in many ways, again, I would like not see a state that's as big as it is now, but Clinton, in many ways, ended up -- I think, he certainly is not the President going out he was coming in. And his plans, most of his grandiose plans, were completely scotched. And at this point at least, according to Congressional Budget Office numbers, Federal outlays as a percentage of GDP are at the lowest they've been since about 1974. Now, the flip-side to that, of course, is that revenues are at a 40-year high, as well.

But I actually worry more about both -- or, ultimately, I think that both of these politicians, both presidential candidates, will end up fundamentally being moderated by whatever Congress is there. And I would also tend to believe that if you get a Republican House, a Republican Senate and a Republican President, I think that's when real trouble will start actually.

MALE VOICE: I actually completely agree with the last part. I actually think that, if were a Bush President, I would be concerned not about my relationships with the Democrats in Congress but my relationships with the Republicans in Congress.

I would predict it will take about three seconds for there to be deep Republican disillusionment with a George Bush presidency.

I think the Republicans have done an extraordinary job, the conservatives have done an extraordinary job, in holding their tongue, through the Convention, that I think Rich honestly described as, from a conservative point of view, nauseating. And I haven't really seen Bush's performance since the Convention, from a conservative point of view, improve very much. I think that the disillusionment that conservatives will feel, given how much they sucked it up during this campaign, I think it will be very, very strong. And my guess would be that the relationship with the Republicans on Capitol Hill will be poor.

MR. BOAZ: Right here?

MALE VOICE: Just a question to Dr. Gillespie. You mentioned about Robert Putnam, and the notion of civil society and the issue of diversity. I agree with that very much. I think that there are more choices now in a civic cultural, more than before. However, there is a major exception which turns out to be the major problem, which is that, in political culture, there is no diversity. It's determined by two political parties.

I think that, to be more consistent, if we could do something more in terms of increasing the number of political parties for people to choose from. Right now, we talk about political apathy. And there are a lot of independent voters out

there; they are not very happy with either of the two parties. And sometimes they are so unhappy with the two candidates of the two parties that they would like to vote for someone else, but they have no other choices. And that's why I say, why do I bother to watch the debate? And even when they watch, they get angry even more.

So I think that if we can have more diversity, that can increase some of the solutions that we are talking about. To prove my point even further, if you look at the panelists here today talking about the presidential election in 2000, there is no diversity, again. There are no minorities. There are no women. There are no Asians. There are no blacks. Even though they constitute more than half of the American population.

And secondly, this is my second issue, in political science, there is a field which is called voting choice theory. And one of the major events noticed in the last 10 years studying political behavior is that the American political voting system is fundamentally flawed. Right now, we have the plurality voting system as opposed to an approval voting system and a voter voting system. Some of the candidates who end up winning are not necessarily the ones with the most number of votes.

MR. BOAZ: Okay. We need a question.

SPEAKER: As are some other voting systems. My recommendation, however, is that if we can look at these two

issues, one, the voting system, the other one is the diversity of political parties, that can increase some of the things that we are talking about to increase the political apathy problem.

MR. GILLESPIE: Let me just respond to two things quickly. One is that we were going to have a woman on the panel, but Rich said that he didn't want to be next to a woman, because that would be a sign of pussing out.

(Laughter.)

MR. GILLESPIE: And we're just not going to stand for men who weep, as they did for much of modern history until a relatively recent period in time when a certain kind of Eisenhower --

MR. LOWRY: Eisenhower-Cheney 2000, that's my ticket.

(Laughter.)

MR. GILLESPIE: Well, it's got my vote at this point.

But the other thing is we're not going to have a diversity of meaningful political parties in the U.S. There is a pretty long track record of this. And for a variety of structural reasons, that's not going to be the case. What may happen is, and it happens from time to time, is that there will always be two dominant parties, and one of those may radically alter from the common ground that the Republicans and Democrats I think tend to share.

MR. LOWRY: If I could just state something quickly on this question about the relationship between societal choice and non-voting which you raised and which was the center of Ed's talk, which I think was interesting. I think one cautionary note, obviously, to bring up is that the people in America who have the most choices, the people with the highest levels of education and the highest levels of income, vote at very high levels. They vote at basically the same rate you find in Europe, over 70 percent by and large.

It is the people in America who have the least choices, who are least affected by the societal trends, who vote at incredibly low rates. So I think one needs to be a little more careful about the relationship between societal trends and non-voting.

MALE VOICE: Well, I think that there is a drop-off at different income levels, but it's also that young people don't vote. And, again, it's not because they can't -- you know, college students don't vote very much -- it's that they don't want to. I think, to go back to this question, one reason -- and you actually raised the question -- of this race is tight, et cetera. Why is it so tight, given all of Gore's positives?

It's that people really don't see a choice there. People aren't going to watch this, because there is not a stark

choice, once you're outside of, I think, the very narrow part of the political spectrum.

MR. BOAZ: Yes, ma'am?

FEMALE VOICE: What kind of candidate, or pair of candidates, do you think would make people want to vote more in four or eight years?

MALE VOICE: God, I hope you're not asking me. I really don't have any idea. Somebody who would -- well, I was going to say somebody who would make me tear up, but that's off the table.

(Laughter.)

MALE VOICE: Somebody who would sex me up, but that doesn't sound right either. So, you got me.

Basically, somebody who would actually take fully the logic of choice and of leaving people alone, not so that they can become kind of Lee Harvey Oswalds, going to bowling alleys by themselves, but rather leave them alone so that they can carve out, to kind of form voluntary groups and pursue happiness on their own terms to the maximum degree possible.

MALE VOICE: Could I just aadress -- address the question of conservatives? "Agree," Freudian slip.

MR. BOAZ: Don't tell me you're believing in Freud now. That seems awful progressive.

(Laughter.)

MALE VOICE: The question of Bush and conservatives and whether there's a choice in this election: If Bush is elected, it's going to be excruciating for conservatives. I mean, we'll be grinding our teeth every night. But the thing is he's going to do, we hope, at least three big things that are important strategically to the future of conservatives and people who want to limit government. And I get the vague idea that that's something you're interested in.

One, we're not going to stop the spending spree in Washington unless we stop sending the money here. And that's why Bush's tax cut is so important. It's the only way to sort of have a break on spending in Washington.

His Social Security plan, and I wish it went further, but it's extremely important strategically. The most important demographic trend in American politics now is the rise of mass investment and the investor class. If you get people invested in the stock market, if you get them owning a piece of the rock, it changes their attitudes towards government, and a whole host of issues, in a more limited government direction. So it's extremely important to create more investors, which is exactly what the Bush Social Security plan would do.

And then, finally, the Supreme Court: If Gore is elected and appoints more liberal activist judges, that will be a veto over a whole host of conservative social policies. It won't

happen if Gore solidifies the liberal hold over the Supreme Court. So these are just -- I expect him to be weeping on Oprah still, I expect him to be spending all sorts of money on new education grants, but these are the three extremely important things that will at least let conservative politics in the country have a future.

MR. BEINART: If I could just quickly respond. I think your Social Security point is a good one. The other two I think are kind of weak. I mean, it seems to me, first of all, even you imagined that Bush could get his tax cut plan, or some close facsimile, it seems to me, if we learned anything from Reagan, it's that there isn't necessarily a relationship between tax cuts and spending. And, in fact, Bush has proposed spending lots and lots of money, as conservatives have found to their chagrin, even while purposing this big tax cut. So, tax rates may go down; I don't think it necessarily means spending will go down.

Second of all, and I would recommend to you Andrew Sullivan's TRB in this most recent issue of *The New Republic* -- not the one you have but the one that comes out today. There is not really much evidence that Bush has any record of appointing conservative judges. I mean, three of the four people who voted in Texas on the abortion decision that got the conservatives in Texas so up in arms were Bush appointees. It seems to me entirely plausible that you will have -- it seems to me your best

scenario is probably Sandra Day O'Connors and Anthony Kennedys, and it seems to me entirely plausible you'll get David Souters.

MR. BOAZ: Peter, can I ask you then, why aren't you supporting Bush?

MR. BEINART: Why aren't I supporting Bush?

MR. BOAZ: Yes. I mean, he seems to be right up your alley.

(Laughter.)

MR. BEINART: Not exactly. That's a longer conversation. But, obviously, as a liberal magazine we come to two fundamental issues that define our approach to this race: (a) the question of who is likely to increase the standard of living for working-class and poor Americans, and the second is who do we think is likely to believe in an American foreign policy that combines the use of power to the use that America has a moral mission in the world. And I think, on those, Gore is actually substantially ahead.

MR. BOAZ: Tom?

MR. PALMER: Tom Palmer, from the Cato Institute.

I'm interested in the panelists' remarks on the gender gap, which is normally spun in the Washington Post and New York Times as a liability for the Republicans. It turns out, if you look at the numbers, it's a big liability for the Democrats.

What do you think are the sources of the persistent difference in male and female voting patterns? Do you think this is likely to be an ongoing feature of American politics into the future? And what do you think is its significance?

MALE VOICE: Do I have to tread here again with my views on women?

(Laughter.)

MR. BOAZ: Yes.

MALE VOICE: Well, I do think it involves a little bit of what I was talking about. I think women voters tend to be a little more concerned about security and stability. And that is what Al Gore, fundamentally, is offering them. And the Bush agenda is marginally skewed more toward sort of self-reliant individualism that just tends to be a little more attractive to the guys.

But I do think a lot of this is just totally atmospheric. And especially the numbers with women voters have swung rather remarkably over the course of the year in response to things that wouldn't seem that important, like Al Gore's kiss, for instance. But I think what has been a good thing about the coverage this year is that at least it recognizes that the gender gap cuts both ways. And it may be great if you're winning women by eight points, but it's not so great if you're losing men by

20. And at least I think some of the analysis began to recognize that.

MR. GILLESPIE: First off, I hesitate to even weigh in on something like the gender gap just because, in many ways, it's an artifact of us slicing up demographic groups in a particular way. And I'm not sure -- I know I used to read about the Catholic vote; you don't hear about that much anymore. And I'm not sure that that is all that much a meaningful category in various ways, or that there aren't other things that would actually group people together more meaningful than gender.

But I think, in many cases, and certainly when you look at the Republican Party before and after Reagan, a lot of it has to do with abortion rights. And it's clear that the Republican Party, at its best, is willing to soft-peddle that issue, and kind of say, yes, it's in our platform, it's in our platform, but we're not going to do anything about it, but, by and large, takes a tough line against that, and that that turns off a lot of women. And that's probably a more significant issue to them at this point in time than many other issues.

MR. LOWRY: If I can just jump in, I think that, Nick, is one of the more tired cliches in American politics. If you look at the numbers, the group that is most pro-choice in America is young men. Which makes a lot of sense, because it's young men

who want to create the freest range for promiscuity and consequence-free sex as possible.

MR. GILLESPIE: There comes the evolutionary psychology.

MR. LOWRY: Well, look at the numbers.

MR. GILLESPIE: Oddly, if I an just say, though, the last time I checked, virtually a 100 percent of all abortions were actually performed on women. I mean, actually, to be honest, I'm shocked in the kind of retrograde gender roles that you're talking about in your comments. But, essentially, to leave women out of the picture of abortion strikes me as a marginal oversight.

MR. LOWRY: I wasn't leaving women out. I was just pointing out that the guys have an interest in being able to have sex with women without having to worry about have any responsibility for it nine months down the line.

MR. BOAZ: All right. Lets have a referee from the liberal side.

(Laughter.)

MR. BEINART: No. This is delicious. I don't want to jump in.

MR. BEINART: But just on a small technical point, I think that Rich is absolutely right. I don't think the public opinion polls on abortion show really any gender difference. I

think actually you find religiosity and education to be the biggest indicators of how people come down on abortion. But I think, in voting terms, it actually does make a difference despite that.

Because the problem I think is that there are a lot of, for instance, poor African-American women. Poor African-American women, particularly in lower levels of education and income, are very anti-abortion, one of the most anti-abortion demographic groups in the country. But they still vote Democratic. So, essentially, even though you don't find a gender split in actually public opinion polls, I think you do find it showing up at the voting booth.

MR. BOAZ: Mike Lieberman?

MR. LIEBERMAN: Education Policy Institute.

The Democrats favor government funding of abortions and they oppose government funding of school choice. And the Republicans are just the opposite. They're opposed to government funding of abortions, but they now favor government funding of school choice. My question is: Is this simply, in your mind, more interest group hypocrisy or is there really a basic reason for their inconsistencies on those two issues, or are they really inconsistencies?

MR. BEINART: I think actually Rich may be better on this than me, because we are actually for government funding of

abortions and at least for government funding of experiments with vouchers. So it's not an inconsistency, although, God knows, there are many others, that cuts through The New Republic.

I never quite understand what people mean when they talk about inconsistencies, given that, it seems to me, that any party or political movement is informed by very historically contingent political traditions that have numerous causes and that are essentially the product of history, not the product of abstract theorizing. So, of course, in a sense, the Catholic Church sacred garment position is purely consistent and Reason magazine's position is entirely consistent in a way that the Democratic Party and Republican Party aren't good in a sense. That's because the Republican Party and Democratic Party are the product of contingent historical forces that come out of American events. And I don't think that is necessarily a bad thing. It seems to me that perhaps even a necessary and inevitable democratic thing.

MALE VOICE: Well, I don't think it's inconsistent to be in favor of limited government. But to also be in favor of laws -- we're going to get into an abortion fight here, obviously -- but to be in favor of laws that prevent people from harming other people. And, I mean, let's be honest about what abortion is in this country. We have children with Down's Syndrome systematically hunted down in the womb and destroyed

because they'll be inconvenient, because retarded children are inconvenient. So we have this great abortion regime that does away with them. And I think that is atrocious.

And I think a lot of liberals have abandoned the best aspects of their tradition, which is supposed to be about defending the weak and the helpless. And a child with Down's Syndrome in the world is as close as you get to being absolutely weak and defenseless. And this also applies, I think, in the area of school choice, where, who should be in favor of school choice, of helping minority children get out of those schools and get a decent education?

It should be the liberals who should be in favor of that, but they're not. Because they've sold out to a powerful interest. In this case, teachers unions. In the case of abortion, it's the feminists. So I think we've increasingly seen a liberalism that is venal and corrupt and that has rejected the best aspects of its own tradition in this country.

MALE VOICE: Now, if I can just jump in briefly. I think Peter summarized. I mean, essentially, what you're talking about is an inconsistency in a political party as opposed to a larger governing philosophy.

One thing, just to follow up on the education talk. I actually remain amazed that the teachers unions and the kind of education establishment really hasn't glommed on to choice yet

and figured out ways in which they can use that actually to end up increasing government funding at all levels, and basically taking the whole notion of choice and vouchers and charter schools and really turning it to their financial advantage. I mean, I hope that they don't figure that out, but it amazes me that they've actually been that stupid.

MALE VOICE: All they have to do is follow the example of higher education.

MALE VOICE: Yes.

MALE VOICE: Private and public universities joined to squeeze more money out of the government. And that will happen in K-12 as soon as people in unions aren't scared of it happening.

MALE VOICE: Yes.

MR. BOAZ: Okay, I'm going to take one last question, there in the back row.

MALE VOICE: I would like to start out by saying I really like what you said, Rich, about this new Al Gore; you know, he's alpha male, and yet he's a sensitive, nice guy. When I saw the kiss at the Democratic National Convention, I remember the first thing that ran through my mind was, why can't he keep his sex life in the Oval Office like everybody else?

(Laughter.)

MALE VOICE: But, anyway, that wasn't my question. What I wondered was, after listening to Mr. Beinart talking about a new type of candidate -- and I guess, in the event of a Bush loss is mainly what I'm thinking, you would have to think that the Republicans would have to say something else, they need to try something different: Maybe a McCain-type/Ventura-type Republican. That interests me, and I think that would work.

Because I think one of the main problems with the Republicans, a Republican needs to be cool. The Dems have been MTV in the past while the Republicans are Sinatra. The problem, though, is I think if they do that, they run the risk of abandoning their ideological base. In Canada there is Stockwell Day who has just recently --

MR. BOAZ: We need a question.

MALE VOICE: He has just recently become the opposition. He is very conservative and yet he takes Ski-Doos to press conferences, and it has worked. Could we see a candidate like that, somebody with a compelling biography, yet, at the same time who is conservative? Is that the new type of candidate? I mean, what are we looking for as a Republican, do you think?

MR. LOWRY: Well, I think if Bush loses, Peter is right, there will be an ideological bloodbath on the right, and we'll hear a lot of noise from McCain supporters about what a

mistake it was for the Republicans not to nominate him. I don't think that is true necessarily.

Because, for me, the great weakness for much of this year of the Bush campaign was that it was too focused on Al Gore's character. And, in that respect, McCain would have run the Bush campaign squared. It would have been entirely the Buddhist Temple. And, look, the Buddhist Temple is embarrassing for Gore, but people don't really care about that. And that's what McCain was pledging to run on, and he would have muted all the other issue differences that I think now are cutting in Bush's favor.

And also McCain was just temperamentally, I think, unsuited to the rigors and pressures of a national campaign. If you run in the Republican primary and you call a third of the Republican base evil, I think that casts some doubt on your effectiveness and strength as a potential presidential candidate.

And, finally, if you just talk a little bit about tax cuts -- and Peter is going to get bored here, because he's heard this three or four times from me already -- but, look, it's definitely not 1980. It's not 1994. But the world is not safe for big government liberalism quite yet, either. And that's what Bob Shrum and the guys over in the Gore camp have forgotten.

We had 65 Democrats in the House vote to end the estate tax, 51 Democrats voted to end the marriage penalty. We had

about 180 Democrats vote for the super saver bill that would have increased tax-free savings vehicles. And on the question of the tax cut, Gore-Bush, they're now tied. If you ask people, do you prefer or a large across-the-board cut or a smaller targeted cut, it's tied 48/48.

The thing that is notable about that, first, is that both candidates are talking about tax cuts. And if tax cuts was such a loser, Gore wouldn't be trying to portray himself as a tax cutter. Two, Bush, over the last month, has made up a lot of ground on that number, and they're tied 48/48 on it. I don't think that indicates tax cuts is a loser any more than the fact that Bush and Gore are almost tied on health care and prescription drugs means that prescription drugs is necessarily a losing issue for Gore. I think both of them are fundamental to their campaigns and their governing philosophy, in a way, and I think it's very tight on both of them.

MR. GILLESPIE: Your actual question was essentially whether or not could there be a cool Republican. And I don't think the supercomputer has been built yet that could come up with the program that would be able to put that mythological beast together.

(Laughter.)

MR. GILLESPIE: The short answer is no, they can't. And one of the reasons is because they've got to come back to

certain basics and they've got to spill over from a stated rhetoric of limited government, leaving people alone, et cetera. And they've got to come back with the cultural talk, where they start treading on people even as they say they want to limit it. So the fact of the matter is, in 2004, don't expect the Republican presidential nominee to show up at the podium on a scooter.

MR. LOWRY: Could I just jump in very briefly? Sorry Peter.

I agree with Nick in the sense that I think it's been strange this year, because I think both Gore's popularism is totally outdated and not responsive to the new forces in our politics and in our economy and Bush's response for the longest time has been outdated, his timidly on taking it on, his unwillingness to identify himself with the new investor class and with the new economy I think, has been a mistake all year for him.

MR. GILLESPIE: I don't think that's a mistake. I mean, I think that's implicit in when Republicans talk about themselves as the party of the real America, middle America, this and that, that means that you've got to be square. And I don't want to see a bunch of Republicans wearing linen suits and smoking cigarillos.

MR. BEINART: But, Nick, you live in Ohio and you're pretty cool right? I mean, I think you should give middle America a little more credit.

MR. GILLESPIE: Well, let me put it this way. I'm not making a value judgment about it.

MR. BEINART: It's not just in L.A. that people are on the Internet and investing in stocks everyday.

MR. GILLESPIE: Oh, gee. That's odd. I didn't realize that.

MR. BEINART: If I could jump in. And I should preface this by saying you should never trust a liberal when he gives advice to conservatives. But Ronald Reagan was, by any stretch, cool. And I think what Ronald Reagan had that the Republican Party has lost is he was cool in the minds of most Americans. And that's why a lot of Americans who were members of labor unions and who never really bought into the Republican Party on economics, although maybe they wanted their taxes cut a little bit, basically supported him.

And I think that's what the Republican Party -- I think I would interpret your cool question as, essentially, the Republican Party needs to regain the patriotism question. Now, obviously, our friends at the Standard are kind of somewhat obsessed with this issue. I think the problem for regaining the patriotism issue for Republicans is that you can't be patriotic

without talking about foreign policy. And it seems to me here the Republican Party has two ways of being patriotic, I could think, or at least being nationalist on foreign policy, that I think could help them electorally. The problem is I don't think the party establishment wants to do either.

The first is the foreign policy of McCain, which is an extremely hawkish foreign policy, which is going to be very interventionist and which is going to wear America's heart on its sleeve, and, at least if you buy his rhetoric, send American troops all around the world to try to protect people who most Americans have never heard of.

Now, we would be thrilled. But my sense is the Republican Party's drift has been exactly in the opposite direction, and McCain knows it. All you have to do is look at the Republican Congress, which has, as McCain has said, a kind of Pavlovian opposition to the use of American troops anywhere. And anyone who thinks that there are going to be lots of Gulf Wars again, where you can send troops in those kinds of situations, everybody knows that most of the opportunities to send American troops where moral questions are at hand are going to be more similar to Rwanda and Kosovo than they are going to be to Iraq and Kuwait. That's the question the Republican Party has to decide about whether they give a damn about.

And they can do exactly the reverse. I think they can take Pat Buchanan's position on patriotism, as well. They can take a very hard line nationalist position and say, we're going to protect America from cultural pollution and from the pollution of immigrants, and we're going to wall America off and see the rest of the world as hostile and threatening. I think that, in bad economic times, that also potentially could play. It would be a way of getting back the patriotism issue.

Again, the problem seems to me that, with the kind of corporate quasi-isolationist, at very best, description, Kissingerian politics that seems to be taking over the Republican Party now, I don't see that they're close to either.

MR. LOWRY: Peter, you really exaggerate the extent to which McCain was a Weekly Standard humanitarian, "let's send them all over the world" interventionist. I mean, in this regard, I really think he is a Jacksonian, who is someone who is slow to commit troops. But when he does, it is solely to smash and destroy the enemy. And that's what we saw in Kosovo, where McCain actually called Kosovo immoral, because we weren't taking it on in the most forceful way possible.

MR. BEINART: That's right.

MR. LOWRY: And the reason why we weren't taking it on in the most forceful way possible is because I think the American people will take casualties, but only in a cause that clearly

implicates the national interest. And that's why the Clinton Administration was scared to death to have one casualty in Kosovo.

MR. BEINART: But where is the national interest in Kosovo? I mean, McCain argued for it. It seems to me the national interest on the Kosovo question was always a stretch. It was basically the moral rationale, which was the only strong rationale for Kosovo. I agree that at times McCain tried to have it both ways on Kosovo, but his essential position was attacking the Clinton administration for not sending ground troops. And the only justification that anyone could muster for that, including McCain, was a moral argument. Which is why Bush's discussion of this rings so hollow, where he says we needed to do Kosovo to protect NATO, despite the fact that many of the countries in NATO, like Italy, were dead set against doing Kosovo. It's illogical.

MR. LOWRY: Well, even the stingy realist Bush was in favor of Kosovo. And it's because American credibility was implicated and the future of the Alliance was at stake.

MR. BEINART: But only because we wanted to do Kosovo. I mean, the Italians would have been thrilled if we'd said, we don't want to do Kosovo in the first place, then credibility never would have come up.

MR. LOWRY: Right. Well, dealt the cards that we had, which was, for about a decade, we were warning Milosevic not to do what he did, that implicated U.S. credibility.

MR. GILLESPIE: I think that this colloquy actually shows definitively that we really have not come up with a post-Cold War foreign policy.

MR. LOWRY: But Peter and I will keep working on it.

(Laughter.)

MR. GILLESPIE: I look forward to hearing it.

While they were talking, I actually thought back and I need to amend my answer to the question about, again, whether or not there's the possibility of a cool Republican. And I don't think patriotism is cool. I think patriotism, in many ways, is the antithesis of cool. Reagan was certainly popular. I never heard anybody, when I was in college, refer to him as cool or hip or anything, even ironically.

But, in any case, it's recently come out that Marilyn Manson actually is a Republican, or that he said he leans more towards George Bush's politics, et cetera. And the Republicans, they have the Rock, the professional wrestler, who showed up at the Republican Convention. And I guess, in 2004, if Marilyn Manson addresses the Republican National Convention, then I'll stand corrected.

But, again, I think it points to an underlying problem with the Republican Party, which is that it apes a very libertarian, a very limited government line, but it does not have the courage of its convictions. And the Republicans, I'm sure, will look at it as some kind of moral failure on their part if somebody like Marilyn Manson can say, apparently unironically, oh, George Bush, I like him more than I like Al Gore.

MR. LOWRY: The problem with Marilyn Manson is that he is a no-talent knock-off of other acts and a total jerk.

MR. BEINART: Like George Bush.

MR. LOWRY: So the National Review's position is, is Marilyn Monroe not Marilyn Manson?

MR. GILLESPIE: That's right. Marilyn Monroe is okay.

MR. BOAZ: Okay. All right. Thank you very much Peter Beinart, Nick Gillespie, Richard Lowry.

(Applause.)

MR. BOAZ: And please join us upstairs for lunch.

(Whereupon, the Policy Forum was concluded.)