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Why Bush Won; What To Do Next: Analysis of the 2004 Election

by Peter Dreier

Got the post-election blues? Get over it.

The results from the November 2 election are mostly painful, but there are silver linings and lessons to be learned for the future. The Bush and Republican victories were due mostly to how well the GOP and its allies mobilized the white, conservative, evangelical base compared with how well their liberal counterparts (unions, MoveOn.Org, environmental groups, women's rights organizations, civil rights groups, community groups like ACORN, and coalitions such as Americans Coming Together, and America Votes) did in mobilizing the Democratic base.

In addition, the Bush forces did a better job of framing the agenda so that its issues -- the war on terrorism, opposition to abortion, and opposition to gay marriage -- dominated the public debate rather than the economy, health care, the environment, and the failure of the American occupation in Iraq. There is no reason for the Democrats to concede the Bible or the flag to the Republicans, but the Kerry campaign allowed Bush to appear to have a monopoly on "moral values" and patriotism.

The overwhelming victories of ballot measures in Florida and Nevada to raise the minimum wage, and the successes of Democratic candidates for governor, Senator, and Congressperson in states and districts that also went for George Bush, suggest that Bush's win was a victory of personality more than program, of infrastructure more than issues. This was no mandate.

Immediately after the election results were known, pundits and columnists started warning that Democrats will have to "move to the center," and compromise on "moral values" issues like abortion and gay rights, to win the White House and Congress in the future. But before Democrats start spending millions of dollars on polls and focus groups to rethink the party's policy agenda, they should ask themselves some basic questions: Did they lose because of the message, or because of the messenger? How did the Republicans manage to drown out the Democrats' message? Can Democrats win with a similar policy agenda, but with a better messenger, clearer vision, and a stronger organizational infrastructure?

Kerry probably should have known he was trouble when the star pitcher on his favorite team, the Boston Red Sox, endorsed Bush. At the end of an interview on "Good Morning America" the day after the Sox won the World Series for the first time in 86 years, Curt Schilling, a born-again Christian, told the interviewer, "Make sure you tell everybody to vote, and vote Bush next week." The Republican National Committee quickly distributed Schilling's statement to its massive e-mail list.

This was an election in which the candidates -- or at least how the voters perceived the candidates in terms of character and leadership -- trumped what should have been the defining issues. There is no evidence that Bush won because more Americans agreed with the Republican policy agenda than the Democrats' policy agenda.

Although Bush and Kerry faced off in three debates, the two campaigns were like ships passing

in the night. They were talking past each other, and each was talking to a different group of potential voters. They both focused their campaigns on 15 "swing" (or "battleground") states, but the issues and constituencies they focused on were very different. They were battling to mobilize their respective bases. The Bush forces did a better job. When examining the so-called "moderate" swing voters, however, one finds that they are incredibly split on issues and, if anything, tend to support a liberal over a conservative policy agenda. If that's the case, why Bush win? Three factors made the difference:

The Movement: The Bush campaign had more organizational resources to reach its base, such as evangelical Christians and gun owners, especially in terms of voter registration and election-day turnout. They simply out-organized their liberal counterparts, despite the unprecedented level of grassroots mobilization by unions and their allies.

The Message: The Bush campaign was more effective at setting the issues agenda in the campaign. The Republicans' strongest issues (terrorism, gay marriage, and abortion) drowned out the Democrats' strongest issues (the economy, health care, and the occupation of Iraq).

The Messenger: Bush proved to be a more effective advocate for his agenda than Kerry was for his. Bush voters were more enthusiastic "for" their candidate than Kerry voters were for theirs. Voters with very strong feelings against gay marriage and terrorism supported Bush. Voters with very strong feelings on the economy, health care, and Iraq voted for Kerry. Swing voters -- those who had cross-cutting views (for example, who were upset about the economy but also worried about terrorism) but no single over-riding issue - may have voted for the "default" candidate who showed the strongest character and leadership qualities. According to exit polls, that candidate was George Bush.

Mobilizing Constituencies: The Armies of the Right and Left

On November 2, about 116 million Americans went to the polls. Bush beat Kerry by 3.5 million votes, a 51%-48% margin. But, as Wall Street Journal editor Albert Hunt observed, "It was a GOP sweep, but it also was the narrowest win for a sitting president since Woodrow Wilson in 1916." This was hardly a landslide victory. Bush won by slight margins in many battleground districts, but those handful of votes proved the difference between victory and defeat. Accusations of ballot tampering, miscounting of votes, and long lines at polling places that discouraged some voters (especially in Ohio, where it rained on election day), particularly in Democrat-leaning districts, may have dampened the Kerry vote, but it is unlikely that they made the critical difference in the election outcome.

Fifty-nine percent of eligible voters went to the polls. This is the highest overall turnout since 1968 (although still dramatically lower than turnout in other democracies). The 59% who voted are not representative of all eligible voters. The non-voters are more likely to be young, poor, and minority -- groups that are most likely to vote Democratic. These are the Americans that need activist government the most, and the ones who are most alienated from the political system.

Turnout increased among all significant demographic groups. The Kerry campaign and its allied 527 groups (Americans Coming Together and others) did an impressive job at voter registration and turnout, especially in swing states -- better than liberal/labor groups have done in decades. They invested heavily in new technology, did an excellent job of targeting likely Kerry voters, and had an unprecedented level of street-level coordination among volunteers and staffers. But, they were out-gunned by the Bush forces in the "ground game." The election reflected the influence of big money and organizational resources, as well as the nation's class, race and gender divisions.

Income was an important factor in how Americans voted. Voters with incomes under \$15,000 (8% of the total) went 63% for Kerry; while among those with incomes between \$15,000-\$30,000 (15% of the total) 57% voted for Kerry. Overall, voters with family incomes below \$50,000 (45% of the total turnout) voted for Kerry 55-45%. Voters with family incomes over \$50,000 (55% of the total turnout) voted for Bush, 56-43%. Even more dramatically, voters with family incomes under \$100,000 (82% of turnout) gave Kerry a slight edge, 50-49%, while voters over \$100,000 (18% of the total) gave Bush a much larger edge, 58-41%. Indeed, an analysis by Phillip Klinkner, a political scientist at Hamilton College, indicates that Bush made his most significant gains over 2000 among voters with incomes over \$50,000 and particularly those over \$100,000.

Men favored Bush by a 55% to 44% margin. Women favored Kerry by a 51% to 48% margin. But when race is factored in, the election results are even more polarized. Sixty-two percent of white men (36% of the total vote) and 55% of white women (41% of the total vote) favored Bush. Compared with the 2000 election, Bush gained two points among white men, but six points among white women, a significant improvement.

In contrast, 67% of minority men (10% of the total vote) and 75% of minority women (12% of the total vote) favored Kerry. More specifically 88% of African American, who represented 11% of the voters, sided with Kerry. Hispanics favored Kerry over Bush by a 53% to 44% margin. If you add the 2% who voted for Nader, the Hispanics' liberal margin is even bigger.

These figures show that Bush's core constituencies gave him wider margins than Kerry's core constituencies. This was due in part to the Bush campaigns more effective outreach and mobilization efforts and in part to the reality that Bush's supporters were more enthusiastic about their candidate and Kerry's supporters. Compare, for example, the votes of Bush's key constituencies, evangelical Christians and gun owners, to Kerry's major base, African Americans and union members.

Exit polls reveal that white evangelicals and born-again Christians accounted for 23% of the total vote, and that 78% of them voted for Bush. Among evangelicals who attend church at least weekly (8% of the total vote), 96% voted for Bush. This is an incredibly large and stable captive audience for the Republicans. In addition, gun owners, 41% of the those who went to the polls, gave Bush 63% of their votes. Both the Christian Right and the National Rifle Association have spent decades educating, agitating, and mobilizing their constituencies. The Bush campaign devoted much of its campaign warchest to reaching these voters and making sure they showed up at the polls on election day.

But while Bush did very well among these voters, his support also increased among less religious (or at least less church-going) voters, according to an analysis by Emory University political scientist Alan Abramowitz. Among voters who attend services at least every week, support for Bush rose by 1 percent, from 63 percent in 2000 to 64 percent in 2004. Among voters who attend services a few times a month, his support rose by 4 points, from 46 percent to 50 percent. Bush did poorly among those who never attend religious services, but his support nevertheless increased by 4 points, from 32 percent to 36 percent.

Kerry's 88% to 11% margin among African Americans was only slightly less than Al Gore's 90% to 9% margin four years ago. Clearly black voters remain loyal Democrats, and black turnout increased over four years ago, helping Kerry win Pennsylvania and other battleground states.. But overall low turnout rates continue to make blacks, who comprised 11% of all voters this year, a less significant political force than they could be.

Union members represented 14% of all votes on November 2, while union households represented 24% of all voters. Union members gave Kerry 61% of their votes, while union

households favored Kerry with 59% of their votes. (In the battleground states, where unions focused their turnout efforts, they did even better. In Ohio, for example, union members favored Kerry by a 67% to 31% margin). While union members were overwhelmingly pro-Kerry, evangelicals and gun owners were even more overwhelmingly pro-Bush.

Let's remember that the Right has been cultivating its evangelical base for many years. It didn't happen overnight, as a reading of Ralph Reed's 1994 book, *Politically Incorrect: The Emerging Faith Factor in American Politics*, shows. Reed, former director of the Christian Coalition, recounts how his movement built itself up from scratch, utilizing the network of conservative pastors and churches, providing sermons, voter guides, get-out-the-vote training, and other resources to create a powerful organizational infrastructure. Separate, but overlapping with the religious right, the National Rifle Association and the gun lobby also used its huge warchest and organizational resources to mobilize its members and their families.

Moreover, the religious right and the gun lobby isn't just an election-day operation. This is an ongoing movement that provides people with social, psychological, and political sustenance on a regular basis. Bush's political director, Karl Rove, did an incredible job building on this earlier work, and did so under the radar screen of most reporters and pundits.

The Union Difference

When voters' loyalties were divided between their economic interests and other concerns, however, union membership was a crucial determinant of their votes. For example, gun owners favored Bush by a 63-36% margin, but union members who own guns supported Kerry 55-43%, according to an AFL-CIO survey. Bush carried all weekly church-goers by a 61-39% margin, but Kerry won among union members who attend church weekly by a 55-43% margin. Bush won among white men by 62-37% margin, but Kerry carried white men in unions by a 59-38% margin. Bush won among white women by 55-44% but Kerry won among white women in unions by a 67-32% margin.

What accounts for these differences?

Liberals and progressives currently lack the same kind of organizational infrastructure to compete on an equal footing with the religious right, the gun lobby, and their allies. Union members are more likely to vote, more likely to vote for Democrats, and more likely to volunteer for campaigns (phone banking, door-knocking) than people with similar demographic and job characteristics who are not union members. For Democrats, the problem is that there are simply not enough union members. The labor movement, Democrats' strongest organizational ally in terms of money and members, is not the organizational powerhouse it once was.

This year, in particular, the labor movement poured enormous resources (money, staff, members) into the election. They worked in coalition with community groups like ACORN, environmental, women's rights, consumer, and civil rights groups. But there were simply too few union members to overcome the Bush forces' edge. The long-term decline in union membership is perhaps the most important factor in explaining the gap between how well the Kerry and Bush forces did in mobilizing their respective bases. Union members - 35% in the 1950s, 25% in the 1970s - is down to 11% today. Had union membership been at its 1970s levels, Kerry would have won by a landslide.

The new level of energy and strategic thinking within the labor movement is heartening. The current generation of union leaders like Andy Stern, Maria Elena Durazo, Miguel Contreras, Bruce Raynor, and John Wilhelm is focused on organizing and coalition-building. Thanks to these efforts, a growing number of clergy (linked through the National Interfaith Committee for

Worker Justice) have become labor's strong allies, helping to connect the struggles of the working poor to the Biblical tradition of prophetic justice. Thousands of young college students are flocking to the labor movement to become organizers and researchers. Unions are forging new ties with environmental groups, housing activists, and immigrant rights' coalitions.

There's no quick fix to the decline of union membership. Surveys consistently show that most workers would like a union voice at work, but federal labor laws are so tilted toward management that it is almost impossible to win an NLRB election. Businesses consistently fire and harass workers illegally for union activity without serious sanctions. We won't see a significant increase in union membership without reform of federal labor laws. Kerry pledged to support labor law reform, but we're not going to get such reform out of this President and Congress. In fact, Bush has already indicated his commitment to weaken federal labor laws, through his appointments to the NLRB and curtailing so-called "neutrality" agreements between unions and companies, which unions have used to circumvent a hostile NLRB to win organizing victories. Despite a hostile White House and Congress, it is important to start laying the groundwork for future labor reform.

However, time, and demographics, are on the liberals' side. Young people showed high levels of intensity and enthusiasm this year, helped by groups such as Rock the Vote and pro-Kerry rock concert tours in swing states by Bruce Springsteen, the Foo Fighters, Ani DiFranco, and others. Voter turnout among Americans under 30, though modest compared with other age groups, increased from 42.3% in 2000 to 51.6% this year. The youth vote is trending toward Democrats. In 2000, 47.6% of 18 to 29 years olds voted for Gore, another 4.7% for Nader, and 46.2% for Bush. This year, Kerry captured 55% percent of the youth vote and Nader got another 1%, while Bush's support fell to 44%. Also, huge numbers of college students did volunteer work in various (mostly Democratic) campaigns. As their voter participation increases, this generation will change the political calculations. In particular, they are more tolerant and less susceptible to right-wing appeals around gay-bashing and opposition to abortion.

In addition, the inevitable increase in Hispanic voting -- as immigrants and their children become citizens, register, and vote -- will bring more Democrats into the fold. The Hispanic population is not monolithic on economic, foreign policy or cultural issues (including gay rights and abortion), and Bush captured more Hispanic votes this year than he did four years ago. But the Hispanic vote is still a predominantly Democratic constituency and a key recruiting ground for union organizing efforts among low-wage workers.

The Issues: Was the Election a Mandate?

Two days after the election, Bush said, "The people made it clear what they wanted," and claimed that the outcome gave him a mandate. The mainstream media once again towed the White House line. In a front page story a day after the election, headlined "President Seems Poised to Claim a New Mandate," the New York Times wrote that Bush "can claim that an apparently insurmountable lead in the popular vote vindicated his policies, his persistence, his personal qualities and his political strategy." U.S. News & World Report called Bush the "man with the mandate." The Wall Street Journal headlined its editorial, "The Bush Mandate."

But the exit polls make it clear that this isn't true. There is no majority mandate for any of the issues Bush identified as his priorities, such as privatization of Social Security, further regressive tax cuts for the wealthy, or imposing limits on lawsuits against corporations and medical malpractice, much less overturning Roe v. Wade and banning gay marriage through a Constitutional amendment.

The proportion of Americans who define themselves as "liberals" has been declining for several

decades. But this does not mean that Americans do not share most "liberal" values. For example, fewer women call themselves "feminists" now than did 20 years ago, but more women agree with once-controversial "feminist" ideas like equal pay for equal work or a women's right to choose. Likewise, more Americans today than 20 years ago believe that government should protect the environment, consumers, and workers from unhealthy workplaces and other dangers. Most Americans now think that the federal government should help guarantee health insurance for everyone.

Ideas that were once outside the mainstream and now so taken-for-granted that many people who call themselves "moderates," or "conservatives," agree with them. (Remember: more than 20% of evangelicals voted for Kerry). This is progress.

Some issues, however, are still very polarizing, and can be used by politicians to "wedge" their way to victory. The exit polls from November 2 are clear. Bush effectively made the election a referendum on gay marriage and terrorism. Kerry tried to focus on the economy, health care, and the war in Iraq. The Bush campaign, helped by the mainstream media, did a better job of setting and dominating the issue agenda. But, as the exit polls reveal, the public is hardly in sync with Bush's broader agenda.

- o 49% of the voters on November 2 said they are "angry" or "dissatisfied" with Bush, while 48% are "satisfied" or "enthusiastic" with Bush. This is an incredible low level of support for an incumbent President, especially in the middle of a war.

- o 70% of voters are "very concerned" about the availability and cost of health care and another 23% are "somewhat concerned."

- o 54% percent of voters think that Bush pays more attention to large corporations than to "ordinary Americans."

- o 52% of voters think the economy is either "not so good" or "poor," compared with 47% of voters who think the economy is "excellent" (only 4% do) or "good."

- o 43% of voters think the job situation in their area is worse than it was four years ago, compared with 23% who think it is better. (34% think it is the same).

- o 53% of voters think the war in Iraq is doing "somewhat" or "very" badly and 46% of voters "somewhat" or "strongly" disapprove of the US decision to go to war with Iraq. But...

- o 55% of voters think that the war in Iraq is part of the war on terrorism.

Even on what the media have been labeling "moral values" (by which they really mean opposition to gay marriage and to abortion), Tuesday's voters are far from monolithic.

- o 55% of voters think that abortion should be legal in all cases (21%) or most cases (34%). In other words, a pro-choice majority.

- o 60% of voters believe that gay and lesbian couples should either be allowed to legally marry (25%) or form civil unions but not marry (35%). Only 37% oppose any legal recognition of gay/lesbian relationships.

America is in the midst of a significant demographic and cultural shift. Americans are increasingly accepting of homosexuals. Out-of-the-closet gays and lesbians have been elected to Congress and are prominent in the entertainment industry, business, journalism, and the

clergy. Many big cities and suburbs have openly gay schoolteachers. TV sit-coms have openly gay characters. The New York Times and other daily papers now include same-sex wedding announcements. In 20 years -- when today's younger voters reach middle-age -- this topic will no longer be controversial. No presidential candidate will be able to create a "wedge" issue about gay marriage.

The Candidates and the Campaigns

Kerry, a much-decorated VietNam vet, ran as an economic moderate (he barely mentioned the poor during the entire campaign), a foreign policy moderate (arguing he'd win the war on terrorism and the war in Iraq by cajoling our allies and the UN to play a larger role), and a social liberal (supportive of stronger environmental laws, a women's right to choose and gay civil unions, though not gay marriage). Nevertheless, Karl Rove was successful in portraying Kerry as a flip-flopping ultra-liberal with a controversial military record. Plus, Kerry's patrician demeanor didn't make him the best salesman for the Democrat's strongest issues -- Bush's crony capitalism, tax cuts for the rich, jobs, the economy and health care.

The major media made it easy for Rove to set the agenda. Over the past several years, the mainstream media played into Bush's hands, often unwittingly, by repeating lies and distortions that originated with the White House and its allies. These messages reflected the close ties between the Bush White House and right-wing media, including talk radio shows, Fox News, Sinclair broadcasting, the Washington Times, the New York Post, the Weekly Standard, and conservative syndicated columnists. This created the "echo chamber" effect that eventually pushed these messages into the mainstream media.

For example, the misleading notion that Kerry was the "most liberal" Senator and "more liberal than Ted Kennedy" (which, based on National Journal rankings, was true only for 2003, when Kerry missed many votes while campaigning) began with the right-wing media and eventually became a topic of debate and controversy within the mainstream media.

Similarly, the assault on Kerry's military record in VietNam, and his later anti-war activities, started with the right-wing news outlets, repeating the accusations of Swift Boat Veterans for Truth (SBVT) and similar groups close to the Bush campaign. Although the SBVT only spent about \$500,000 to broadcast its TV ad attacking Kerry's war record, it received tens of millions of dollars in free publicity, first in the right-wing media and then in the mainstream media. This "echo chamber" effect helped cast doubt about Kerry despite the fact that in-depth stories in several papers challenged the credibility of the SBVT's allegations. This allowed SBVT to dominate the news, turning Kerry's war record into a liability rather than an advantage.

The New York Times and other mainstream media repeated the Bush administration's fabrications about weapons of mass destruction and the alleged Osama-Saddam connection. The media utilized sources with questionable credibility who helped Bush tie the unpopular war in Iraq to the more popular war against terrorism. Last May, in a rare act of eating crow, the Times apologized for its reliance on these sources and for failing to challenge the Bush administration's claims. The Times acknowledged that "it looks as if we, along with the administration, were taken in" and that the paper, like the Bush administration, "sometimes fell for misinformation" from Ahmad Chalabi and other Iraqi exiles.

The mainstream media gave Rove a free hand at setting the agenda around gay marriage, even making Kerry's reference to Mary Cheney's lesbianism in the last debate a controversy out of nowhere.

The Kerry campaign and the Democrats had no comparable echo chamber. For example, the New York Times' expose of the close ties between the Bush campaign and SBVT, and the

widespread distortions in the SBVT attacks on Kerry, did little to repair the damage already done to the Kerry campaign. For one thing, the mainstream media outside the two coasts did not report the Times' expose. It did not "echo" through the radio talk show circuit. Liberals have no counterweight to the close-knit right-wing web of think tanks, talk shows, and columnists.

The Bush campaign was able to portray itself as having almost a monopoly on "moral values." The right wing's version of morality was obsessed almost entirely with sex -- abortion (including stem cell research) and gay rights. Kerry was unable to promote the Democrats' own version of morality, to present his own policy ideas in Biblical and moral terms: That it is immoral for families to suffer without health insurance. That it is immoral for people who work full-time, year-round to live in poverty, in the wealthiest nation on earth. That it is immoral to give a tax cut to the richest CEO's in the country while our millions of kids go to underfunded schools and thousands of our soldiers in Iraq lack basic necessities to protect themselves from death and injury. That it is immoral to allow corporate greed to endanger public health and destroy environment for future generations.

The voters who think that "moral values" were the most important issue in the campaign (22% of all voters) voted 80% for Bush. The voters who think that "terrorism" was the most important issue in the campaign (19% of all voters) voted 86% for Bush. The voters who thought that taxes, education, Iraq, the economy and health care were the most important issues voted for Kerry, but (except for health care, 8% of all voters, 80% of whom voted for Kerry) not by the same wide margins.

Even many of Kerry's supporters, however, question his leadership qualities. In many ways, Bush was a better candidate than Kerry, at least in terms of their respective abilities to connect with their core constituencies and with swing voters. Kerry's base was simply less enthusiastic about their nominee than Bush's base was enthusiastic about their candidate. Among the 69% of voters who were enthusiastic "for" their candidate, 59% voted for Bush. Of the 25% of voters who mainly voted "against" a candidate, 70% voted for Kerry. Bush inspired his voters; Kerry voters were more likely to be voting "against" Bush than "for" Kerry.

Kerry voters were more likely to think that "he cares about people like me," "he is intelligent" and "he will bring about needed change." Bush voters were more likely to think that Bush was a "strong leader," "is honest and trustworthy," "has clear stands on the issues," and "has strong religious faith." Under such circumstances, it isn't surprising the evangelicals favored Bush by a much wider margin than union members favored Kerry.

Silver Linings and Next Steps

The Bush forces were brilliant at encouraging conservative voter turnout by reaching out to evangelical churches and by putting ballot initiatives in 11 states opposing gay marriage. The liberal forces had a parallel strategy, but only in two states. In Florida and Nevada, progressive and liberal-labor groups sponsored statewide ballot measures to raise each state's minimum wage by one dollar. In both cases, they won overwhelmingly. In Florida, by 72-28; in Nevada, by 68-32. Florida voters approved, by a 72% to 28% margin (4.95 million to 1.96 million), the statewide ballot initiative to raise the state minimum wage by one dollar an hour, to \$6.15/hour (and index it to inflation) -- sponsored by ACORN with a broad coalition of unions and others liberal groups -- despite the united opposition (and heavy spending) by the state's big business community and Florida Gov. Jeb Bush. This margin was much higher than the 68,000 vote margin (out of 6.85 million cast) for Republican Mel Martinez over Democrat Betty Castor for Florida's open US Senate seat and much larger than Bush's 300,000 vote margin over Kerry in that state.

Obviously, many Floridians, including many middle class voters (and certainly some

evangelicals), who voted for Bush and Martinez, also voted to raise the minimum wage. Florida saw a significant increase in turnout among low-income and working class voters, as well as African American and Latino voters -- thanks to a grassroots voter registration and GOTV campaign by the coalition of liberal and progressive groups -- but it wasn't sufficient to beat Bush and Martinez.

Further, voters in other states approved important progressive measures. California voters approved a tax on people with annual incomes of \$1 million or more to pay for additional mental health services.-- "about as pure a Robin Hood measure as one can imagine," observed syndicated columnist Neal Peirce. Voters in Colorado and Oklahoma approved increased tobacco taxes to health care services. In Maine and Washington, voters defeated tax cut measures. Colorado voters approved a ballot measure which set goals for public utilities to adapt more wind, solar and biomass power.

In other words, many voters (though not a majority) may agree Bush on abortion, gay rights, and terrorism, but most voters (and even more non-voters) do not agree with Bush on his running of the economy, the widening economic divide, the 36 million Americans living below the poverty line (an increasing number of them the working poor), growing job insecurity, the 45 million without health insurance, and his efforts to dismantle environmental and consumer protections. This should offer hope for liberals and progressives.

Despite the significant increase in voter turnout among the have-nots, the overall turnout rate among poor, working class and minority voters (in Florida, Ohio, and other swing states) was still much lower than it should and could be, especially when compared to turnout rates among more affluent voters, including evangelicals (whose churches did a great job of mobilizing voters).

The issue of the "working poor," widening inequality, and the Walmart-ization of America is now a mainstream issue. Ironically, welfare reform helped. Pushed off welfare, folks are now working in the low-wage economy. Liberal and progressive groups need not simply fight defensive battles while Bush promotes his agenda. For example, they should be laying the groundwork for a national campaign to raise the federal minimum wage to at least the poverty level: \$9.50/hour (which translates into \$19,000/year - the official poverty level). Kerry was too timid proposing \$7/hour. If the minimum wage level in 1968 had risen with inflation, it would be \$8/hour now. Start off bold; compromise down the road to \$7.50.

Moral values? How about "make work pay." and "no one who works full time should be in poverty"? Let the guy in the White House who gave the richest Americans a huge tax break try to argue that a nurses aide with two kids can raise a family on \$5.15/hour, \$10,300 a year. Let the Republicans in Congress try to make the case that a worker in a poultry plant shouldn't be making \$19,000 a year.

Members of Congress should be vulnerable to pressure to give Americans a raise. Let the 435 members of the House and the 33 Senate members -- especially. the Republicans -- who are up for re-election in 2006 try to oppose the minimum wage. Business groups will trot out their hired-hand economists to argue that raising the minimum wage will kills jobs, especially for small business. But there's plenty of empirical evidence that ripple ("multiplier") effects of raising the minimum wage are positive for jobs and the economy.

The Long Haul

Political victories are about more than technology and election-day turnout. They are about message and movement. Successes on election day are a by-product of, not a substitute for, effective grassroots organizing in between elections. Over the past century, the key turning

points for improving American society involved large-scale mobilizations around a broad egalitarian and morally uplifting vision of America, a progressive patriotism animated by "liberty and justice for all." In the Gilded Age, it was agrarian populism and urban Progressivism. During the Depression, it was the upsurge of industrial unionism linked to Roosevelt's New Deal. In the 1960's and 1970s, it was the civil rights, women's rights, and environmental movements, promoting a vision of how the nation's prosperity should be shared by all but not squandered for future generations. These movements drew on traditions of justice and morality. They redefined the rights and responsibilities of citizens, government, and business.

To those suffering from post-election depression, Rick Perlstein's book, *Before the Storm*, about the Goldwater movement offers some solace and lessons. If you think Democrats are depressed now, think about how depressed the Republicans were in 1964 when President Lyndon Johnson beat Goldwater in a real landslide and the Democrats won huge majorities in Congress. (One of Goldwater's volunteers was a young Arizona attorney named William Rehnquist who, in the early 1960s, served as a poll watcher assigned to keep Hispanics and Blacks from voting). At the time, almost every pundit in the country wrote the conservative movement's obituary. Goldwater's right-wing supporters were viewed as fanatics, out of touch with mainstream America.

But, the GOP's right wing regrouped. With the help of conservative millionaires and foundations, they created new organizations, professorships at universities, and think tanks to help shape the intellectual climate and policy agenda. They recruited a new generation of college students and funded their campus organizations. They created a network of right-wing talk radio stations. They identified potential political candidates, cultivated and trained them. They took over the atrophied apparatus of the Republican Party. They helped change the political agenda. In 1980, they elected Ronald Reagan. In 2000, they helped Bush steal the election. On November 2, they helped Bush win a second term, almost fair and square.

The late social critic and activist Michael Harrington used to say that progressives have to be long-distance runners. We're in this for the long haul. We lost a big battle on Tuesday, but we won a few skirmishes (the Florida and Nevada minimum wage victories; California's tax on the very rich to fund mental health services). More importantly, there is still a war to win -- a war of ideas, a war of position, and a war of organization and strategy.

The next two years will be brutal and painful in terms of Bush's foreign policy agenda, domestic agenda, a war on the poor and workers, and Supreme Court appointments. It is time to take to the streets as well as the workplaces, living rooms, church basements, union halls, and neighborhoods. The issues are clear: Bush's mismanaged occupation of Iraq (and any additional wars Bush might have in mind), Supreme Court nominees, further dismantling of environmental, worker, and consumer protection laws, and attempts to slash the social safety net and Social Security. There are also pro-active campaigns to raise the minimum wage and to organize workers at Wal-Marts and other corporations.

America today is holding its breath, trying to decide what kind of society it wants to be. Liberal and progressive forces are gaining momentum, but still lack the organizational infrastructure needed to effectively challenge the conservative message and movement. They have begun to invest in building that infrastructure -- think tanks, grassroots coalitions, technology, recruitment of staff, identification and training of candidates. Some of that investment bore fruit on November 2, but there is more to be done. It is also time to regroup for another round of voter mobilization, organizing at the local and state levels, and preparation for the 2006 Congressional elections, only two years away. We can try to checkmate the worst part of Bush's agenda while building for the 2006 elections, the 2008 elections, and beyond.

This is no time for hopelessness.

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