

# The Bush Decision

Back in November of last year, I wrote in this space that the political forecast for the Republican Party was “dark.” Six months later the darkness has not lifted; in fact, bats are now hanging from the White House ceiling.

The bleak outlook is because of three major issues: Iraq, gas prices, and immigration.

The Iraq conflict is simply too confusing. Now in its fourth year, the geo-political strategy of establishing a democratic beachhead in the terror-filled Gulf region is still a jump ball. Will Iraq ever become a free country? Who the heck knows?

But we all know about gas prices. According to a Gallup Poll, 69% of Americans say the rocketing cost of fuel is hurting them every day. Even though President Bush might not be at fault here, he is the coach of team America. And when the fans are angry, the coach usually gets fired. And the fans are angry.

On immigration, the President’s position is nuanced. He wants a “guest worker” program, but is hazy about how to secure the border so millions more “guest workers” don’t come dashing into this country uninvited.

Unfortunately for Mr. Bush, most Americans are not nuanced about illegal immigration. They don’t like it. They want it stopped. After the border is finally secured, many Americans will consider some kind of orderly process to mainstream those who have entered illegally, but not before.

So the President finds himself in an unlit cave with no clear way out. He can blaviate all he wants about the worthiness of Iraq, the pain of high gas prices, and the humane way to deal with illegal immigration, but the folks want some results.

Dreaming about ethanol is not going to cut it.

With his administration on the verge of entering Jimmy Carter territory—that is, losing the confidence of the public, President Bush must act boldly. Here's how he can turn things around:

- Move the National Guard to the southern border to back up the Border Patrol. That would shut down most illegal entries and stunt the rampant drug smuggling. The press would scream, but the President's base would be energized, and his poll numbers would shoot up immediately.
- In conjunction with the troop movements, the President could then demand Congress pass a "fair worker" program that would provide a "pathway" to citizenship for those illegal aliens who pay a fine and register for proper working credentials. Some conservatives might not like that, but would accept it, knowing troops were helping control the border.
- Strongly suggest that oil companies voluntarily roll back prices to 2005 levels for the good of the country in a time of war. Remember, the oil companies made record profits last year. They'd still be swimming in money if they cut prices 20%.
- Stay the course in Iraq. That country's future is now vital to America's future. Whatever it takes, we have to win there. A loss in Iraq gives Iran major power in the Gulf. God help us.

So those are some daring moves the President could make tomorrow. The President might also seriously think about exactly where he is in history. Maybe somebody should tape a picture of Jimmy Carter on his bathroom mirror.

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# Gas Pains

The next time a gas fill-up costs you 40 bucks or more, consider this: Lee Raymond, the retired CEO of Exxon-Mobil, was paid close to a billion dollars by that company from 1993 to the present. Raymond's retirement package is about \$400 million, according to published reports. Does everybody love Raymond? I don't. I think he's a greed-head.

The Exxon-Mobil board of directors approved Raymond's compensation, and guess who appointed most of those well-paid board members to their positions? Does the name Lee Raymond ring a bell?

And guess who is paying all those Exxon-Mobil salaries, including our pal Lee's? The regular folks who must buy gas to go to work and heat their homes. This is called "predatory capitalism."

Let me explain, and please keep in mind that I am a big-time supporter of capitalism. Gasoline supplies are at an eight year high, according to OPEC. There is plenty of gas selling on the open market, more than enough to meet the worldwide demand.

So rising gas prices are not a supply and demand issue.

What the American oil companies are doing is exploiting the uncertainty in the world. Every time the nutty Iranian government threatens to kill the Jews or the Americans or whoever, speculators bid up the paper price of a barrel of oil.

These speculators operate in the so-called commodities markets. They gamble on where the price of oil and other tangible assets will be months from now. These Vegas-type people sit in front of their computers and bid on "futures" contracts.

Every time the oil company executives, guys like Lee Raymond, see these people bidding up oil "futures," they order their retail gas station owners to jack up prices to you. Supply and demand my carburetor-this has nothing to do with the free market.

If you don't believe me, try to start your own oil company. Just try. The government has to approve almost everything these conglomerates do, and there's no room for any "startups."

So everyday Americans are at the mercy of a complicated shell game that is manipulated by a few people playing high risk financial roulette. But it is no game to millions of Americans who have to buy gas. We have no choice.

That's because the U.S. government declined to do what the government of Brazil did. Next year, Brazil, population 188 million, will be totally independent of imported oil. Back in the 1970's, the Brazilian government mandated that all cars sold in that country run on sugar-based ethanol. And now they do.

These are the same cars we drive. But in Brazil, the fuel situation is sweet. Vehicles run on sugar.

Back here in the USA, the federal government rejected ethanol, and all other alternative fuels, because Lee Raymond and his brethren wanted none of that. Raymond is in the oil business, not the sugar business.

In the time of the French Revolution, Lee Raymond and his \$400 million pension would be running one step ahead of the guillotine. But today, some in America admire Raymond and support his unbelievable compensation.

But to those of us who really understand what's going on here, Raymond and his ilk are hurting the country and the government is their enabler. Talk about gas pains. There isn't enough

Alka-Seltzer in the world.

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## The Judas Factor

So now in this Easter season we find out that Judas Iscariot, one of history's great villains, was really a good guy. A recently published text written about 1,700 years ago and discovered in Egypt says that Jesus ordered the Apostle Judas to betray him to fulfill God's will. In other words, Jesus wanted Judas to deliver him to his enemies and Judas did that as a friend.

Well, I believe my third grade teacher at St. Brigid's School, Sister Mary Lurana, would not be having any of this. The good sister understood that the Gospels were teaching tools, not history, and that the story of Judas was consistent with one of Jesus' central messages: "Don't sell out what you believe in for money."

Remember Moses smashing the Golden Idol? Remember Jesus driving the money changers from the Temple? Remember the parable of the rich man, the eye of the needle, and heaven? If not, grab a copy of the Bible. It's a bestseller, you know.

Anyway, Judas has been dead for more than 2,000 years so it really doesn't matter much to him how he's perceived on earth, especially if he's in heaven, right? But the lesson of betrayal is very relevant to us all.

These days in America, money is a driving force and many of us have been personally betrayed by people seeking our money. It is also quite common for people to use other people in pursuit of currency. In fact, I believe the love of money is the root of much evil. Where did I hear that before?

The revelation of the so called "Gospel of Judas" has some theologians in a tizzy. The original Gospels are now being reexamined and debated, and one Princeton professor even wrote that discoveries of this kind are "exploding the myth of a monolithic Christianity..."

Sister Lurana would have definitely scolded that professor in no uncertain terms.

The good Sister would likely say that the Judas tract explodes nothing. It is simply another early Christian writing explaining an author's viewpoint on this particular Apostle and his relationship with Jesus. Again, the scriptures are not history; they were written to instruct people as to how Jesus lived and what his message was. Whether Judas was a traitor or not is really not important. What is imperative to those who want to follow in the footsteps of Christ is to understand that hurting another person for money is not acceptable. Got it? I'm glad.

Anything to do with religion in America is touchy these days, so I fully expect one of Judas's descendants to get a lawyer and demand restitution for all Judas has suffered over the years. I mean, there are a myriad of damages in play here. By some accounts, Judas hung himself after he realized what a scoundrel he was. Wrongful death suit?

And what exactly happened to those thirty pieces of silver he was paid to betray Jesus? Compounded over the centuries, that would be a major stake today. Surely, Judas would want the money in the hands of his people, would he not?

Also, don't even bring up the subject of libel. How many kids are named "Judas?" Do Matthew, Mark, Luke and John have any traceable assets the libel lawyers can go after?

Not that money has anything to do with all this, no; there's a principle in play here. And, as any good lawyer will tell you, that principle can only be illustrated by the payment of money

to the aggrieved estate of Judas Iscariot. God bless him.

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## Choose Booze or Not

Next time you see a teenager sitting around with a soda can, especially at night, ask him or her if you can have a sip. If they offer you the can, you don't have to drink. If they don't, there's a good chance the beverage inside isn't Dr. Pepper.

Drinking is cool again in America's high schools—way cool.

My father broke his back working in order to send me to Chaminade High School on Long Island. This is a college preparatory school with a strict code of behavior. My dad knew that if I got through that place, there would be a chance I would not wind up in Sing-Sing, a situation my grammar school teachers had predicted.

While Chaminade taught “values” and a Christian philosophy on life, off campus many students were wild men. Back then, the drinking age was 18 and most seniors could legally buy all the booze they wanted. And many did, leading to the usual chaos.

Now, the drinking age in America is 21, if the state wants federal highway funds. But, according to my high school teacher friends, student drinking is worse than it ever was. It's so bad that Chaminade and other private schools have cancelled proms this year, citing after-prom parties where many kids drink themselves sick.

The principal at Chaminade, Father James Williams, places much of the blame on parents. And remember, these parents aren't struggling in the inner city to put food on the table—these

are affluent parents who believe kids will be kids, so why not let them get wasted once in a while?

This attitude is more common than you might think in America. The primary rationalization is, you can die for your country in Iraq or Afghanistan, but you can't drink? Come on.

Okay, fine, it is tough to tell an 18-year old that his Bud's not for him. But let's be realistic. Intoxication can lead to many things, and not many of them are good. Drunk adults often get away with the overindulgence, but the risk goes through the roof with kids.

Most guidance counselors will tell you that many pregnancies occur when teenagers are drunk. STD's are also easily passed along when teens are too out of it to use protection. Fights break out, destructive traffic accidents are common, and so is destruction of property.

If a teenager is drunk and unsupervised—look out.

Often, parents have an unrealistic view of their offspring. How many moms and dads that you know will say, "Yeah, I know Jack's a lush, but hey, I'm not committed enough to control him." How many times have you ever heard THAT?

No, the usual dance is for parents to say they have "good kids," and to slough off substance abuse with a shrug. After all, many baby boomer parents routinely got blasted in their youth.

That kind of thinking is foolish, and if you don't believe me, have a medium set you up with Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin. Substance abuse was dopey then, and it's dopey now. Just because you survived it doesn't mean your daughter will.

So the best plan is to lay out the pros and cons of getting loaded. Discuss the good things about it with your kids, and

the bad things about it. Use some visuals to make points. Baby pictures, hospital rooms, wrecked cars, that kind of thing.

Then keep track of your kid. As long as he or she is getting laundry done in the house, you have a right to do that.

In short, do everything you can to discourage the intoxication deal. In that way, if you fail, at least you know you tried.