

## THE PREVARICATOR II: THE MIDTERM CAMPAIGN

*The saga of the midterm elections in 2002 is not a shining hour for American politics. Rather, it's a tale of new lows in dirty tricks and a corrupt politicization of the war on terrorism.*

Not only was the presidential election in 2000 one of the closest in history, but the total of all votes cast in the congressional and senatorial elections was equally close. Only half of one percent separated Bush and Gore, and approximately the same percentage separated all the votes cast for Republican candidates for Congress and for their Democratic opponents.<sup>363</sup>

In 2001, Republican Senator James Jeffords of Vermont, fed up with the extreme conservatism of the Republican Party, announced that he would become an Independent. However, since he no longer voted with the Republicans, his decision gave the Democrats control of the Senate.

Going into the 2002 elections, the Republicans held a six-seat advantage in the House of Representatives and, with reapportionment reallocating 12 congressional seats from states in the East and Midwest to states in the South and West, Bush had hopes of increasing the Republican margin.<sup>364</sup> But what Bush desperately wanted was to regain control of the Senate, where his legislative agenda was stalled.

The Republicans raised a total of \$400 million in hard money compared to \$220 million for the Democrats. Operating with White House leadership, the Republican National Committee organized the "72-Hour Task Force," and the Republican House leadership organized the Strategic Taskforce to Organize and Mobilize People (STOMP). So much for subtlety. The plan included celebrity visits by Bush, Cheney, and their wives to pump up Republican campaign workers and to gain news coverage.<sup>365</sup>

### **Karl Rove's Political War**

Karl Rove proposed to turn the war on terror into a political weapon against the Democrats. At a meeting of the Republican National Committee in Austin, Texas, Rove stated, "We can go to the country on this issue, because they trust the Republican Party to do a better job of protecting and strengthening America's military might and thereby protecting America."<sup>366</sup>

The fact that Rove was politicizing the war was confirmed when a computer disc containing a power-point presentation was found in Lafayette Park across the street from the White House. Slide number 20 was entitled "Republican Strategy" and listed six ways to win the election. The first was to "Focus on War and the Economy."<sup>367</sup> Even Pat Buchanan observed, "I think the way they rationalize ... Rove would rationalize it, is to explain to the President the consequences ... the political consequences of each of the choices he is considering, and that so long as policy is not disturbed by doing something that helps us politically, we should feel free to do something that helps us politically."<sup>368</sup>

Karl Rove's favorite propagandist, David Horowitz, wrote a campaign booklet entitled "How to Beat the Democrats." He emphasized that "mainstream Democrats [were] ... significant players in the debacle of 9/11. And no one is more singularly responsible for America's vulnerability on that fateful day than the Democratic president, Bill Clinton, and his White House staff." Clinton was accused of having "simply refused to do anything serious about the threat." Horowitz concluded, "This is a story the Republicans must tell the American people if they are to be warned about the dangers of putting their trust in the party of Bill Clinton by casting their votes for Democrats come November."<sup>369</sup>

In 1999, Bush had promised, "I've learned you cannot lead by dividing people. This country is hungry for a new style of campaign. Positive. Hopeful. Inclusive." Well, we saw how he conducted the 2000 campaign, and like a movie that becomes a box office success, he set out to make a sequel. During the 2002 campaign, Bush campaigned through 15 states. He stayed on

message throughout and repeatedly accused Democrats of sacrificing America's safety by supporting workplace protection for the new employees of the Department of Homeland Security, and that Democrats were therefore uninterested in the security of the American people.

In the final days of the election, Karl Rove began to play his usual dirty tricks. In Florida and Texas, two states considered crucial to reelect Jeb Bush as governor and a Republican Senator, voters began to receive telephone calls purportedly from gay rights organizations encouraging them to vote for the Democratic candidates because they supported gay marriage.<sup>370</sup>

### **A Cowardly Attack on an American Patriot**

Democrat Max Cleland was the senior Senator from Georgia. Between 1965 and 1968, he had volunteered to fight in the Vietnam War as a Captain in the Army's 1<sup>st</sup> Calvary Division. He lost both legs and his right arm in a grenade explosion, and he received numerous awards for his bravery, including the Silver Star for Gallantry in Action.\* He went on to serve as the youngest administrator ever of the Veterans Administration for President Carter. As a senator, Cleland gained respect for his work in health care, bio-terrorism preparedness, and homeland security.<sup>371</sup> He was a liberal on economic issues and a moderate on cultural and foreign affairs. He was an ardent conservationist, receiving a perfect score of 100 percent on environmental issues from the League of Conservation Voters. The polls showed that Georgia voters had a generally favorable impression of Cleland.<sup>372</sup>

In the Senate, Cleland co-sponsored the legislation to establish the Department of Homeland Security, which was initially opposed by Bush; however, Cleland opposed Bush's

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\* Cleland was awarded the Silver Star because, "during heavy enemy rocket and mortar attack, Capt. Cleland disregarded his own safety, exposed himself to rocket barrage as he left his covered position to administer first aid to his wounded comrades. He then assisted them in moving the injured personnel to covered positions. Cleland's gallant action is in keeping with the highest traditions of military service."

plan to deny civil service protection to Department employees. This was enough to make him a target of the Republican juggernaut. Cleland's opponent in the 2002 Senate race was Republican Congressman Saxby Chambliss, a Chicken Hawk, who had avoided service in Vietnam because of a "football injury" and four student deferments.<sup>373</sup> Chambliss had a score of zero percent on environmental issues. Chambliss once said that to combat terrorism, a Georgia sheriff could be turned loose to "arrest every Muslim that comes across the state line."<sup>374</sup>

A true believer in going nasty, Chambliss began to run television attack ads that questioned Cleland's patriotism. The ads featured photographs of Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein and attacked Cleland as supposedly voting against homeland security and questioned his courage to lead. Chambliss labeled Cleland as "the most liberal senator Georgia has ever had."

Bush visited Georgia five times to campaign for Chambliss. In October 2002, Bush spoke at a fund-raiser for Chambliss, where he blamed Democrats for trying to "tie the hands of this president and future presidents to be able to carry out one of our most solemn duties, which is to protect the homeland." Since Cleland was a Democrat, it wasn't hard for Georgia voters to get the message.<sup>375</sup>

After Bush put the boots to Cleland, his buddy Chambliss, the crass bully, went on to defeat the brave and dignified warrior, who had given so much for his country and who deserved so much better. Who cares? Out of habit, Bush lied that the Republicans had prevailed because they ran clean campaigns, saying, "Their accent was on the positive."

The *Weekly Scalawag* reports that after his election, Chambliss telephoned Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist to ask a favor. What he didn't know was that he was on a speaker phone and that a reporter's tape recorder was running. Chambliss said that a friend who helped "raise a chunk of money" to get him elected wanted an "ambassadorship to an overseas economic development organization." When Chambliss was later confronted about the incident on Meet the Press, he said the friend "just happens to be a donor." Nonetheless, he said, "the

guy's qualified." Yet, he had told Frist, "I don't even know what the hell he is, but he wants it." So much for integrity in politics.

The Republicans outspent the Democrats by \$184 million and succeeded in holding their House seats and regaining control of the Senate. The new employees of the Department of Homeland Security lost out on workplace protection, and the Department was politicized when the Republican-controlled Congress passed the law and Bush signed it.

Do you think Bush acted in the best interests of Americans when he and Rove cynically used the 9/11 attacks as a political weapon? Do you think he cared about Homeland Security when he helped stomp on a true patriot, one who had really wanted to fight in Vietnam, who was not afraid to volunteer, and who really did give his right arm (and two legs) for his country? You're not stupid! Get the truth.

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363. Zogby, James J., "The stakes are high in the 2002 congressional elections," January 15, 2002, [www.jordanembassyus.org/01152002009.html](http://www.jordanembassyus.org/01152002009.html).

364. *Ibid.*

365. "The Last Hurrah? Soft Money And Issue Advocacy In The 2002 Congressional Elections," Edited by David B. Magleby and J. Quin Monson, Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 2003, [www.byu.edu/outsidemoney](http://www.byu.edu/outsidemoney).

366. Conason, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

367. Moore, *op. cit.*, pp. 290, 291.

368. *Ibid.*, p. 291.

369. Conason, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

370. Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 320.

371. "Stories of Courage: Senator Max Cleland," [www.loc.gov/cocoon/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.03512](http://www.loc.gov/cocoon/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.03512).

372. "Race At A Glance: Georgia Senate," League of Conservation Voters, [www.lev.org/Campaigns/Campaigns.cfm?ID=1517&c=1](http://www.lev.org/Campaigns/Campaigns.cfm?ID=1517&c=1).

373. Conason, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

374. "Rep. Saxby Chambliss: Arrest every Muslim That Enters Georgia," November 21, 2001, [www/refuseandresist/org/newrepression/120501chambliss.html](http://www/refuseandresist/org/newrepression/120501chambliss.html).

375. Corn, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

