



Iraq disaster finally caught up with Bush

(<http://www.suntimes.com/news/greeley/131251.CST-EDT-gree10.article>)

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Even the "born-again" may have been part of the Democratic revolution last Tuesday. In its final pre-election poll, the New York Times, with its usual religious tin ear, presented but did not comment on a graph that showed this Republican "base" was evenly split between Democrats and Republicans in its voting plans. While exit poll data is necessary to confirm this finding, it was a strong hint that the house of cards Karl Rove had created was falling apart.

In our book on conservative Christians, Professor Michael Hout from Berkeley and I questioned whether the "evangelicals" were a strong component of Rove's coalition. We had calculated that they added at the most one or two percentage points to the "base" provided by the white Protestant population. The influence of their religious leadership on Republican politics was based on what former House Speaker "Tip" O'Neill called "shadows and mirrors."

Another component of Rove's alleged magic was "patriotism" and fear of the terrorists. President Bush claimed during his madcap campaign that the Democrats were in fact on the side of the terrorists, creating much enthusiasm among the partisan crowds to which he spoke. As Abraham Lincoln may have said, you can fool all of the people some of the time and some of the people all the time, but you can't fool all the people, all the time. Enough of the people were fed up with the Iraq war that Rove's black magic did not work like it used to. It took a long time for the electorate to move beyond the fear and anger of the World Trade Center attack, but move it finally did.

The Republican leadership continued with all the old dirty tricks -- vicious negative ads, harassing phone calls, targeting candidates who seemed particularly vulnerable, hassling voters, especially if they were black, identifying themselves with "our brave troops," wrapping themselves in the American flag. They took particular pleasure in going after war hero Tammy Duckworth in the 6th District just as they had destroyed amputee Sen. Max Cleland in the 2002 Georgia election. Cleland was not a patriot because he opposed the Homeland Security Department. Duckworth planned to take Social Security money from elderly white Americans and give it to Mexican illegals. Such lies call to heaven for vengeance. But the administration has told so many lies in the past six years that lies are not enough to win an election anymore.

Sixty years ago the Republicans got even with Franklin Roosevelt by forbidding third terms to a president through the 22nd Amendment. A president elected to a second term is a "lame duck" on Inauguration Day because he has lost the power of running again. Oddly, four Republican presidents became lame ducks -- Eisenhower, Nixon, Reagan, and now George W. Bush. Nixon was forced to resign. Eisenhower and

Reagan were the victims of the 22nd Amendment, forbidden a third term by Republican animus toward Roosevelt.

Bush, then, is a lame duck. After this week's election he has become a very lame duck -- indeed, a dead duck. He chose to make the election a referendum on the Iraq war and on himself. He lost. Overwhelmingly. He has spent all the capital that he claimed from his 2004 victory.

Commentators already are telling the Democrats that they must compromise to get along with the president. Bush is making nice noises about working together -- which means in his version of English that they must do what he says. The war in Iraq must go on till victory, no matter how long it takes and how many Iraqis and Americans die.

The new Democratic Congress must resist the temptation to be "responsible" on Iraq. They were not elected to be responsible. They were elected to end this stupid and immoral war. James Baker, who in Florida in 2000 showed how skilled he is in turning defeat into victory, may well provide a face-saving way out for the president, but even that will not hide the truth that his legacy will be the memory of a scarred battleground presidency, devastated by vicious partisan politics and a deadly blend of ignorance, arrogance and incompetence.