



11350 Random Hills Road, Suite 800, Fairfax, Virginia 22030 Phone (703) 934-6101 Fax (703) 352-3678

fff@fff.org www.fff.org

GOP, R.I.P.? **by Sheldon Richman**

I don't usually come to the defense of conservatives, but I am perplexed that they are being attacked because they don't support John McCain's presidential bid. Self-anointed Voices of Responsibility are chiding conservative spokesmen and spokeswomen for criticizing McCain on several counts and for going as far as promising to vote for Hillary Clinton if she's the alternative to the Arizona senator.

Would these conservatives really promote a Democratic victory in November in order to initiate a reform of the Republican Party, the allegedly more mature McCain supporters want to know.

Well, why not? Shouldn't principle count for something? Are there no conceivable circumstances under which a political party ought to be defeated to be saved? Of course there are.

Not that I agree with every conservative criticism of McCain. I don't. When they call him an advocate of open borders, they are wrong, although I wish they were right. The conservatives are completely off-base on the immigration issue. Freedom is not just for Americans. The freedom to move is an individual right. Legalistic arguments against illegal immigration disguise a fear of unmonitored foreigners. The logic of the conservative position would require that everyone carry a national identity card to be presented on demand. So much for freedom.

Conservatives argue that walls intended to keep people out are different from walls intended to keep people in. Balderdash. If all countries built walls against immigration, they would lock people in the countries in which they happened to be born; those walls would be no different from the Berlin Wall, which conservative hero Ronald Reagan wanted torn down.

But McCain is not for the freedom to move. He favors "controlling the borders." As for the unauthorized immigrants already here, he would fine them steeply — for what? For exercising their liberty without government permission. Admittedly, his position is more humane than the conservative position that calls for tracking the immigrants down and deporting them.

The conservatives are on firmer ground when they criticize McCain for his so-called campaign-finance reform. Every aspect of McCain-Feingold is without doubt a violation of

freedom of speech, among other liberties. McCain has sanctimoniously insisted he's only trying to take corruption out of politics — as though that were possible — but in fact he and his allies in this cause are mainly concerned with protecting incumbents from “negative” advertising. The floor debate in the Senate made that abundantly clear.

The conservatives also cannot stomach that McCain voted against President Bush's tax cuts — using class-warfare arguments against them — cut a deal with the Democrats on judicial confirmations, and teamed up with Sen. Joe Lieberman to sponsor a bill to cap carbon emissions in order to fight allegedly man-made global warming. Whether one agrees with the conservatives on these issues or not, they hold them to be important.

Who, then, can fault the conservatives for their opposition to McCain? Is no principle important enough to stand by it, even at the cost of electoral defeat?

I wish the conservatives disagreed with McCain on more things. In my mind, one incident with McCain is enough to rule out supporting him, regardless of who his opponent is. When he stood in front of an audience and laughingly sang the old Beach Boys hit as “Bomb, bomb bomb/bomb, bomb Iran,” McCain should have been regarded as disqualified from holding any office in the land. If the United States attacks Iran, many innocent men, women, and children will be killed or maimed, just as they were in Iraq. Is that a laughing matter, Mr. McCain?

But the conservatives who otherwise can't stand McCain must have loved that moment.

The same for when he called for increasing U.S. troop strength in Iraq and said it would be fine if the troops stayed there for a hundred years or more. He figures that as long as the troops are not taking casualties, the somnambulant American people won't care. That's no way to do foreign policy.

McCain is a fan of Theodore Roosevelt, who was an unabashed imperialist and lover of war. Who'd want such a man in the White House?

I agree with the conservatives in this respect: a Republican party that nominates John McCain for president is unfit to exist. The sooner it is demolished, the better.

*Sheldon Richman is senior fellow at The Future of Freedom Foundation, author of **Tethered Citizens: Time to Repeal the Welfare State**, and editor of [The Freeman](#) magazine.*

This article was originally published in February 2008.