

# Cato's Letter

A QUARTERLY MESSAGE ON LIBERTY

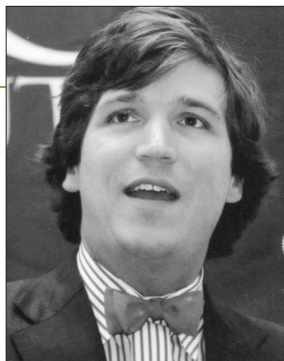
## The Decline and Fall of the Republican Party

**Tucker Carlson**

**W**hat went wrong with the Republican Party? That is a really tragic question. I do not actually consider myself much of a Republican, so I am not necessarily disappointed. But I am still a little bit shocked by what has happened in the last 11 years to this party that had such promise. How did this administration—which is, in the shorthand of the media, a sort of right-wing, small-government, tear-it-all-down, cryptolibertarian administration—get to be, in fact, an administration that is in almost every single way as liberal as Bill Clinton's administration? How did that happen?

The first and most obvious explanation of the problems in the Republican Party is that the president, despite everything you hear, is not actually all that conservative. He is definitely not animated by any libertarian instincts. Even during his 2000 campaign, he never claimed to be particularly conservative or libertarian. Bush's problem, fundamentally, is that he is not an ideologue in any way. Everyone attacks ideologues as rigid, but in fact they govern far more effectively

*Tucker Carlson is the host of MSNBC's **The Situation with Tucker Carlson**. This is an excerpt from his remarks at a Cato Institute City Seminar in New York in December.*



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because they actually believe something. Bush is not a deep thinker. He is not an ideological thinker, and he does not think systematically about politics and the world.

Bush's political philosophy, such as it is, was all there in the 2000 campaign. If you listened to Bush speak, he repeated one line in every speech: "Prosperity must have a purpose. Prosperity uncoupled from purpose is simple materialism." That is a verbatim quote. Bush said that

would give you license to do a lot of things I do not think you ought to be doing. Bush's claims of small government conservatism were a crock.

This administration has not stood up for the principles of liberty. With a few exceptions—the withdrawal from the Kyoto Treaty and the tax cuts are both good things we would not have gotten under a Democratic president—this president has not stood up for small government. There was no remark from the

**“I think I would rather be poor than take government money, just on principle.”**



in every single stump speech, even to business groups. But most people at those speeches were not paying close attention. I do not think anybody stopped to ask what he meant.

2 On a moral level, he's right. But I remember thinking that when it comes to government, simple materialism is more than enough. I am uncomfortable with governments that aspire to a lot more than simple materialism. That implies that the government has plans for me. It wants to make me a better person. I do not want to be made a better person. If that were the goal, the government would have license to do a lot of things I do not think it ought to be doing. And that

Bush administration of any kind after the decision in the *Kelo* eminent domain case. This administration has done virtually nothing for school choice. It took the wrong side in the University of Michigan case on diversity, essentially saying that government has an interest in promoting diversity for its own sake—not as a means of redressing past discrimination, but simply because multicolored is better than monochromatic. That is almost an aesthetic position. Bush signed a campaign finance regulation bill that he acknowledged was unconstitutional.

Again and again, this administration has turned down opportunities, even when they were not terribly costly politi-

cally, to stand on principle. It has acted against its own best interest, alienating the very people who voted for Bush. Why? Because, as the brilliant Rick Brookhiser once said about Republicans: in their hearts, they know they are wrong.

I covered political campaigns for 10 years. When I interviewed liberal candidates, I always got the feeling that they really believed in what they were working toward. I got the opposite feeling when I interviewed a Republican candidate and his staff. I talked to Republican staffers, and I always got the feeling that they liked their candidate well enough. Their candidate was a better guy than the other guy; the other guy was a pretty bad guy. Of course, they all had plans to go join a lobbying shop in Washington if their guy didn't win, but in the meantime, they were solidly behind their guy.

When I went over to the other side of the room to talk to the liberal staffers clustered around the liberal candidate, they believed that their guy was a great guy with terrific ideas. Not only was the other guy a very bad guy, his ideas were terrible ideas, and if he were to beat their guy, the Republic would fall. If their guy won, he would improve not simply the quality of life for every American but human nature itself.

The Left believes in politics in a way that the Right does not. The average conservative, certainly the average libertarian, genuinely wants to be left alone to do his own thing. That is a huge disadvantage when it comes to governing, because it implies that the enterprise we are devoting our lives to isn't all that worthy. If the best we can do is keep government at bay, it's no wonder we have problems

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convincing people to let us run the government.

This president does not have beliefs that are strong enough to stand up to the political instincts of his advisers. They understand that ordinary people, even those who claim at cocktail parties to be sympathetic to libertarianism, do not mean it. People like government programs. Real libertarians do not. I certainly do not. I think I would rather be poor than take government money, just on principle. But most people do not feel that way. They want their Social Security. And Karl Rove understands that. So, actually, as Clinton proved for eight years, pandering to the middle class with government programs works very well indeed. The Bush people know that, which is one of the reasons this president has not vetoed anything.

If you are president, what constitutional powers do you have? You really have three. You have the power to declare

war, or at least the power to send our troops into war. And that obviously has been exercised by this president. You have the ability to veto things Congress does. This president has never done that. And you have your position in the White House from which to convince the public and Congress to enact your programs. President Bush is not very good at that. He is a man who distrusts rhetoric and who is obviously not a great public speaker. As a friend of mine once said, watching Bush give a speech is like watching a drunk man cross an icy street. You really want him to get to the other side, but it's clear he won't be able to make it without a lot of stumbling.

This administration has also had a problem with Congress. The problem is that it is a Republican Congress. Now, I am not looking forward to what I suspect will be a Democrat-controlled Congress 11 months from now. However, there is an important argument for divided government: it works better. The Founders designed our government to move really slowly. Gridlock is good. They set it up so we would have gridlock a lot of the time. I love gridlock. It means bad things are not happening. And in a divided Congress, you get gridlock. The problem with the president's relationship with Congress is that he is dealing with his own side. He does not dare say no to his own people.

If Congress, even just one chamber, had been controlled by Democrats for the past five years, we wouldn't have had the transportation bill we just got. If the Alaska delegation, all three of them, were

Democrats, they wouldn't have gotten away with the bridge to nowhere. But they are Republicans, so the president said nothing because saying something would be too costly politically.

In a Congress that is so closely divided, a small group of 25 or 30 liberal Republicans, big-government Republicans, essentially control the place. These Republicans are far more liberal than a lot of Democrats in the body. They empower the swing vote, just like a close election empowers people who didn't know a week before Election Day whom they wanted to vote for. As a result of that, we're seeing case after case where these influential politicians are able to pass ludicrous unnecessary spending packages.

People like me who critique Republicans from the Right like to believe that these policies have doomed the Republican Party. Republicans are no longer committed to small government, therefore they are going to lose. The sad truth is that big-government policies don't hurt a party at the ballot box. Democrats controlled Congress for many years, through

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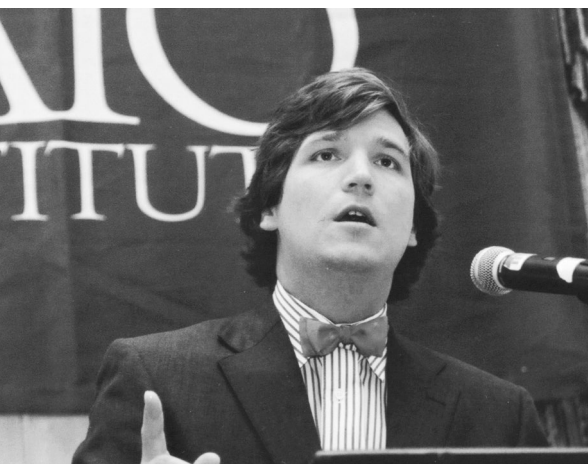


depression and prosperity, and they were always committed to big government.

The reason I believe Republicans are in for a very rough time in the midterm elections has nothing to do with their betrayal of their own ideology. There is a growing perception among the American people that the Republicans have become corrupt. I went back and reread the “Contract with America” the other day.

were mad because they thought the Democrats were just sitting around wallowing in the perks of power.

Those few of you who read the “Contract with America” will remember that the Republicans promised, upon taking power, to enact eight changes immediately. Not one of those changes had anything to do with making government smaller, or the military stronger, or the



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Virtually no one read the “Contract with America” when it was published over a decade ago. First of all, it wasn’t widely published. But, second, most smart people dismissed it out of hand as a marketing ploy aimed at dumb people, which is not far off. But it is still instructive as a historical document.

The “Contract with America” is interesting because it was not always an ideological document. Nor was the Republican takeover in 1994—much as I thought otherwise at the time and wish it had been otherwise now—an ideological revolution so much as it was a reaction against the perceived corruption of Democrats. Republican strategists at the time knew that people weren’t mad at the Democrats because they were liberal—though I and a lot of others were annoyed at that. Most ordinary people

family stronger, whatever that means. Instead, all eight were procedural changes designed to respond to the perception that the Democrats were a bloated, corrupt party.

Why is that significant? Because people hate corruption most of all, even minor corruption. They hate people who cut in line, who do not wait their turn. And they perceived the Democrats as a party full of people who cut in line and take more than their fair share. They had visions of politicians stealing stamps from the House post office, and that made them mad enough to kick those politicians out of office. Elected officials could build a bridge from Nome to the Bering Sea and the American people probably wouldn’t care. That is far away. But if they think that politicians are arrogant and power drunk and eating at La Colline

every day and charging it somehow to the taxpayers, they get really angry. Angry enough to spark a revolution.

Scandal will have a powerful effect on the 2006 midterm election. Most members of Congress are not corrupt, but people will remember the ones who are. Duke Cunningham clearly just went completely insane, and that is anomalous, but people will remember. The Jack Abramoff scandal, which is very complicated and very interesting, will be a major issue in the election. People will remember that Jack Abramoff was a close associate of Tom DeLay, and that connection will be more devastating than the Valerie Plame leak or the war in Iraq. I think it signals to voters that Republican politics has turned into *Animal Farm*.

In the last scene of *Animal Farm*, the animals throw off the master. But of

course the pigs wind up becoming the masters in the final scene, wearing the old master's clothes and swilling his liquor. All the dumb animals, the kind of sweet, credulous animals—the horses, the hounds, the hares—are peering through the farmhouse window on the crisp night, and inside the pigs are sitting with the neighboring farmers playing poker and getting loaded. And the animals outside could not tell who were the pigs and who were the masters. They all looked the same. The revolution had come full circle.

To an average voter, it looks like the Republicans have put on Democrats' clothes and are sitting around playing poker in Congress. Republicans will be punished for what they have done, but for all the wrong reasons. The election this fall will be bittersweet no matter what happens.

## Making the Case for Your Freedom in Washington

**T**he need for a voice of reason and a commitment to principle in the face of runaway federal spending and an almost casual abuse of civil liberties is greater now than ever. In the midst of the increased dangers to our heritage of liberty, the Cato Institute stands tall in the nation's capital beholden to no person or political party—only to the principles of individual liberty. Little wonder that the *Times* of London wrote recently, “The Cato Institute [is] Washington's think tank powerhouse.”

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# Cato Scholar Profile: ANDREW COULSON

In an effort to better inform you about the work of the Cato Institute, in this issue of Cato's Letter we begin a series of profiles of Cato policy experts.

In 1976 Microsoft founder Bill Gates dropped out of school to devote himself full-time to his revolutionary computer company. In 1994 software engineer Andrew Coulson quit his job at Microsoft to devote himself to revolutionizing America's schools. Coulson is director of Cato's Center for Educational Freedom.

**How did you become involved in the education reform movement?**

While I was considering leaving Microsoft to work in public policy, Oregon was having a ballot initiative debate over school vouchers. Naively, I imagined that it would win in a landslide; I thought people would jump at the chance to take more control over their own tax dollars. I couldn't have been more wrong. When the initiative went down in flames, my tendency toward obsessive research kicked in, and within a year I had left Microsoft to begin work on my book, *Market Education: The Unknown History*.

**What do you have planned for the Center for Educational Freedom in the coming months?**

I think a multipronged strategy is called for. We're planning new empirical research, such as a state-by-state survey of private schools that will dispel misconceptions about independent education. To help people distinguish between effective and ineffective policies, we're developing a policy tool that rates school reforms and school systems on the basis of how close they are to free markets. A lot of reforms that go under the heading "school choice" are too weak to do much good. We're also planning some less technical articles that reach out directly to the general public, and we have a great book in the works for this fall: *Liberty and Learning: Milton Fried-*

*man's Voucher Idea at Fifty*, which reevaluates Friedman's 1955 essay that sparked the modern American school choice movement.

**What recent successes will we be able to build on?**

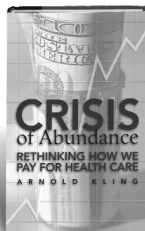
The prospective expansion of the Milwaukee school voucher program from a cap of 15,000 students to 22,500 is an exciting development. But even more promising is the proliferation of new school choice bills and laws around the country. Market-inspired policies are being proposed and passed in more states than ever before. Momentum is building. So far, none of these programs has been strong enough to create a real free market in education, but as soon as such a market is created in a single state, the others will follow like dominos.

**What are the biggest challenges ahead for advocates of educational freedom and choice?**

We continue to face entrenched, relentless opposition from well-organized special interests that benefit from the status quo government school monopoly. We have to fight for market reforms at the K-12 level and also against state and federal government encroachment at the pre-school and university levels. Perhaps most important, we have to overcome some common public misconceptions about state schooling and free education markets. For instance, very few Americans know that private schools spend thousands of dollars less per pupil than do government schools, or that the academic achievement of applicants is not an important criterion for admissions to most independent schools. We'll be getting those messages out through our publications, media outreach efforts, and legal battles.



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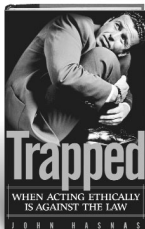


***Crisis of Abundance: Rethinking How We Pay for Health Care***

by Arnold Kling

America's health care troubles largely stem from a great success: modern medicine can do much more today than in the past. So what's the trouble? How to pay for it. MIT-trained economist Arnold Kling explains better ways of financing health care for workers, the poor, the disabled, and the elderly. Kling predicts that relying less on government and more on private savings would improve health outcomes.

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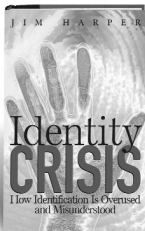


***Trapped: When Acting Ethically Is Against the Law***

by John Hasnas

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***Identity Crisis: How Identification Is Overused and Misunderstood***

by Jim Harper

Governments and businesses have increased their demands for identification since 9/11, believing that identifying people provides security against terrorism. Meanwhile, computer technology is changing the consequences of being identified, increasing threats to autonomy, privacy, and civil liberties. This book argues that authorization, not identification, is the better approach for security—and all kinds of interactions in the economy of the future.

\$22.95, hardback, 1-930865-84-8 (available in May)

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