FROM: Phyllis Schlafly

68 FAIRMOUNT, ALTON, ILLINOIS 62002 / (618) 462-5415

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ECONOMIC ISSUES VERSUS SOCIAL ISSUES

The New York Times and other liberals are shedding tears because Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker has said he can no longer prevent the Senate from discussing social issues such as forced busing and abortion. The New York Times claims that it hurts Republicans to discuss such issues because polls show that new voters are attracted to the Republican Party by economic issues, and the Times fears that these new Republican Party voters may be alienated by Senate preoccupation with social issues.

There are many defects in this argument. First, the New York Times is no friend of the Republican Party and its advice should no more be listened to by Republicans than advice from the Americans for Democratic Action.

Secondly, while it may be true that those who switched to a Republican Party identification may be more interested in economic issues, that is not nearly as important as whether people will vote for Republican candidates.

You don't have to be a Republican to vote for a Republican candidate. Millions of Democratic, non-affiliated, and new voters voted last year for Ronald Reagan and for other Republican candidates, and the social issues were the primary reasons for their switch.

Successful Presidents who change the course of history are those who put together a coalition of people of all parties to make an electoral majority. Ronald Reagan made a great start in this direction last year, and it would be a pity if he let his coalition fall apart now.

The people who are urging President Reagan to stick exclusively with economic issues and to forget social issues are the kind of people whose "gospel" is public opinion surveys. They argue for economic issues instead of social issues because "the polls show" that new Republicans are attracted to Reagan because of inflation and other economic problems.

However, the people who want Reagan to take their advice are very selective about

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which polls they cite. They ignore the tremendous lopsided majorities of Americans who are just waiting to follow a leader who articulates their views on social issues.

For example, a January New York Times/CBS News Poll said that 77 percent of the American people oppose court-ordered busing. One of the easiest ways for Reagan to increase his margin of support by some 20 points would be to co-opt the people who are against court-ordered busing.

Here are some other examples of lopsided majorities on the social issues just waiting for President Reagan to become their leader: 83 percent of Americans favor a constitutional amendment allowing prayer in public schools (Gallup, March 28-31, 1980). 72 percent favor the death penalty for persons convicted of murder (National Opinion Research Center, General Social Survey, 1980). 89 percent favor a constitutional amendment requiring a balanced budget except in an emergency (Roper, August 16-23, 1980). 70 percent oppose affirmative action programs (ABC News/Washington Post, Feb. 26-Mar. 6, 1981).

Most Americans intuitively understand that the social problems they are concerned about were largely caused by Supreme Court decisions. Here again, reliable public opinion surveys indicate that a large majority of Americans are eager for a leader to tackle the problem of the Supreme Court itself.

A recent survey conducted by the Sindlinger & Co., Inc., of Media, Pa., showed that 74 percent of Americans believe Federal judges should be reconfirmed periodically, and 63 percent of Americans want judges to run for election.

There is more, much more, to prove the American public's disaffection with the Federal courts. More than 81 percent favor Congressional efforts to withdraw Federal court jurisdiction over cases involving issues such as busing. And 62 percent would prefer to have a sensitive issue such as busing, abortion, and voluntary prayer decided in state courts rather than in Federal courts.

President Ronald Reagan has only a few more months in which he can convert his coalition of last November into the wave of the future. This coalition can be glued together only on the social issues, because those issues are the ones that motivate people politically.

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