What's Going On With Bob Dole's Friends?

May 16, 1996 by Phyllis Schlafly

Why are the so-called Republican moderates undermining Bob Dole's presidential candidacy? Doesn't he have enough problems without his friends planting mines on his road to the White House?

First, Governors Christine Whitman and Pete Wilson gave cover to Bill Clinton on his veto of the partial birth abortion ban, which was overwhelmingly passed by Congress (with support from Bob Dole) and was building to become a major Republican campaign issue. When Whitman and Wilson said on national television that they support Clinton's veto, they destroyed effective campaign use of this issue by Bob Dole.

Whatever one thinks about the abortion issue, this support of Clinton by two prominent Dole supporters was completely unnecessary and grossly unhelpful to his campaign. Dole had just honored Whitman by naming her one of the two temporary chairmen of the Republican National Convention.

Secondly, we saw the incredible undermining of Bob Dole by his longtime friend and fellow Kansan, Senator Nancy Kassebaum, as well as the other moderates, Senators John Chafee, Slade Gorton, Mark Hatfield, and even Kit Bond. What they did was to join the Democrats on a motion (that passed 52-46) to remove Medical Savings Accounts (MSAs) from Senator Dole's leadership amendment to the Kennedy-Kassebaum health bill.

MSAs are not only sound policy and very popular, but they are supported by Bob Dole. They help to define the difference between the parties: Republicans support MSAs because they promote choice in doctors and treatment, portability and affordability, while the Democrats oppose them with dishonest class-warfare rhetoric.

Above and beyond the substance of the MSA argument, the Democrats clearly recognized this vote as a crucial Clinton vs. Dole political confrontation. Every single Democrat voted against MSAs and Vice President Al Gore was rushed to the Senate Chamber in case he was needed to break a tie vote.

The rejection of MSAs in the Senate bill was a rejection of Bob Dole's leadership. When Dole has friends like this, he doesn't need any enemies.

Third, Christian Coalition director Ralph Reed signaled his willingness to accept a rewriting of the Republican Platform plank on abortion. He gave talkative interviews that resulted in front-page news stories in the New York Times for three days running.

Reed may have been trying to help Bob Dole by putting the Christian Coalition's imprimatur on a move long demanded by the moderates, namely, the removal of or watering down of the pro- life plank in the Republican Platform. But his contradictory statements (such as denying that he is trying to rewrite the platform language and the same week releasing a new book that specifically presents new platform language) have the effect of encouraging the pro-choicers to keep the political pot boiling in the media and then push for a prime-time floor fight at the Republican National Convention in San Diego. That is decidedly not helpful to Bob Dole.

Reed's proposed new platform language uses the word "constitutional" in a slippery and deceptive way. Instead of calling for constitutional protection for the unborn and/or overturning Roe v. Wade, he suggests using "legal and constitutional means to protect the right to life." Under this language, all actions would have to be in conformity with Roe v. Wade.

Reed's new book, excerpted this week in Newsweek, also lectures religious conservatives to "shun harsh language" in "Clinton- bashing." That's strange advice in this presidential campaign in which the Democrats are already conducting a no-holds-barred media advertising campaign of Republican-bashing.

Reed is widely credited with clinching the nomination of Bob Dole by using Christian Coalition troops to carry Iowa and particularly South Carolina for Dole. But he's not helping Dole now by fracturing the constituency that Dole desperately needs to be elected.

Fourth, in a Sunday television appearance, one of Bob Dole's closest associates, Senator Al D'Amato, aimed daggers at Newt Gingrich and Pat Buchanan, accusing the former of setting the wrong agenda for the 104th Congress and the latter of being a "philosophical ayatollah." That is hardly the way to unite the party and encourage broad-based support of Bob Dole, and an experienced politician like D'Amato must know this.

Finally, Bill Kristol has weighed in with the argument that Bob Dole can't win. That's one of the most hurtful slogans that can be hung around the neck of any candidate.

What's going on? Why are the people who were once so determined that Dole be the Republican presidential candidate now sniping at him?