The Race To The Middle For 2008

by Phyllis Schlafly November 29, 2006

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The best postmortem on the 2006 election came from that perennial politician, Senator Ted Kennedy (D-MA). He said, "People want to know who's on their side. Whether it's health care or wages or retirement issues, they want to have someone on their side."

The biggest electoral bloc of the "they" who are seeking friends is the middle class, which includes people variously labeled blue-collar workers, skilled workers, or Reagan Democrats. They are the swing voters, often called the moveables. President Ronald Reagan's victories absolutely depended on their support. But Presidents Bush I and II kicked them away from the Republican Party, particularly on the issue of jobs.

Did the 2006 election teach Republicans that it is smart to be friends of the middle class? Have Republicans realized that jobs were second only to the unpopular war as the issue of 2006, and will surely be the number-one issue in 2008? George W. Bush carried Ohio in 2004 because the marriage amendment brought out the values voters. But Democrats can play that game, too: in 2006 the Ohio referendum on increasing the minimum wage raised the jobs issue, passed by 57 percent, and helped to bury Republican candidates.

Ohio has lost its manufacturing base. Some of the good jobs went to plants that were outsourced overseas and some disappeared in the tsunami of cheap Chinese goods as Wal-Mart replaced small businesses and left behind towns with empty streets and boarded-up windows.

Incumbent Republican Senator Mike DeWine was badly defeated by Rep. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) who had led the congressional fight against CAFTA and wrote a book called "Myths of Free Trade." Brown's TV ads showing him standing in front of a "plant closed" sign were powerful.

Almost every one of the Republican Members of Congress who bit the dust in the 2006 election had been an enthusiastic booster of the globalists' agenda: NAFTA, CAFTA, WTO (World Trade Organization), Fast Track, PNTR (Permanent Normal Trading Relations), and Free Trade Agreements (FTA) with countries most Americans never heard of. Republicans were badly on the defensive in the face of Democrat ads touting the issue of jobs.

The United States has lost over three million manufacturing jobs since Bush became President. The U.S. trade deficit hit a record high of $717 billion last year, and is expected to be even higher this year.

The middle class is not placated by feel-good talk that the stock market has climbed to a record high, or that unemployment is at a record low, or that the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is growing. Unemployment statistics don't count the guys who lost $50,000 jobs in manufacturing and are now working $25,000 jobs in retail, and job-growth figures happily do count the wives who have been involuntarily forced into the labor force just to keep groceries on the table.

The middle class is not placated by glib slogans that free trade is good for the economy and that protectionism is a nasty word. Common sense tells them that there is no such thing as a free lunch and yes, indeed, they do expect friends in government and industry to protect American jobs against unfair competition from

foreigners who work for 30 cents an hour. Americans relish competition, as our national fixation on sports contests proves every day. But the globalists have destroyed a level playing field and, in addition, have subordinated us to an umpire (a.k.a. the WTO) that is biased against us.

Globalist policies have encouraged U.S. employers to use near-slave labor in Asia, whose products are then guaranteed duty-free or low-tariff re-entry to the United States. Those products are then sold here for prices that are cheap by U.S. standards but have a high markup of up to 80 percent.

Globalist policies also allow discrimination against U.S. manufacturers by the Value Added Tax racket, whereby foreign governments subsidize their products both coming and going. For example, German automobiles cost 16 percent less in the United States than the same car sold in Germany, and U.S. automobiles cost 16 percent more in Germany than the same car bought in the United States.

Nancy Pelosi plans to shift the dialogue on Capitol Hill to worker's pay, college tuition, health-care costs, and other issues that touch ordinary families. Her solutions are all bad economics and very expensive, but they will enable her to pose as a friend of the middle class.

All six U.S. Senators thought to be planning a run for the Democratic nomination for president voted against CAFTA. The issue would be dramatically joined if the Democratic nominee were opposed, for example, by Senator John McCain, who supported NAFTA, CAFTA, WTO, and PNTR for China.

Will Republicans continue to follow George W. Bush in his post-election travels to solicit even more Asian products made by cheap labor and subsidized by their governments? Or will Republicans get smart on the jobs issue and reestablish their friendship with the Reagan Democrats?