Warning Signs For Republicans

September 9, 1995 by Phyllis Schlafly

As the New York Times bluntly put it, Bradley's departure "foreshadows the end of the Democratic Party as Americans know it today." It is not the "end" because Bradley is so indispensable to Democratic dominance, nor even because Democrats are leaving the Senate and their Party at an unprecedented rate (six retirements, two defections, and still counting).

It's the "end" because the Democrats have suffered "a collapse of their credibility." Their core belief that government has the ability and the duty to improve our lives with a steady stream of tax-funded benefits is in tatters, and it can't be shored up even by the new monument to the godfather of this ideology, Franklin D. Roosevelt, or by the fatuous tribute paid to FDR by Speaker Newt Gingrich.

But the collapse of the Democratic ideology doesn't necessarily mean that everybody's suddenly become a Republican. Americans voted against George Bush in 1992 and against the Democratic Congress in 1994, but who or what will they vote against in 1996? Maybe Bill Clinton, and maybe the Republican Congress if it doesn't deliver what the voters expect.

Elections are not won by a majority of people sharing the same ideology, but by different groups of people, with different motives, deciding to vote for or against candidates, and then caring enough to get themselves to the polling place on election day.

In 1992, Bill Clinton's margin of victory was provided by some millions of voters who were angry at George Bush for reneging on his "read my lips -- no new taxes" campaign promise, and by other millions who voted for Ross Perot. In 1994, both blocs voted against the Democratic Congress because they wanted massive cuts in the size of government and a change from the old way of doing things.

All the Republican presidential candidates trooped down to Dallas to speak to Ross Perot's gathering, as indeed they should have. Republican candidates certainly should be sensitive to the concerns of such a large constituency.

The media missed the point in belittling the attendance of "only" several thousand. Frank Luntz's polls

count Perot voters at 20 million, 65 percent of whom now believe neither party keeps its promises.

Where will the Perotistas perch in 1996? Republicans will not solve their problem by simply deterring Ross Perot from running; they can solve it only if they address the issues the Perotistas and other millions of Americans care about.

The majority of the American people want tax cuts they can feel in their pocketbooks, term limits on Congress, an end to affirmative action quotas, a stop to illegal immigration and tax-paid benefits to illegal immigrants, an end to foreign aid and Mexican bailouts, an end to involvement in foreign wars and to sending American troops on phony United Nations "peacekeeping" missions where they serve under foreign commanders, an "end to welfare as we know it" with its outrageous subsidization of illegitimacy, an accounting for the NAFTA and GATT mistakes, and an end to the pay raises and plush pensions that Congressmen continue to vote for themselves.

Yes, crime is a big political issue. But Republicans are making a terrible mistake if they think they can deal with it by federalizing crimes, giving Janet Reno the power to wiretap the phones and seize the bank and credit card records of all Americans, and giving more power and personnel to the same federal agencies who committed the Waco and Ruby Ridge shootouts and then engaged in coverup.

Yes, education is a tremendous political issue. But Republicans are making a terrible mistake if they think the American people will accept the "solution" of transferring the money from the Department of Education to the Departments of Labor and Health and Human Services.

Yes, health care and the loss of health insurance when you lose your job are big political issues. But Republicans are making a terrible mistake if they think the American people will accept managed care as a solution, instead of the right to own our own health insurance (such as through Medical Savings Accounts).

Despite the flying start from the Contract With America, the current perception now is that Congress is bogged down in business as usual. All the brave rhetoric about abolishing federal agencies and activities is gone, and senior Republican go-alongers have apparently decided to continue the despised programs while just trimming a little fat around the edges.

Nothing confirms Middle Americans' belief that it is business-as- usual in Congress like the failure to make drastic cuts and changes in welfare. The Republican Congress couldn't even abolish the offensive

National Endowment for the Arts.

Likewise for the National Endowment for the Humanities (which financed the outrageous History Standards), the Legal Services Corporation (the sinecure for Hillary's leftwing lawyer friends), the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Planned Parenthood, and dozens of other private lobbying organizations that receive millions of dollars of federal handouts.

The jury's still out on the Republican Congress, as well as on who the Republican presidential candidate will be. But unless the former manifests real change, and unless the latter address the issues Middle America cares about, Republicans in 1996 are not going to cash in on the Democrats' collapse of credibility.