

*A Heritage Foundation Symposium*

**The Presidential Election Results:  
Understanding What Happened and Why**

**Panel Moderator  
GRANT UJIFUSA**

Senior Editor, *Reader's Digest*  
Founding Editor, *Almanac of American Politics*

**J. EDWARD GRIMSLEY**

Editorial Board Chairman, *Richmond Times-Dispatch*

**JOSEPH PERKINS**

Editorial Writer and Columnist, *San Diego Union-Tribune*

**HUGH POWERS**

Associate Editor and Editorial Board Chairman, *Houston Chronicle*

**DEBRA SAUNDERS**

Editorial Page Columnist, *San Francisco Chronicle*

**PHILIP TERZIAN**

Associate Editor, *Providence Journal*

**The Lehrman Auditorium  
The Heritage Foundation  
Washington, D.C.  
November 5, 1992**

# **The Presidential Election Results: Understanding What Happened and Why**

## **INTRODUCTION**

**L**ess than 36 hours after the polls closed in Hawaii, The Heritage Foundation convened a national panel of opinion journalists to discuss the November 3, 1992, election results. The purpose was to provide an Outside-the-Beltway perspective on an election that was likely to end—and did end—the Republican Party's twelve-year hold on the White House.

The consensus that emerged from the panelists—later echoed by both the Washington-based and broader national opinion communities—was that the election results revolved around a single issue: the poor performance of the economy under President Bush.

It was a conclusion difficult to dispute. The Bush recession had dragged on for nearly two years. Instead of the 3.7 percent annual rate of economic growth experienced during the Reagan expansion, the Bush team had produced an economic growth rate of less than 1 percent. Instead of the 20 million-plus net new jobs created during the Reagan years, there were some 2 million fewer jobs on election day. Instead of a 5.7 percent rate of unemployment, as it stood in September 1988, unemployment had jumped to 7.5 percent. And instead of a budget deficit that had declined sharply during the expansion—from 6.3 percent of gross domestic product in 1983 to 3 percent of GDP in Reagan's last year—the deficit had more than doubled, to nearly \$300 billion.

Despite the Bush campaign's focus on the "trust" issue, voters in the end decided to place their trust in Bill Clinton, the self-described "New Democrat" centrist.

With all three candidates running as fiscal conservatives, and the new President offering a program "that was at least half conservative," as Henry Grunwald put it in the November 30 issue of *Time* magazine, those looking to use the Bush defeat to discredit the conservative revolution launched by Ronald Reagan were sadly disappointed.

As panel moderator **Grant Ujifusa**, Senior Editor at *Reader's Digest* and Founding Editor of *The Almanac of American Politics*, concluded in his opening remarks: More than anything else the November 3 election proved "that the political marketplace, like the other marketplace that we respect, rewards competence and punishes incompetence."

Also participating in the Heritage Foundation's Media Roundtable, in alphabetical order, were:

- ◆ **J. Edward Grimsley**, Editorial Board Chairman of the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, Richmond, Virginia, and a nationally syndicated columnist with Creator's Syndicate;
- ◆ **Joseph Perkins**, an Editorial Writer and Columnist for the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, San Diego, California, and a nationally syndicated columnist with Newspaper Enterprise Association;
- ◆ **Hugh Powers**, Associate Editor and Editorial Board Chairman of the *Houston Chronicle*, Houston, Texas;
- ◆ **Debra Saunders**, Editorial Page Columnist for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, San Francisco, California, whose column is distributed nationally by the New York Times News Service; and
- ◆ **Philip Terzian**, Associate Editor of the *Providence Journal*, Providence, Rhode Island.

## GRANT UJIFUSA

Herb Berkowitz asked me to lead with some observations from the perspective of one *Reader's Digest* editor. I make my living outside the Beltway and very much west of the Hudson. That's where people who read us live, and we value them. In my judgment, the Founding Editor of *Reader's Digest*, Dewitt Wallace, had a secret that should be obvious to any politician: that the intelligence, decency, and courage of the average American always has to be respected. When it is not, you pay a price, not only in Adam Smith's marketplace, but in the political marketplace as well.

The greatest strength of our magazine is narrative presentation. Unlike most practicing journalists who write in the form of a pyramid, our writers tell a story with a beginning, middle, and end. Once a reader starts an article, you make him ask a simple set of questions: "And then what happened; and then what happened; and then what happened?"

So, I want to tell you two stories, which by way of some indirection perhaps, will give you my sense of what I think happened. These may be anecdotes to a scholar, but they are part of my life and I am an excellent authority on my own life. Some of my learned friends criticize the *Digest* by saying, "Why, you are just an anecdotal magazine, how can you generalize from anecdotes?" For me, a substantiated anecdote is a reality check—real life lived by real people.

My first anecdote has to do with an experience I had at the White House during the regime of [Chief of Staff] Sam Skinner. Somebody who worked for him decided it would be a good idea to invite about fifteen Asian-Americans to the White House. If polls are to be believed, Asian-Americans have been very responsive to Reagan's and Bush's themes of tying family solidarity to economic growth and opportunity. The White House was doing a little preaching to the choir. Some of us—I not among them—could satisfactorily answer the Great American Question: namely, if you're so smart, why ain't you rich?

So, here we were, proud Asian-Americans as we walked into the Roosevelt Room and sat down and waited—he was about ten minutes late. That's always okay in politics. Then Skinner comes in, very affably goes around the table, shakes hands and sits down, whereupon his secretary comes in and says, "Secretary Skinner, there is a phone call for you; it's from Air Force One." Skinner looks at us and says, "Well, obviously I have to take this call, but while I am away why don't you people talk amongst yourselves and decide what three or four things you would like me to bring up with the President."

So, he walked out and we started talking. Most of us spoke completely unaccented American English. Not shy, I said, "Well, there are a lot of things that divide us in this group—the glass ceiling is real for some here, but not for others—but what unites us? One of the things that does is that if you are walking down the street and you are perceived to be a maker of a pretty good automobile or an operator of a decently efficient green grocery, you might get clubbed." This is known as anti-Asian violence, and we saw a tragic example of the phenomenon about a year later in South Central Los Angeles.

We decided on an agenda—three or four issues as Skinner had suggested. He walks back in and sits down. He says, "Let's open it up."

I say, "Mr. Secretary, anti-Asian violence in our country makes us all feel uneasy. We think it might be a good thing if you brought the issue up with the President, because it makes for both good principle and for good politics."

So he nods his head and he says somewhat awkwardly, "Well, the President is only interested in principles, never in politics." People sighed. Then he says, "Well, you have to understand that Americans are a very fair people, but there are some people in Tokyo who have erected certain

trade barriers that make it very hard for Americans to stay fair. And I think that what you should do is try to help us attack those trade barriers.”

Then he paused, and without saying it gave us the impression: “You take down the barriers and then you come back and talk to me about anti-Asian violence.”

So then I said, “Mr. Secretary, imagine three people—Mickey Rooney, Fred MacMurray (who had just died), and Ronald Reagan—who are they? They are Americans; so are we. We can’t do anything to help the President in Tokyo.”

The fellow sitting next to me was a Filipino who had done quite well in corporate America. Who knows? His grandparents may have been butchered by the Imperial Japanese Army. This guy is supposed to go to Tokyo? Another fellow was a thoroughly Americanized vice chairman of Toys-R-Us. And Sue Allen was there, a splendid lawyer here in Washington.

Skinner said, “Well, no, I can see from reading your bios here that you are a pretty powerful bunch of people and you should be able to help us.”

I tried another tack. I said, “Many of us have been here for five or six generations.” But Skinner still didn’t get it. I am not at all politically correct, but here was one white male who was never going to lose an argument. As one real, but depressed American, I remember wondering as I left the White House: How many other mistakes of this sort have the President’s helpers made?

Anecdote two. I was part of a group of four *Digest* editors who interviewed Bill Clinton early in August somewhere in New Jersey. We had an hour with him, just as earlier we had an hour with President Bush. For a while we had the only “debate” around, the only same question format before the TV debates were aired. It was my high responsibility, among other things, to run the tape machine: no tape, no record, no article.

After the interview, I was putting away the machine when Clinton wandered over. He had also read our bios. Clinton was very quick to establish deep eye contact, and we started talking. Well, I thought, here is a Southern politician with great charm with a little bit of Marin County Human Potential thrown in. Southern politicians are, as a group, it seems to me, better than Northern politicians, except for the Irish. Clinton’s eyes conveyed, “I care about you.”

Then the future President of the United States asked me, “Grant, can you tell me how your grandfather got to Wyoming?” A perfect question because I was perfectly comfortable talking about grandpa. I am at ease. What Clinton was saying was, “Grant, I know you are an American.” This meant something to me. And I thought at the time, how many other minor successes of this sort had he scored during the course of the campaign? Unlike my experience with some other politicians, Clinton did not ask me whether I thought the Japanese had formed a cartel on memory chips, whether the voluntary restraint on automobile exports should be maintained, or anything else about which the ordinary American has no expertise.

The conclusion that I have drawn from my two experiences is that the political marketplace, like the other marketplace that we respect, rewards competence and punishes incompetence.

## **EDWARD GRIMSLEY**

The morning after the presidential “debate” in Richmond a few weeks ago, I was on C-SPAN with another editor from Charlotte, North Carolina, to analyze the debate. During the course of my remarks I was thoughtless enough to say that the questions that had come from the audience were largely stupid and that the debate was pretty much a waste of time. Among the many letters that I received was one that opened with this paragraph:

Dear Mr. Grimsley, if I had the power of Adolph Hitler to gas people, the first people I would gas would be the news media.

I hope there is nobody in this room who will feel that strongly about what I will say.

Let me, by way of background, just tell you where I am coming from. Virginia is a state that has gone for every Republican presidential candidate since 1964. Richmond is a city that has very strong personal ties to George Bush. He doesn't lease a hotel room in Richmond, and Virginia is not one of his residences, but he does have family connections in Richmond. One of his very closest friends is a good friend of mine. He is a friend of the chairman of my board. They have known each other for years. I move in circles in Richmond that include a lot of people who know George Bush personally, and have known him for many years. These are people who consider themselves to be his friends.

We endorsed George Bush enthusiastically four years ago and we endorsed him this time, but with much less enthusiasm. Many of the critical remarks that I am prepared to make are shared by some of George Bush's friends in Richmond, and I think that gives them some added significance.

Why did George Bush lose? I agree with most of the people who have been writing about this in the last couple of days. You need look no further than the pages of the *Washington Post*. He lost partly because he violated his campaign pledges, and especially his pledge against higher taxes. He did not produce the millions of jobs that he promised. He did not ease government regulations; on the contrary, regulations on business, I think, have intensified during his administration. So, he really did alienate many people by retreating from these solemn vows he made in his campaign.

We were among those newspapers who editorially, as long ago as July 1990, were saying that he was in danger of chasing away a lot of people who had supported him. We quoted some anonymous White House official as saying conservatives didn't have any place to go, but we warned in our editorials, one after another, that he was quite wrong about that.

So, I think Bush lost for all of those reasons. But this is not the complete answer. Other Presidents have violated campaign pledges without incurring defeat. I refer you to Ronald Reagan. Reagan went into office vowing to dismantle the Departments of Education and Energy. They are still there. I am not aware that he made any real serious attempt to abolish either department. He went into office as a foe of the Voting Rights Act, but he signed a new Voting Rights Act that is worse than the one that was on the books when he became President.

I was with a group of editors invited to the White House to lunch with the President soon after he signed that new bill. Richmond was one of the first cities in the nation to be adversely affected by the original law. And I asked him, "Mr. President, you campaigned against the Voting Rights Act and you have just signed one that imposes harsher penalties and harsher restrictions than the previous act. Why did you do that?" He never really answered me. He continued to chew on his bread and his salad and reacted as if no explanations were necessary. I may have been the only editor in this country who raised questions about that broken campaign promise.

Reagan violated those pledges, but that hurt him not one bit. Not one bit. Now, what is the difference? Poor George Bush breaks a few promises and he gets creamed. Reagan violates pledges and he gets re-elected and ultimately leaves office as a very popular, beloved individual.

There are other factors then that you have to consider in trying to understand Bush's defeat. These factors are both personal and institutional. They have to do with the man, they have to do

with his style, and they have to do with some of the policies that he followed in terms of presidential public relations.

George Bush is a person who by nature often appears indifferent and unenthusiastic. A good President can cover up a lot of weak and bad policies if he has the ability to inspire and reassure people. Carter didn't have it; he went down in flames. Reagan had it; he survived. George Bush did not have it. He did not have this ability to convince people that he was genuinely concerned about their problems and that he was determined to do something about them. Now, I don't believe that a lot of people—this I know from talking to my friends and people around me in the community that I serve as an editor—expected him to wave a magic wand and solve the economic problems. But they did expect him to try.

They expected George Bush to convince them that he was really concerned about the recession and that he was willing to fight for sound economic moves to solve it. He should have campaigned vigorously for his capital gains tax cut. He didn't accomplish anything by just tossing it out there and reading a speech in which he says, "I think we ought to do thus and so about the capital gains tax." He needed to convince people that he was really trying to do something to correct the country's economic problems. He didn't do that. Instead, he conveyed the impression of being indifferent and really unconcerned about what a growing number of American people viewed as a very serious matter.

Public Relations. I have been editor of the *Times-Dispatch* ever since the Nixon Administration. From my perspective, and from the perspective of many editors with whom I have talked, the Bush White House had by far the worst press relations program beyond the Beltway of any White House since Richard Nixon's.

We were constantly bombarded by telephone calls, press releases, and invitations from Nixon, from Ford, even from Carter. Carter probably did it more than anybody else. It seemed that there was hardly a major policy decision made in the Carter White House without editors from around the country being invited to Washington soon thereafter to be briefed by top White House officials. Under Reagan, basically the same policy prevailed. I was part of a little informal group of editors organized by Joe Sterne of the *Baltimore Sun* who would meet about four times a year with White House officials and other government representatives. You know how many times we convened at the White House under the Bush Administration? None.

I am not aware of any organized effort by the Bush White House to bring in non-Washington editors for briefings, to inform them about policy matters, to explain what was going on. The budget agreement was a classic example. I had a thousand questions I wanted to ask somebody on the White House staff about that agreement. But I never got the chance. The White House did invite non-Washington journalists to come up for a briefing, but you know who they invited? City newsroom reporters. City newsroom reporters who never write a word about the federal budget.

It seems that every time he turned around, George Bush was making some public relations blunder. One I remember occurred when there had been a very bad economic report from the Department of Commerce—the recession was growing worse. Bush chose to meet the press to discuss that gloomy report as he was getting ready to go out to play golf. And there he was, standing with a driver in his hand—or a three wood. That to me was just incredibly stupid symbolism on the part of the President of the United States.

A President who is deficient in substance can sometimes survive if he doesn't have other major weaknesses. But when you are deficient in both substance and in perception, you are in pretty bad shape.

Clinton won, on the other hand, by conducting a very smart campaign. He focussed on the one issue that really mattered to people, and that was the economy. I think we have found in this election that the pocketbook is still the No. 1 concern of most people. You can talk about marital infidelity, you can talk about affairs, you can talk about draft dodging, and many other things, but if the economy is bad enough, that is what people are going to be concerned about. Clinton recognized it; he never abandoned that theme. And Bush had absolutely no defense.

He displayed no understanding of how to deal with people, no understanding, really, of how to deal effectively with the press. All of these things combined, I think, to help defeat George Bush.

Finally, I want to make one observation about the role of the religious right. A lot of people are saying that it was a fatal mistake for the Republicans to allow the religious right to participate prominently in the convention in Houston. Well, I am not sure about that. But it would be a stupid mistake for the Republican Party to ascribe too much power to the religious right. We have two of the most powerful leaders of the religious right in Virginia, Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, and neither one of them could elect a governor in our state. Now, why in the world should we think they are powerful enough to elect a President of the United States? I do not understand why the powers that be in the Republican Party continue to think that they have to make concessions to the religious right to get elected. Besides, I think the results showed that a vast number of the fundamentalists voted for Clinton despite the Republicans' efforts to win their enthusiastic support.

## **PHILIP TERZIAN**

I agree with a lot of what Ed has just said. Speaking about what New England thinks about these things is somewhat futile, since New England has become the contemporary equivalent of the Solid South. I am both pleased and chagrined to note that Rhode Island, I think, might have given Bill Clinton his highest percentage in the nation.

Let me quickly just say what I suppose everyone here is going to agree about. I fully agree that George Bush is not a terribly confident politician; Bill Clinton is. I agree with you, Ed, that President Bush made little or no effort to cultivate that very small handful of journalists who supported him editorially. I have to say, for the record, that I was invited to one briefing at the White House with the President, and it was so unique I can still remember the very date of it; it was December 13, 1989, and I never heard from the White House again. And that was a continual frustration to me, as one who generally wished the President well, and whose editorial page supported the Bush Administration far more enthusiastically than most people here today.

In one sentence, I would say that George Bush is a man who probably feels most comfortable in appointive office, including the Presidency. I think he probably felt himself to be a kind of natural born Secretary of State and he certainly was always very candid in saying that he found the electioneering and campaigning quite uncomfortable. That was always painfully obvious. The only President in modern times, I think, who exuded the same attitude about partisan politics was Dwight Eisenhower, and of course he had the singular virtue of being a war hero. I frankly think that President Bush may have thought he had accomplished the same feat with the Persian Gulf War. I think we probably can agree about President Bush's political aptitude, especially in contrast to his predecessor.

I confess, though, that I take a slightly more nihilistic view of all this. I think that presidential elections are very much determined by external factors, over which candidates and Presidents have very little control. I would point to the fact that this year, despite the fact that President

Bush lost, he didn't lose by all that much—despite all that we have read about the contempt in which he is held by the American public, the sour mood of the country, and so on.

The fact is that the spread in the popular vote was nowhere near as dramatic as one might have imagined or was led to expect. And what has astonished me is that Bill Clinton, for all of his personal magnetism, and the state of the economy and so forth, actually lost seats for his party in the House of Representatives. Not many, but that hasn't happened in thirty-some years. And the Senate, as far as I can tell, is pretty much unchanged.

I think that three external factors, having nothing whatsoever to do with whether George Bush is a good politician or not, defeated him this year. First, unlike most conservatives, I have very limited faith in the fundamental wisdom of the American people. I think they tend to base their votes on personal comfort. If they are doing well in a given year, they will vote for the incumbent; if they are not doing well, they will vote for the alternative with the best sales pitch. And what better description could there be of Bill Clinton?

Last spring, you may recall, when H. Ross Perot was getting 38 percent of the vote in the public opinion polls, when the pollsters would substitute the name of General Schwarzkopf, he, too, would get 38 percent of the vote. So, this was a year when the American people were prepared, because of the recession, to vote for just about anyone. And inasmuch as the so-called senior statesman of the Democratic Party chose not to run themselves this year, in the primaries Clinton practically *did* win against just about anybody.

The second external factor was this: Liberals seem to think that bad times will never pass, while conservatives seem to think that good times will never end. And it's an unhappy fact of life in a capitalist system that the business cycle is a pretty inexorable phenomenon. At some point the umpteenth months of uninterrupted growth we enjoyed between the mid-1980s and early '90s were bound to slow down a bit. And inevitably they did. Unfortunately, it happened on George Bush's watch, although I would argue that the recession really began with the stock market crash in 1987. There will be an endless argument about this, and, certainly in these precincts, a lot of thinking about whether President Bush could have done more to prevent or alleviate the recession. I tend to think not. I don't think that any President has the power to so affect the economy. In fact, it is somewhat frightening when Presidents or candidates suggest that they can cure the vagaries of the business cycle by legislative or executive action. President Clinton is going to have an interesting time, I think, trying to fulfill the promises he has made about jump-starting the economy, "investing" in the infrastructure, shepherding small businesses while reducing the deficit.

To me, Bill Clinton was a rather weaker candidate than the results might suggest. Ed Grimsley mentioned what we might call his character deficiencies—marital infidelity, draft dodging, and so forth. I think, in times of recession, as Ed said, these pale into insignificance. But when such a person becomes President of the United States, problems with character—and there seems little doubt that the American people harbored some uncertainties about Clinton's character—will begin to tell, and will begin to influence his behavior in office and public perceptions of his behavior. Clearly, the character issues were not decisive in this particular election, but I think they are going to take a toll with time.

The third factor, which seems to me unique to this year, was H. Ross Perot. I have a theory about the United States. There is a floating figure, somewhere between 20 percent and 25 percent of the American people, who will believe anything about anybody at any given time. Twenty-three percent of the American people will believe that Earl Warren and Tom Wicker conspired to assassinate John F. Kennedy. We see this with the continued public obsession about living

POWs in Southeast Asia. There are a whole host of such issues. H. Ross Perot, it seems to me, was the candidate of that percentage of the population.

I figure it would require the combined skills of Evelyn Waugh, H. L. Mencken, and Hanna-Barbera to fully describe this individual. I would watch his rallies and look at the people who were standing and cheering and had tears welling in their eyes at the very sight of H. Ross Perot. And by a very cursory and unscientific examination, I hate to say it, those seemed like Republican voters to me. Not all of them, but enough to make a difference. I may be completely out of step with the received wisdom about this, but I genuinely think that the Perot factor, which was practically one-fifth of the vote, cut in more heavily to Bush's vote than to Clinton's. And if Perot takes any satisfaction in denying George Bush a second term, I think he is probably entitled to it.

I will repeat again that George Bush's political—I hesitate to say incompetence; I don't think anyone who ever becomes President is fully incompetent—lesser political skills, at least relative to Clinton, were especially telling during this year. But, I think we have to bear in mind what a very peculiar political year this was. President-elect Clinton, it seems to me, has the same problem that the last Democratic President had: He was elected under peculiar, certainly unique, political circumstances, with no clear mandate. He is not going to enjoy a cooperative Congress, despite the fact that it is dominated by his own party. He had no discernible coattails, and the mandarins of Capitol Hill owe him no particular favors.

I don't think congressional gridlock is a partisan matter; I think it's an institutional phenomenon. The legislature is the jealous branch of government. This is true in the United States, as it is true in other republics. The legislature wants to employ the executive power that the President must exercise. When a Republican is in the White House and there is a Democratic Congress, obviously there is a partisan conflict. But now I think we have acquired an even more dangerous set of circumstances: that the leaders on Capitol Hill think they will be able to exercise independent political leadership. This is sure to create conflict. As I said, Clinton holds no I.O.U.'s on the Hill; by the same token, I have very little confidence that George Mitchell plans to serve as Bill Clinton's errand boy, either.

Permit me a brief parochial observation.

Rhode Island is, of course, an overwhelmingly Democratic state, with a largely blue-collar population. Even with some political problems unique to Rhode Island that, to some degree skewed the outcome, it still seems to me that the results we saw in Rhode Island were emblematic of the problems the Republican Party suffers nationwide. There are five state-wide elected offices in Rhode Island. Two of these—governor and lieutenant governor—were won by Democratic candidates for reasons having nothing whatsoever to do with national issues. The three other offices were won, quite decisively, by Republicans—one of them, the General Treasurer, for the first time since 1938. The General Assembly, meanwhile, was re-elected with its overwhelming Democratic majority intact, even though we had a local banking scandal that put the House banking scandal to shame. Looking at a state such as Rhode Island, the Republicans should be very concerned about their inability to make inroads in these less glamorous, but no less important, realms of elective life: the state legislatures and local offices, which have so much to do with creating the permanent Democratic majorities in Congress. For even supposing that Bill Clinton is a one-term President, as I think he will be, and the Republicans organize decisively behind a successful candidate in 1996, Republican President X will still face the same partisan congressional veto that stymied Ronald Reagan and subverted George Bush.

## JOSEPH PERKINS

I agree with much of what both Ed and Phil had to say. Phil mentioned that this year was a peculiar year with peculiar circumstances. Yet, from where I sat, some 2,300 miles away, I don't think it would have been so peculiar if Bush had been a more formidable candidate.

I also don't agree with those who believe that the Republican Party had a problem and that Bush was a victim. We should not overlook the fact that Republicans captured nine state legislatures, and in six of those states, Bill Clinton actually won. So, it was not a broad repudiation of the Republican Party or the conservative movement, it seems to me, but more a repudiation of the President.

In San Diego and Southern California, which in previous years had been both decidedly Republican and decidedly conservative, the President didn't fare well at all. San Diego went for a Democrat for the first time since before I was born. Orange County, which went to Bush about 70-30 in 1988, or some margin like that, was in Clinton's column until election day when Bush eked out a victory.

To what may this be attributed? I don't think that peripheral issues are nearly as important as others seem to believe. In San Diego, a military town—a town that is decidedly Republican—the economy shed jobs over the last four years. The big employers, General Dynamics, Rohr Industries, TRW—they all shed workers. I don't think those workers were inclined to vote for Clinton simply because they lost their jobs. I believe they became inclined to support Clinton because they did not see leadership forthcoming from the White House.

And so, I believe that the watershed in the Bush Presidency was right after the Gulf War when he was riding high in the polls—when he had, in my mind, a new national mandate to take action on the domestic front. He squandered that opportunity. No program was really put forward by the White House. Had Bush done that, maybe people might have been willing to forgive him for raising their taxes; they might have been willing to forgive him for introducing a new regime of regulations that make the Carter years look almost favorable; they might have forgiven him a lot of things. But he didn't do that. More than anything else, I think this inaction shaped the outcome of the election.

As for Bill Clinton, it is interesting: The first newspaper I saw the day after election day was *USA Today*, which called it a landslide, a judgment which was echoed by the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and a number of other newspapers. In fact, Clinton captured about 370 electoral votes, less than what Bush got in 1988, but none of the fifty largest newspapers in the country declared Bush's victory in 1988 a landslide.

I think that says a lot about the role of the media in defining this election, and that is what I worry about. I worry about a revisionism of the last twelve years. To make the 1980s, a boom decade with seven years of uninterrupted growth and 20 million new jobs, into a bad period in the history of America just defies belief in my mind. And that is what we have to look forward to over the next couple of years.

I would like to get beyond what happened Tuesday and start talking about we need to do in the future. And one of the things I think conservatives need to do is make sure that those who have now seized the reins of power here in the Nation's Capital don't redefine the 1980s to suggest that the Reagan Doctrine was just incidental to the collapse of Communism and that Reagan's economic policies—Reaganomics—were just incidental to the longest period of peacetime expansion in U.S. history. I think that is one of the challenges we face over the next four years.

Ideas do matter; they matter a great deal. The reason a lot of people like myself went enthusiastically into the Bush Administration soon after it inherited the White House was because we

thought George Bush and his administration would attempt to broaden the Republican base, would practice the politics of inclusion, and would consolidate the Republican Party's growing strength among younger Americans. All of this was reversed during the campaign, and that is the one thing that troubles me most about the election outcome. I mean, even blacks were generally approving of George Bush as recently as a year and a half ago, by overwhelming numbers. Union members favored Bush as recently as a year ago. We thought his popularity might even result in gains in both the Senate and the House. And all of that has fallen by the wayside in the last year.

And why is that? The reason, I believe, is because George Bush succeeded in making the election what Michael Dukakis talked about, a contest having to do with competence and not ideology. I might differ somewhat from the other panelists, but I think elections *must* be ideological if those who are in the minority are to win. I don't believe that you can try to run to the middle and muddle the differences, because a Democrat like Bill Clinton, who is quite clever, will be able to cast himself as a moderate. And if you have not stood on principle yourself during your tenure, there is no way you can cast your opponent as being out of the mainstream.

I mean, on very few issues do I really see clear differences between Bill Clinton and George Bush. Moreover, if you have presided over the longest economic downturn since the great Depression, then people are going to say, "Well, since there seems to be very little difference between these two guys, we will go for the guy who hasn't presided over this downturn. We will give the other guy a chance." And that is what happened.

I am not willing to say now that Republicans made a mistake by giving the convention over to the religious right. I didn't get that. What I remembered was the resounding speech of Ronald Reagan. That is what should have been more prominent during the convention. If George Bush had delivered the kind of message that Ronald Reagan delivered during the convention, one that spoke of hope and opportunity and America's best days being before it—and that notwithstanding the problems of the day and tomorrow, we will get it done—I think it would have sold to the American people.

I am one of those who came of age during the 1980s. I remember sitting in this room some years ago speaking to a meeting of the Third Generation. For many of us, the 1980s were a golden age. We really believed in the future of our country. We didn't buy the argument of the declinists that somehow our lives would be measurably worse than our parents'. A lot of Americans believe that today; 40 percent now believe that things are worse today than they were four years ago. And people who think that way are hardly going to vote for incumbents.

On the other hand, I see conservative ideas still winning around the country. I mean, term limits, basically a conservative idea, won in all fourteen states where it was on the ballot.

Some people say that "family values" and social issues work against Republicans. Well, in the state of California a "right to die" initiative was on the ballot and it was defeated. Similarly, and this might be a contentious matter, there were referendums on gay rights in a number of states, and in almost all of them "gay rights" went down in flames. So to suggest that all of these ideas work against Republicans, I don't buy that.

Let me conclude by saying that the ideas that produced Ronald Reagan's landslide victories in 1980 and 1984, and which helped George Bush win the White House in 1988, could have won in 1992, but we didn't have a strong advocate for those beliefs.

## DEBRA SAUNDERS

Wednesday morning, as I was getting ready to catch my plane to come out here, I turned on the television set and I was watching one of the reporters talk about how the Republicans had handled their loss, and she said that the Republicans were really gracious. I don't think that the Republicans were really gracious, I think they were ecstatic. I think they were relieved. I think many Republicans were just plain glad that George Bush lost. Even people like me, who voted for him, felt that on a personal level his karma was up, it was time for him to go. Also, it is not our fault, whatever happens now.

I am going to talk about people like me, who joined the Republican Party because we believe in individual responsibility and limited government and less taxation and all of those things, and we were betrayed by George Bush. I refer to the 1990 lips flop. I refer to the collusive manner with which he worked with Congress to go around his no new taxes pledge.

People like me who are attracted to the Republican Party because it stands for limited government got betrayed in the one area we cared about—and we got stuck with the one area we didn't care about, the social agenda of the religious right. Now, I have a great deal of respect for people who care deeply about these issues, but unlike some of my fellow panelists, I felt that the Houston Convention became ugly. I guarantee you that it cost George Bush votes. Someone like me will look at policy and make my vote that way, but I know a number of other people who have never voted for a Democrat, but who voted for Bill Clinton. They did it in part because of the abortion issue and because of the general tone of much of the rhetoric unleashed in Houston. It cost a lot of Republican votes.

I think another way you can see how the Republican Convention affected things is by taking a look at California's new U.S. Senators, Thelma and Louise. *They* call themselves Thelma and Louise. You would think that somebody else would have made it up. But they adopted it themselves, and the nickname didn't hurt them.

And of course, I also have to mention the abortion issue. Let's face it, even a great many Republicans are really concerned about the party's advocacy of an absolute ban on abortion. I think the party's position is crazy. In California, the state constitution protects abortion. Still, Bush's stand on abortion hurt him in California.

Finally, the economy. The California economy is much worse than the national economy. Unemployment is about a percentage point higher. That also had a role in the election.

As important as why George Bush lost is why Bill Clinton won. Well, the main reason is that he wasn't George Bush who in 1988 promised tax policy on which he did not deliver. Clinton too basically misled the American people about what he wants to do about taxes, unless there are a lot more couples we don't know about out there making more than \$200,000. If there aren't more such couples, the plans he is talking about are not realistic.

I think stylistically, Clinton really appealed to people. Grant's story, I think, is very illustrative. During the University of Richmond debate, remember the woman who asked the question about how the national debt had affected the candidates? Remember what Bill Clinton did? He said, "Tell me more about what you were thinking about that?" That woman was so grateful that he even wanted to know.

In a related vein, Lyn Nofziger told me this story about the Bush people. California Governor Pete Wilson was trying to get Ed Rollins involved—this was way before Ross Perot—in the Bush/Quayle campaign. Somebody from Bush/Quayle apparently nixed him. They were so busy trying to keep other people out of their little club, they didn't care about winning, they didn't

care about trying to bring people in. They just wanted it to be them and their little club. And of course, when you have a little club, you lose.

In my view, the real problem with the election was that in a way it was all about personality; there was really no talk about what people want from government. What was Bill Clinton's mandate? More government that somebody else pays for. And yet, if you look at the way people voted, that's probably not what they want. The real shame is that there was never a debate about what people want out of government.

I also want to talk about a couple of things that happened on the California ballot that I think are sort of interesting. One, Californians, by a 15 percent margin, elected Bill Clinton, who talks about "investment"—right, we all love that word—and spending more money on infrastructure. At the same time, Californians rejected a rail-bond measure. Here is a guy who says that if Americans spend more money on trains and highways there will be a great multiplier effect and that would be good for the economy. And yet, people reject it.

What does that say? Again, more government, if someone else pays for it.

Prop. 165 lost. That was the welfare reform initiative with more budget powers for Pete Wilson. I find this really ironic. Bill Clinton says he wants welfare reform and he is treated like a total hero, right? At the same time people are putting Clinton on this pedestal, they are reviling Pete Wilson for talking about the same kind of change that Clinton talked about.

The unique thing about what Wilson wanted to do was that the person who worked part-time would not lose a dime. That initiative failed. So here we have everybody talking about how great welfare reform is, but when voters have to sit down and pull the lever for it, people wouldn't do it.

The last thing I want to talk about is the so-called "death with dignity" initiative that Joe Perkins referred to. I don't know when in this culture everybody decided that if you want to kill yourself, you shouldn't have to do it yourself; you should have an institution do it for you. But that is really what this measure was all about. It is the oddest thing. People who are for it want you to think that it is for someone who is infirm and can't move and is at the end. But it wasn't. It was for anybody who could be deemed to die within six months.

It disturbs me that we no longer have to kill ourselves, and that all these people think that we should have someone else do it for us. The initiative, I am happy to say, lost. But the fact that people were thinking about it as much as they were, and that it almost passed, shows how, without even thinking, we look to our institutions to do all of these things for us. It is horrible all the people who think suicide is good, and that is why government should facilitate it. It is scary.

We really do need to have a debate about how much Americans want from government, and maybe that is the place to start.

## HUGH POWERS

I have been a little struck by everyone's emphasis on why George Bush lost the election, as if that is all there were to it. I would remind everyone that that didn't happen in a vacuum and that Bill Clinton also won the election. I think that everybody has ignored that fact. Of course, the President lost the election because of the economy. It is rather a cliché, but it doesn't make it any less true, that a presidential election reflects the economy. When the economy is good, the party in power wins, and vice versa. Unfortunately for Bush, he was on the vice versa. That is important.

But I think it is also very important to understand why Clinton won. It has a very serious message for Republicans and Democrats and conservatives and liberals alike. Clinton won because he was able to convince some number of people—four out of ten, in any event—that he was a centrist, that he was and would govern more moderately than the traditional, Democratic devil the Republic has feared for years. Now, whether or not that is true is beside the point. He won the election, in my opinion, almost solely on that point.

That being the case, I don't think there is anything that George Bush could have done to win, or that Bill Clinton could have done to lose. I think that the experience of our past elections demonstrates that. Only twice in the last seven elections have the Democrats been able to overcome the voter mistrust of that liberal tendency. And in both cases they did it with a person who deliberately tried to, or was perceived to, move away from those liberal tendencies. And even then, they only managed to squeak through. And that is not an accident.

For years the Democrats have been told by Governor Clinton that they better move to the center. And they ignored it. Well, they finally took the advice and they won.

Republicans have been chuckling for years at the Democrats' tendency to self-destruct because of their insistence on this ideological pilgrimage to the left, and their insistence on that at the expense of winning. I submit to you that right now, this very day, the Republicans are in danger of indulging in the same thing. Forgive me for saying so, but part of that is this business that George Bush lost because he wasn't conservative enough. Perhaps that is true, but I would point out the Democrats' long exile because they insisted on not having what the late Lee Atwater termed a big tent. I would think that Republicans and conservatives would do well to listen to the implications of that message.

♦ ♦ ♦