

After W

Six years into the Bush administration, the Republican Party appeared to be in disarray. Burdened by the conflict in Iraq, economic unease, and unchecked government spending, the Republicans lost control of both houses of Congress in the 2006 mid-term elections.

In the wake of the losses, David Keene, chairman of the American Conservative Union, declared that voters had turned the party out "not because they rejected where Republicans want to take the country so much as the Republicans' performance in taking us there." Prominent conservative Richard Viguerie blamed "the Big Government Republicans who took us into a nation-building war while they busted the budget and enriched Big Business and its K Street lobbyists."

Looking to 2008, Republicans sought a presidential candidate who could bring conservative principles to bear on the challenges facing the country. The party needed a leader who could revive the Republican brand, retain the White House, and help reverse the setbacks suffered in 2006.

It would not be an easy task for whomever GOP voters chose as their nominee. In recent history, it is rare for a party to win three consecutive presidential elections. George H. W. Bush ("41") did ride Ronald Reagan's coattails to victory in 1988, but that was the exception rather than the rule.

George W. Bush's ("43") job-approval ratings had plummeted to 30 percent and lower, and there was little enthusiasm for building on the theme of "compassionate conservatism." The search was on for "a true conservative candidate" who was committed to lower taxes, limited government, and strong values. Twenty years after Reagan, Republicans were still in a sense trying to rebuild the Reagan coalition.

A sizable field of candidates formed, offering their records and positions on issues including the economy, taxes and spending, the war in Iraq and the war on terror, illegal immigration, and life and cultural concerns. All laid claim to the conserva-

tive label; some fared better on the fiscal dimension and others on the social dimension.

Former Virginia governor Jim Gilmore presented himself as "a consistent conservative," while former Wisconsin governor Tommy Thompson offered himself as "the reliable conservative." Both made quick exits from the race. Kansas senator Sam Brownback, who likewise did not make it to the first contest, declared, "I am a conservative, and I'm proud of being a conservative. But I'm a conservative that believes in addressing problems, not ignoring them."

Former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani touted columnist George Will's assessment of the Giuliani record as "the most successful episode of conservative governance in the past fifty years." Social conservatives, however, viewed Giuliani with suspicion.

Former Tennessee senator and actor Fred Thompson's supporters compared him to Reagan. In a September 2007 speech in Des Moines, he observed, "As far as I am concerned, I still have the same common-sense conservative beliefs I did when I ran in 1994."

Mitt Romney, former governor of Massachusetts, offered the metaphor of a three-legged stool. "The three legs of the conservative stool are strong military, strong economy, and strong families, and I will fight for all three of those things," he said. Critics questioned the consistency of Romney's conservative views.

Former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee, an ordained Baptist minister, could not easily be challenged by social conservatives, but he did come under attack from fiscal conservatives for his record on taxes and spending.

Texas congressman Ron Paul offered a libertarian variant of conservatism. "The Republicans are losing because they did not keep their promise to end Big Government at home and nation-building overseas," he declared. "My record is different."

Sen. John McCain of Arizona, who was virtually

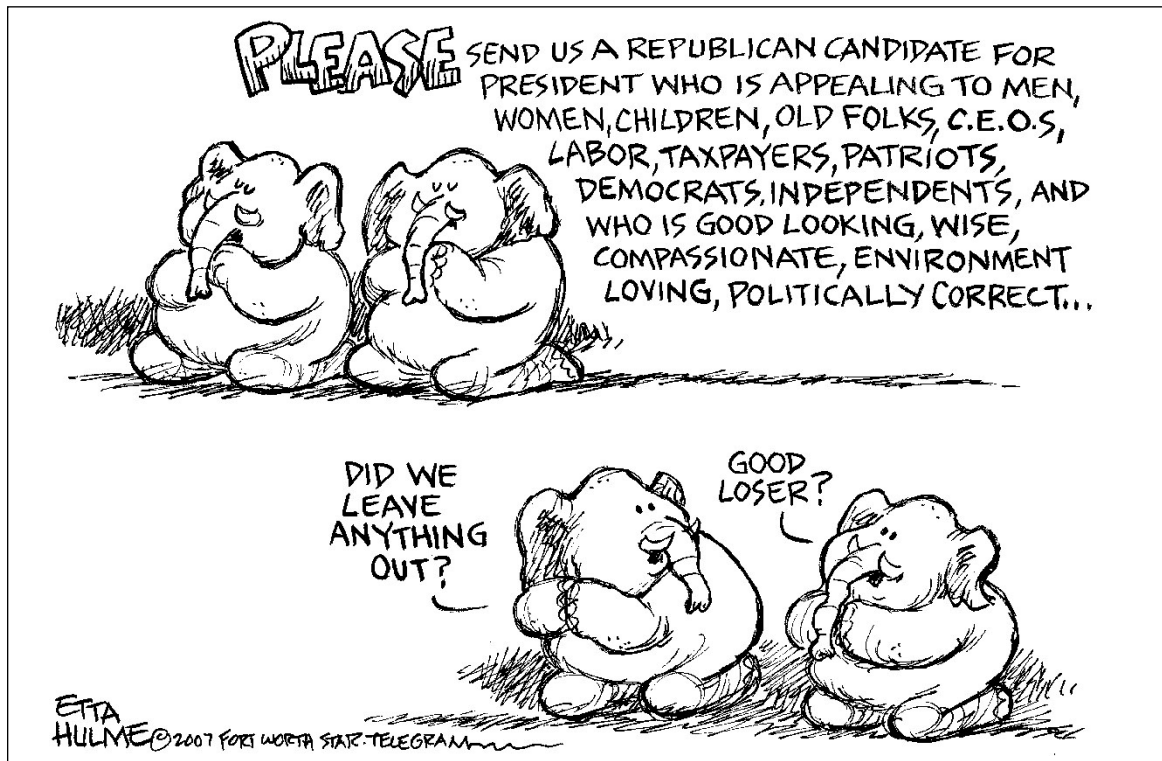
counted out in mid-2007 but rallied to win the majority of the delegates, is perhaps best characterized as a moderate, maverick conservative. McCain's positions on campaign finance reform, immigration, and global warming, along with his initial opposition to the Bush tax cuts, troubled many conservatives, but he boasted strong national security credentials and a long record of fighting pork-barrel spending. McCain has described himself as "a common-sense conservative," stating that "common-sense conservatives believe that the

government that governs least governs best; that government should do only those things individuals cannot do for themselves, and do them efficiently."

Among the field of Republican candidates, McCain was viewed as the one with the greatest potential to attract support of Independents and Democrats. His challenge will be to maintain his appeal to those groups and at the same time win over movement conservatives in what many observers predicted could be a very difficult year for Republicans.



Rob Smith, Jr.
Courtesy DBR Media

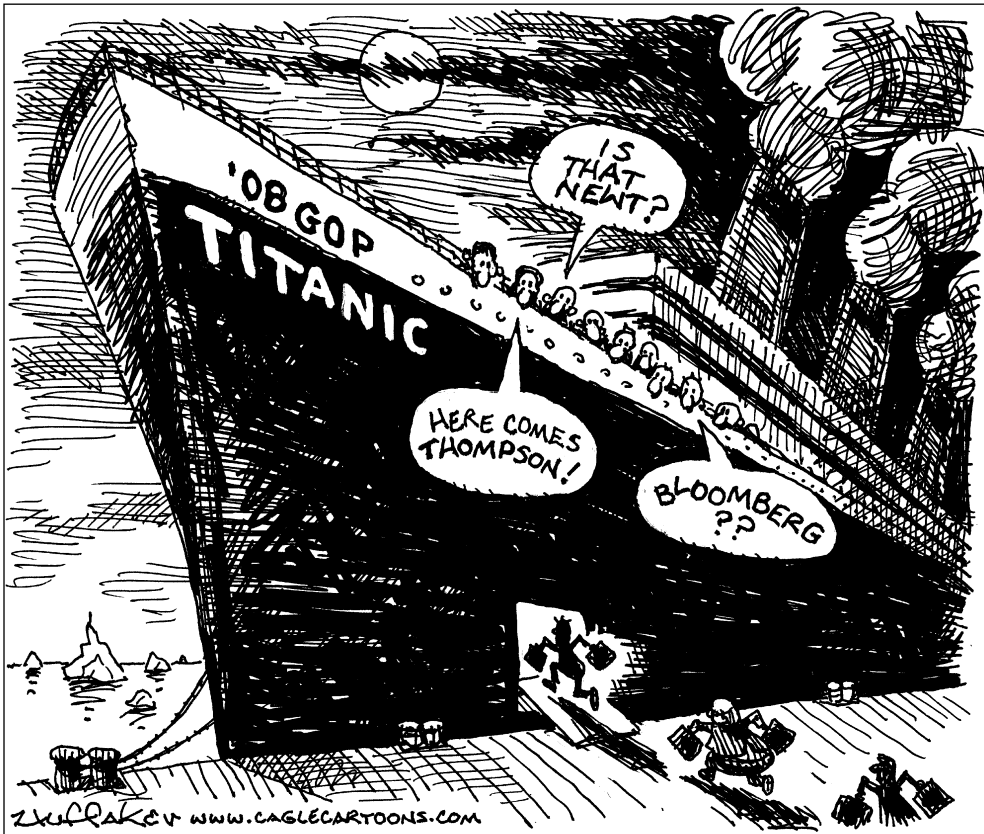


Etta Hulme
 Courtesy The Fort Worth Star-Telegram

The Bush Legacy



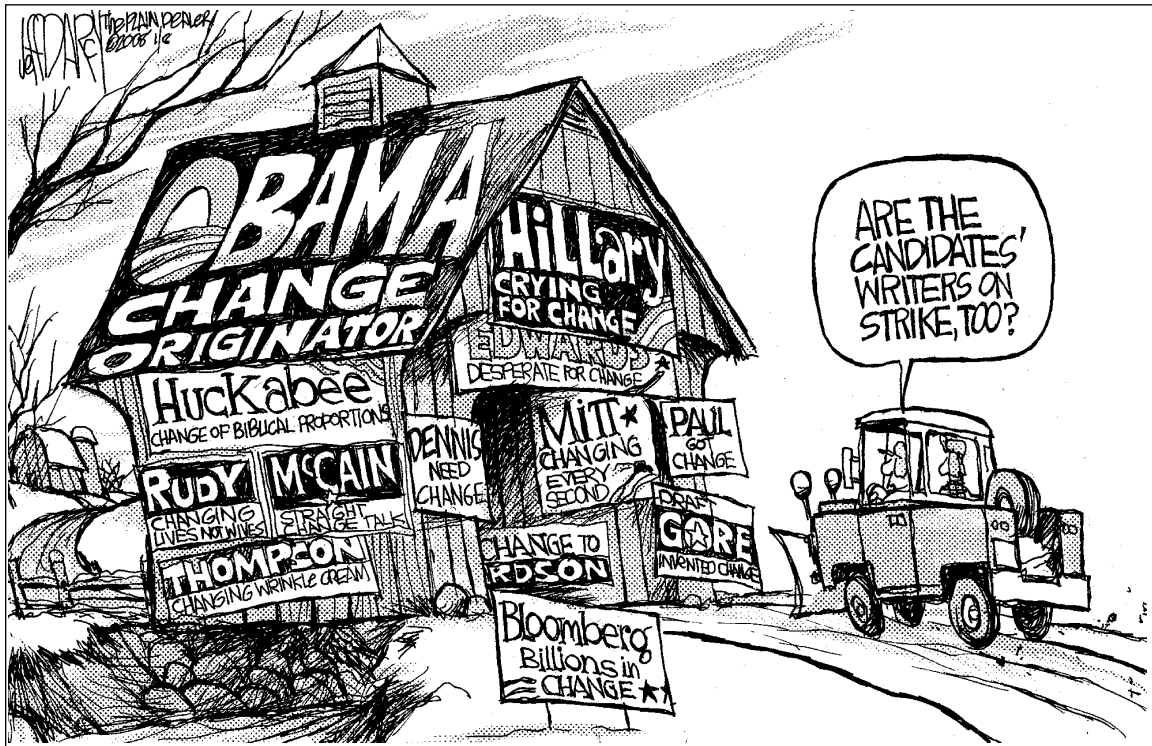
Jeff Danziger
 Courtesy NYTimes Syndicate



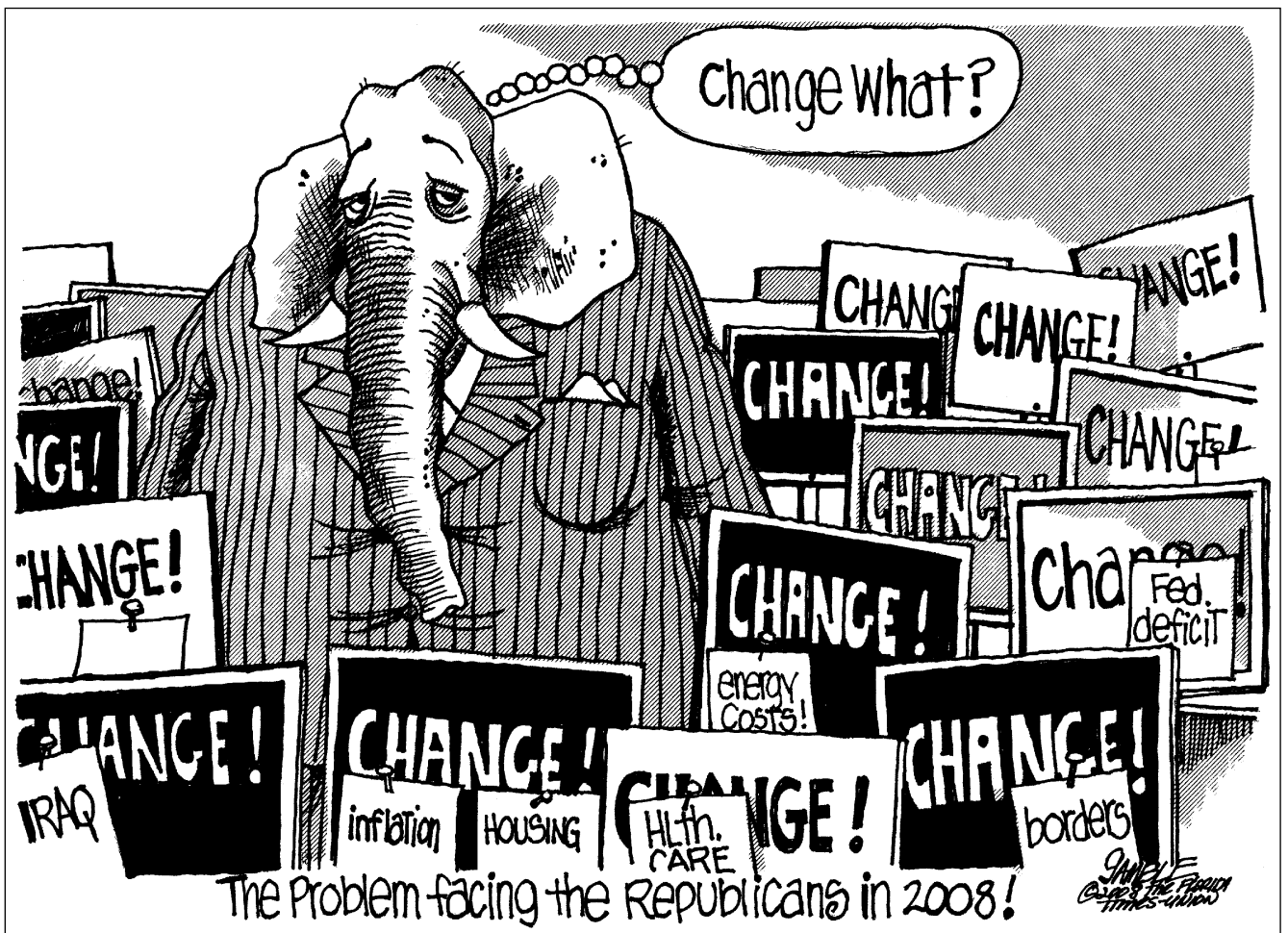
Sandy Huffaker
 Courtesy Cagle Cartoons



Bob Lang
 Courtesy RightToons.com



Jeff Darcy
 Courtesy The Plain Dealer (Cleveland, Ohio)



Ed Gamble
 Courtesy The Florida Times-Union

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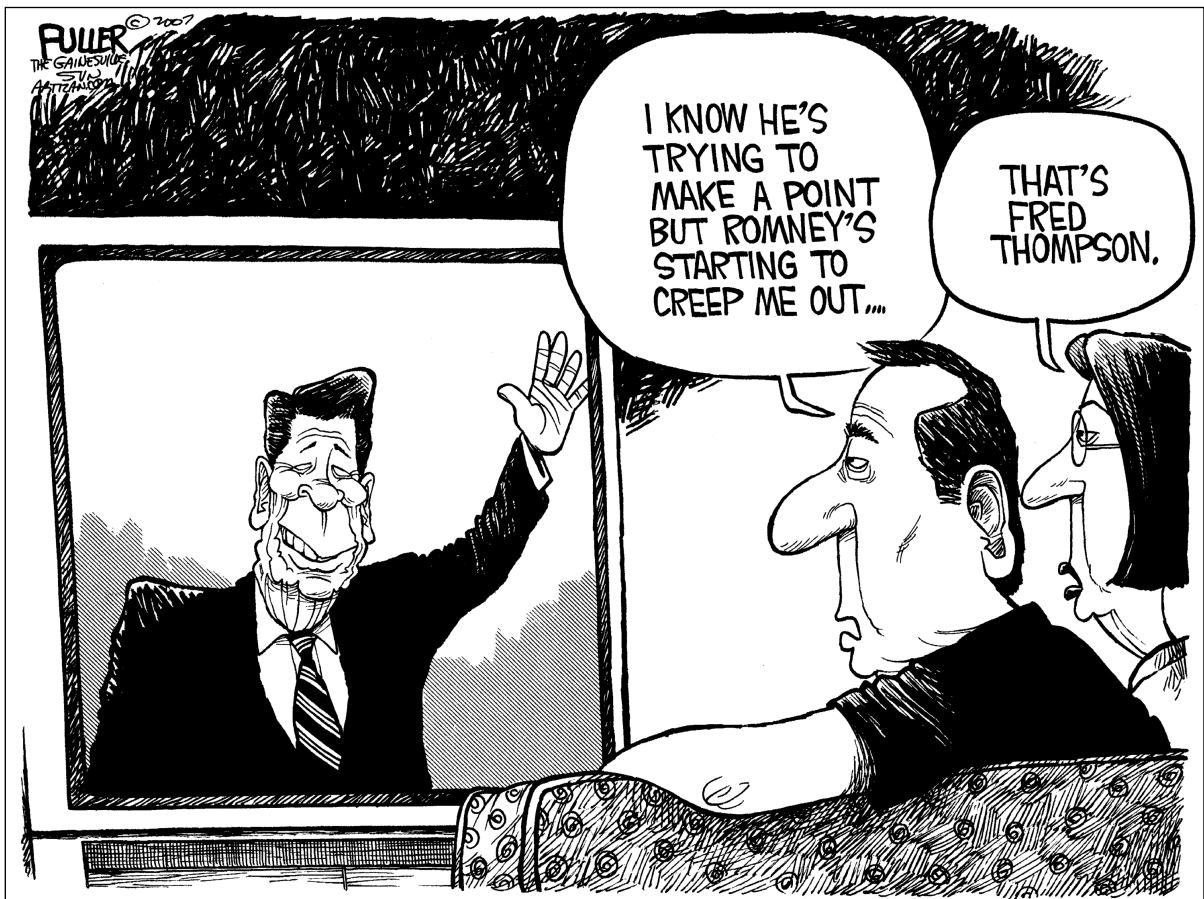
Jimmy Margulies
Courtesy King Features



John Trever
Courtesy Albuquerque Journal



Nate Beeler
Courtesy The Washington Examiner



Jake Fuller
Courtesy The Gainesville Sun

NO MIND YOUR BUSINESS

DID YOU CONSIDER, AMBASSADOR YOUNG, THAT THE REASON OBAMA HASN'T BEEN WITH AS MANY BLACK WOMEN AS BILL CLINTON IS BECAUSE HE'S SO YOUNG?

¿QUIEN ES MAS REAGAN?

¿SEÑOR ROMNEY?

MY HAIR DOESN'T MOVE AND WE WERE BOTH PRO-ABORTION GOVERNORS...

WIND TUNNEL RULES
 NO FOOD
 NO DRINKS
 NO SITTING
 NO PETS
 NO PEPPER
 GAMES

ROLL CALL

¿O SEÑOR THOMPSON?

¿SEÑOR MCCAIN?

¿O SEÑOR GIULIANI?

I'M HALF THE ACTOR BUT TWICE THE NAPPER.

WELL WHO DOESN'T LIKE A GOOD JOKE ABOUT STARTING WORLD WAR III?

FREEMEN AGAINST GIULIANI

911

MY KIDS HATE ME TOO.

THOSE ARE ALL VERY GOOD BUT MORE OR LESS COSMETIC. WHO WILL LIVE UP TO REAGAN'S POLICY LEGACY?

WHO IS UP FOR...

WELL...

- WAGING COVERT PROXY WARS AGAINST EMPIRES?
- USING NON-EXISTENT WEAPONS SYSTEMS TO GIVE HIS ENEMIES FITS?
- HAVING NO QUALMS ABOUT VISITING AN S.S. CEMETERY

HIM? MAN, NO ONE'S GOING TO LIKE THAT.

AHMADINEJAD

REAGAN?! NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT, I GUESS SO... BUT I'M MUCH BETTER - LOOKING AND I CURED A.I.D.S.

MAMBRO@BELLSOUTH.NET

Mike Mikula
 Courtesy Roll Call