



O'Donnell's "Witchcraft" is Same Old "Voodoo"

Some of us may have thought politics in America couldn't get more absurd than it was in the 1970's, when we had a President of the United States proclaim: "I'm not a crook." Now we have a major party candidate for the U.S. Senate beginning her first general election campaign ad with, "I'm not a witch."



It was Richard Nixon, of course, who said, "I'm not a crook." Christine O'Donnell is the Republican Senate candidate in Delaware who is "not a witch," though she admitted years back that she "dabbled" in witchcraft as a teenager. Frankly, I wouldn't care if O'Donnell were a witch. We already have one of those at the State Department and America's foreign policy has not become appreciably worse since Mme. Hillarious became Secretary of State. Besides, what's a little witchcraft to a nation that thrived in the 1980s on "voodoo economics"?

You remember "voodoo economics." That was George Bush the elder's description of the formula — military buildup, protection of entitlements (the "safety net") and large tax cuts — Ronald Reagan would employ to bring us, among other things, balanced budgets. But that was before Daddy Daffy Bush was offered a place on Reagan's ticket and developed a new and abiding respect for the economics of the black arts.

The Regan-Bush ticket won in 1980 and the rest is history — written in red ink. Reagan barely had time to find the Lincoln bedroom before his budget director was forecasting \$200 billion deficits for "as far as the eye can see." The late Joe Sobran once said campaign promises should come with expiration dates, "like dairy products." He had a point, but the dairy industry might take exception. Their products have a longer shelf life.

Candidate O'Donnell met her opponent, Democrat Chris Coons, in a nationally televised debate in Newark, Delaware, Wednesday (October 13) night and was forced to defend a comment she had made on a TV show a dozen years ago when she called evolution "a myth." She made that comment, she said, in the context of a discussion about the teaching of creationism in public schools. O'Donnell believes that decision should be left to local school boards. But Coons and moderator Wolf Blitzer of CNN both wanted to know more about her beliefs. Coons said it was important to get "on the record" O'Donnell's "views on things like prayer, abortion, evolution" so people could better evaluate "what sort of judges she would confirm, what sort of issues she would take up."

"Voters want to know," Blitzer insisted when pressing O'Donnell for her belief about evolution. But O'Donnell stood her ground. "What I believe is irrelevant," she said. "What I will support in Washington is the ability for the local school system to decide what is taught in their classrooms."

So far, so good. O'Donnell's stand contrasts nicely with that of her opponent, who takes the typically liberal view that improvements in education (and nearly everything else) can and should be directed from Washington. There is, Coons said, a "significant role" for the federal government to play in providing financial support and scholarships for those who want to teach science, technology, engineering or math. "We need a new generation of teachers who are fully prepared, fully equipped,



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fully qualified to engage their students in the classrooms," Coons said.

Well, now, that doesn't say much for the present and past generations of teachers, does it? And it doesn't say much for the "improvements" in education we have enjoyed — or endured — in the 45 years since Congress passed the first Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965. Not if we don't already have a generation of teachers "fully prepared, fully equipped, fully qualified to engage their students in the classrooms." And, of course, Coons would repair rather than repeal the intrusive federal No Child Left Behind Act, which he believes should be "modernized and made more flexible and responsive." Responsive to *whom*, he did not say.

But O'Donnell showed herself to be something other than a strict constitutionalist when asked if she favored the elimination of the federal Department of Education.

"I don't think we have to take that drastic a step," she said. She then cited a report released by Sen. Tom Coburn, (R-Oklahoma) of billions wasted in "schoolhouse pork." "That's the kind of stuff we have to stop. We also have to make sure that the money we are putting into education does go to the classroom and makes them more effective."

Here we go again. We don't have to eliminate federal departments or programs. We just have to eliminate that old standby, also invoked by O'Donnell, called "waste, fraud and abuse." The Department of Education has effectively been added to Reagan's "safety net." It would be "drastic" to eliminate it, O'Donnell said, despite the fact that Republicans promised to do just that for 20 years before dropping that pledge from the party platform in 2000. And despite the fact that nowhere in the Constitution of the United States is there any authorization for federal involvement in elementary and secondary education.

So if O'Donnell won't work for the elimination of the Department of Education, what departments or programs would she seek to eliminate? How would she try to get federal budgets, with annual deficits now measured in the trillions, anywhere near balanced? Eliminating "waste, fraud and abuse," along with freezes on hiring and "discretionary spending" won't yield the kind of savings needed. In fact, the Coburn report she cited claims \$2.3 billion have been wasted in "schoolhouse pork" over the past decade. Real money, to be sure, but not enough to put even a small dent in the kind of deficits the government is running up today. And O'Donnell seems unaware that war is the biggest and most costly "big government" program yet devised. She believes we need to keep 100,000 or more troops in Afghanistan until there is "a representative government over there that serves the needs of the people and that can defend themselves." A rather ambitious goal, considering Afghanistan has never had that. And we don't even have a government in the United States that "serves the needs of the people" — like defending our borders and obeying the Constitution.

O'Donnell says she has long since turned away from the witchcraft she flirted with as a teen. But from a constitutionally conservative perspective, her view of statecraft leaves a lot to be desired.

Photo: Democratic candidate Chris Coons and Republican candidate Christine O'Donnell answers questions during a televised Delaware Senate debate at the University of Delaware in Newark, Del., Oct. 13, 2010: AP Images



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