



Rick Perry: Another Four Years of George W. Bush?

This past weekend, as the victors of the Ames Straw Poll were being determined in Iowa, Texas governor Rick Perry declared his candidacy for the presidency. The talking heads of “conservative” talk radio and elsewhere were giddy with excitement. For more than one reason, I, for one, do not share their enthusiasm.



Already, comparisons between Perry and former President George W. Bush are being drawn in venues that are friendly to both our national parties. Admittedly, some commentators have noted the differences between the two, but these are largely stylistic and tangential. Their likenesses, though, are too obvious to be glossed over: both claim to be “conservative”; both are Texans; and both have served as governors of the Lone Star State.

These similarities alone are sufficient to engender no inconsiderable degree of concern in numerous voters. George W. Bush’s approval rating was abysmal when he left office, and it hasn’t risen appreciably since. The prospect of but another governor from Texas in the White House simply is *not* palatable to millions and millions of Americans. That this apparently doesn’t register with establishment Republicans goes to show how thoroughly blinded they are by ideology. It also signals that for all of their protestations to the contrary, these Republicans really haven’t learned the lessons that they claimed to have learned from the electoral defeats they suffered in 2006 and 2008.

In politics, imagery not infrequently trumps substance. If ever proof was needed for this proposition, Barack Obama’s election to the presidency is it. And the very image of another Texas governor as a Republican president doesn’t promise to go any distance in helping Americans overcome the weariness over Bush from which, in varying degrees, they continue to suffer.

Fiscal conservatives and libertarian-minded folks have always known that if there were any differences at all between Bush’s governance as president and that of any given leftist, they were negligible. In other words, they have known that Bush is not “the conservative” who he claimed to be. And with no thanks to his cheerleaders in the so-called “alternative” or “conservative” media, more traditional-minded conservatives *are*, thankfully, beginning to realize this.

Bush contributed to the further expansion of the federal government via Middle Eastern wars; a prescription drug benefit that served to strengthen Medicaid; No Child Left Behind, a program that, far from weakening the influence of the Department of Education over the states, consolidated its power; Faith-based Initiatives which rendered private religious and charitable organizations subservient to the federal government; his Home Owner Society that required the federal government to bring pressure to bear upon private-sector lending institutions to make sub-prime loans to unqualified applicants; and a



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whole lot more.

Perry has repudiated none of this agenda.

Yet in addition to all of this, Bush also made several attempts to grant a de facto amnesty to the millions of illegal immigrants residing within our country. Thankfully, such efforts proved unsuccessful.

This is relevant, though, because Perry gives no indications of being very much different from his predecessor on this issue. Texas borders Mexico and has for decades had all manner of problems with illegal immigration. Yet Perry has steadfastly refused to so much as lend support to the construction of a border fence, much less adopt the sorts of sensible measures in response to those problems to which Arizona has had to resort. He has also helped to arrange for illegal immigrants to pay *in-state tuition* fees while attending pursuing a higher education! Unsurprisingly, the conservative immigration organization, [NumbersUSA](#), has given Perry a D- on immigration related matters.

There is another consideration that should cool the enthusiasm that has greeted Perry's announcement on Saturday.

Perry didn't become a Republican until 1989. He was actually part of Al Gore's campaign for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination just the year before. Shortly after Gore lost the nomination to Dukakis, Karl Rove recruited Perry.

This in and of itself doesn't necessarily mean that Perry isn't a conservative now, but that he spent his formative years, including much of his adult life, ingesting and defending the ideas of the Democratic Party and only became a Republican after GOP fixer Karl Rove came knocking at his door suggests that his "conservatism," like that of Bush's, isn't authentic. And when we further recall that Perry once referred to Bush as his "philosophical soulmate," we may be pardoned for suspecting that Perry will govern as president similarly to the manner in which Bush governed.

Charity and humility combine to caution us against rendering unduly harsh verdicts upon Perry this prematurely. But wisdom counsels us to avoid another four years of George W. Bush.



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