

Use the Bush Failures

By Grover Norquist

If President George W. Bush is to win re-election with a mandate, he needs to focus more public attention on his failures.

The temptation for all Presidents and governors running for re-election is to dwell on their accomplishments. A President's campaign staff wants to argue that every challenge has been met, every promise kept, and numerous successes have been racked up.

George Bush Sr. was proud of his record of never having his veto overridden by Congress. He signed and approved every piece of legislation from 1989-92. His White House staff thought this was an asset. On an "Inside the Beltway" scorecard, he had all wins, no losses. But he also had no public record of opposition to any law, tax, or regulation in existence. He became Mr. Status Quo. Yet in November 1992, with a weak economy, the status quo was unacceptable to many voters.

Thanks to the tax cuts championed by his son President George W. Bush in 2001, 2002, and 2003, our economy is now growing—more than 7 percent in the third quarter of 2003. It would be easy and fun to campaign on this record.

But even if growth continues strongly through 2004, there will be pockets of stagnation and downturn. Democrats are already focusing on the manufacturing employment numbers. Back in 1984, Democrats attacked Reagan's job creation boom by falsely claiming that all the new jobs were for hamburger flippers, and that the economic recovery did not extend into our heartland.

President Bush should remind people that none of his tax cuts passed as he wanted them; all were watered down, delayed, made temporary. The Senate only allowed President Bush to cut the double taxation of dividend income in half rather than eliminate it. The death tax repeal and marriage penalty reduction are phased in, and are only temporary.

Should the economy slow in 2004, or employment growth lag in the manufacturing sector, the American people need to know that the Democrats defeated Bush's efforts to make tax cuts larger and permanent. It is understandable that advisers would suggest that President Bush push for a small tax cut in 2004 to maintain his "tax cut every year" record without engendering massive Democratic opposition. But a wiser move would be to design a larger tax cut targeted for manufacturing. Let the Democratic Party leadership decide if it wants to oppose a pro-jobs, pro-manufacturing stimulus.

An incumbent who is honest about his failures and frustrations is insulated from criticisms of the status quo. Reminding voters where he has been blocked is also a good way of making sure the 2004 election is not just a popularity contest or a thank-you-for-a-job-well-done, but also a mandate for future progress in a second administration.

Ronald Reagan ran for re-election in 1984 with a record of tremendous success: inflation down from double digits, 4 million new jobs created in 1983 alone, Grenada liberated, tax rates cut 25 percent across the board. He ran on the slogan, "Morning in America," and he was able to



Miguel Estrada, repeatedly rejected by Senate Democrats as a Bush-appointed Hispanic judge.

defeat Walter Mondale. But with this "mission accomplished" strategy Reagan failed to win a mandate for his second term.

President Bush should highlight the Senate Democrats' filibustering of judicial nominees, and their stymieing of tort reform. He should make a strong case that a second term for him, working with more Republican Senators, would be an agenda worth voting for.

Of course the kind of folks who get their news from cable networks like CNN, MSNBC, and FOX News already know that President Bush has fought hard for meaningful tort reform and for his judicial nominees. That accounts for 33 percent of Americans. But most Americans follow politics as if overhearing an argument conducted in a foreign language from across a crowded restaurant. It is hard to get the attention of voters who have real lives to run and choose not to study the news all day. They need to be reminded of what the Senate was doing while they were watching the World Series.

A successful 2004 election will be one that gives President Bush not just a second term but also a meaningful mandate, as well as larger majorities in both houses of Congress. The recipe: Spend the first half of the day reminding Americans that Bush kept his word and accomplished great things. Then spend the afternoon highlighting the President's failures, setbacks, and disappointments—as foisted upon him by Senate Democrats.

