



## **The Religious Right and the South Carolina Republican Party Primary in 2000:**

An Analysis of the Religious Right in South Carolina and its role in the primary  
victory of George W. Bush

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### Abstract

In 2000, the Religious Right in South Carolina proved that their movement was far from dead. Their constituency was galvanized by the candidacy of George W. Bush, a born-again Protestant from Crawford, Texas. Despite the usual bickering and divisive nature of the Religious Right, most state leaders gave their undisputed support to Bush. This trend is contrary to Christian Right history in South Carolina. However, their overt support, while beneficial to Bush's impressive South Carolina victory, was not alone responsible for his win.

The role of the Christian Right in American politics in the last decade has been tumultuous. No one has been able to portend the ebbs and flows of this social movement's history. In fact, a large debate emerges each November about the exact impact of the Christian Right on elections. One place where this role is debated on an annual basis is South Carolina. Historically, the Palmetto state consists of predominantly conservative Protestants with an active Christian Right contingency. In fact, as John Guth points out: "South Carolina has long been one of the 'buckles' on the Bible belt."<sup>2</sup> Due to this, the Christian Right has attempted to flex its muscles, with varying success, in South Carolina in the 1990s. However, no election saw as much national media attention as the state's 2000 Presidential primary. Held on February 19 the primary was perfectly placed to play an integral role in the presidential nominating process. Indeed, George W. Bush's convincing victory in the state probably saved him the nomination. One characteristic South Carolina maintains which earlier primary states do not, is that more than one in three voters classify themselves as part of the Religious Right.<sup>3</sup> The 2000 Republican South Carolina primary showed the vigor and activism of this political unit. Despite traditional tendencies of the Religious Right leadership to be splintered during the Republican primary, almost all leaders supported Bush. While Bush was not overly dependent on them in terms of actual votes, their campaigning and voice helped to alienate McCain from the party and give the election to Bush.

### **The Religious Right In South Carolina, A Brief Summary**

We must first begin by defining what is meant by the term "Religious Right." For this survey, I will use the terms Christian Right and Religious Right interchangeably. Professor Clyde Wilcox defines the group as "a social movement that attempts to mobilize evangelical

Protestants and other orthodox Christians into conservative political action.<sup>4</sup> It is generally assumed that the base for the Religious Right is evangelical Christians. Evangelical is a broad term used to classify many distinct religious organizations. Lyman Kellstedt gives four basic ideas as “minimalist criteria” for defining evangelical: the divinity of Christ; acceptance of Christ as the only way to attain eternal life or salvation; an inerrant Bible; and a commitment to spreading the Gospel.<sup>5</sup> In addition, one component which is characteristic of most, but not all, evangelicals is a born-again experience. Two main evangelical groups have been very active politically: fundamentalists and charismatics/Pentecostals.

Fundamentalists are Bible literalists, participate in born-again experiences and are exceedingly conservative. On the other hand, the charismatics believe in a second baptism of the Holy Spirit, the born-again experience, and have highly energized, emotional sermons.<sup>6</sup> While all evangelicals have similar religious beliefs, sharp religious nuances divide these groups. In addition, each group has its own leader and distinct followers. This plurality yields to no single platform for the Christian Right; each group has similar but distinct agendas. Therefore, given their heterogeneous nature, it is often difficult for these groups to work together under the umbrella term of “evangelical” or “Christian Right.” Despite its many pluralities, one constant for its members has been party affiliation. Since the foundation of the Moral Majority and the victory of Ronald Reagan in 1980, the Christian Right has been a vacillating power faction within only the Republican party.<sup>7</sup> In a sense, the history of the Religious Right in South Carolina is a paradigm of the movement as a whole. South Carolina is an ideal microcosm of Christian Right political activity. Conservative Protestant religions are still a majority in the Palmetto state, despite the demographic changes caused by urbanization. The Southern Baptists

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<sup>7</sup>Wilcox, 3-8.

maintain the largest percentage of religious followers in the state with 40 percent of all church members in 1990.<sup>8</sup>

In the early stages of the movement Bob Jones University (BJU) in Greenville emerged as a bastion of fundamentalist activity within the Republican Party. It was this year they worked arduously for Ronald Reagan attempting to prevent President Ford from winning the GOP nomination. It was the first time the Religious Right had a legitimate and unique say in the party in South Carolina. During the mid-1980's the BJU activists merged with other Republican leaders in the state,<sup>9</sup> and they consequently became “indistinguishable from other conservative Republican activists and officeholders.”<sup>10</sup> Although the BJU contingent was very visible, they were not unified as a group, but rather acted individually. Guth and Smith claim this led to a faction consisting of “savvy politicians” as opposed to “amateur religious enthusiasts,” resulting in pragmatic concessions as opposed to tough ideological stances.<sup>11</sup> One of the most prominent Religious Right leaders, Jerry Falwell, had troubles mobilizing any kind of grass roots activity in South Carolina, in part because of opposition from the BJU contingent. Many of the Baptists Falwell usually courted were solidly behind the BJU contingent. Therefore, Falwell was only represented in the Palmetto state by a few Bible Baptist mega-churches. In addition, his leaders clashed often with the leaders from BJU, posing no threat to the Republican Party regulars.<sup>12</sup>

It was not until 1988, when Pat Robertson mobilized a solid block of Religious Right voters to support his bid for the Presidency, that an outsider infiltrated the BJU contingent. However, even his support was limited coming mainly from charismatic and Pentecostal allies. He placed a lowly third in the 1988 Republican primary. His vote total accounted for only about 20 percent of primary voters, with many Southern Baptists voting for George Bush Sr. and a few

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 18.

BJU followers voting for Jack Kemp as opposed to Robertson. However, Bush knew he could not ignore Robertson and his contingent in the general election. Consequently, a truce was called and many Robertson supporters were given important political positions within the state. This eventually motivated the group to reform in 1991 as the South Carolina Christian Coalition (SCCC). The SCCC movement, complemented by the 1988 political appointments, helped Robertson's supporters gain ground within the state party eventually gaining an ascendancy during 1993 local GOP meetings.<sup>13</sup> The group was also able to mobilize some Southern Baptist support, helping it to elect their choice for Republican state chairman. This alliance between Southern Baptists and Falwell's supports (Pentecostal or charismatics) helped bring the Religious Right to the forefront. Up to this point, the divisive nature of the Christians had thus far prevented it from becoming a real force in South Carolina's Republican party.<sup>14</sup>

The Southern Baptists from Falwell's Moral Majority and the charismatic leaders from Robertson's Christian Coalition had now formed a solid faction in the state Republican Party. While this alliance within the party was tenuous, their power as a unified group was impressive. Many mainstream Republicans resented any power gained by the Religious Right often joking that the activists had to cancel meetings because the chairman forgot to bring the snake.<sup>15</sup> Despite the joke, with these new advantages the Religious Right made real gains in the 1994 elections: David Beasley defeated two mainstream candidates in the Republican primary and went on to become governor; the Republicans made significant gains in the State Senate; and after many Democratic defections, the GOP won a majority of seats in the State House of Representatives. This year the national Christian Right also scored many big gains in statehouses across the country, not just in South Carolina. While these victories delineated the

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<sup>14</sup>Guth and Smith, 18-19.

emerging political power of the Christian Right, it also cited the immense diversity of the group. Guth notes: “The races highlight the religious heterogeneity of the movement and the difficulties of managing that diversity.”<sup>16</sup>

The 1996 Presidential primary again demonstrated the heterogeneous nature of the Christian Right in South Carolina and in the nation. Exit polls show that South Carolina Religious Right members were evenly split amongst candidates Robert Dole and Pat Buchanan.<sup>17</sup> Guth notes that while state party chair Roberta Combs supported Dole, many of her local leaders were backing Buchanan.<sup>18</sup> Most of the core groups within the faction were fiercely anti-Catholic. Primarily, Falwell’s Moral Majority, but also many other evangelical leaders often publicly make anti-Catholic remarks. One specific place anti-Catholic sentiment permeates South Carolinian society is at BJU. The school received harsh condemnation after some of the school’s leaders called the Pope the anti-Christ.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, any support amongst the Religious Right for the Buchanan, who was not only a Catholic but a graduate of Georgetown, the nation’s oldest Catholic university, was surprising. Nevertheless, Buchanan’s support from the Christian Right held strongly throughout the nomination process. Even by Super Tuesday, one-third of all Religious Right members were still voting Buchanan.<sup>20</sup> Hence, the trend in South Carolina seemed to parody the nation’s results. This is another example of the lack of unification Religious Right members in South Carolina and the nation. While, they constituted more than 36 percent of voters within the South Carolina Republican primary, they were the antithesis of a solid voting bloc because of their support for numerous candidates.<sup>21</sup> Maligning matters further, at the state convention in May the traditional rift between party regulars and conservative Christians reemerged. Prior to the convention, Governor Beasley and Combs had made an

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<sup>16</sup>Guth 1995, 133.

agreement about the slate of delegates to be chosen. However, at the convention the pact broke down and the Christians gained control of the convention. Many GOP regulars were left out, including some congressmen, who had to settle for alternate slots or none at all.<sup>22</sup>

In 1998 Beasley and many Republican and Religious Right candidates lost to Democrats. These losses came in the face of major activity by the Religious Right in South Carolina. The group issued voter guides for many important races and even had the help of national Christian leaders like Gary Bauer. In addition, the National Right to Life Committee spent \$8,000 dollars on radio and television advertisements supporting Religious Right candidates.<sup>24</sup> Many claimed that the devastating losses in 1998 would spell the end of the Religious Right in politics in South Carolina. Indeed, they had lost a majority of their high-ranking positions in the state with the defeat of Beasley. Moreover, financial woes became characteristic of most conservative Christian groups. Many pundits began digging graves for the Religious Right. Guth saw the Christian Right in the following light after the 1998 elections: “Christian conservatives constitute a substantial portion of South Carolina's population, as much as half the electorate in Republican primaries, and some of the most engaged activists in the state, although they are seldom monolithic in activism.”<sup>25</sup> Surprisingly, though, these losses did not prevent them from bouncing back with renewed vigor in 2000, starting with the GOP primary in February. Not only did the movement strike back with vigor, but also with surprising unity. In 2000, just before the Republican primary, *NBC News* conducted a poll of registered voters in South Carolina and found that 32 percent still considered themselves part of the Religious Right.

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<sup>22</sup>Vinson and Guth.

<sup>25</sup>Guth 2000, 37.

## **The 2000 Republican Primary**

The 2000 Republican Presidential Primary season was exciting and full of surprises. Many observers assumed the nomination was George W. Bush's for the taking. Bush's impressive "war chest" of money and success in national polls prompted the media declare him the favorite for the nomination. On January 24, 2002, Bush seemed to take the first step in winning the nomination by placing first in the Iowa Caucuses with a strong plurality of more than 41 percent.<sup>26</sup> Entrance polls from the primary indicate that 37 percent of caucus voters classified themselves as part of the Religious Right. This is a relatively high turnout for the movement, especially in Iowa. However, caucuses are not the best method of finding a representative group in the nomination process. Caucuses are highly permeable events that are easily penetrated by highly energized and active voters like the Christian Right. Moreover, studies have shown that caucuses see around 18 times less voters than primaries.<sup>27</sup> Entrance polls showed participants from this voting bloc overwhelmingly supported no one candidate. Bush was most preferred but he only got the support of 33 percent of those identifying with the Religious Right,<sup>28</sup> significantly lower than his 41 percent of all votes not indicating a heavy reliance on the Religious Right.

After Iowa, the candidates moved to New Hampshire, the nation's first primary. Historically, compared with the rest of the country, New Hampshire has not been kind to front-runners in primary elections. This trend continued in 2000 as John McCain trounced Bush by more than 18 points.<sup>29</sup> The extremity of McCain's victory can be attributed to New Hampshire's open primary system, allowing nonparty members to vote. However, even amongst registered

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<sup>28</sup>CNN, <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2000/primaries/IA/poll.html>, visited 27 November 2002.

Republicans McCain won by nine points. Although, according to exit polls, Religious Right voters only made up 16 percent of voters, these voters voted for Bush over McCain by 10 percent.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the Religious Right was one of the few groups showing significant support for Bush in New Hampshire. Unfortunately, since the Granite State is not known for its religiosity, the media overlooked the small victory. However, it would be a prelude of things to come. As the primary season rolled on, one primary would emerge that would give Bush a chance to take full advantage for his growing contingent of Christian Right voters: South Carolina.

Bush never wavered in courting the Christian Right contingency in South Carolina. After the New Hampshire primary, polls in South Carolina were ambiguous as to who had the early lead. While, many polls showed Bush winning, some had McCain with a small lead. Accordingly, both campaigns understood the election would be close and courted the Christian Right vote; however, Bush seemed to pay extra attention in enticing the conservative Christians. He opened his campaign in the Palmetto state with a speech at the infamous Bob Jones University. While this appearance set off a nationwide debate, it was indicative of the lengths the campaign was willing to go through to solidify the support of the Religious Right. South Carolina's Democratic Senator Fritz Hollings made the AP wire deploring Bush's visit to BJU and calling the university "a national embarrassment."<sup>31</sup> McCain attempted to take advantage of the BJU visit by planning a visit to a synagogue directly after it. Hoping to delineate a serious contrast between the two candidates, McCain wanted to be seen as the candidate of diversity and portray Bush as an intolerant conservative.<sup>32</sup> Later, he used the visit to target Bush in other, less conservative states, primarily Michigan. McCain specifically highlighted the traditional anti-catholic stance of BJU to callers in at least one of his Michigan phone banks.<sup>33</sup> McCain's attacks

on the BJU visit did have an impact on his own campaign as the co-chairman of his South Carolina campaign resigned in protest.<sup>34</sup>

The Bush campaign knew how splintered the Christian Right had become in recent Republican primaries and sought to court all major players from the group. Including his visit to BJU, he maintained active and open communication with the Christian Coalition and fought vigilantly to win over Southern Baptists.<sup>35</sup> The Christian Coalition sent out two mailings, including the infamous “10 disturbing facts about John McCain” to some 140,000 households in South Carolina. Coalition leader, Pat Robertson, was specifically involved in attacks on McCain. He often spoke on radio talk-shows against the Arizona Senator and even recorded a message for a phone bank that would make calls supporting Bush.<sup>36</sup> These attacks in South Carolina embittered McCain, who continued to mention them weeks after the campaign was over. According to McCain, “Neither party should be defined by pandering to the outer reaches of American politics and the agents of intolerance, whether they be Louis Farrakhan or Al Sharpton on the left, or Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell on the right.”<sup>37</sup> Robertson got his chance to fight back in the next round of primaries calling one McCain official “a vicious bigot who wrote that conservative Christians in politics are anti-abortion zealots, homophobes and would-be censors.”<sup>38</sup> The barrage from the Religious Right in South Carolina provoked McCain to make a risky attack on Bush. The Arizona Senator ran a series of ads comparing Bush to President Clinton; a tactic many Republican partisans saw as completely crossing the line.<sup>39</sup> Despite the early attacks on McCain, both sides were seen as contributing to the negative tone of the campaign. As Table 2 shows, in a survey conducted of South Carolina registered voters a few days before the election, the people seemed divided as to who was to blame for starting the

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

negative campaigning in the primary race. Therefore, it seemed as if the negative tactics of the Christian Right were not directly attributed to Bush as much as McCain would have hoped. In fact, McCain's negative response seems to have backfired as he was blamed just as much as Bush for the negative campaigning. Notwithstanding, for 48 percent of likely voters polled by the *Los Angeles Times* said that the ads would have 'none' or 'not too much' of an impact on their vote.<sup>40</sup> As the *Washington Post* wrote, "Despite two weeks of negative ads and constant attacks back and forth from the campaign trail, all signs pointed toward a record turnout on [election day]."<sup>41</sup>

Anti-abortion groups also took an active role in supporting Bush. These groups spent a combined \$47,000 on radio advertisements on mostly Christian radio stations. In addition, these groups sent out massive mailings and made numerous phone calls supporting Bush.<sup>42</sup> Other anti-abortion activity included Congressman Henry Hyde of Illinois who spent time recording advertisements for Bush that aired, among other places, during the Rush Limbaugh show.<sup>43</sup> These ads touted Bush's ideals on abortion as superior to any other candidate in the Republican primary. Clearly, anti-abortion advocates were solidly behind Bush, feeling McCain's stance on the issue just too inchoate. Given the heavy media advertising from the Christian Right, and McCain's subsequent response, a poll taken five days before showed that almost all registered voters had seen or heard political advertisements for one of the Republican candidates (see table 3). McCain did get some support from Gary Bauer, one anti-abortion and Religious Right leader. Bauer, after dropping out of the race for the nomination, campaigned actively for McCain in South Carolina. At Furman University Bauer said, "I know that when John was sitting around in that POW camp he was not thinking about the wealth of America or the power

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<sup>41</sup>Dan Balz, "Bush, McCain Make Last Appeals in South Carolina," *The Washington Post*, 19 February 2000, sec A, p. 1.

of America. He was thinking about the moral idea of America. He wants a political system that is not moneybags democracy, but a system built on civility, decency and honor.’<sup>44</sup> As one midwestern newspaper wrote, “Bauer's move is another indication that the “pro-family movement,” as many social conservatives call it, is not politically monolithic.’<sup>45</sup> Further evidence of a theme we have seen developed throughout the history of the Religious Right. Indeed, McCain started his campaign in South Carolina by courting the Religious Right just as much as Bush did. However, these attacks and fierce competition quickly diverted his attention and he began focusing on encouraging Independents and Democrats to vote in the Republican primary. His campaign schedule is indicative of this change as he switched from stumping in rural counties to more urban and coastal districts. At this point, the Religious Right turned from McCain’s hopeful supporters to an indelible enemy. As McCain strategist John Weaver put it: “We lost the Religious Right by 57 points, proudly. They overwhelmingly turned out for [Bush]. Ralph Reed, Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell ought to be congratulated.’<sup>46</sup> A McCain spokesman was also quoted saying, “There was obviously some frustration at the level of vitriol that was leveled against the Senator” by the Religious Right.

While McCain’s strategy eventually changed the strategies of everyone, these examples show the lack of unification of the Religious Right in South Carolina and the nation; once again proving a heterogeneous characteristic that is seemingly inherent in the nature of the Religious Right. While leaders seemed to be solidly behind the Bush candidacy, many members of the Christian Right saw merits in both candidates. *The Stuart News* of Port St. Lucie, Florida conducted an unofficial poll of conservative Christians in South Carolina prior to the primary. The consensus from the poll was that the conservative Christians saw both Bush and McCain as good men. The most important component of their stance was that the Clinton-Gore era ended.

To achieve this goal it did not matter if the candidate in November was Bush or McCain. According to one person polled: “We have learned our lesson. For a conservative to win this time, there has to be one candidate we can all unite behind who can win everything non-Democratic.”<sup>47</sup> Exit polls also seemed to confirm this sentiment as 88 percent of voters claimed they were satisfied with the lot of GOP candidates and almost 60 percent believe Bush was a more viable come November.<sup>48</sup> Another respondent, Rev. Al Phillips who worked for the Bush campaign in South Carolina said, “I think whoever it is - Bush or McCain - Christian conservatives will come out and vote for him, especially if the Democratic candidate is Gore. We just don’t want anyone who is connected with the Clinton administration and its sleaze.”<sup>49</sup> Bush, perhaps keen to the anti-Clinton sentiment, ran a series of commercials delineating him as the candidate who could best end the Clinton era in Washington.<sup>50</sup> However, as usual, other members of the Religious Right were not so tolerant of both of the main Republican candidates. Pat Robertson was quoted as saying just before the primary that if McCain wins the nomination Christian conservatives would leave the GOP “in major waves.”<sup>51</sup> The inflammatory discourse and high profile of the primary was getting everyone in the state interested. According to a Roper Center poll of South Carolina residents 100 percent of respondents were following the Republican primary “very closely” or “somewhat closely.” A strong majority, 61 percent, of those were following “very closely.”<sup>52</sup>

Both Bush and McCain had backgrounds that appealed to the Religious Right. Each candidate was raised in Episcopal homes and each man switched to the Protestant church of their wives. However, Bush was the only candidate who readily classified himself as a “born-again” Christian. McCain mostly talked about leading religious services in his North Vietnamese prison

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<sup>52</sup>Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, poll for ABC/Washington Post, Storrs, CT, 8 February 2000.

camp.<sup>53</sup> Nonetheless, both candidates were not perfect specimens for the Christian Right. Although Bush maintained consistent anti-abortion rhetoric, he was not as tough on the issues as the anti-abortion groups would like. In addition, he has not overtly agreed with the idea of creationism, something most members of the Religious Right see as a fundamental tenant to their belief, not to mention his experiences as a young adult. Similarly, McCain also had a not so innocent youth, waffled on abortion and was divorced.<sup>54</sup> The integral issue separating the two, however, was abortion. Although, McCain had the support of Gary Bauer, Bush had the overwhelming support of the anti-abortion faction. The interest group saw McCain as inconsistent and not strong enough in his views on abortion. This was clearly portrayed in the exit polls from the primary. Bush won amongst voters who said abortion should never be legal or only legal in few cases; McCain won amongst those voters who believed abortion should be legal in most cases or always. However, unfortunately for McCain, pro-choice leaning voters constituted only 39 percent of the voters in the South Carolina primary.<sup>55</sup>

The general theme of moral issues was also central to the campaign in South Carolina. Exit polls show that of seven issues (world affairs, campaign finance, abortion, social security, moral values, taxes and tobacco) given to voters, moral values were the most important for a strong plurality of the voters (37 percent). Of this 37 percent of the electorate, Bush beat McCain by almost 20 points.<sup>56</sup> McCain's trademark issue, campaign finance reform, did not help him earn the support of Religious Right leaders. The majority of groups that make up the Religious Right rely heavily on using their money to gain access to political leaders. As William Moore, a political scientist at the College of Charleston said, "For the right-to-life groups,

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<sup>55</sup>CNN, <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2000/primaries/SC/poll.rep.html>, visited 30 November 2002.

McCain's opposition to soft money would impact their ability to affect the outcome of elections" and this is the primary reason for the massive media blitz against McCain.<sup>57</sup>

In the end, Bush won South Carolina with 53 percent of the vote to John McCain's 42 percent (see table 4).<sup>58</sup> Exit poll analysis shows that Religious Right voters constituted 34 percent of the electorate. This percentage voted overwhelmingly for Bush at 68 percent, with 24 percent going to McCain and 8 percent to Keyes. If we remove all Religious Right voters, McCain would have won the election with 52 percent to Bush's 46 percent.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, can it be said that the Christian Right was the reason George Bush won in South Carolina? Most Religious Right voters also identify themselves as a member of the Republican Party. Therefore, if we erase the Religious Right from the campaign, most members would vote in a similar fashion to those identifying themselves with the GOP. Amongst those voters, Bush earned 69 percent to McCain's 26 percent. Assuming the above, it makes sense that the overall statistics of GOP voters are similar to those of Religious Right voters (see table 5). Nevertheless, the Religious Right is very good at getting people to vote that normally would not. Therefore, one must assume that many of the primary voters were encouraged to vote for Bush in the primary. Given the decisive victory by Bush, however, it is unlikely the Religious Right motivated that many voters who were not going to vote anyway.

Another possibility is that Bush's affiliation with the Religious Right affected whom people voted for. This is more difficult to prove, but there is some evidence to show that this affiliation is only of marginal consequence. In 1994, at the height of Christian Right success and activity, a poll was taken amongst registered voters in South Carolina. This poll indicated that if a candidate was affiliated with the Christian Coalition (not the Religious Right as a whole) 25

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<sup>57</sup>David Gibson 19 February 2000, D6.

percent would be more likely to vote for them, 21 percent would be less likely and 54 percent said it would have no effect or did not know.<sup>60</sup> According to these numbers, the link with the Christian Coalition in South Carolina would not statistically gain many more votes than it would lose votes. Perhaps, if this poll was taken amongst only Republicans, the numbers would be different; however, since the GOP primary in South Carolina is open to all registered voters, these numbers most parallel our situation in 2000. It is clear that Religious Right support for Bush was strong and active, but there is no evidence showing it was the sole reason for his victory in South Carolina. Simply put, Bush was seen by South Carolina as the better true Republican. McCain alienated many mainstream GOP members by calling out to Independents and Democrats to help him win the primary. The *Post and Courier* of South Carolina wrote, “By openly calling to be rescued by Democrats and Independents, McCain conceded the Republican vote to Bush.”<sup>61</sup> Of course the Religious Right may have been the impetus for this plea from McCain. If their support had been less publicly obvious, McCain may have played less to the Democrats and Independents and continued to court the traditional GOP vote.

## **Conclusion**

In 2000, the Religious Right in South Carolina proved that their movement was far from dead. Their constituency was galvanized by the candidacy of George W. Bush, a born-again Protestant from Crawford, Texas. Despite the usual bickering and divisive nature of the Religious Right, most state leaders gave their undisputed support to Bush. This trend is contrary to Christian Right history in South Carolina. However, their overt support, while beneficial to Bush’s impressive South Carolina victory, was not alone responsible for his win. The only reason the primary was a close at is was, is because of the porous nature of the open primary,

allowing all registered voters to vote in the Republican election. McCain truly alienated the Republican base by appealing to Independents and Democrats to participate in the Republican primary.

The Christian Right received many benefits because of their strong support for Bush, whether their actions were necessary to the Bush victory or not. Primarily, they pushed Bush further to the right than he had planned to go. In addition, it probably helped secure them a key cabinet post, a goal that came to fruition when Bush nominated John Ashcroft for Attorney General of the United States. Therefore, while the Religious Right greatly influenced the consequences and *modus operandi* of the two campaigns in South Carolina, their existence, by no means, was the only reason Bush won the election.