

# STANDING UP FOR CONSERVATIVE BELIEFS

SCOTT FITZGERALD

**I**s Conservatism out of gas? In a word: NO!

In the wake of a very tough election cycle for conservatives, both here in Wisconsin and throughout the country, it's natural to be disappointed and apprehensive about the future of the conservative movement.

After Wisconsin Republicans suffered some devastating losses in 2006 I asked our advisors, strategists, and pollsters exactly what happened. All of them responded with a simple answer of "Voters were sending a message to President Bush on the Iraq War." Polls done after the election show that 31 percent of voters went to the polls to send the President a message; compare that to the 21 percent of voters in 1994 who said they used their vote to send President Clinton a message in a year where Republicans were swept to power throughout the country.

While the war in Iraq is the easy answer to why we suffered losses, I think we need to also address why Wisconsin Republicans could not overcome or perform better in this negative environment. First, our Republican message simply was not carried forward to the voters by both legislators and candidates. During the legislative session before the elections, we had

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a difficult time arriving at an agreement on what we stood for and as a result did not have a coherent message to deliver to the voters.

None of our candidates lost their elections because they were too conservative, opposed tax increases, or stood up for family values. They lost because of the problems in Washington, including runaway spending by Republican

majorities, and a failure on the part of Wisconsin Republicans to effectively communicate our message to the voters. Conservatives should know that this election was not a repudiation of our beliefs, but rather was a result of our inability to clearly stand on those beliefs.

Despite the setbacks of 2006, there are reasons for optimism.

J.B. Van Hollen, running as an unabashed pro-life, pro-family conservative was elected Attorney General—the only statewide GOP challenger in the country to win in 2006.

Mark Green received more votes for governor than any challenger in Wisconsin history. He received the fifth highest vote total among

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*Scott Fitzgerald (R) represents the 13th Wisconsin Senate District in Juneau.*

every Wisconsin gubernatorial candidate in our state's history and built a grassroots army the likes of which Wisconsin had never seen before. The Green Team of volunteers and activists will be the backbone of future conservative campaigns in our state.

While our grassroots team remains strong and energized, we also must regain control of the public debate. The Democrats in Madison have helped our cause by giving us a golden opportunity to seize the high ground on pocketbook issues like taxes and spending.

The Democrat budget proposal raises taxes and fees by almost \$3 billion. They thought they could sneak this massive tax hike past the public by focusing their rhetoric on all the "great" new programs they'd create after taking more money from your pocket. In years past this strategy might have worked, but this time around, they had a surprise waiting for them.

Conservative Republicans united immediately and convincingly with a simple message—Wisconsin's middle-class families can't afford a \$3 billion tax hike.

We pointed out that under their budget, if you own a car, if you own a home, if you rent an apartment, if you get sick, if you live in a nursing home, if you listen to music, if you use tobacco products, if you buy a house, if you sell a house, if you're born, if you die, if you visit Milwaukee, if you buy a gun, if you go to a dry cleaner, if you send an electronic greeting card, if you pay child support, if you receive child support . . . the Democrats want to raise your taxes. They even want you to have to pay a tax when you pay your taxes.

The media, to their credit, seized on the back-breaking level of tax hikes in this budget and the debate shifted quickly from being focused on the merits of new government programs proposed by the Democrats to one cen-

tered on the tax burden in Wisconsin, and whether middle-class families can afford, the Democrat's budget proposal.

This is a debate conservatives will win every time.

The key to a return to success at the ballot box for conservatives is making the public debate about the fundamental bedrock ideas we all believe in—lower taxes, less government, reining in spending, reforming government, and economic freedom.

We've started that process by changing the debate on the state budget and highlighting the Democrats' failure to support important government reforms such as an end to the Frankenstein Veto and the elimination of sick leave benefits for elected officials.

Senate Republicans will continue this effort by advocating for the most conservative agenda we've put together since I was first elected in 1994. Our agenda focuses on income tax cuts, a real property tax freeze, an end to credit card budgeting and runaway spending programs, and health care reforms that empower families and markets, not bureaucrats and government programs.

Conservatives may be down, but we're far from out. Our ideas remain popular and our message remains the proven winning formula, both in Wisconsin and nationwide.

Our challenge is to regain the credibility Republicans have lost in recent years and successfully rebrand ourselves as the party of lower taxes, economic freedom, and opportunity.

With a strong conservative agenda, a statewide grassroots network that remains energized and committed to getting conservatives elected, and a Democratic party lurching ever further to the left, we are well on our way to meeting that challenge.