

VIRGINIA AND TOM DAVIS' PLAN TO SAVE THE GOP BRAND

DHInMI is right. Tom Davis' memo about how to save the Republican brand is worthy reading—if only because one of the few Republicans who believes in gravity penned it.

To me, the most interesting passage is where Davis reviews the reasons why Republican fundraising sucks.

(1) Abandonment of many traditional GOP interest groups or a hedge strategy to “buy in” on a perceived longer term Democratic majority. For example, Pharma, UPS, government contractors and FED Ex are now giving strategically to Democrats for “protection money”.

(2) GOP leaders turned lobbyists, from Bob Livingston to JC Watts, are giving Blue. Are there any Democratic lobbyists returning the favor?

(Is anyone weeping “K Street Project” tears right now? I guess it’s not enough to ensure all the lobbyists are Republicans, now, is it?)

(3) Net roots and money from the internet have swelled Democratic coffers, from the Obama campaign, to their Red to Blue programs, giving Democrats huge fundraising advantages across the board. Much of this is fueled by a strong Democratic desire to seize power after eight years of Bush and Cheney, coupled with a strong disappointment among grass roots Republicans at the party’s performance in office. Governance is a tough business requiring tough choices and holding together coalitions of economic and social conservatives is

difficult to sustain.

Thank you Tom. Though there are bigger reasons why you Republicans suck at the netroots. First, transparency kills Republicans in the same way sunlight kills vampires. That, and dirty fucking hippies scare you Republicans—in fact, anything that operates on any but a top-down hierarchy. So the Republican Party is just constitutionally inappropriate for the netroots. But thanks for the nod of recognition.

Immigration pits our business wing against our grass roots wing. The War has turned many educated, affluent Republicans away. Spending priorities, scandals, gas prices and home value declines leave little for Republicans to be enthused over, particularly when our ability to draw issue lines and force choices by Democrats is frustrated by House Rules, inarticulate and unfocused national leadership and finger pointing.

Davis could have written a whole memo about these few subjects, starting with the recognition that you can oppose undocumented workers being hired to bring down wages, but focus on prosecuting employers, not brown people. Given that it's not even in the realm of imagination for Davis, I guess he's just got a paradigmatic inability to understand the issues that—even he says—could flip this election. And that's way before we get to the war, which he considers a "cultural" issue and only a cultural issue.

4) Incumbent giving was a Republican invention from 1994 to 2004. We outraised Democrats because we were more committed to keeping our majority and the attendant perks of leadership. But guess what? We are being badly outraised by Democratic members' contributions.

Democrats are giving more because they

like their majority status; they want to keep it. Republicans don't think they can win this time. Moreover, most Democratic members do not have re-elections that require they spend their money on themselves – particularly senior members on A committees. Republican incumbents are nervous and don't want to give away their money if they may need it, in October.

Democrats are finding it easier to raise money. Republicans are finding it tougher to raise money in the minority. And, Democrats punish and reward party contributors. Republicans haven't done so in the past and do not have the perks and appointments they could disburse that they had when they were in the majority.

The GOP ranks have started to splinter into an "everyman for himself" psychology. This is not conducive to the teamwork necessary to close the financial gap.

(5) Labor unions, long the mainstay of the Democratic Party have gone even deeper into their members' pockets to ensure Democratic majorities. Not resting on their laurels, labor has upped the ante to Democrats and the leadership has delivered. From CardCheck, to Columbia Trade, Democrats have delivered and labor has responded, with cash, enhanced 527s and ground troops. The Democratic financial advantage has been amplified with increased money from Labor. Ironically, the Democrats are not paying any price with Business, as Business PACs have given more to Democrats, not less.

There's an implicit recognition that Democrats have delivered on issues important to labor—and that ties directly to union enthusiasm for

elections. But again, since Davis doesn't believe that union members might actually support things like forming unions, he doesn't get the connection.

Liberal and Democratic use of the internet has far outperformed conservative and Republican deployment of the same. Failure to invest in on-line funding over the last two cycles has put the GOP behind the technology eight ball. This doesn't even address the numerous 527s dominated by the left.

The whole netroots phenom seems to bug Davis. Good.

Now, Davis does say a few things that are important for Congressional Democrats to hear. We haven't accomplished any grandiose agenda. On a number of key issues—like healthcare—we haven't really started advocating for real promises rather than opposing Bush's Medicare giveaway to Pharma or trying to ensure children get healthcare. Even if it's only rhetorical, we need to be better about advocating our own agenda.

One area where I believe this is particularly important is on terrorism. Tom Davis thinks—even now—that FISA is a winning issue—largely because Democrats haven't noted that Bush and the Republicans are still falling woefully short on a number of nonsense things to keep the US safe. We need to keep pushing for the things that will keep us safe, beyond the 9/11 Commission recommendations we championed. For example, we ought to talk about inspecting more cargo containers. The reasons we're not, after all, is because it'd hurt WalMart, though it actually might create some American jobs. So we need to be sure to be advocating for our policies, even if they won't get passed so long as Joe Lieberman can flip a vote.

Finally, though, consider the source. Yes, Tom Davis is intelligent. Yes, unlike many

Republicans, he does believe in gravity and other reality-based concepts.

But Tom Davis is retiring this year because he's not sure he can win his increasingly Democratic district comprising a bunch of affluent VA suburbs of DC, along with some rural horse country. Mind you, his is not one of the areas he lists as urban or "granola belt," though big parts are the inner circles of suburbs he admits Democrats are solidly winning. But his district also encompasses a whole lot of Pentagon employees, CIA employees, defense contractors. And in spite of the fact that he includes military veterans in his description of the GOP base,

So let's focus on shoring up our base: social conservatives, lunch bucket blue collar whites, Hispanics (they are in play for McCain), and military veterans.

...with his very retirement, he's admitting that veterans—at least those still tied into government—aren't necessarily the GOP base anymore (and particularly not after it takes Obama to make sure veterans with PTSD get diagnosed properly—isn't Davis on an Oversight Committee of some sort?).

And that's just Davis, who is, admittedly, in an increasingly tough VA district. But the whole state of VA (well, except for the Appalachian counties) went in big numbers for Obama this year, even while McCain was worried about depriving Huckabee of a moral victory. Worse for Davis, no one in their right mind thinks the GOP will retain Senator John Warner's seat this year, not with Mark Warner in the race.

Tom Davis has a bunch of ideas. But his retirement, by itself, suggests they won't even work for a reddish-purple state like VA.