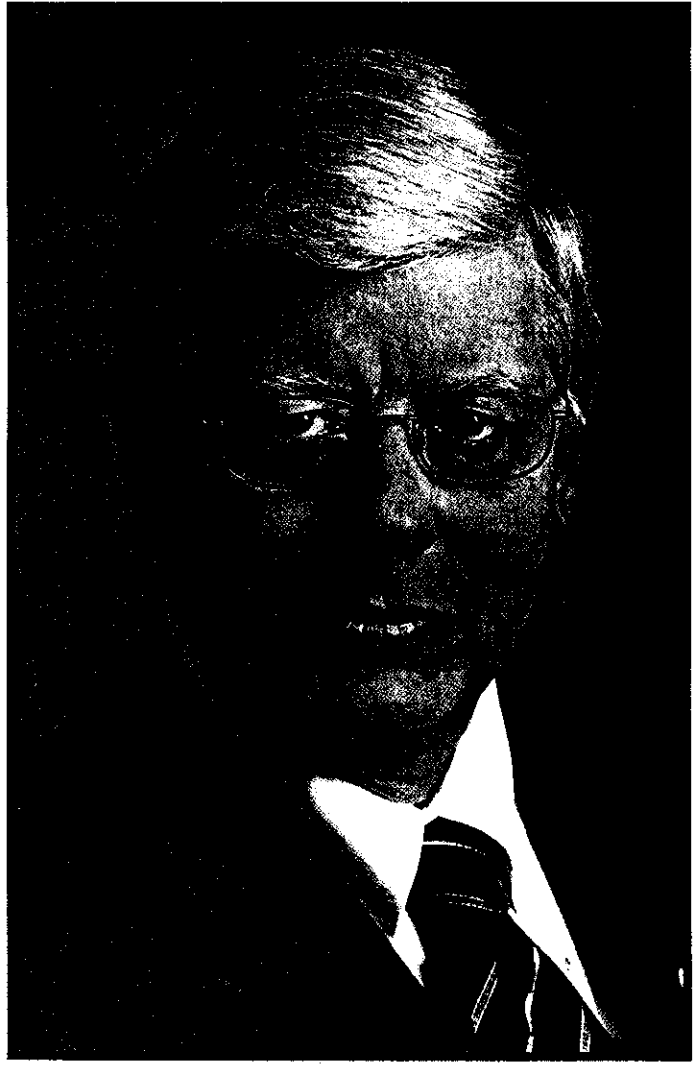


MY

CONVERSATION

WITH DAVID KEENE



ESSENTIAL ANALYSIS ALERT! I have expanded this portion of my newsletter to accommodate this not-to-be-missed interview with the very able chairman of the American Conservative Union, whose 36th Annual conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) will be held on Feb. 26-28 in Washington, DC (www.cpac.org): www.Conservative.org

RUSH: I was trying to think of who to talk to about the election, the aftermath and the future, and you're the first name that came to mind, so I really appreciate your making time here. What do you think about what happened and where we go? What explains where we are? I mean, we lost the tax-cut issue! How in the world does that happen?

KEENE: Well, we did it; we worked at it. We managed, over the course of the last few years, to pretty much destroy the Republican brand — so that we were viewed as big-government types who were for spending. Obama and his people talk about how this was a transformational election and the whole country's changed. E.J. Dionne is writing that it's no longer a right-of-center country, it's a left-of-center country and that Obama needs to govern that way. But during the campaign, they knew better. Look at the ads and the message delivered in the battleground states: "John McCain wants to tax your health care; Barack Obama wants to cut your taxes. Barack Obama is against a national health care program. He's in favor of charter schools." He ran a campaign which recognized that this country is what it has been for the last couple of decades: just right-of-center — despite what he may say now.

During the campaign, Obama said that as a law professor he believed in the individual right to keep and bear arms, as the Supreme Court eventually found in the *Heller* decision. At one point, when he was being criticized on Second Amendment issues, he said, look, even if I did want to take your guns, I'll never have the votes to do it, so it's not a relevant issue. But in the final two days of the campaign, he told an NPR reporter that he would like a federal law doing away with concealed-carry laws, which are now on the books in 48 states. And within a couple of days the transition website carried a list of things he wants to do on Second Amendment issues: bring back the Clinton assault weapons ban, the gun-show loophole question, and a whole series of things out of the anti-gun crowd's dream book.

So he and his managers recognized during the campaign that they were running in the kind of country that you and I like, rather than the kind of country they'd like it to be. But now they're arguing that the outcome of the election was a recognition that the country has changed in many significant ways, and that therefore they have a mandate to govern from the left, which they don't have.

What happened was that the American people were fed up with the performance of Republicans in office. The Republicans in office had not only proven themselves time and again to be less competent than they had been expected to be, but had only given lip service to the kinds of issues that Americans care about, and the kinds of values they said they represent. So by the time we got to 2008, aside from the economic crisis, you had a public saying, "Why should we continue these people in power?" And they were ready to fire the Republicans.

Rush, a year ago I said this race was very much like the 1980 race, but this time Obama was Reagan. In 1980, the public was desperate to get rid of Jimmy Carter, desperate to fire the Democrats. Still, until October, Carter ran ahead of Reagan, because voters weren't sure they could risk a Reagan Presidency. By October they decided they could, and we saw the Reagan landslide. What they wanted to do they did; they fired the guys they didn't like. And this time they did exactly the same thing. The problem, though, is that sometimes, when you fire somebody because you don't like him, the guy you get to replace him

is not what you were looking for. And that may be what happened this time.

RUSH: If you're right, what we have here is a fraudulent campaign. Because you and I both know that Obama is indeed a left-leaner, leftist, whatever term you want to use, and we all know that's going to be the agenda he tries. I saw that website of his, change.gov, and I spent a lot of time on my program reading from it, and I'm not at all surprised they scrubbed it. They don't want people to know what's coming.

KEENE: Of course not.

RUSH: They've got eagerness, with Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid, to help push this. He's going to try to do all these things he was talking about, raising taxes on the rich, "spread the wealth around," which he let slip in that conversation with the plumber. I don't know what percentage of the people that voted for him actually bought into this messianic, charismatic demagogue cult-type thing, who just love him so much that he cannot do any wrong in their view.

KEENE: There are a lot of them. On Wednesday after the election I did an NPR program, and one of the people who called in said, "I'm so elated I think now we can cure cancer." I said, "I think your expectations might be a little high here." But they really are willing to follow him anywhere. My concern is that he will try to tie these people together, utilizing the internet and all the far-left-wing infrastructure that went into the campaign, so that he can use them as a mass pressure group as he moves forward.



have the economic tools now. Thanks to the bailout legislation that Paulson and the Bush Administration sent to the Hill, they have basically the unfettered power to pick winners and losers — it goes beyond banks — and that can be used to steer support from the financial community and from the Fortune 500 as time goes on. If they could shut down discussion via talk radio, if they could increase pressure on people not to say things that they consider politically incorrect, or discuss issues that they don't think ought to be discussed, if they can increase their financial capability, both through card-check and by additional funding of non-government institutions that are friendly to them, like ACORN, and if they can use the Justice Department in the way that, for example, Mike Barone suggested they might in his pre-election column, "The Coming Obama Thugocracy," you're facing a very serious situation.

The optimistic view, however, is that there is one thing that winning politicians always do wrong. They assume that everybody who voted for them, voted for them for the reasons the politicians wanted them to vote for them. You remember that Bill Clinton gave one speech in which he mentioned health care reform, and decided that he had a mandate to reform the health care system in the way he and his wife wanted it reformed. That was an overreach, because that's not why people voted for him. The

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The most important thing I think his folks have in mind is changing the shape of the playing field. The left has concluded, over time, that they can't really win the battle of ideas, that they can't debate tax policy and economic policy and come out a winner, at least not often enough to make it worthwhile. As a consequence I think they want to ignore that to the extent that they can. You'll recall that during the election, when the court case in Chicago found that the Annenberg Challenge papers would be released, the Obama campaign almost closed down a respected radio talk show on WGN. The instructions to the people were to call in and demand that this not be discussed. I don't think they find anything wrong, in their own minds, with closing down their opposition. So I think you're going to see an early push on structural reforms, for example, card-check, eliminating the secret ballot for union workers, which Obama has promised in the first 100 days. This would give him incredible financial resources by forcing people into labor organizations. I think they are going to move on the Fairness Doctrine or something similar, to try and close down a lot of talk radio. As you know, Charlie Schumer's been talking about utilizing the sections of the law that are used to go after obscenity, because in the same way people think pornographers are obscene, he thinks Rush Limbaugh is obscene. Which begs the question of what we think of him.

RUSH: Exactly.

KEENE: [LAUGHTER] But they're going to try to do those things, I think. And unfortunately, they have been enabled by the Bush Administration and by many conservatives in recent months. They

Obama people now think that the American public wants Obama to do everything that Obama publicly or privately wants to do. When politicians conclude those things, they almost invariably overreach. And when they overreach, the pendulum begins to swing the other way, the opposition forms, and that's the balance weight in our system.

I think these people will overreach relatively quickly. The question is, will conservatives be able to respond effectively enough during that period to stop them, before it's too late to stop them, or before the hill that we have to climb becomes so much higher because of the structural changes that they make? That question remains to be answered, because we've got a lot of problems of our own that have to be fixed.

RUSH: Well, let's get to those in just a second, but let me ask you to answer your own question: Will conservatives be strong enough, have enough fortitude to oppose these things when Obama overreaches? What about the racial factor? David Gergen said the other night, directly warning people like me, "I'd be very, very careful of being critical at this time, in the first 100 days, of the first black President..." It's a way to try to intimidate people on our side to shut up.

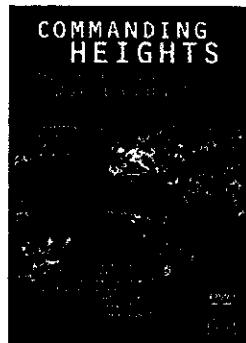
KEENE: Some people will be intimidated, and some people will shut up. That's one of the reasons it's being played the way it is. Of course, this wasn't a racial election until after the votes were counted. Both sides consciously stayed away from racial questions during the campaign itself. I think the race issue helped Obama, and the

election returns and data demonstrate that. But if in fact we have achieved, or are on the way to achieving what Obama claims he wants, a post-racial society, then those who disagree with him have an obligation to stand up to him, in spite of the fact that he happens to be black. We have an obligation, if in fact we believe in a non-racial society, to call the issues as we see them, and not hold our fire simply because of race. We have to look at the issues and we have to say, this is what I believe, that's what he believes, and I'm standing on my beliefs and I'm not going to compromise them simply because of his race.

RUSH: Exactly. It has to stay on ideas, but I guarantee you that there already are people who have been chilled into shutting up. Our side particularly is scared to death of being called racists.

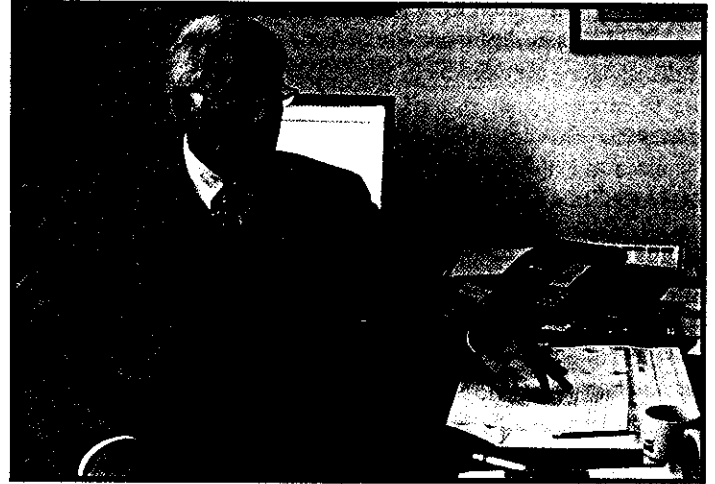
KEENE: And they'll use that. Some people won't say anything because they're afraid of being called racists, but you know, you can overuse that pretty fast. If our people stick to the issues and the values that Americans share, and they fight him on those bases when he's wrong, then I don't think that's going to be a long-term problem.

RUSH: I hope you're right. There has been, in addition to everything else you talked about in terms of their agenda, a successful stealth buildup. They have far leftists in the government infrastructure that are beyond elections. You mentioned the millions of agitators that are going to make up his donor list and his internet list, but look at all of the appointments they've succeeded in making over the years in the bureaucracy,



KEENE: Beginning in January, when the new Congress comes in and tries to do some of these things, we have to be ready to fight. Let's take the Fairness Doctrine or the attempt to restrict the ability of talk radio to be used as a communications medium. Unfortunately, that doesn't require legislation, as you know. There's only one way to defeat it, and that's the kind of public uproar and uprising that defeated the immigration bill.

No matter who's elected to public office, and no matter who's in the Senate or who's in the House, they have one eye on the public, and in this instance we have fairness on our side, which we don't always have, in terms of the public mind. Just in today's newspaper, Nat Hentoff, one of the few people who actually believes in the First Amendment, was warning about the coming attempt to close down discussion by the Obama people.



"We now have a Senate in which Teddy Kennedy is a

from the CIA to the State Department to the Judiciary, you name it.

KEENE: Consider this, Rush. Just prior to the election, the contributions made by employees of various branches of the government were made public. The only agency in which employees contributed a slight majority of money to John McCain was the Department of Defense. All the other agencies favored Obama. But do you know which agency was the most pro-Obama in the entire government, by a factor of several times? The Department of Justice. In the civil rights division, under the top person, the next three people had all maxed out to Obama. The head of the office charged with voter integrity issues had maxed out to Obama. Is it any wonder that most of the prosecutions in the public integrity area, even during a Republican Administration, were Republicans? And while Ted Stevens of Alaska was convicted just before he was up for election, that William Jefferson is still running around?

You're absolutely right, the permanent government is heavily Democratic and heavily liberal. I was told a couple of months ago that Bush appointees were informed by the White House that they should not expect to be careered into this government, because that's not the way the Bush Administration operates; when he leaves, they leave. Which is very high-sounding [LAUGHS], but merely means you're abandoning more of the permanent government to the opposition. And the opposition is there to take it, to burrow in, to stay and to use it.

RUSH: So they are fixing the game. What can be done about it?

I think it was Newt Gingrich who said some years ago, if you have an 80 percent issue, you ought to stand next to it. If their overreach is on questions of freedom of speech or the secret ballot — and after all, card-check is an 80 percent issue — these are issues that we can build around and mobilize around. And if a new Administration comes in with all these heightened expectations, overreaches and creates a push-back from the public that stops it on a major question, from that point on that Administration is going to be a lot more cautious. So from a purely political standpoint, we need to pick out one or two of these things that we know they're going to try and we need to stop them. And I can't think of two issues where we have the high ground morally, politically, and the ability to organize around, better than the Fairness Doctrine and card-check.

You know, it's amazing. We're now living in a country where we have a Senate in which Teddy Kennedy is a moderate. We're living in a country where people are so concerned about the overreach on the left that George McGovern is doing ads warning the American public that his Democratic friends are trying to take away the workers' right to a secret ballot. There's been a big change in the last decade or so. Barack Obama was the most liberal Senator, and Joe Biden was the third most liberal Senator; Teddy Kennedy and the people we've always considered to be hard left were way down that list. That's how much the Democratic Party has changed, and that's what we have to be prepared to fight.

RUSH: Well, how did that happen? We had Bush in the ... well, I'm

answering my own question. Never mind. [LAUGHTER] Really, when you're absent conservative electoral leadership, everybody's free to wander off the reservation and try to be the smartest guy in the room, which is really the next thing I want to ask you about. In this year's CPAC promo you write: "Liberals will say that this election signaled the end of the conservative era." Yes, they are saying that. The problem is, way too many people ostensibly on our side are saying the same thing.

KEENE: That's correct.

RUSH: "The era of Reagan is over." I never hear the left, David, say, "The era of FDR is over."

KEENE: That's right, because in their minds it isn't.

RUSH: This frosts me. We haven't tried Reaganism in 20 years. There's going to be a battle in our own movement.

KEENE: A lot of the people who make up this generation of conservatism don't get it. When the movement began in the 50s and 60s, when I was in college, all of the conservatives in America probably could meet in the proverbial phone booth. We couldn't win public office in those days, and there was a good side to that. We sat around, we discussed ideas, we read. Every six weeks or so I had to go from Wisconsin up to Woodstock, New York, to spend the weekend with Frank Meyer, who drilled into my head: what it is we are here to accomplish; what it is we're here to believe in. He gave me assigned reading, and it was tough, but by the time it was over, you had a movement of people with a set of beliefs. We knew what the free market was, we knew what individual freedom meant, we knew what the Founders had been about, and we went forward, not because we admired this politician or that politician, but because of the ideas.

When I talk to young conservatives I always urge that they read Daniel Yergin's book, *The Commanding Heights*, which I'm sure

virtually all conservatives from the beginning have believed in: that we live in a dangerous world, and that the United States needs to be strong to protect her interests and her citizenry in that world. That the mainspring of human progress is made up of free markets and free people. And they believe in the structure of the Constitution, and in the values of the Founding Fathers, and in the values that create strong families and the like. That's always been the vital mix.

Yet in recent years we've had people saying, "This stuff about smaller government is just passé. We live in a more complicated world than that." A few years ago we had a symposium at Princeton on the history, the present, and the future of American conservatism, and invited David Brooks to speak on the future. M. Stanton Evans, who you know, stood up at the end and said, "David, that was a very intelligent speech. The problem is, I think I heard it before. Nelson Rockefeller delivered it in the 1960s."

RUSH: Exactly right.

KEENE: There isn't any difference in the arguments going on now than were going on then. And that has to be fought out. We need a re-grounding. The reason these people are wandering all over the place is because they don't know where they're supposed to be in many cases.

RUSH: But they think they do. This is what troubles me. These are the people who think they're the smartest in the room, that they are the most enlightened, and they're trying to provide a new definition. I don't know what their motivation is. It clearly isn't winning, because they got everything they wanted in this last campaign, and we saw what happened. Now, some people say, "Rush, you shouldn't worry about their motivation, they just need to be shelved and defeated."

moderate." — DAVID KEENE

you've read. He talks about the triumph of the market in politics. The 50s and 60s, particularly the 50s, were the height of collectivist thinking. He goes through the founding of the Mont Pelerin Society, the Philadelphia Society, Milton Friedman, and *National Review*. He concludes that successful political movements begin as movements based on ideas and on values, and that political success follows the dissemination of those ideas and those values. At that point, there's another problem. You know you're about to succeed politically when the rats start to join the ship. And pretty soon the ship gets taken over by the rats. All of a sudden, many of the people who are your friends and your allies don't know why they're there.

When we came to town in 1980 with Reagan, there were a lot of young people who, when asked, "Are you a conservative?" said, "Yes." Why? "I love Ronald Reagan." That's fine. That's not why you should be a conservative. Later we had people who said, "I'm a conservative because I love Newt Gingrich." And then we had people who said, "I'm a conservative because I love George W. Bush." You take away those people, and they're lost. Or they decide that conservatism is whatever these leaders say it is, because they don't have the grounding in the ideas, and there isn't the discussion of the ideas so important to the formation of the movement.

One of the things that conservatives have to do is spend time re-focusing on what it is that's important. As you know, we have all kinds of different offshoots of conservatism. That's always been true; it's always been a coalition. But there are certain things that



KEENE: But you do have to worry about their motivation, because there will be others coming along, doing the same thing.

RUSH: I don't want to get into names here — you've mentioned one, but we both know who we're talking about. Are these people what you would refer to as the rats who came onboard late? Who really weren't grounded in the ideas, they were just attracted to the movement as a political fad, "Hey, this is hip, this is winning"? And now they think they've evolved beyond it? I think they look at the conservative movement as dominated by NASCAR people and proliferators and I think they're embarrassed by it.

KEENE: You saw this most clearly in the last few weeks, in this