

Grand New Ideas Are GOP's Only Hope

By Kasey S. Pipes

In fall 2005, the Republican Party experienced a long, sleepless night. Concerned with Iraq, confounded by Katrina and cast into despair by Harriet Miers, party activists worried about the party's future.

During this dusk, Ross Douthat and Reihan Salam took to the pages of *The Weekly Standard* to urge Republicans to embrace the first light of a new era. How? By winning back working-class voters, or "Sam's Club Republicans," to use Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty's phrase. In Washington, the article was widely read and well-regarded. The incomparable Michael Barone was so impressed he suggested that "numerous copies get over to the White House."

Now, three years later, Douthat and Salam, both writers at *The Atlantic*, have expanded their article into a book, "Grand New Party: How the Republicans Can Win the Working Class and Save the American Dream." They define working-class voters as "the non-college-educated voters who make up roughly half of the American electorate" and describe them as the swing voters.

The book is best understood as a rebuttal to Thomas Frank's best-selling book "What's the Matter With Kansas?" Frank hypothesized that while the majority of working-class voters care most about economics, they are tricked into voting Republican by faux cultural issues such as abortion, crime and traditional marriage.

Douthat and Salam disagree. They believe working-class voters understand a profound truth that eludes the sophisticated Frank: Cultural and economic issues are related. Ironically, it was a liberal, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who famously articulated the conservative principle that poverty does not create broken families, but broken families create poverty. Douthat and Salam take this a step further and show that working-class voters appreciate traditional values because of the impact on their economic well-being. Marriage may be a trivial issue to Frank, but it's an economic issue to the working class.

For example, higher divorce rates are a proud legacy of the sexual revolution, but divorce costs money and hurts the working class more than the upper class. Since "family stability is a prerequisite for financial stability," the authors write, "working-class voters are less likely to benefit from sexual freedom and more likely to suffer from its side effects."

The book ends with policy proposals. Having delved into the thicket of working-class issues, history and demographics, Douthat and Salam seek a path forward by offering a vast array of solutions. Some are new. Others are recycled. But all are designed to move the GOP away from libertarianism and toward limited government that helps the working class.

Indeed, they argue, "the working class wants, and needs, more from public policy than simply to be left alone." So they propose to help people economically and culturally, to address where they work and how they live.

To lessen economic instability and anxiety, the authors urge tax cuts. Since many working-class voters pay more in payroll taxes than in income taxes, the authors suggest leaving income taxes alone and reducing payroll taxes.

To improve health care, they propose allowing families to set aside 15 percent of their income for Health Savings Accounts. If their annual health care costs exceeded this amount, the government would step in. Conversely, if money remained in their account at year's end, families would keep it. This would reduce the primary problem with health care today: the market distortion created by people receiving health care through third-party insurance that drives up costs.

To enhance education, they propose sending money not to school districts but to school principals to spend as they see fit.

To strengthen families, they borrow from Ramesh Ponnuru's revenue-neutral tax reform plan that would dramatically increase the child tax credit.

They also have plans on sprawl, crime, transportation and agriculture. Douthat and Salam seem to offer something for everything.

Unfortunately, many of these proposals seem too grand to be enacted or too small to make a difference.

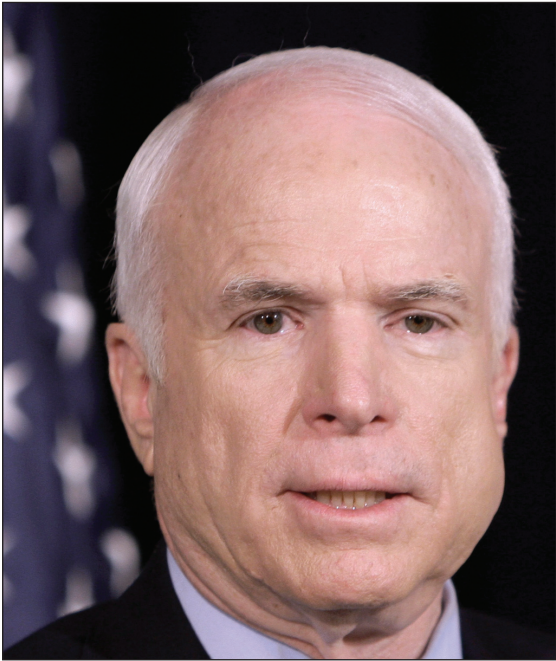
Reducing payroll taxes, for example, likely will incur the wrath of angry senior groups arguing that it will reduce Medicare and Social Security funds. On the other hand, ideas such as creating more summer programs for kids sound a lot like the famous microagendas created by Dick Morris in the 1990s. Those Clinton proposals (i.e., school uniforms for kids, V-chips for parents) confused governing with campaigning. They garnered headlines, but they made little difference.

In short, many of the Douthat-Salam proposals that could help can't pass, and many that could pass can't help.

Still, the authors raise many important questions and offer more than a few interesting solutions. With Barack Obama poised to win the White House, Republicans need to rethink, recast and repack-age their ideas to meet working-class voters' needs.

"Grand New Party" provides a great starting point. John McCain should pick up a copy.

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Candidates **Barack Obama** (left) and **John McCain** might want to ask their prospective VP choices the below questions. AP PHOTOS

How to Vet Your Veep

By Jonathan Leigh Solomon

The two presumptive nominees are considering their picks for veep. There are search committees, week-ends at the ranch, leaking of short lists By the time it's all over, Craigslist will have been cased. But whom to choose? It's personal, it's political, it's critical, and it's irreversible. So, who? Simple. Just like any-time you have a difficult decision to make, get out a sheet of paper, put the pluses on one side and the minuses on the other, and tally it up. Here it is: Jonathan Leigh Solomon's Foolproof "I Am the Decider" Veep Chooser.

What You Do Want to Hear From Your Prospective Choice All answers worth +1 point		What You Don't Want to Hear From Your Prospective Choice All answers worth -1 point	
I met my wife in college. Would you like to see pictures of us at our wedding?		I met my wife at a sit-in at the Pentagon. Would you like to see pictures of us with Jane Fonda?	
I have never held a job lobbying for a company offering subprime mortgages.		I'm not exactly sure what a subprime mortgage is.	
If you put me on the ticket, you will get an immediate bump in the polls.		If you put me on the ticket, video of me on YouTube using a racial slur will immediately get a lot more hits.	
I don't have a reputation for being a hothead.		I am not a hothead, and anyone who says I am is an a----- f---!	
I have never had a homosexual affair.		I am a proud gay American, and I plan to announce that I am if it ever gets out that I pleaded no contest to doing something I wasn't doing, in what I didn't even realize was a men's room.	
Neither I nor my spouse has any "questionable" business associates.		Most of the guys at the social club know me as "Knuckles."	
I have no past history of illegal drug use.		Chances are I've never done drugs, but to be honest, dude, the '70s are mostly a blur.	
My family and I attend church every Sunday, and our pastor has never been involved in any sort of controversy.		My family and I belong to a coven.	
I am the author of a best-selling book containing inspirational stories about everyday Americans.		I meet everyday Americans when I'm at Bund meetings.	
I have never used PAC money to pay for my campaigns.		I have used PAC money to pay off my markers at the Bellagio.	
While I was governor, I cut taxes while reducing our state's deficit.		While I was governor, I cut out of the office every afternoon to see my therapist.	
As a result of my time as a U.S. ambassador, I have an extensive knowledge of Middle East policy.		As a result of my time as a U.S. ambassador, I have an extensive collection of Egyptian erotica.	
When I make a public appearance, I wear an American flag lapel pin.		When I go to bed, I wear Pokemon pajamas.	
I would be honored to serve in your administration.		Assuming we lose this thing, can I count on your endorsement when I run in 2012?	
Tally the score. Toss it in a wastebasket.			
Choose the guy or gal who least reminds you of Dan Quayle.			