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## Dick Morris Strikes Again

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Morris began his political career working for Bill Clinton. An advisor in Clinton's 1977 race for governor of Arkansas, Morris later hit the big time, working for both Democrats and Republicans. He helped Trent Lott win his US Senate seat and joined George H.W. Bush as a presidential campaign advisor in 1988.

Since then, he has been an advisor for hire. Now, he is ready to offer free advice to the Republican Party. The sum and substance of his recommendations—ditch the Christian right.

Morris's advice was predictable, given the election of Arnold Schwarzenegger as Governor of California in that state's infamous recall election. "Schwarzenegger offers Republicans a winning formula for the future," Morris argues, "combining fiscal conservatism with progressive positions on social issues."

"The Republican Party made a pact with the Christian right in the 1970s," Morris explains. Ronald Reagan put together a coalition of anti-tax, anti-government, anti-abortion, and pro-defense voters and went on to win the presidency by a landslide—twice. As Morris explains, "The coalition between economic and social conservatives animated [Reagan's] 1980 triumph and made the ensuing 10 years into a Republican decade."

That's all over, now. Morris advises that the Republican Party must sever its ties with Christian conservatives or enter into a period of inevitable retreat and defeat. "Ever since the 1980s," Morris argues, "The Republican Party has paid the price for its coalition with the advocates of bedroom regulation." How? "The Christian right has so alienated women that it has opened up gender gap that often swells to more than 20 points, crippling Republican candidates."

And that's not all. Morris waves a red flag of warning to the Grand Old Party, sending out the alarm that the Christian right is about to become for the Republicans what Jesse Jackson's rainbow coalition was to the Democrats—the "kiss of death."

"Not that the religious right is wrong," Morris advises. As a matter of fact, right and wrong have nothing to do with his analysis. The Christian conservatives get "in the way of so much good that the Republican Party could achieve if it were not in the Christian right's grasp."

Similar advice had been directed to Republicans for years. Even during the Reagan Revolution, party strategists warned that an alliance with Christian conservatives would mean eventual disaster for the party. Of course, the fact remains that the base of Christian conservatives has been the foundation for every major Republican victory from 1980 to the present. Candidates like Arnold Schwarzenegger have generally been elected under unusual circumstances, such as the quirk of this year's recall election.

Why should anyone listen to Dick Morris anyway? His advice has certainly not been infallible. Though gifted with periodic political genius, Morris's advice is very much a hit or miss affair. When he is right, he is generally very right, and when he is wrong, he is disastrously wrong. In the wake of the 1994 Democratic defeat, Morris was called upon by President Bill Clinton, and he became one of the closest presidential advisors in modern history—and one of the most

hated.

With Bill Clinton, Morris developed his infamous political strategy of “triangulation.” Morris described triangulation as a model that “involves using the solutions of both parties to solve each new problem.” It goes without saying that triangulation is a political strategy that “true believers” on either side of the political spectrum find morally repugnant. Convictions of politicians see the very notion of triangulation as reprehensible. Not so for those in the middle, who are looking for just enough political traction to win an election, without being saddled with a political or moral ideology that would get in the way of compromise.

In his book *Power Plays*, Morris presents Bill Clinton as a model of triangulation. Running for president in 1992, Clinton stole many of the most popular positions long held by Republicans and claimed them for his own agenda. He presented himself as pro-defense and anti-crime, and promised an economic policy that would cut the deficit, increase federal spending for popular programs, and save taxpayers’ money. The fact that many of these goals seemed incompatible was of little interest to the voting public. Clinton promised to “end welfare as we know it,” and ran as a stalwart defender of the death penalty.

Morris functioned as a close advisor to Bill Clinton through the 1996 presidential election. It all fell apart on the third day of the convention itself. Reporters revealed that Morris had been involved with a Washington prostitute, and had actually engaged in telephone conversations with the President of the United States with a prostitute in the room.

Needless to say, Dick Morris has never been a poster boy for the Christian right. His policy of triangulation is repulsive to those who operate out of political conviction rather than mere calculation. Given his infinitely flexible political philosophy, Morris can work on either side of any political campaign, apparently without any crisis of conscience.

Added to this, his personal involvement in a sex scandal left him, to say the very least, in a morally compromised situation. But never count Dick Morris out of the political equation—he was back on the airwaves offering political advice in short order.

In essence, Dick Morris is a modern day Machiavelli, always ready to offer worldly advice to the powers that be. He may be the perfect political consultant for the postmodern age.

Machiavelli, of course, was the philosopher-advisor to the Medici family of medieval Florence. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli offered his distilled political advice to his noble patrons. Taking the infamous Caesar Borgia as his model, Machiavelli advised the Medicis to rule with an iron hand in a velvet glove. When times call for a fox—be a fox. When the times demand a lion—be a lion.

There was nothing noble about Machiavelli’s advice, and there is nothing noble in Dick Morris’s analysis. When he calls upon the Republican Party to “escape from the embrace of the pro-lifers” and nominate candidates like Rudy Giuliani and Arnold Schwarzenegger, he is offering a poisonous recipe.

Any political party that would forfeit its convictions on matters so important as abortion, marriage, and homosexuality in order to curry favor may find that it is traded short-term gain for long-term disaster. The Christian right may embarrass the cultural elites, but the moral convictions of conservative Christians are not up for compromise. Following Dick Morris’s advice may cause the Republican Party to win elections, only to discover that it has lost its soul.

