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# The Grand New Alliance

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A profoundly significant new political alignment within the right flank of the Republican Party is becoming entrenched in American politics.

For the modern, somewhat more mainstream economic and neo-conservative Reagan-Bush-Bush-Cheney Republican Establishment, it is a threat far more dangerous to its control of the Conservative-Right than, in their time, were the rambunctious John Birch Society, the youthful Goldwater Rebellion, or the Lee Atwater upstarts who orchestrated the Reagan Revolution.

For Independents, moderate Republicans and Democrats this new alignment should be a wake-up call that the foundations of Democracy are always fragile and the promises of America must never be taken for granted.

### **Powerful New Political Alliance**

History ultimately will judge its relevance and impact, but an harmonic convergence -- a "grand new alliance" -- is occurring among Libertarians, the Christian Right and the disparate legions of Tea Party activists that is transforming politics as we have known it. (For ease of reference, I will refer to this grand new alliance as the "GNA" or the "Libertarian-Religious-Tea Party Alliance".)

Tensions and fissures are clearly visible within this new alliance -- for example, around the environment, the legitimacy of Social Security and Medicare/Medicaid, and gay marriage. Naturally deep disagreements exist and not every person or organization in each cohort of the alliance agrees with every tenet of other leaders or groups that comprise the GNA.

Thus, it is far too early to predict with certainty the pace or direction of the GNA's evolution, the nature and scope of its long-term influence or its sustainability.

Nevertheless, we, as a nation, should neither ignore nor deny its significance, and we should understand clearly who comprises the GNA, precisely what it has achieved, and what it hopes to accomplish in the months and years ahead.

Today, the Libertarian-Religious-Tea Party Alliance is a consciously strategic federation of separate, but inter-connected, wings of a potent right-wing political machine that is energized by the frightening uncertainties of the economic downturn, mobilized in rigid opposition to a President they cannot abide, emboldened by confrontation with some of their historic allies within the broader Republican conservative movement, and fueled by a new avalanche of post-Citizen's United-inspired financial resources.

Its political power has risen rapidly and dramatically. In just the past twelve months, the GNAs' successes have affected virtually every nook and cranny of American politics - sweeping victories in the 2010 Congressional and state elections, grid-locked legislative stand-off with Congressional Democrats and President Obama, scorched earth political wars in Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana, New Jersey and other states with overwhelming Republican elected majorities, and a dramatic hijacking of the current Republican Presidential Primary process through the candidacies of Rick Perry, Herman Cain, Michelle Bachmann, Ron Paul, Newt Gingrich and Rick Santorum.

While Mitt Romney, or some other (although that increasingly seems unlikely) theoretically more "moderate" candidate, may emerge within the next six months from the Republican primary process, the unmistakable tone, substance and aura of the Republican primaries thus far overwhelmingly has hewed to the Libertarian-Religious-Tea Party rhetoric and agenda.

### **Components of the GNA**

There are three separate political camps, or sub-groups, that have converged to form the GNA.

**"Libertarianism"**. As a political philosophy, Libertarianism began gaining traction as a distinct wing of Republican politics in the late 1970's with the creation of the Cato Institute, and over the next two decades, the Reason Foundation, Young America's Foundation, Foundation for Economic Education, the Mercatus Center (at George Mason University), and eight or ten other libertarian-oriented think tanks, advocacy organizations, leadership training groups, and communications outlets.

Collectively, these organizations have annual operating budgets exceeding \$100 million and constitute a potent libertarian network of policy, electoral and legislative activity.

Funded primarily by wealthy business leaders led by the Koch Brothers and others, the libertarian wing of the Conservative Right, over the past 40 years, has championed the fundamentalist economic "liberty" cause of lowest taxes, least regulation, and smallest government. The core tenets of modern American Libertarianism are generally described in Libertarian mission statements as some version of "...promoting the principles of

individual freedom and personal responsibility..." which can best be encouraged through policies that emphasize a "...free economy, private initiative and limited government...."

For most of its history, the libertarian "movement" has consisted primarily of a conservative elite -- that is, a well-educated state and national network of business leaders, politicians, academics, college students, pundits and public intellectuals rather than legions of grassroots activists. Over the years, libertarians also have participated actively in local and state elections and legislative battles, and have invested heavily in building state political infrastructure in places such as North Carolina (see, Jane Mayer's recent well researched and informative article in the October 10, 2011 issue of the *New Yorker*, entitled "[State for Sale](#)", on Art Pope and his wide ranging political activities in North Carolina), Illinois (Heartland Institute), California (Pacific Research Institute), and other states.

While in its earlier years, libertarianism provided a relatively modest intellectual contribution to Conservative Republicanism, in time, it has become a distinct and vocal voice within the American political dialogue, an increasingly accepted member of the center-right coalition, and a steadfast supporter of Republican candidates at the local, state and national level.

**"Religious Right"**. The Christian Right, as it exists today, has its roots in the 1980 and 1990's activism of Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Ralph Reed, et. al. These early pioneers of political engagement used church infrastructure as well as newly formed, non-church, Christian-oriented non-profits - The Moral Majority, Focus on the Family, Family Research Action Council, and others -- to inform, organize and mobilize armies of white Christian voters to support Republican candidates throughout the country.

The 21st Century Christian Right political apparatus is dramatically larger, better organized and more powerful than ever. Currently, approximately 35 million white Christians self-identify as Right-wing political adherents, roughly 28 million of whom are Protestant (including Mormon) and about 7 million of whom are Catholic. While there are significant concentrations of Christian Right activists in virtually every state, they are most heavily concentrated in approximately 30 states, primarily in the Rocky Mountain, Midwest, South and Mid-Atlantic regions of the country.

In addition to the Christian Right's formidable religious institutional infrastructure -- mega-churches and smaller parishes, church-owned publications and media, and pastor networks -- the financial resources of which are inestimable, it also has created and financed a non-church, religious-oriented network of powerful think tanks, advocacy groups, communications vehicles and media outlets (including, Salem Communications, the Christian Broadcast Network, Bott Radio Network, American Family Radio and others) that educate, organize and mobilize Christian Right activists to participate in legislative and electoral politics. This non-church, Christian Right-oriented network of organizations has an aggregate annual operating budget well in excess of \$1 billion per year.

This conglomerate of church, and religious-oriented non-church, activist institutions constitutes the largest, best organized, most effective and well-financed special interest political infrastructure in America. Together with its grassroots allies on the Republican-right, the politically activist Christian Right has been instrumental (primarily in the 30 states where they have the most adherents, political infrastructure and influence) in assuring overwhelming Republican control of local elected offices, state legislatures, US congressional delegations and US Senate seats. These same states possess more than enough electoral votes (350+) to assure victory for a Republican presidential candidate who excites GNA activists in 2012.

**"Tea Party"**. The Tea Party, nearly three years old now, is still less of a political "party" than it is a loose federation of grassroots activists, national back-up support groups, and an effective branding phenomenon. While the size and make-up of the Tea Party is neither easy to define nor document, most credible polling (American Values Survey, Gallup and others) suggests that roughly half of self-identifying Tea Party activists are also self-identifying Christian Right adherents.

The Tea Party institutional infrastructure includes the Tea Party Express, Tea Party Patriots, Tea Party Nation, National Tea Party Federation, Nationwide Tea Party Coalition, and others. Collectively, these groups comprise various networks of activists throughout the country. However, because the Tea Party is not a political party in any sense of the term, the real number of "chapters", "affiliates", or "members" is unknown and probably unknowable.

Sophisticated, Washington-based organizational glue binds Tea Party activists to one another. National non-party, non-profit groups such as Freedom Works, Americans for Prosperity, and others provide critically important national strategic focus, content, training, convening and online communities for the disparate Tea Party affiliates from around the country.

What distinguishes the Tea Party from its less successful political predecessors, however, has been its remarkable ability to play a critical leadership role in shifting the dominant Republican political narrative over the past twenty-four months.

The dominant Republican narrative for most of this decade was a complex mix of Chamber of Commerce and Business Roundtable corporate economic conservatism, muscular foreign policy neo-conservatism, and specific social agenda (god, gays and guns) conservatism. However, by 2010, responding to economic stresses and a visceral hatred of President Obama, the Republican narrative, under the Tea Party brand, evolved into a powerfully resonant right-wing populist economic (anti-tax, anti-regulation, anti-government, anti-Obama) message that is drowning out reasoned debate, causing legislative gridlock, and strengthening reactionary forces.

**Stronger in Concert: Aligning The GNA Political Narrative and Machinery**

Moreover, these three separate, but inter-related, camps - the Libertarians, the Christian Right and the Tea Party - elegantly have aligned their political narrative with their independent, non-party political machinery to seize effective control of Republican political processes and messages. This means that their narrative is delivered daily (through GNA's various local, state and national institutions and media outlets) to an estimated 40 or 50 million activists who are deeply committed to electing Republicans in 2012 at every level in every state in the country.

Libertarian, Christian Right and Tea Party activists have far more power together than they do isolated one from the other.

Libertarians, without the Tea Party and the Christian Right, are primarily passionate, well organized, but politically limited, conservative-right business leaders and anti-government enthusiasts without a committed grassroots base of activists and voters.

The Christian Right, without the Tea Party and Libertarian economic messages, is an effective army of frequently frustrated activists whose anti-abortion, anti-gay, anti-social progress agenda is often ignored by the business community and marginalized by the political elite of both major political parties.

And the Tea Party, without Libertarians or the Christian Right, is a relatively disorganized and undisciplined array of passionate, economically stressed and angry citizens speaking their often-garbled truths to power.

But acting in concert, the Libertarians, the Christian Right and the Tea Party have become a grand new alliance that has seized control of the Republican message, become the dominant political voice in the Republican Party, is driving the Republican Congressional agenda, is creating political havoc in selected states, and is orchestrating the theatrical drama of the Republican presidential primary process.

Clearly, the whole of this alliance is far more powerful than the mere sum of its parts. The grand new alliance is not just challenging the leadership prerogatives and institutional dominance of the grand old party, it is methodically positioning itself for a wholesale dismantling of 20th Century Republicanism.

### **Political Impact of the GNA in 2012**

An obvious next phase in this struggle between the new and old Republicanism will be the Republican presidential nominating process, which is rapidly, unfolding as the primary season heats up.

Perhaps the most likely scenario is that Mitt Romney will be the nominee and he will select a darling of the GNA as his running mate. If this were to happen, the GNA is energized, the economy is floundering, and President Obama appears weak, a GNA fueled Romney-Rubio or Romney-Perry ticket could prevail in the fall elections.

It also is possible, if not probable, that Republicans could nominate a GNA presidential candidate in 2012. Such a candidate could cause a Republican defeat worse than Barry Goldwater's in 1964. Or, in the "if the economy were to worsen significantly" scenario, a GNA presidential candidate could conceivably (highly unlikely) deny a weakened President Obama a second term.

And it is possible, though also not yet probable, that the GNA, failing to successfully nominate an acceptable candidate in the Republican primaries (or to get the VP slot), would support a GNA candidate, rather than the Republican Party candidate, in the general election. There, of course, are many potential political permutations of this, but such a scenario would create deep consternation within the Republican Party and would challenge the entire American political system in new and unpredictable ways.

What makes 2012 so different from 1964, however, is the sophistication and potency of the non-party, non-candidate, independent political machinery that the GNA has at its disposal and the vast financial resources it will raise next year. It will almost certainly out-raise and out-spend the Republican Party in 2012 - my estimate is that the GNA could raise \$400-500 million or more for its independent 2012 electoral activities.

This money will be used to both demonize and denigrate President Obama and Democratic candidates at every level, as well as to mobilize tens of millions of Libertarian, Christian Right and Tea Party voters.

The Supreme Court's decision in the Citizen's United case in 2009 opened the floodgates for individuals, corporations and unions to make unlimited and often unreported contributions to non-party, non-candidate, non-profit organizations like the ones built over the past several decades by the GNA. To maximize this financial opportunity, the GNA has built a prodigious fundraising machine that has identified and convinced a new generation of wealthy GNA donors -- including, but not limited to, Texas energy barons, New York hedge fund managers, and Silicon Valley entrepreneurs - to donate millions to the GNA political machinery.

An aligned, well-financed and strategically deployed GNA political machine will wreak havoc against Democrats in 2012.

Consider the 2012 presidential race. In 2008, President Obama won with 67 million votes, while John McCain garnered 58 million. In 2004, George W. Bush received 62 million votes and John Kerry got 59 million.

If the Republican nominee can hold the historic Republican core of about 60 million votes in 2012, and mobilize millions more Independents and GNA activists - and President Obama loses some independents as well as some of his natural allies (students, Latinos, African-Americans, unmarried women) due to apathy, disaffection and/or the pernicious voter suppression laws (supported by GNA-elected governors and state legislators) that are being enacted in key battleground states - a GNA supported candidate

conceivably could win the popular vote and garner enough electoral votes to win the presidency. While such an outcome may not yet be likely, it surely is possible.

This same army of GNA mobilized voters could devastate Democrats in local, state and Congressional elections in many states in 2012.

### **The GNA Is A Sustainable, Super-Charged Opposition Force**

But whether or not the Libertarian-Religious-Tea Party Alliance is successful in winning the presidency in 2012, or indeed, whether or not it is able to defeat Democrats at all levels within the states, there is little doubt that its power and influence will grow throughout 2012 and beyond.

With added strength, it will continue to bedevil the Republican establishment, continue to do all in its power to undermine the effectiveness of President Obama and Democratic Congressional leaders, continue to exercise control in state legislative chambers, and continue to frustrate the advancement of enlightened policies that are desperately needed to restore American confidence, economic prosperity and fairness.

A new, powerful right-wing populist alliance may seem counter-intuitive, illogical and even unsustainable to many on the center-left. After all, they might argue, how long really can east and west coast Libertarian business leaders possibly square their values and views with southern and mid-western right-wing evangelicals? How long can aging, anti-government Tea Party enthusiasts, many of whom support Medicare and Social Security, work closely with Libertarians who oppose all government entitlements? And, won't the profoundly contentious differences that exist within the GNA concerning foreign policy, poverty programs, gay marriage and the environment ultimately assure its demise?

Surely, the center-left might further posit, the GNA has deep divisions, is a fragile coalition, and sooner rather than later will self-destruct.

It no doubt is accurate to assume that there may come a day when the GNA fabric unravels; but that is highly unlikely to happen before the American economy is vibrant and growing again.

There is a politically rational reason for this.

The GNA is not a political party, a substantive platform, nor even a specific affirmative legislative agenda. Rather, it is an exquisite oppositional political narrative operating in the current toxic mix of economic distress and strangely immune to normal political constraints. It opposes government, opposes taxes, opposes regulation, and opposes anything President Obama says or does. It promotes repeal of legislation, rolling back of regulations, and resisting any form of taxation.

With laser-like efficiency and remarkable discipline, the GNA has become an opposition force -- perhaps the strongest, best financed and most sustainable such force in modern American political history -- that defies traditional political calculus.

### **The GNA in 2013 and Beyond**

In an era of prolonged economic distress, the GNA could continue to exercise enormous economic and political influence for a very long time without actually electing a president, holding congressional majorities, or controlling the levers of power.

Imagine the GNA launching sophisticated, coordinated, well-financed campaigns to frustrate every level of government on every conceivable central issue of our time beginning next year and proceeding continuously.

Envision the GNA expanding its ferocious assault on state budgets driven by blind opposition to any and all taxes.

Picture the GNA draining limited and precious state legislative and political energies into endless battles over social issues, critical supports for low and moderate income citizens, collective bargaining for public employees and new ways of suppressing voting.

Imagine the incessant use of the GNA's Grover Norquist-mandated commitment against taxes to block any attempt at federal fiscal sanity or investments necessary to support American innovation and economic competitiveness.

Envision relentlessly well-orchestrated attacks designed to repeal virtually every state and federal health and safety regulation enacted with significant bi-partisan majorities over the past 50 years.

And, imagine our children, and grandchildren, being held hostage for decades to a GNA oppositional agenda that has stifled our economic growth, strangled our middle class, and shredded our social safety net.

### **A Moment Of Choice**

Given these realistic and dire possibilities, Democrats, moderate Republicans and Independents who value a healthy, competitive economy, a competent government, and a society respectful of the dignity of each human being have a critical choice to make.

Either, we can align ourselves into our own new powerful coalition to promote our core values, counter the views and positions of the GNA, and leave the door open for responsible members of the GNA to join with us whenever possible.

Or, we can continue to focus on our differences with one another, squander our opportunities for cooperation, reject our own leadership responsibility to build a strong, secure and just America, and stand by while the GNA doggedly refuses to secure



America's economic competitiveness and methodically dismantles the pillars of our democracy.

The "Occupy" banner that is sweeping the county, and now maybe the world, is not just about corporate greed and illegality in financial service companies, not just about inequality, not just about the failure of Republicans and Democrats to counter the power of organized wealth. Those certainly are powerful elements of the message.

But the loudest canary in the "occupy" mine is reminding us that we have reached a pivotal moment when least government, least taxes and least regulation will not rebuild America and provide a better quality of life for generations to come.

A healthy, mature and growing America requires strong and honest companies, competent, truth-telling government, informed and engaged citizens, and a spirit of collective action that transcends narrow philosophy, rigid ideology, the politics of demonization, and the unraveling of our constitutional protections.

"Occupy", at its core, is purely and simply a reasoned call to action for political and economic sanity.

The choice could not be clearer. Time is of the essence.