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## An open letter to the GOP candidates running for the 1st Congressional District

Republicans' War Fetish

by Jack Hunter

Attending a reception at the South Carolina Republican gubernatorial primary debate in January, a candidate vying for Congressman Henry Brown's 1st Congressional District seat ribbed me about something and said with a smile: "I want to get you on my side."

At that moment and with zero forethought, I knew precisely what that candidate could do to get me on his side. Consider this an open letter to every Republican running in the 1st Congressional District race.

Today, virtually every Republican is against spending and massive debt. Every Republican firmly opposes President Obama's and the Democrats' agenda. In this Tea Party-influenced election, a renewed interest in constitutional principles and limited government, whether genuine or just rhetorical, is a standard, default position for candidates. Of course, this is a wonderful development — that is until the GOP goes and mucks it all up with another standard, Republican default position that contradicts their otherwise conservative platform.

*The Post and Courier* reported that during a recent debate, the candidates for the 1st District were asked "to employ their best '20/20 hindsight' to say whether the invasion of Iraq was wise."

The paper added, "[Paul] Thurmond said the invasion was justified because Saddam Hussein was a dictator and posed problems 'we needed to resolve.' [Stovall] Witte said that although weapons of mass destruction did not turn up, 'We did the right thing.' [Carroll] Campbell stated that 'The best defense is a strong offense.' [Larry] Kobrovsky said yes and (Mark) Lutz said no. [Katherine] Jenerette said that America did not go there for democracy, 'We were there for oil.' But she said the invasion was a necessity because 'If we weren't there, the Russians would be there. The Chinese would be there.'"

The Iraq War is considered by many to be the worst foreign policy disaster since Vietnam, though a kinder critic might settle for just calling it a mistake. Who says this? According to some Republicans, everyone does.

During a foreign policy panel discussion in March sponsored by the libertarian CATO Institute, moderator Grover Norquist asked about the Iraq war: "Of Republicans in Congress, who would agree with the general analysis here that it was a mistake...?" Replied Congressman Tom McClintock (R-CA), "I think everyone would agree Iraq was a mistake." Added panel contributor Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA), who voted for the authorization of military force in Iraq: "Well, now that we know that it cost a trillion dollars and all of these years and all of these lives and all of this blood, uh ... All I can say is the people, everybody I know thinks it was a mistake to go in now." Rep. John Duncan Jr. (R-TN), who also sat on the panel but did not vote for the Iraq war, agreed.

These Republicans are not alone. After returning from a second trip to Iraq in 2008, Sen. Tom Coburn, a war supporter who former Vice President Dick Cheney had campaigned for, said, "I will tell you personally that I think it was probably a mistake going to Iraq." Rep. Walter Jones (R-NC), perhaps best known for wanting to rename french fries "freedom fries" in the House cafeteria, now writes letters to the families of fallen soldiers in his district apologizing for supporting a war he now calls a mistake. He says, "If we were given misinformation intentionally by people in this administration to commit the authority to send boys, and in some instances girls, to go into Iraq, that is wrong. Congress must be told the truth."

An earnest cost-benefit analysis of our adventure in Iraq should raise at least some degree of questioning or even regret, as it obviously has for the Republicans I've mentioned. The rationales for war given by most of the GOP candidates running for Henry Brown's seat are as varied as they are irrational, suggesting that even though the reasons for our mission in Iraq aren't clear among its defenders, Republicans still feel the need to let voters know they support it. Sadly, such intellectual wobbliness reveals not simply a misguided concern for a proper defense, but that for much of the GOP, war has become a fetish.

And it isn't funny anymore. I'm not asking every candidate to become Ron Paul (though it would be nice), only to finally question their government on this important issue as their fellow Republicans have. Their ongoing inability to acknowledge gross foreign policy mistakes tells me that such Republicans would be more than willing to repeat them in the future.

This is completely unacceptable, it's certainly unconscionable, and it's definitely not conservative, but it is Republican. And it's a problem.

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