

OPINION

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POLITICS

WHAT IS RICK PERRY UP TO THESE DAYS?

Will the governor's sudden flirtation with social moderation help to elect a Republican president who will take the country beyond the divisive politics of hate and fear?



GREGG CANTRELL

With the Legislature safely out of session and political attention focused elsewhere, Gov. Rick Perry caught us by surprise back in October when he momentarily grabbed the headlines with his endorsement of former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani for president.

The announcement came as a surprise for two reasons. First, it was early; most politicians are waiting for a clearer idea of who will win, so they can then jump on the bandwagon. But apart from the timing, the endorsement came as a shocker to many because of the ideological differences between the two politicians.

In 2006, Perry based his reelection bid on an appeal to the religious right. With four major candidates in the field, he knew that if he could get out the hard-core social conservatives, they could provide the votes he needed to win.

Perry campaigned for a ban on gay marriage, staunchly opposed abortion rights and famously signed ceremonial bills on both issues while hobnobbing with fundamentalist leaders in the gym of Fort Worth's Calvary Christian Academy. He championed school prayer, vouchers and the teaching of creationism in the public schools, and he managed to cobble together 39 percent of the vote.

So imagine the consternation of his supporters when Perry endorsed Giuliani for president instead of the current darling of religious conservatives, Mike Huckabee. Perry defended his action, arguing that he supported the New York mayor — despite Giuliani's well-known support of gay rights, abortion rights and gun control — on the grounds that Giuliani was "the most electable of our candidates."

It is hard to reconcile the Giuliani endorsement with Perry's long record as an arch-conservative on social issues. One obvious explanation is that Perry wants to back a winner and is willing to sacrifice his principles for victory in the fall. Speculation is rampant that Perry is eyeing a Cabinet post or even the vice presidential slot if his man wins the nomination.

Social conservatives were not thrilled. "I'm confused," said Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson, who at the time was backing Fred Thompson. "One of if not the most conservative governors in Texas history endorses a pro-choice, rabidly anti-Second Amendment New York mayor. ... What happened to conservative principles as the first measure of who to support for any office?"

Pro-lifers and other religious conservatives have harshly condemned Perry.

My knee-jerk reaction as a historian was to search for meaningful precedents that might shed light on the situation, and one was not long in coming. Rewind to the mid-1950s, when Texas was represented in the U.S. Senate

by Lyndon B. Johnson, who had ascended to the powerful post of majority leader.

Few believed that LBJ, like Perry, had satisfied his ambitions. But Johnson had a problem: His record on the most controversial issue of the day — civil rights for African-Americans — was that of a fairly typical Southern senator.

Texas, then as now, was a conservative state, and LBJ knew that a majority of his Texas constituents opposed civil rights. He could hold his Senate seat if he didn't alienate the segregationists of Texas; however, he also understood that a Southern segregationist would never become president. (Ask Strom Thurmond or George Wallace.)

So Johnson carefully began distancing himself from the segregationist wing of his party, and in 1957 he threw his support behind the first civil rights bill since Reconstruction.

Now acceptable to the Kennedy wing of the Democratic Party, LBJ was rewarded with the vice presidency. Later, as president, Johnson went on to sign the two most important civil rights acts in a century: the 1964 and 1965 bills that overturned segregation and secured voting rights for blacks.

There can be little doubt that Perry has made a similar calculation. George W. Bush notwithstanding (and remember that Bush ran for president in 2000 essentially as a moderate — a "uniter not a divider"), a gay-bashing, abortion-criminalizing, evolution-denying enemy of public education is not likely to have much appeal on the national stage.

If the Giuliani campaign manages to revive its fortunes in Florida by Tuesday, expect Perry to downplay the issues that got him elected governor and emphasize, as he already is doing, Giuliani's alleged credentials on defense and economic policy, leaving social issues to rest on the mayor's vague promise to appoint "strict constructionist" judges.

Some still believe that LBJ's conversion to liberalism on civil rights was little more than cynical political expediency. But if so, it still moved America closer to fulfilling the promise of a truly democratic nation. Will Perry's sudden flirtation with social moderation help to elect a Republican president who will take the country beyond the divisive politics of hate and fear? Only time will tell.

In the meantime, if he hopes to win another statewide race in Texas, he had better start thinking about forming a new coalition. The religious right in the Lone Star State has a very long memory.

GREGG CANTRELL OF FORT WORTH IS A HISTORY PROFESSOR AT TEXAS CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY AND A MEMBER OF THE STAR-TELEGRAM COMMUNITY COLUMNIST PANEL.

CHEERS AND JEERS

Cheers: To Rick Hurley of Vandergriff Toyota in Arlington for making the purchase of a new Camry pleasant and painless. Other dealerships should emulate Rick's enthusiasm, product knowledge and zero-pressure approach. I made a new friend, and I have a beautiful new car!
— *Hector Casanova, Arlington*

Jeers: To Jeff Johnson and Louise Blackerby, writers of Jan. 22 letters ("Football angst"). I don't need people who aren't Dallas Cowboys fans to tell me how I should feel.
— *John Stewart, Fort Worth*

Cheers: To Mike Carroll of the Wal-Mart in Plano, Jim Anderson of Holiday World of Dallas and the many volunteers from Discount Tire Stores for their steadfast support of the 2007 Marine Corps Toys for Tots campaign. We're fortunate to have such organizations that commit to giving back to the community.
— *Lt. Col. W.C. Schmick Jr., retired, Dallas chapter, 1st Marine Division Association, Arlington*

Cheers: To Anthony and Chris Vallejo, Pastor Bill and his wife of Holy Vessel Church and two other men whose names we don't know. They helped two people in distress at the Campus Drive exit on Interstate 20 in Fort Worth after our car broke down Sunday. God bless you.
— *Ben and Lois Rathgeber, Cleburne*

Jeers: To the *Star-Telegram* for dropping columnist Jeff D. Opdyke and the *Wall Street Journal* pages from the Sunday paper. I've cut out and saved many of his columns and used several for a class I teach at a local high school. His financial advice was practical, helpful and easily applicable.
— *Shannon Walker, Benbrook*

Cheers: To Travis, Jason, Alan and Arlington Animal Services for responding to a report of a dog living in the grassy area along U.S. 287 near the Little Road exit. They set a humane trap and captured him within two days. Special cheers to Jason for meeting me quickly that day so that I could show him where the dog was living.
— *Lori Adams, Arlington*

Jeers: To Pam Wells of North Richland Hills for complaining about the noise from an adjacent farm that boards horses. (See Jan. 20 news story "When city and country collide.") I find it hard to believe that she has to wear headphones to drown out the noise of horses being fed. The farm was there first.
— *Debra Sisk, Roanoke*

Cheers: To Melvin Wood! I've boarded horses at his farm on and off during the past 10 years and have never heard anyone other than Wells raise a complaint of this nature. She has lived there during all 23 years of horse boarding. Why the ruckus now?
— *Ron Caffey, Hurst*

Cheers: To the Wood family for being so gracious and kind after being treated badly by a neighbor who had no right to complain.
— *Mary Fergusson, Keller*

Jeers: To Six Flags for wanting to sell beer in its Arlington parks.
— *Mary Williams, Fort Worth*

Cheers: To the staff at the Millsap Veterinary Clinic for squeezing us in on a busy Saturday! Thanks to Dr. Joel Brockett, we still have our buddy, Scout! Cheers also to Rachael for the calls and for taking care of her! Millsap is lucky to have you!
— *Daniele Clark and the Clark family, Millsap*

Jeers: To a major delivery service, which said that a package had been delivered to my address days before I phoned to inquire about it. Cheers to a real estate agent who retrieved my package from the unoccupied house next door and brought it to me — five days after it was supposed to have been delivered.
— *Bettie Wylie, Arlington*

Cheers: To Diane Gatzke for writing something nice about Tillie Burgin and Mission Arlington even though she threw in some negative thoughts. (See Jan. 12 commentary "Cultivating that heart of a servant.") All the *Star-Telegram* had done so far was to bash Mission Arlington. Tillie and the mission have helped many people who needed help. Cheers to Tillie and the mission. Jeers to the *Star-Telegram*.
— *Barbara Anderson, Arlington*

Jeers: To a Burleson antique dealer who was rude to me and my wife when we asked to come by and see a bed that the dealer had advertised online. He berated us for wanting to be careful consumers and hung up on us as well.
— *Gavin Smith, Granbury*

Cheers: To Mr. and Mrs. Travis of Andy T's Hot Sauce Co. for donating the wonderful hot sauce to be served at staff meetings. Cheers also for supporting our attendance program. The donated bike was a real incentive for students to come to school every day and on time.
— *Principal Linda Adrian, South Hills Elementary School, Fort Worth*

Jeers: To the person I met during the weekend of the Texas-Oklahoma football game. We made a wager on the Dallas Cowboys. Now that the Cowboys are out of the playoffs, I found I was given a wrong telephone number.
— *Greg DePretto, Arlington*

Cheers: To the *Star-Telegram* for all of the "punny" headlines. I often just scan the headlines to find something to smile about. I also got a good laugh from Buddy Hickerson's Nov. 23 drawing of a woman in pink shrink-wrap. Did anyone else notice the two right feet?
— *Millie Dixon, Fort Worth*

Cheers: To Speedway Children's Charities, which distributed grant checks totaling more than \$750,000 to 198 charities across North Texas at a Dec. 4 tree-lighting ceremony. Green Oaks School was the joyful recipient of one of these grants. May God bless the dedicated SCC volunteers who work year-round to benefit our children.
— *Kim Marshall, executive director, Green Oaks School, Arlington*



The Trinity Trojans celebrate their 13-10 defeat of Converse Judson for the state title in December.
STAR-TELEGRAM FILES/RALPH LAUER

Cheers: To the Benenati law firm of Bedford. When it learned that the Trinity Trojans football players didn't have money to buy state championship rings, the firm paid \$2,500 for them to work for area nonprofits so that they could earn money and have a lifetime remembrance. What a great example!
— *Rebecca Barksdale, Arlington*

Cheers: To the Trinity High School junior varsity soccer team for helping with the Nov. 9 Special Olympics bowling tournament at Don Carter Lanes in Fort Worth. What a respectful, tolerant, patient and supportive group of young men, who had the courage to venture out of their comfort zones and allowed all who watched them work to witness unconditional acceptance in action.
— *Joan O'Brien, Southlake*

Cheers: To the Texas Department of Transportation for creating the gaudiest overpasses on Interstate 35W in Burleson at Renfro Street and Hidden Creek Parkway. The colors are awful! The Renfro overpass is especially nice, as one side is painted and the other isn't. It's great to see how our tax dollars are used.
— *Joe McCarver, Burleson*

Cheers: To Ed and Tracy Amaya for again hosting a wonderful evening for their family and friends to raise money for the neonatal intensive care unit at Cook Children's Medical Center. Many babies and families will benefit from their generosity.
— *Barbara Greer, Benbrook*

Cheers: To the 24 Hour Tire shop in Duncanville. I had a flat on the way home from work. It was dark, and I was alone in an unfamiliar neighborhood. The personnel were courteous and quick and gave me a more-than-reasonable deal on a good used tire.
— *Lucy Tyson, Arlington*

Jeers: To rude IHOP patrons for ruining my breakfast with the gross habit of blowing their noses at the table. No one likes to hear snot blown out while trying to enjoy their pancakes. Use your manners and go to the restroom. The rest of us would appreciate it.
— *Kristi Southern, Fort Worth*

Jeers: To District 7 Fort Worth City Councilman Carter Burdette for voting in favor of a zoning case that would turn our quiet little neighborhood into an industrial park.
— *Ron Sears, Fort Worth*

Jeers: To Fort Worth T bus drivers for taking breaks on busy streets such as University Drive past Berry Street and holding up traffic. Breaks are well-deserved, but it seems that they could pull off onto a side street.
— *Gary Harrell, Fort Worth*

Cheers: To Joshua and his mother, Veronica, for finding and returning my wife's purse, which was inadvertently left in a shopping cart. She had already tried to retrieve it but with no luck. We were beginning to cancel the credit cards when the doorbell rang. Believe it or not, it was as good as winning the lottery.
— *Joe Robert Wise, Grapevine*

Cheers: To Judy Good of North Richland Hills. Because of a mix-up, the Kohl's gift certificates I ordered for my daughter, Judy Good of Humble, were delivered to Judy Good in North Richland Hills. This honest lady tracked down the correct address and forwarded the gift to my daughter. I wish she would call so I can thank her personally.
— *Ruth Ford, Hurst*

Cheers: To the Wal-Mart on South Cooper Street. On Dec. 3, I was shopping and in a hurry. While loading groceries into my car, I foolishly left my purse in the shopping cart. Wal-Mart's Rosie called the next day with the good news: My purse had been found intact.
— *Judy Sutherland, Arlington*

Cheers: To banking institutions, title companies, suppliers, subcontractors and their employees and to the sales staff of Steve Hawkins Custom Homes for the time, talent and funding for the All Church Home Christmas party and for their support throughout the year. You made some children very happy.
— *Janice and Steve Hawkins, Fort Worth*

Cheers: To Arlington police officers Dolores Chavez and Kevin Ruppert for their genuine care, concern and professionalism while assisting our family. They are truly two of Arlington's finest!
— *D'Ann Woodle, Lakeside*

Cheers: To our Hulen Heights neighbors. At a recent community event, residents donated more than 5,600 pounds of food for the Tarrant Area Food Bank.
— *Cyndi Caldwell, Fort Worth*

Cheers: To Bo Greggs, manager of the post office on Altamesa Drive, who came to the station at 8:30 p.m. on a Saturday to open the office for me to receive my Dallas Cowboys playoff tickets, which had come by express mail that day. Cheers to this great Cowboys fan. Jeers to the New York Giants.
— *Paul T. Price, Fort Worth*

Jeers: To Stevie Wonder, John Fogerty, Billy Joel or any entertainer who believes we care about their political persuasions while attending a concert. Jeers to your reviewer who apparently feels the same way. Seventy-five dollars for tickets, \$15 to park and bottled water for \$4 at Nokia Theater! Here's an idea: Shut up and sing.
— *Bruce Collins, Grand Prairie*

Cheers: To the Fort Worth VA Regional Clinic for its outstanding service and compassion. I arrived at the clinic after it had closed. The staff wouldn't let me leave until my problem was attended to. An off-duty doctor saw me and wrote prescriptions that were filled in 30 minutes.
— *Martin Brent Buckles, Crowley*

Cheers: To the young man and his lady at the Poolville One Stop who paid for the meals of three 84-year-olds who were having a night out on the town.
— *Leon Hodges, Ethelene Maden and Mildred Ellenbarger, Poolville*

Jeers: To a telephone repair operator for telling my daughter that she would have to report my out-of-order phone from my phone. How does one do that? Duh!
— *Jackie Nugent, Bedford*

Jeers: To the Dillard's in Hurst for escorting a disabled Iraq veteran from the store because he had a service dog to help him get around. Store policy was cited as the reason. I'll try never to shop at Dillard's again. How thoughtless of the store.
— *Deette Hoch, Roanoke*

Cheers: To the gentleman who paid for these two old folks' lunch at Cracker Barrel on Dec. 19. What a thoughtful and generous person you are. The very best to you and yours this new year. We will pay it forward.
— *John and Jo Bohannan, Forest Hill*

HOW TO SUBMIT A CHEER OR JEER

Limit your Cheer or Jeer to about 50 words. Full name (signature and printed), address and daytime telephone number are required. There are some restrictions on subjects. Items may be edited.

Questions: Call 817-390-7753. **Mail:** Box 1870, Fort Worth, TX 76101. **Fax:** 817-390-7688. **E-mail:** letters@star-telegram.com.