

BOOK TALK » READING BETWEEN THE LINES OF NEW AND NOTABLE BOOKS

Feulner explains true conservative values

Edwin J. Feulner, president of the Heritage Foundation and co-author of the new book "Getting America Right: The True Conservative Values Our Nation Needs Today" (written with Townhall.com's Doug Wilson) sits down with *The Examiner* to discuss the state of conservatism.

Q Do you think that the Republican Party is as far removed from the principles of conservatism as it's ever been?

A I think that's putting it too strongly, but it's definitely a risk. Most conservatives in Washington do want to stand up for the age-old values that Ronald Reagan stood up for. Sometimes the challenges of governing, however, force them to remove their eyes from the ball. Special interests spend billions of dollars each year to tempt Washington; it's up to we, the people, to force them to stay true to the principles we all believe in.

That's why we wrote "Getting America Right" — it provides the how-to guidance that the can-do American people need in order to get better results from those they send to Washington.

Q What is the most powerful reason that the Republican Party has drifted from conservatism?

A On a lot of issues, the GOP is still standing proud and true to conservatism — look at our two new Supreme Court members, look at the 2003 Bush tax cuts, the president's steadfastness in the long war against Islamic extremism, and a host of other achievements — bankruptcy reform; union reporting transparency; and I could go on. But undoubtedly the burdens of re-election have caused some in the GOP to drift. Almost everybody in the GOP genuinely wants to do what's best for America by sticking to our conservative principles, but when it comes time to vote, some of them figure, "Well I need to make an exception in this case for the good of the party." It's like the man who resolves every day that tomorrow will be the day he goes to the gym. Republicans would be a lot better off if they stuck to the principles of Ronald Reagan, just as I'd be better off if I finally got to the gym.

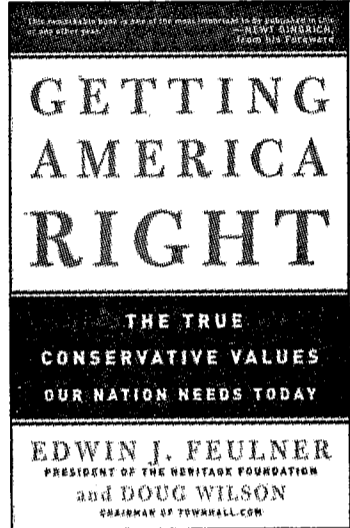
Q What do you make of the fact that President Bush has yet to veto a single bill during his presidency?

A It's very frustrating. I understand the president's thinking. Take the 2005 highway bill: If he hadn't negotiated with Congress; they would have come back with a bill far more pork-laden and objectionable than what was passed and what he signed. But at the end of the day, our country still ended up with the poster child for Washington's excesses. There have been plenty of bad bills, and the president would be in a lot better shape than he is now if he'd just vetoed one of them.

On a related note, one of our specific proposed reforms in "Getting



Edwin J. Feulner — Courtesy photo/Book cover — Amazon.com



America Right" is for Congress to give the president a line-item veto. And I'm thrilled to see that he proposed that recently. Right on!

The president is the only person elected to represent the interests of all Americans. I hope he gets the authority to line-item veto some of the disturbing, parochial items put into spending bills such as rainforests in Iowa, bridges to nowhere in Alaska, and bike paths on the levees of New Orleans.

Q What suggestions do you have to rein in federal spending?

A Well, I just named two. The one I'm most excited about, however, is to post all legislation on the Internet for at least 24 hours, before Congress votes on it. Remember what happened to Dan Rather? He tried to pass off a completely bogus document and within 24 hours bloggers across the country tore it to pieces.

Well, if some of the goofy stuff that Congress passes on a daily basis were subject to that level of scrutiny our members of Congress would be held to account in the very same way. Bloggers nowadays are one of the great institutions of civil

FROM THE BOOK ...

"On the whole, the Constitution of a marvel of principles and restraint, a unique compass designed to keep the nation both pointed in the right direction and stable in the face of unknowable change in the future. But if we revisit the Constitution's original impetus — the need to preserve American independence and self-reliance — we realize that what the document does not say is no less important than what it does say. For example, it does not mention such activities as education, medical care, and retirement security. These issues and others affect self-reliance in profound ways. The framers excluded them from the Constitution almost certainly because, at the time, most

Americans thought they were none of the government's business and were best carried out by individual citizens ...

"It is clearly impractical to demand that the federal government immediately withdraw from education, health care and all the other areas in which its current vast presence is, to our minds, clearly unconstitutional. It is too late, as well as politically impossible, to try to lock that barn door. The intruders are already acting like owners. But we can, and must, try to keep the remaining horses under local control. With patience, persistence, and citizen involvement, it should also be possible to get back some of the stolen ponies."

society. They didn't come about because of a planned intervention by government. They have prospered because there is a need for real accountability in Washington and for alternative voices from the so-called

mainstream news media, on college campuses, and so forth.

Q Is federal pork an unfortunate reality? Or should these line-item additions be banned?

A I understand the logic of the members who defend pork. They say, "I'm the elected representative, and why should I allow some unelected bureaucrats to deny my constituents money which they may need." There's a degree of truth there, but it is so out of control now that Congress needs to recognize that they are hurting themselves immeasurably with the public. I'd say make sure it's clear who sponsored every earmark and that all of them are included in the text of a bill so they are actually voted on. Then let's all of us put some real pressure on Congress to get rid of the bad stuff. I have a lot of respect for what Sen. Tom Coburn did last year when Katrina hit: He said, "Look, even if you supported Alaska's bridge to nowhere in August, let's re-evaluate it now because we have some unanticipated expenses that we need to pay for." The American people know that if a hurricane destroys your house, you might put off buying an expensive new car. Unfortunately, too many in Congress seem to be incapable of understanding the need for real restraint.

Q If your proposals are not taken into account, what does the future portend for the Republican party and the United States as a whole?

A Well, not to be too dramatic about it, but we could very well end up looking like France. On the economic front, the growth of entitlements threatens to force our country to raise taxes to European levels, and with that comes European unemployment and European lack of growth. On the military front, these entitlements could force us to make major and devastating cuts to our military and homeland security infrastructure. Remember that French aircraft carrier that broke down a few years ago and had to be hauled to port by the U.S. military? And in terms of our culture, multiculturalism really threatens our nation's values, and I think we've seen the potential unruliness that can result in the riots that happened a few months ago in Paris. Without major reform, France threatens to no longer be the butt of our jokes, but rather our future.

