

# PRAGMATISTS, VISIONARIES, AND PROGRESSIVE POLITICS<sup>1</sup>

by

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Political struggles among Kansas and national Democrats and progressive activists are said to pit centrists against leftists. I think that's misleading. In terms of concrete proposals for government programs, the two sides agree much more than they disagree. What most separates them is the planning horizon. Those called centrists focus almost single-mindedly on winning the next election for Democrats.<sup>3</sup> Those called leftists focus almost singlemindedly on what they hope progressives can accomplish in twenty or thirty years. For that reason I'm going to call them pragmatists and visionaries.<sup>4</sup> Pragmatists are especially likely to have experience running for office or working intensively in political campaigns. Visionaries are especially likely to be grass roots Democrats who vote, attend meetings, write letters and emails, send in some money, and/or are peripherally involved in campaigns.

This split is shown for example over the Iraq War, which the major share of national elected Democratic officials have supported in one way or another, but which rank and file Democrats

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<sup>2</sup> I have received helpful comments from Gary Brunk, Sarah Coles, Mary Davidson, Paul Fairchild, Jeanne Klein, Joey Sprague, and an anonymous reviewer.

<sup>3</sup> This paper focuses mainly on the case of the Democratic Party. Moderate Republicans are in a somewhat different and arguably worse situation. Their overdeveloped pragmatist wing is supported by an underdeveloped visionary wing; partly in consequence, they have no real strategy. Researchers could usefully explore the long-run political implications for Kansas moderate Republicans of adopting alternative strategies, such as: re-occupying the "true conservative" positive that the radical right has abandoned; emphasizing government services to the middle class; or co-opting more progressive programs from the Democrats.

<sup>4</sup> The terms "pragmatist" and "visionary" are used by Geoffrey Moore (1999) in a somewhat different context to contrast two different consumer attitudes towards adoption of new technology. Moore's "visionaries" are early adopters, while his "pragmatists" are the early majority of mainstream adopters. Moore has three other categories that could also be usefully applied to political activism and political change: "enthusiasts," who are the original innovators; "conservatives," who are the late majority of adopters; and "skeptics," who are laggards at adoption. However my subject here is adoption of ideology by progressive activists, most of whom are either visionaries or pragmatists. The Appendix shows Moore's description of attitude differences between pragmatists and visionaries. For other efforts to apply Moore's categories to Democratic politics, see Dina (2004) and Sippey (2004).

have fairly consistently opposed. National Democrats believed (with very good reason) that politicians who opposed the war too radically would be heavily targeted by radical right money and were likely to be picked off in the 2004 election. But as a result of tacking with the wind, few leaders are now in a good position to lead the charge against the war, at a time when swing voters would be responsive to it.

This paper makes several points:

1. Pragmatists and visionaries actually agree much more than they disagree about the government reforms they would like to focus on over the next twenty years.
2. They differ however over a number of secondary questions, for example: what reforms to focus on in the next election, to what extent is incrementalism a good long-run strategy, to what extent do we even need a long-run strategy, what language to use in describing reforms, how should politicians present themselves, and to what extent should compromise and heterodoxy be acceptable within political groups, especially by not only the Democratic Party. And, they feel a certain amount of rage at each other about it.
3. There is a socially necessary division of labor between pragmatists and visionaries. Visionaries create ideas and a climate of opinion that allows pragmatists to win elections and implement those ideas. Hence they need each other.
4. People on both sides of the divide could do a better job if they worked together more closely. However, lots of folks on both sides are not convinced they need to work together very much if at all. They need to be convinced.

## **1. The division of labor in social change**

"Pragmatist" and "visionary" are schematic models or ideal types. Real people come in many intermediate flavors, with varying time horizons. Also there are important differences in ideology among progressives other than the planning horizon. But to the extent that the time horizon does not capture all the differences between centrists and leftists, I suggest that differences in time horizon are much more important than, for example, differences in program. I hypothesize that time horizon does a better job than any other single variable of explaining what the struggle in the Democratic Party is all about.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> This model can also be applied to activism on the radical right, as suggested at a few points in this paper. However, there are important differences. The radical right really is radical and not truly conservative: there is essentially nothing in the existing social and political order that they especially want to conserve, and they have no principled allegiance to the American Constitution as it now exists. They sometimes view the Constitution as a grab bag of weapons and tools they can deploy as needed, and sometimes as a reactionary dream of an idealized past that never existed. (These points really need to be elaborated in a monograph.) Progressives almost by definition are not radicals: they believe in progress, which means incremental improvements in the good things our political order has already established. More than many other historical radical movements, the American radical right does use

These ideal types are intended to model attitudes more than roles. There are many visionary politicians, and even more pragmatic opinion leaders and theoreticians. Nevertheless, the attitudes can be defined in terms of the roles they best support.

I would also suggest that the real work of social change depends on having people who operate at a variety of time horizons: there is a division of labor. We need to analyze that division of labor in order understand if and how people occupying different roles should cooperate with each other. We also need to understand the innate barriers to cooperation.

One very important barrier is the reality principle. People in different roles have different ways of deciding what is real, true, or important. That can make it very hard to cooperate across roles. In normal cooperation, when you disagree on what is important, then the first thing you should try to do is conduct a joint reality check: you try to agree on what the facts are, to see what that tells you about what is important. That doesn't work well between pragmatists and visionaries because they tend to disagree on what facts are relevant.

### *Visionaries*

The socially useful labor of a visionary consists in engaging in dialog, speaking out, and writing. This work accomplishes three outputs: clarifying the vision (i.e. generating ideology), infecting other people with the same vision (i.e. acting as opinion leaders), and energizing people around them to act politically (motivating political participation). At the highest levels of visioning, we have public intellectuals who try to write influential books and think pieces. At intermediate levels we have citizens who write letters to the editor. At the bottom levels we have people who read those letters, assimilate them into their world view, and then pass on their ideas orally to their friends and family.

The work of visionaries has several targets. They seek to formulate programs, and rationales for programs, that people can support. They seek to rally the Democrat grass roots. They seek to recruit new grass root activists. They seek to tilt swing voters to the left. And they seek to demoralize the right.

Visionaries and opinion leaders can take a long view because they are not personally invested in winning the next election. Their most important reason for engaging with politics is that they want to live in a better society. They also enjoy influencing people. Any visionary who believes a better society can be built in a single election cycle drops out of the game after an election cycle or two proves her wrong

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incremental change as a tactic (e.g. the salami tactics that Samuel Alito and others devised to undercut Roe versus Wade), but being radicals they do not view either incremental change or majority consent as important political principles. Their innate radicalism shifts the balance of power within the radical right movement away from pragmatists and towards visionaries.

In principle, the reality principle of a visionary consists in the development of content and support for successful long-run strategies. If a strategy:

- a. is accepted by a mass of progressives, and
- b. leads to adoption of significant progressive reforms, and the prevention of further radical right successes; and
- c. the reforms function approximately as advertised;

then it is a good one.

Strategies are of two kinds: proactive (or offensive) and reactive (defensive). In light of hindsight, progressives pursued very effective proactive strategies on behalf of abolitionists, anti-monopolists, the labor movement, the ACLU, the civil rights movement, the women's movement, and the environmental movement. Those strategies are now mostly completed or decaying and need to be updated or replaced. (The reviving environmental movement is achieving some gains against global warming, and the gay rights movement is a relatively new success story.)

Recently the only successful reactive strategy by progressives consisted in defense of the Social Security system. I believe that the counterattack against teaching creationism in the schools will also succeed.

In practice, long-run success is not a clearly agreed or direct reality principle. One must wait many years in order to see if a given strategy pans out, and by then the authors of the strategy are no longer leading the progressives. However, visionaries do have a second order, predictive indicator of reality, which consists in the prestige which derives from persuasiveness.

Persuasiveness is the true coin of the realm among visionaries, but people differ in what they find persuasive. Prestige within various hierarchies is an important marker of persuasiveness. For example, academic success in a relevant discipline, readership for a writer, and leadership in large issue-oriented organizations are markers of prestige. At a more micro level, visionaries interact within influence hierarchies; those who are listened to by the most people have the most prestige.

At a very micro level, most ordinary voters who are not opinion leaders themselves take their cues from a small number of visionary opinion leaders they are close to, ones who more often than not have little prestige outside their small group. Mass media ads can reach these ordinary voters directly, but most voters still check out their impressions with local opinion leaders, and are unlikely to adjust fundamental beliefs without consulting their opinion leaders. Therefore to reach ordinary voters in any fundamental way it is necessary to motivate entire networks of opinion leaders.

Some people think that prestige and persuasiveness are arbitrary and fickle measures of what should be viewed as real or important. I disagree. Discussion and debate is the method that we human beings use in order to bring our collective intelligence to bear on complex problems. Prestige and persuasiveness are the signposts and markers of that process. When this discussion takes place in an honest and effective way in a political context, we call it democracy. When it occurs within an appropriately structured academic discipline, we call it science.

### *Pragmatists*

The socially useful labor of a pragmatist consists in supporting electoral campaigns. They may be candidates themselves, or they may work at policy formulation, fund raising, logistics, PR, speech writing, or organizing volunteers, but their goal is to elect a candidate to public office. Once in office, a candidate's leading goal is to take positions or pass laws which will be helpful during the next electoral cycle.

People who follow elections and legislation closely also tend to be pragmatists. In that sense, many public intellectuals are pragmatists rather than visionaries. By and large, nationally syndicated columnists of the center and left tend to be pragmatists: they focus on horse races stories, and on the next election. Visionaries are not prominent on mass media opinion pages. Paul Krugman and the late Molly Ivins are about as visionary as the mainstream media filter now allows—and both are (or were) relatively pragmatic.

Pragmatists have a very clear reality principle: winning elections. Those who worked in winning elections, or in losing elections that did better than expected, have more prestige and are listened to with more respect than others.

### *Organizers*

There is an intermediate class of activists I will call grass roots organizers. They do not run for office, but they do attempt to implement actual reform from below, by putting organized pressure on office holders. To do their job successfully they need a bit of a fixed vision that is outside the existing mainstream opinion, but they also need practical talents in finding pressure points to bring about actual change. They have an intermediate planning horizon which stretches beyond the next election, but generally not beyond their own tenure in the organizations they form or join. Their reality principle consists in making successful policy changes. They are very important social change agents, but as a simplification I will either omit them from this discussion, or else lump them with the visionaries.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Geoffrey Moore's idea of "crossing the chasm" between technology adoption by visionaries and pragmatists may be helpful in understanding the role of grassroots organizers. To convince a pragmatist to adopt a technology, it is generally necessary to deliver a complete system with all of the bugs worked out, but with a limited set of simple features focused on a very specific application. Grass roots organizers can be thought of as change agents who translate visionary ideas into very specific applications the pragmatists can implement.

### *Integrators*

I hope to discover (or propose to invent) yet another sub-category of activism, which consists in efforts to integrate visionary and pragmatist concerns. At the level of theory, integrators would write papers like this one. Acting as such, they would be a subtype of visionaries. At the level of action, integrators would attempt to create organizational forms that can support cooperation between visionaries, organizers, and pragmatists. Acting as such, they would be a subtype of grass roots organizers.

### *Rank and file voters*

The previous categories refer to people who are activists in their various ways. They probably constitute less than a fourth of the Democratic Party. The remaining people who identify themselves as Democrats generally follow elections and politics at the level of headlines in the press or one-liners by TV comedians, show up and vote, and do little more.<sup>7</sup>

### *Model validity*

I'd ask progressive readers to consider whether each fits reasonably well into just one of these categories. I'd be interested in feedback on what descriptive elements in that category don't seem to fit.

## **2. Common agreement**

I suggest that most people in the Democratic Party, whether pragmatists, visionaries, organizers, or rank and file voters, could accept 80% or more of the following statements as ideal goals, subject only to differences about political feasibility or effectiveness.

### *A model platform*

- a. We need to cut our losses and get out of Iraq as quickly as is politically feasible.
- b. The struggle against al Qaida is real and needs to be actively pursued, but not at any serious cost to our civil liberties.
- c. We support multilateralism and the rule of law over unilateralism in international affairs.
- d. The country desperately needs universal health insurance with a secure funding base.
- e. We should increase K-12 teachers' salaries, provide universal early child hood education, and make college attendance feasible for every high school graduate. And universal summer school is the only assured way we have of making American K-12 education more competitive with other industrialized countries.
- f. We should balance the budget.

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<sup>7</sup> Using Geoffrey Moore's terminology, they could be referred to as "conservatives."

- g. We should do so mainly by raising taxes on businesses and the rich and cutting the useless parts of national defense, not by cutting social programs.
- h. Star Wars is useless and should be dismantled.
- i. Military bases in the Middle East will be useless if we get serious about energy independence.
- j. We should reverse every environmental regulation cut back by Bush.
- k. We should sign the Kyoto protocol.
- l. Energy independence starts with government energy efficiency regulations.
- m. A stiff carbon tax with a give-back to poor people is a great idea if we can sell it politically. A good time to sell it would be after the next terrorist attack on US soil.
- n. Expanding the earned income credit is the best thing Clinton did.
- o. A national law outlawing state and local discretionary tax abatements for economic development would be a good idea.
- p. We need to put rehabilitation programs back into prisons.
- q. We should outlaw the death penalty.
- r. We support Roe versus Wade, but not all the exceptions allowed by the Supreme Court.
- s. Creationism has no place in public school science classes.
- t. Gay marriage should be a right.
- u. Free trade rules are no longer working to the advantage of ordinary Americans. We need to develop new rules that will protect general wage levels in America without protecting specific industries. For example, we might require the Chinese to buy as much from us as we buy from them.
- v. We need to change the rules so that many more voters get the polls.
- w. DC and Puerto Rico ought to have statehood, or the equivalent.
- x. We need to break up the media monopolies.
- y. The only stable solution to campaign finance scandals is public support for campaigns.
- z. We need Supreme Court Justices who pay close attention to impacts on ordinary people.

Now granted, I could also come up with a list of issues that would generate heated disagreement (for example, alternative energy versus CO<sub>2</sub> sequestration; how extensively to demilitarize American foreign policy<sup>8</sup>; reparations for Blacks).<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, I think most Democrats would happily support any candidate whose platform was identical to my first list, provided he or she could get elected.<sup>10</sup> If I'm right, that indicates strong agreement between pragmatists and

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<sup>8</sup> Probably the most important split is between "liberals of fear," who support expanding our unilateral military means of national defense, and "liberals of hope," who support strengthening the international order (Robin, 2004, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> One can generate even more fire by bringing up shibboleths dear to the heart of a significant number of visionaries, such as socialism, public ownership of the fundamental means of production, atheism, and world government. I call these issues shibboleths because they are of absolutely no practical importance to the positions most serious progressives plan to pursue in the next twenty years. Even if these shibboleths were good ideas on their own merits, as most progressive visionaries realize a majority of Americans won't be converted to them within our planning horizon.

<sup>10</sup> However I don't claim there is anything magical about this particular list. Many items could be added or

visionaries at the level of ideal programs.

### *Model validity*

All of these claims are empirically testable. For starters, I ask my readers to calculate what share of these statements each disagrees with. I also ask them if they would support a politically promising candidate with that particular platform.

### *Further implications*

Furthermore, I'd claim that Democrats are ideologically more unified now than ever before during some two centuries of party history. Democrats since Jefferson have always had a strong progressive strain, in the sense of representing the interests of ordinary people in opposition to interests of the rich or powerful or traditionalists, but always in the past there were strong progressive elements in the Whig or Republican Party as well, and also strong regressive elements in the Democratic Party. That is less true now than ever before.

This unity is not necessarily a short run or tactical advantage, by the way. Most of the ordinary people we seek to defend have selective regressive sympathies, and to win their votes we need to make compromises. It is hard for us as a movement to make compromises with regressive positions that most of us strongly disagree with.<sup>11</sup>

There is an important paradox we need to understand. On the one hand, the positions given above are not just accepted by most Democrats—to a significant extent, most of them are accepted by a majority of Americans. Progressive values are in fact the majority position in America. (Gay marriage for example is rejected by a majority of American, but closer polling shows that majority of Americans either accept gay marriage, or are quite uncomfortable with the degree of unfairness gays have to put up with. Most people know in their hearts – and the radical right especially well knows – that gay marriage is coming.) On the other hand, a majority of voters have strong emotional hot-button regressive reactions on one or more of these topics. These hot buttons are rooted in fear or hatred, which overrides more rational thought based on self-interest. Appealing to these hot buttons is the basis for all radical right electoral success.<sup>12</sup> Successful Democratic and moderate Republican campaigns therefore depend on narrowing the focus of the election to a small number of issues, and preventing a majority of the voters from allowing their hot buttons to be triggered.

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deleted without changing my conclusions.

<sup>11</sup> The radical left in the 1960's hoped for realignment of the two major parties. Now they've got what they wanted. Thus far it hasn't been a good thing for progressives.

<sup>12</sup> I elaborate on this claim in Burress (2006).



Indeed, this is the basic reason why progressives need a strategy: if we take on every issue at once (as our unity tempts us to do) we will almost always lose. In developing a strategy, however, unity gives us a long run advantage: agreeing on goals is half of the internal battle.<sup>13</sup>

### **3. Common disagreement**

Pragmatists and visionaries may converge at the level of goals, but they are far apart on means, as well as on language and style. (Parental warning: many readers will find some of the following distasteful to their ears. I intend to be partly descriptive and partly critical.)

#### *A model of pragmatist beliefs*

Pragmatists tend to support the big tent and the 11<sup>th</sup> commandment, because both are practical short-run aids to winning elections. Most pragmatists believe that candidates have to bend with the wind in each electoral district. On the other hand, they tend to think that voters ought to vote a straight Party ticket, as a rebuttable moral principle. Pragmatists want to focus in on a very small number of carefully selected issues. They generally do not get out in front on issues unless they believe there is already majority support for that position in their electorate. They seek to have very good intelligence on what voters in their district are actually thinking. If an individual or an issue becomes damaging to them, they try to distance themselves and cut their losses as quickly as they can. They need to make decisions quickly, without a lot of debate. They try not to say things they don't believe, but they very definitely do not announce publicly every single thing they do believe. Pragmatists recognize the importance of secrecy in campaign tactics. They are very aware of new electoral technologies and techniques, and while they may not like the way political campaigning has gone, they feel they do have to be very good at campaigning as it now is. They tend to hate what they see as the utter impracticality of many visionaries, and they find visionary conversation to be just so much time-wasting. Many pragmatists would explain the rise of radical right largely in terms of the loss of the South, and if they wanted to they could point out that it was precipitated by Democratic civil rights policies pushed by progressive visionaries and opposed by many pragmatists. (Does that mean the Democrats should regret supporting desegregation? Of course not. But visionaries do need to be aware of the full costs of implementing their visions.) Pragmatists tend to believe that reversing the radical right tide depends on having better use of language, better framing, better issue selection, and better technique. They tend to view Bill Clinton as a great strategist.

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<sup>13</sup> It is an interesting paradox that progressives, who are united in values, work together much more poorly than regressives, who are not. Can any one imagine any two groups with less in common than antigovernment libertarians, and the theocratic, sexually repressive radical religious right? Yet the RRR provide the shock troops, and rich libertarians the money, that together have been taking progressives to the cleaners.

### *A model of visionary beliefs*

Visionaries tend to support party discipline at the level of party leadership, because it is essential for passing and implementing legislation. Most visionaries believe that, over time, a unified national political voice could do much to reverse radical right dominance. At the same time (and somewhat inconsistently), they tend to be very willing to go public with their own controversial personal views, and they don't much like secrecy. They tend to be a fractious lot, and they view that as a strength. And yet (somewhat inconsistently) they tend to think that candidates should accept all elements of the party platform. Moreover, they tend to think the party platform should include most of the points listed in Section 2, and more. Yet they like to stray away from voting a straight Democratic ticket as necessary to punish leaders who don't agree. And, they tend to think that Democrats in Congress and the Statehouse should be fighting on all of those fronts at once. At the same time (and somewhat inconsistently) they fault pragmatists for having no long-run strategy. They also fault pragmatists in office for exerting little energy to change the electoral rules and campaign finance rules that they are accustomed to, and for being too beholden to great corporations. They tend to view Clinton as a great tactician who was a failed strategist. They think that pragmatists bear substantial blame for the reduction of Democratic Party from majority to minority status over the past twenty years. They tend to think of pragmatists as narrow technicians who know little history or theory and apply even less to their work. (The Clintons are semi-counter-examples, polymaths who as yet have not been especially successful at application.) They believe that pragmatists take a static and short-sighted view of issue selection (what issues can we sell today?), whereas we really need a dynamic view (what issues can we use to change public opinion over time?). They tend to suspect pragmatists of being cynical, being willing to lie to the voters, and having little faith in the electorate's ability to understand the truth.

### *Model validity*

These are empirically testable claims about the attitudes and beliefs of the two factions. As a first pass at empirical testing, I ask my readers to reread the paragraph above that best applies to you (and you know who you are!) and see what share of the statements accurately describe your attitudes. Then give me your feed-back. Did I get it approximately right?

## **4. Reciprocity**

### *Why visionaries need pragmatists*

A visionary of the American left is nearly always a small-d democrat. That means that, however progressive or leftist or socialistic his ideals may be, he cannot self-consistently implement progressive reforms contrary to the concerted will of the people. Persuasion must precede reform. This remains true no matter how corrupt and unfair the existing system is, nor how monopolized the media; significant change depends on organizing the people to share a new vision.

Visionaries have a key role in influencing the general climate of opinion, but by nature they are unable to make the final sale. At the point of sale, a collection of candidates must actually get elected, and then actually vote in the change, and then police the implementation of that change over time. Candidates who get elected are pragmatists, almost by definition. Therefore vision without the support of pragmatics is wheel spinning.

Moreover, pragmatists supply a clear reality principle. If your vision does not make contact with reality, it has no use. Visions can in principle go wrong, in either of two ways: they might not work as advertised if implemented, or they might be incapable of winning approval and being implemented in a particular society. The realism of the vision matters deeply. The only way to demonstrate realism is get the vision implemented, with help of pragmatists.

Visionaries also need pragmatists to assist the work of visioning. This is not just a need for pragmatists "eventually" or "when the time comes." The need is for direct feedback from pragmatists at the time the visionary is doing her work. Visions based on flights of fancy rather than on reality are the penalty for visioning without any pragmatic interaction. Pragmatists may not know very well what could be sold over time, but they do know what can be sold today. And today is the parent of tomorrow.

Most visionaries are aware of their intellectual and political dependence on pragmatic politicians, but are typically not very willing to compromise with them. They see their respective tasks as unrelated. They need to rethink.

Visionaries who get involved with electoral campaigns tend to find that their visions change. That means that their visions were not robust against new data, which is to say they included erroneous ideas. A theoretician who resists data is an ideologue, which is to say, unwilling to discard wrong ideas. That tends to make him useless to the progressive movement. Visionaries need the reality check of direct political involvement.

Visionaries may also find they have something distinctive to offer the campaign. Visionary Democrats who genuinely want to improve society cannot consistently duck out of supporting short-run electoral efforts.

#### *Why pragmatists need visionaries*

Most candidates and public officials do recognize their need for services which, on examination, are best provided by visionaries.

- They see a need for policy analysis - i.e. facts and technical arguments to support their positions, or to help them select positions. As I will argued in Burrell (forthcoming), in the nature of things competent policy analysis is largely supplied by visionaries and not by

pragmatists.<sup>14</sup>

- Politicians stand to gain from coordinating with opinion leaders to get messages out prior to elections. They could also gain from coordinating messages during elections. As argued above, opinion leaders are typically visionaries.
- Some politicians who look beyond the next election also see value in having a long-run progressive strategy. Pragmatists need visionaries to help in that strategizing because visionaries provide a kind of reality check that is different from winning elections. Pragmatists in the trenches often lose track of the big picture. From time to time they need to talk to someone who thinks about the war as a whole, and asks whether one should actually be fighting in this particular trench at all. That is the job of visionaries.

Nevertheless, many pragmatists see little to gain from working cooperatively with visionaries. Visionaries are in fact hard to work with: they have personality styles that conflict with pragmatists, and visionaries tend to resist campaign discipline. Politicians tend to think that, when they need op ed writers and policy analysts and speech writers and public opinion managers who are long-run visionaries, either they will volunteer their services, or else they can be purchased on the open market using campaign dollars—just like any other campaign skill. In either case the visionaries are under campaign discipline. Visionaries employed directly by the candidate are much less of a pain in the butt than free-range visionaries: if they go off the reservation they get dumped immediately, like any other political embarrassment.

At the Presidential level that privatized delivery model is reasonably effective. Each major Presidential candidate and each President gathers a large stable of specialized visionaries and public intellectuals.<sup>15</sup> At the Congressional and especially at the state and local level this market model is much less effective. Policy analysis for example is an expensive commodity that is always in short supply for small scale campaigns and lower-level office holders.

Large gains in efficiency are available from sharing policy analysis and op ed pieces across campaigns and office holders. However those gains come at a cost: market power would be increased for the visionaries and reduced for the politicians. The politicians would have to work more cooperatively with visionaries, rather than in a commanding patron-client relationship. Politicians would also need to coordinate their campaigns more closely with each other, in order to share common public opinion efforts.

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<sup>14</sup> I am not including public opinion pollsters and PR specialists in the category of policy analysts. A policy analyst tries to determine what public policies would actually work in the long run, which makes her a visionary. A PR specialist tries to determine what proposals can be sold to the public in the short run, which makes her a pragmatist.

<sup>15</sup> It is important to note however that Presidential candidates are clients of public intellectuals as much as public intellectuals are clients of candidates. The candidate often signs on to pre-existing policy positions worked out by the intellectual, which increases the prestige of both parties.

Democrats and moderate Republicans at lower levels have typically tended to go it alone, relying on privately employed visionaries where available and doing without otherwise. Radical right Republicans have increasingly adopted a more efficient collectivized delivery model, organized partly around think tanks and partly around the radical right media machine, and they accept the collective discipline their system imposes on candidates. The success of the radical right's collective approach speaks for itself.<sup>16</sup>

Most politicians can see the benefits (as well as costs) of coordinated and collective campaign services and coordinated opinion management over a short run or tactical time frame. In contrast, many pragmatists<sup>17</sup> do not see much benefit in developing and following a long run progressive strategy. They tend to believe that a series of short run technically-based successes will translate into a long run progressive resurgence.

To them I say, what other than a collective long-run strategy could conceivably reverse 40 years of relatively steady decline of the progressive left? It seems clear to me that long-run strategy was essential for the rise of the radical right. To have no counter-strategy is to engage in wishful thinking; it turns pragmatism into its opposite, which is fecklessness.

Other pragmatists say that long-run strategy can be worked out by practicing politicians. To them I say, during 40 years of relatively steady decline in progressive power why haven't progressive politicians done so?<sup>18</sup> The strategies listed on page 4 were worked out by organizers and visionaries, not pragmatists—with exception of the (purely reactive) defense of Social Security, a consensual strategy that has been accepted by all progressive factions since the time of FDR.

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<sup>16</sup> Again the paradox: regressives preach individualism and practice collectivism; progressives preach collectivism and practice individualism.

<sup>17</sup> Typified at the national level by the Democratic Leadership Committee (DLC).

<sup>18</sup> Lincoln's political skills were unparalleled, but he did not invent the abolitionist program. The reform programs of the American Revolution were worked out by a broad movement with well-balanced pragmatic and visionary impulses. Uniquely among Presidents, FDR however did find his way by trial and error into an effective long-run strategy – based of course on implementing, protecting, and extending the New Deal. No other politician in American history had the combined benefits of systemic crisis, prolonged tenure in office, improvisational brilliance, great personal skill and magnetism, and collective flowering of the visionary brain trust that made the New Deal possible. Any pragmatists still expecting a Second Coming of FDR are actually deluded visionaries. I too have hopes for Barack Obama, but hope is no substitute for a strategy.

## 5. Cooperation

Many Kansas pragmatists and visionaries I talk with share a vision: progressive activists of all stripes from all across the state will one day start sitting down in a room together on a regular basis and hash out common strategies and common language and framing and messages and priorities and platforms, and then they will work together to get those messages out to Kansans on a coordinated basis. In support of that strategizing and messaging, there will be progressive think tanks and progressive opinion networks, and, ultimately, progressive mass media.

The radical right has already achieved such a system of organization at both national and state levels. I do not know to what extent it has been systematized in Kansas the form of regular radical right leadership meetings, but obviously a Kansas system of radical right think tanks and media and unified public rhetoric is in place.

What creates the discipline that holds their system together? A shared desire for power is an important glue, as is true believerdom on the part of many radical right activists, but I believe that the key ingredient is ample funding from a few very wealthy businessmen (in Kansas the Kochs are especially prominent; see e.g. Rothschild, 2005). While money is available for religious right campaigns from many donors in small denominations, what distinctively holds the radical right think tanks and media machines together is centralized big money.

The coalition of Kansas progressives cannot be held together in the same way. Kansas progressives need to discover ways of doing something progressives find difficult: putting together a broad and stable coalition of pragmatists and visionaries. To do that they will need both desire and humility, as well as a willingness to compromise, on both sides. In Burress (forthcoming) I will discuss the roles that a think tank could play in this process.

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### **Appendix: Moore on personality styles**

Moore (1999, page 18) contrasts visionaries and pragmatists according to the following table:

Visionaries	Pragmatists
Intuitive	Analytic
Support revolution	Support evolution
Contrarian	Conformist
Break away from the pack	Stay with the herd
Follow their own dictates	Consult with their colleagues
Take risks	Manage risks
Motivated by future opportunities	Motivated by present problems
Seek what is possible	Seek what is probable

While neither Moore's application (consumer choice, as opposed to styles of activism) nor the exact details of Moore's personality types are exactly the same as in this paper, I think Moore's list is quite helpful. One thing I think it doesn't capture very well however is the relatively high level of desire for autonomous power on the part of pragmatist politicians—which may necessitate standing out from the herd. Also, progressive visionaries by definition believe in progress, not revolution. They may well want faster change than pragmatists believe possible, but they seek neither a shooting revolution nor fundamental changes that are fundamentally resisted by the American people.