

I Have a Question for Donald Trump

As I noted in the first of my columns on last week's meetings between Donald Trump and cultural conservative thinkers, leaders and activists, I was privileged to serve on the steering committee brought together by Bill Dallas, who leads United in Purpose, and the leaders of that organization that organized the meetings.

While the news media portrayed the events as Donald Trump meeting with "Evangelicals," the big town hall-style meeting at the Marriott Marquis on Times Square included about 1,000 individuals representing most of the conservative movement's cultural conservative organizations, interests and issues.

As a member of the steering committee I also had the opportunity to meet with Donald Trump in a much smaller group setting, and in both meetings I was anxious to ask Trump a version of a question that I have put to many post-Reagan Republican candidates, and that I urge conservatives to ask of every candidate for any office:

Mr. Trump,

Candidates for public office often promise us conservatives the sun, the moon, the stars—and sometimes they even believe it.

But conservatives have learned the hard way that personnel is policy, and if the candidate, upon assuming office, puts into key positions mostly captains of industry, Fortune 500 executives, and Wall Street types, we lose—our issues will not see the light of day.

Because of your extensive business background, the people you've walked with for the last 45 years, your friends, your

business associates—with few exceptions—do not share our views and values on our most important issues, such as traditional values, cultural issues, limited government, opposition to crony government and religious liberty.

Why should conservatives, who have strongly-held views about these issues, have confidence that, if you're fortunate to move into 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue next January 20, you will appoint people to key positions in the White House, such as White House Chief of Staff, Deputy Chief of Staff, Chief of Personnel, and cabinet positions, such as Attorney General and Health and Human Services, who share the views and values of us conservatives who are the base of the Republican Party?

Unfortunately, I didn't get to ask that question in either the small group meeting—which was largely Donald Trump delivering a campaign speech to us—or in the large town hall meeting which focused mostly on religious liberty.

The closest Donald Trump came to addressing that question was in his comments about judges, and making his judicial appointments from candidates suggested by the Federalist Society and the Heritage Foundation.

That was encouraging, but it didn't really address my concerns, which were first raised a few months ago during CNN's GOP Town Hall in Columbia, South Carolina when Anderson Cooper asked Donald Trump, "Would you want all Republicans in your cabinet?"

"No, not necessarily," Trump responded. "I want the best people."

I hate to say it, but that was almost word-for-word the answer Mitt Romney gave me when I asked him the personnel question back on October 1, 2007 when he was running in the Primary against John McCain.

In fairness, Trump has come a long way since that CNN town hall in South Carolina and he has, from the beginning of his campaign, assembled a solid inside group of cultural conservative supporters.

Rev. Jerry Falwell, Jr., Phyllis Schlafly, Gov. Sarah Palin, Michele Bachmann, Pastor Paula White, Darrell Scott, former Pentagon official Joseph E. Schmitz and conservative talk show host Sam Clovis, to say nothing of Senator Jeff Sessions and some of his top staffers, have been advising Trump from the beginning, but these conservatives, good people as they are, are Donald Trump's new friends.

And we all know that top government appointments do not go to the applicant with the highest SAT score. When it comes to political appointments "the best" is a highly subject judgement.

So my concern is not with Donald Trump's new conservative friends, my concern is with his old friends, the Wall Street types, the Palm Beach society types, the sports and entertainment types who have been Donald Trump's associates over the long course of his business and entertainment career.

If Donald Trump were to appoint a distinguished Wall Street lawyer as his Attorney General, chances are the cultural conservative agenda would get short shrift, the same thing if he were to appoint a Palm Beach society doctor as Surgeon General or a leading figure from the insurance or medical industry to head the Department of Health and Human Services.

Anyone of those individuals might qualify as among "the best," but they probably wouldn't be the "best conservative" for the job, and that should be our goal as conservatives—getting the best conservatives available appointed to key positions in the next administration.

Clearly, it does not come naturally to Donald Trump to speak the language of cultural conservatives, politically active Christians, the Bible and the Constitution.

But, just as clearly, we have him looking our way on a number of important issues: judicial appointments, matters of conscience and religious liberty, and reining-in the use of government enforced political correctness to stifle Christian witness in the public square.

If I were to summarize my takeaway from my meetings with Donald Trump it would be this: *We have a start, because we have Donald Trump at the negotiating table.*

If you read Donald Trump's book, *The Art of the Deal*, and listen carefully and parse what he says, one thing comes through loud and clear: *What interests Donald Trump is not closing the deal; it is negotiating the deal.*

It is the pursuit that interests Trump, not necessarily the close.

And what this should tell conservatives is that remaining engaged in the communication and education process with Donald Trump is the most important part of the "art of the deal"—simply offering up support and expecting Trump to be on board with our agenda is to disregard his history and the plain words of what he has said in books and speeches spanning decades.

The good news is, Trump has offered conservatives a vehicle to do that, a group referred to by *Politico* as Trump's "Evangelical Advisory Board" which includes, among others, my old friend Dr. James Dobson, Rev. Jerry Falwell, Jr. and Ralph Reed, Founder, of the Faith and Freedom Coalition, and one of cultural conservatism's sharpest political minds.

We know there's no negotiating on our issues with Hillary Clinton, so it is to Trump that right-of-center voters will

have to look if our country and constitutional liberties are to survive, *and it is to us that Trump must look to find the votes necessary to win the election.*

We have an opportunity to negotiate a win-win deal with Donald Trump, but the burden to make clear what our priorities are, and that personnel is policy is one of those priorities, is now on us.

I urge CHQ readers to prayerfully consider how they can get engaged in the Trump campaign and contribute to the effort to educate Donald Trump and his team on how, and most importantly, who can best advance the cause of governing America according to limited government constitutional conservative principles.

Richard A. Viguerie transformed American politics in the 1960s and '70s by pioneering the use of direct mail fundraising in the political and ideological spheres. He used computerized direct mail fundraising to help build the conservative movement, which then elected Ronald Reagan as the first conservative president of the modern era. As the "Funding Father of the conservative movement," Viguerie motivated millions of Americans to participate in politics for the first time, greatly expanding the base of active citizenship. He is our era's equivalent of Tom Paine, using a direct mail letter rather than a pamphlet to deliver his call to arms.