

Richard Viguerie: Phyllis Schlafly Was the First Lady of the Conservative Movement

My longtime friend Phyllis Schlafly, who died yesterday at age 92, was one of the most influential conservatives who never held public office.

Mrs. Schlafly, known to her many friends and admirers as the First Lady of the Conservative Movement, wrote some 20 books and her Eagle Forum issued hundreds of reports and monographs.

However, it was her 1964 book, *A Choice Not an Echo*, written to promote the insurgent conservative candidacy of Senator Barry Goldwater, that became one of the seminal works of the modern conservative movement, and updated in a new 50th Anniversary Edition, it is still in print today.

Phyllis paid her way through college by working in a World War II ammunition plant and later, while rearing her six children, she obtained her law degree.

While perhaps most widely known for her opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment, and the successful national campaign to stop its passage, through her books and columns, Phyllis Schlafly led the conservative movement in the cultural, economic, judicial, national security arenas and in Republican Party organizing—she was the complete package, a true Renaissance Woman.

She was also one of the great authorities on the history of the modern Republican Party, having attended every Republican National Convention from 1952 to 2016 and often serving on its Platform Committee.

Perhaps second only to, 002, Dr. Lee Edwards, Distinguished

Fellow in Conservative Thought, B. Kenneth Simon Center for Principles and Politics at The Heritage Foundation, Phyllis Schlafly was *the* authority on the battle for the soul of the GOP between conservatives and the establishment “kingmakers.”

And it was in her most widely read book, *A Choice Not an Echo*, that she found her strongest and most enduring voice chronicling that battle and calling for a populist-conservative uprising to take back control of the Republican Party and make it once and for all the political home of limited government constitutional conservatives.

In *A Choice Not an Echo* Phyllis Schlafly was perhaps the first person to set forth the argument that the first and greatest impediment to governing America according to conservative principles is not the Democrats and the Left, it is the corrupt and feckless Republican establishment.

The premise of the book was that the “kingmakers” using every trick of politics “dictated the choice of the Republican presidential nominee just as completely as the Paris dressmakers control the length of women’s skirts.”

That insight powered many of her battles, particularly the battles against the ERA, for President Ronald Reagan’s defense build-up and for the Republican Party to become the pro-life party. Schlafly was unstinting and unapologetic in holding the feet of so-called moderate Republicans to the fire when they looked like they might join the progressive Left and abandon the conservative principles she fought to include in the Republican Platform.

It also may have led her to become the first major movement conservative figure to endorse Donald Trump for president, a move which split her Eagle Forum and shook the conservative movement to its core.

But Schlafly was unapologetic for the choice of Trump over other candidates with stronger conservative, especially

cultural conservative, bonafides.

Saying “Trump is the only hope to defeat the kingmakers ... because everybody else will fall in line. The kingmakers have so much money behind them.”

“The kingmakers,” Schlafly told Breitbart, “have picked our last bunch of losers. And there’s one loser after another because they were more interested in maintaining their flow of money from the big donors and their cooperation with the Democrats—their bipartisanship—and that’s not my goal. I’m for America [Schlafly slammed her hand on table] and America first [slammed her hand on table again].”

I last saw Phyllis in July at her “Life of the Party” pro-life luncheon on the Tuesday of the 2016 Republican National Convention. At the event, Phyllis hosted 500 conservative leaders, elected officials and pro-life delegates to the Republican National Convention. I was honored to be seated at her table along with two of my other heroes, former Notre Dame football coaches Lou Holtz and Jerry Faust. While she was often conveyed from place-to-place in a wheelchair by one of her staff, she had lost none of her fire for America or for conservative principles.

Somewhat like Moses, although she had seen the Republican Party adopt in her words “the most conservative platform ever” and she was unapologetic in her belief that Trump would finally realize her vision and break the kingmakers, Phyllis would not live to see the campaign she inspired win.

The No. 1 thing conservatives lack—and it’s above everything else—is leadership.

Among those of us of the New Right, Phyllis Schlafly was affectionately referred to as 001 because she was the conservative movement’s longest-serving and most effective and principled leader. We will not see her like again in our lifetimes. Phyllis, you will always be No. 1 with us. May God

receive you kindly and may He continue to watch over the America you loved so deeply. {eoa}

Richard 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.