

Steve Strang: Covering the Politics of Faith

Note: This article ran in the July 2015 issue of Charisma magazine.

Covering politics is not new to *Charisma*. Over the years we have often covered how the Christian community interacts with the political process, as we have this month. As you read this issue you can see things in our nation are very serious, and this election will be pivotal. All year I'm giving my perspective on how *Charisma* has covered the church and the charismatic movement for the past 40 years.

Most other Christian publications are nonprofits. There are laws against nonprofits endorsing political candidates. Even though ministries and churches can speak out on the issues, they are often reluctant to do so. However because we are set up as a for-profit publishing house we don't have those restrictions. And every four years since 1984 we've endorsed a candidate for president.

In our own way Charisma has tried to sound the alarm on the dangerous trends that our nation faces. In the 1980s it was the abortion debate. Then slowly and more recently the big debate has shifted to the gay agenda.

Our coverage is not about endorsing one political party. I've been registered as a voter in both parties at different times. I consider both parties imperfect at best and corrupt at worst.

Our first big political story was in 1983 when we interviewed then Secretary of the Interior James Watt, who was raised in the Assemblies of God and was the first Pentecostal to serve in a cabinet level position. Even though we think of those as simpler and more conservative times, Watt was villainized by

the left, who made fun of the doctrine of the second coming that most Pentecostals believe.

He was accused of not caring for the environment because, of course, Jesus was going to snatch us away at any time—which meant long-term care of resources was unimportant. Of course nothing was further from the truth. Watt served with distinction and was one of the best secretaries of the interior before or since.

It is the “Jesus is coming” mentality that has kept many Bible believers from engaging more with the culture or the political process. The emphasis was always on a heavenly kingdom rather than an earthly one. Going back to the World War I, most Pentecostals were pacifists (like we would think of the Mennonites today). That changed by the second world war but staying on the political sidelines continued for decades.

In more recent years that has begun to change and we have covered those changes and editorialized that godly voices must speak up—especially pastors and leaders. One such leader who came not from our ranks but from the Baptists was former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee.

In 2007 I recognized a good story when Huckabee ran for president. We ran it in our New Man magazine. Even though he wasn’t well-known, our story made the case, “How Mike Huckabee could be the next president of the United States.”

Our story was written from information in the public domain and we never interviewed Huckabee. We did not literally endorse him—it was too early.

But readers in Iowa started showing up for events with copies of the issue of the magazine to be autographed. Just the fact that our article gave his candidacy credibility was the boost he needed to win the Iowa straw poll shortly after that. Huckabee emailed me to say our article was an important part of his winning Iowa.

A decade ago we published a book that became a best-seller: *The Faith of George W. Bush*. It was a journalistic look at the then-president and how his faith shaped his outlook on life.

TIME magazine credited that book with putting the evangelical vote firmly on Bush's side in the 2004 election.

Our political coverage is about to explode with our new Charisma Caucus website, which we are announcing in this issue. We already have a lot of political coverage from a Christian perspective you'll find nowhere else online.

We are looking for content both original and material we'd aggregate. So we need our readers to engage with us and help us.

This political season there are several good candidates we could get behind. We are holding our endorsement until closer to the primary season to see who emerges as the leader who can ultimately win.

Stay tuned and help us get out the word on Charisma Caucus.