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The GOP's Maginot Line

Michael Sean Winters | Oct. 30, 2009 NCR Today

?Out of the mouths of Fox News reporters?? Politico.com has an interesting article about former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee?s declining to officially endorse Conservative Party candidate Doug Hoffman in the three-way race in New York?s twenty-third congressional district. Hoffman has been endorsed over his Republican and Democratic rivals by such GOP luminaries as Sarah Palin, Tim Pawlenty and Fred Thompson.

The comments of conservative activists show why the GOP will have a hard time climbing out of the ditch into which they have thrown themselves. They voice disappointment, surprise even at Huckabee?s unwillingness to back Hoffman. They want him to ?take a stand.? This small upstate contest has become a battle for the soul of the Republican Party, and there will attach a sense of betrayal, not disagreement, to those who do not sign on.

On Fox, host Neil Cavuto said that conservatives ?seem to be drawing a Maginot Line? around the contest. The metaphor may be more illustrative than Cavuto knows. The Maginot Line was a series of heavy defensive fortifications stretching along the French frontier with Germany from Strasbourg north to Longuyon. It ended there because the Ardennes Forest was considered impassable by modern, mechanized armies. Oddly, the French military chiefs kept forty-three divisions behind these fortifications. When the Germans marched through the Ardennes, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill asked General Gamelin, ?Where is the strategic reserve?? with which he hoped to counter the German attack, Gamelin replied, ?Aucune.? There was no strategic reserve. Half the French Army was standing behind the Maginot Line which should have been defended lightly given the strength of its fortifications. In short, the Maginot Line served its purpose of defending that sector of the frontier, but the French military leadership failed to appreciate, and act upon, that strategic fact.

Many in the GOP are busy opposing their own nominee because she is in favor of gay rights, pro-choice, and has good relations with unions. But, the midterms in 2010, and even more the presidential election in 2012 will not be fought on such issues. Health care reform, whatever is happening in Afghanistan, and the state of the US economy will be the dominant issues and the GOP does not have a whole lot of interesting things to say, except ?No? to any of that. They are strengthening a frontier from which there will be no attack and putting all their troops behind it. It did not work in 1940 for Gamelin and it will not work today for the GOP. Even if they win the race in upstate New York, they will likely draw the wrong conclusion. They need to be reaching out to the center, not calling out those who fail to join in their ideological crusade.

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