

## **The end of history - and back again**

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FRANCIS FUKUYAMA emerged as a celebrated prophet of the conservative movement after he published his famous work *The End Of History*, but today his prophecy is one that American conservatives do not want to hear.

"I think the Republicans don't deserve to get re-elected this year," he said in an interview in Sydney yesterday. "I think they could use four years, or eight years, in the wilderness."

It is not merely that he does not endorse the Republican candidate for the presidency, Senator John McCain. "I think John McCain is by far the best of the candidates the Republicans had, but when you have some responsibility for policy failure on the scale of Iraq, I don't think you should be rewarded."

The Republicans' future offerings do not impress Fukuyama either: "Their two big things are fear of [terrorism] and fear of immigrants - that's not an agenda."

For Francis - "call me Frank" - Fukuyama, the bigger issue is the grand, historical need for change.

The Reagan revolution that swept US politics for the past three decades was vital for America, but, like many revolutions, it went too far, he believes.

The Reagan-Thatcher project was necessary because government had become too big, but now "government is too weak - I think we are due for a big swing back in the other direction. We need to rebuild areas of the public sector.

"I believe in liberal democracy, but what that means in any era depends on the needs of the time," says Fukuyama, a professor of political economy at Johns Hopkins University in Washington.

"This bridge that collapsed in Minneapolis - that wasn't an accident. There has been systematic underfunding of public works and infrastructure for decades."

The eight-lane bridge across the Mississippi which crumpled last August killing 13 people had been officially rated as "structurally deficient" for 17 years.

The occupation of Iraq had exposed many of the weaknesses of the US government sector, Fukuyama said: "It was pervaded by failure of basic capacities - the capacity to protect our own diplomats, the capacity to write contracts, the capacity to distribute aid.

"It took Bush longer to find a general capable of implementing counter-insurgency policy than it took Lincoln to find General Grant. The capacity of our government agencies to recruit and hold good people has been weakened."

Health care and education needed wholesale reform.

Senator Hillary Clinton, however, was not the right candidate to act on this agenda: "She has a very partisan view of politics that would make it difficult for her to accomplish things."

Fukuyama thought that her remark about the assassination of presidential candidates was an attempt to appeal to racist voters.

"There are a lot of people who won't vote for Obama because he's black but they don't want to say so - instead, they say I won't vote for him because I'm worried he'll be assassinated. It's a way of signalling that race is an issue without saying it."

Although Fukuyama is a registered Republican, he intends to vote for Barack Obama. Why?

"Obama is the only one of the candidates who can escape the polarisation" of US politics to find real solutions, he says.

Fukuyama, in Australia as a guest of the US Studies Centre at Sydney University, suspects that it will be a lot easier for the Liberal Party in Australia to rebuild than it will be for its US counterpart. He gives two reasons.

First, the political pendulum did not swing so far to the right in Australia as it did in the US, so the necessary correction will be an easier one, he argues.

And, second, the Coalition was not thrown from office because of a policy cataclysm in the way that Bush is about to be thrown out over Iraq.

One thing in common to both countries, however, was that populist promises to cut petrol excise "make no sense whatsoever".

Fukuyama cited Obama: "He put Hillary on the defensive by saying, 'That is old populism, and you are not talking to the American people like a grown-up.' It ended up hurting her."

This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2008/05/26/1211653939213.html>