

Johnny-come-lately conservatives

I thought to tell us something about failed Republican presidential candidate Jack Kemp that on the very weekend when the surviving GOP contenders arrived in New Hampshire to denounce affirmative action, Mr. Kemp was actually defending it from the safety of a TV talk show. Now that Mr. Kemp is not a candidate, it becomes more and more obvious why he had to stay out of the race.

But Mr. Kemp at least has the virtue of consistency, which may be more than the high rollers who showed up in Manchester have. Almost every one of them had 57 different nasty cracks about affir-

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mative action and what he'd do to stop it if only he were king. The trouble is, if it hadn't been for some of these very same stalwarts of the right, affirmative action wouldn't be much of an issue today.



Samuel Francis

The candidate leading in the polls is Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, and the one now favored by the Beltway conservative phone-booth is Texas Sen. Phil Gramm. It was Mr. Gramm who led the presidential poll at the recent Conservative Political Action Conference, the annual group-grope that is to the Beltway

Right what the Mystic Knights of the Sea was to Amos 'n Andy.

Indeed, both Mr. Dole and Mr. Gramm these days do good imitations of Sir Galahad, whose strength was as the strength of 10 because his heart was pure. But the tarnished truth is that neither gentleman is especially pure of heart ideologically. Both voted for the 1991 act and thereby helped expand affirmative action and its racial discrimination against whites. When they strut about how against it they are now, rank-and-file Republicans need to recall the truth.

Mr. Dole's claims to being a serious conservative can be chiseled on the back of a match-book, but Mr. Gramm is a match that might flare. It behooves real grass-roots conservatives to take a hard look at his voting record before supporting him for the nomination next year.

Not only did Mr. Gramm vote for the racial quotas imposed by the 1991 Civil Rights Act, he also supported the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which outlaws discrimination against the "disabled" and includes as "disabled" those infected with the AIDS virus. Like the Civil Rights Act, the ADA is an affirmative-action measure, creating special government privileges for one group at the expense of others.

Mr. Gramm enjoys a reputation as a budget-cutter, but his real record is a bit more speckled than the legend. He was on the ground floor in President Bush's violation of his "no new taxes" promise and the budget deal of 1990 and vocally defended them in Congress — thereby setting the stage for loss of the White House two years later.

Indeed, as far back as 1982, when

Tip O'Neill and Bob Dole joined forces to persuade President Reagan to raise taxes, Mr. Gramm, then a Democratic congressman, was on board. "Now that we conservatives have a tacit majority," The Washington Post quoted him as saying, "the time has come to stop the protesting and start governing." Think about that comment for a moment.

What Mr. Gramm betrayed in that remark is a thought that may someday be the epitaph of the Republican Party. The thought is essentially this: Use conservatism to gain votes and a majority, but have no intention of abiding by the conservative chocolate-sauce you have to spread. Once you have a majority, dump the right-wing sauce and "start governing." If that's what Mr. Gramm means (it's exactly what a lot of Republicans mean), real conservatives would be foolish to let him "start governing" at all.

It's well known that Mr. Gramm's eyes glaze over when anyone men-

tions "cultural issues." Yet whoever the GOP nominee in 1996 is, he'll have to understand and support them. On immigration, Mr. Gramm is only recently a convert to stricter controls; back before Prop 187 made it a no-no, he was pretty much of an open-borders booster.

On issues like abortion and homosexuals in the military, it's like pulling teeth to get a straight answer out of him that will unequivocally condemn either one on moral grounds. Yet the Beltway leadership of the religious right is leaning toward endorsing him.

"I was conservative when conservative wasn't cool," Mr. Gramm likes to boast. Yes, he was, and he puts on an impressive act today. But the question isn't what he used to be but what he is now and what he will be if the conservative grass roots put him in the White House. Once those grass roots get a good look, they may be well-advised to put Mr. Gramm on the same talk show with the man who used to be Jack Kemp.