

SAMUEL FRANCIS

Left exploits Goldwater for its own purposes

JUNE 10 — It was probably inevitable, and certainly predictable, that the left would try to use the death of Barry Goldwater to preach wall-eyed sermons to the contemporary right. Indeed, it took less than a week after the retired senator's death for one of the most predictable liberals, columnist Frank Rich of the *New York Times*, to explain to the benighted right just how progressive Barry Goldwater really was.

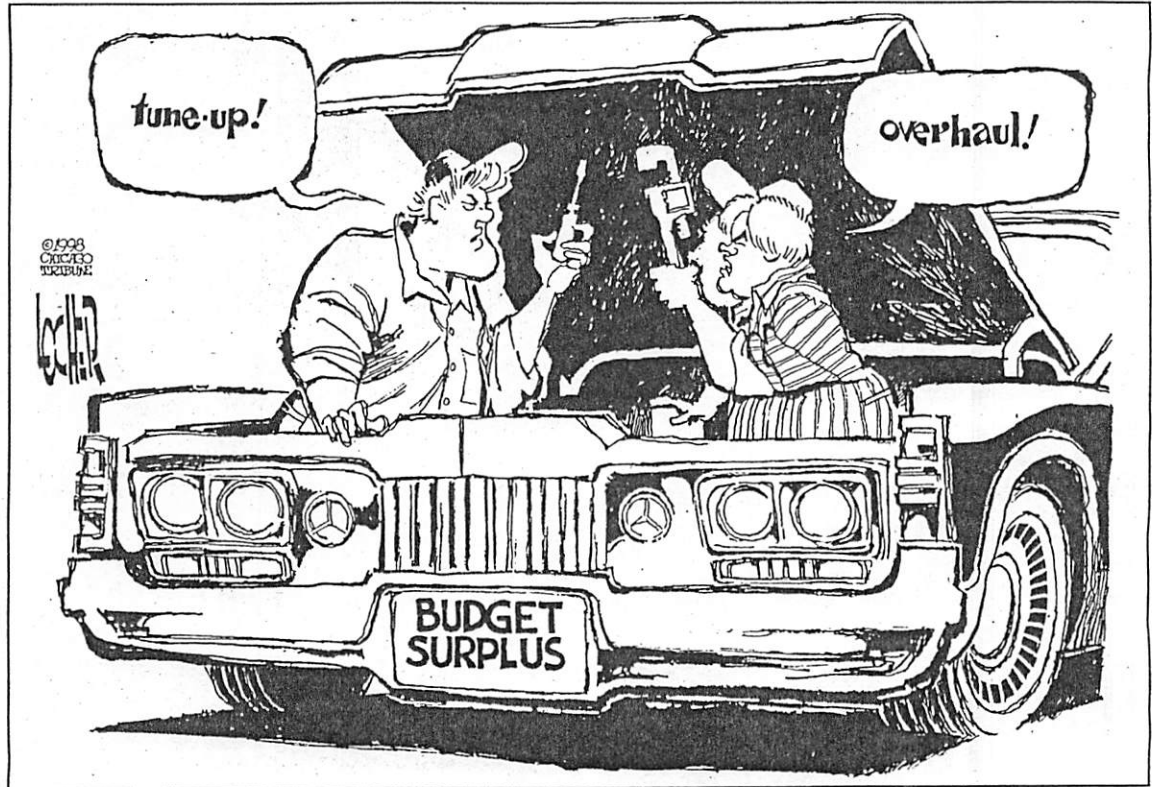
In his later years, you see, Goldwater took strong issue with most conservatives over social and moral issues — in particular, abortion, homosexuality and prayer in schools — and Mr. Rich seized the opportunity last week to get hold of the old gentleman's homosexual grandson to instruct conservatives on what conservatism is really about.

GOLDWATER SEEMS TO have had no objection to homosexuality, even for his own grandson; his first wife was a pioneer for the right to have an abortion; and he often, in his later years, had some snotty cracks to make about the religious right in general and their quest for prayer in public schools in particular. Mr. Rich was especially keen on explaining to all of us that conservatives who disagree with Mr. Conservative really aren't conservatives at all.

I'd be the last to defend much of what today passes for conservatism, but it's a typical tactic of the left to exploit the deviant musings of conservatives to undermine conservative political efforts. When Pat Buchanan was running for president in 1992 and 1996, the media made sure everyone knew that "even William F. Buckley Jr." had said he couldn't defend Mr. Buchanan against the charge of anti-Semitism. It's always useful to the left to have a pet conservative in its pocket to confuse and distract its real enemies on the right.

In his later years, Barry Goldwater was often pulled out of the left's pocket for that very purpose, though of course when he was running for president in 1964, the left used Republicans who opposed him for exactly the same purpose of preaching that it was Goldwater who wasn't a "true conservative." By the 1980s, the man whom the left had smeared in 1964 as a trigger-happy ignoramus and racial bigot proved to be useful for liberal efforts to undermine social conservative causes. Some conservatives, I guess, really were dumb enough to fall for it.

But all of Goldwater's beliefs about abortion, homosexuality and prayer in school derived from his own liber-



tarian view of government, as Mr. Rich acknowledges. What he doesn't acknowledge is that Goldwater's opposition to the 1964 Civil Rights Act derived from the same beliefs. "History records," Mr. Rich records, "that Barry Goldwater's views about constitutional inclusiveness did not prompt him to vote for the Civil Rights Act of 1964." So Uncle Barry is useful when you want to stop conservative opposition to abortion, but you have to stick him back in your pocket when the subject of federal social engineering on racial issues comes up.

WHAT MR. RICH REALLY seems to like about Barry Goldwater was his habit, according to his gay grandson, of "punctuating everything with 'Goddammit.'" That, in Mr. Rich's ideological litmus test, seems to be how you know he was a real conservative.

We now perhaps begin to understand what it was about Goldwater's conservatism that so attracts the left.

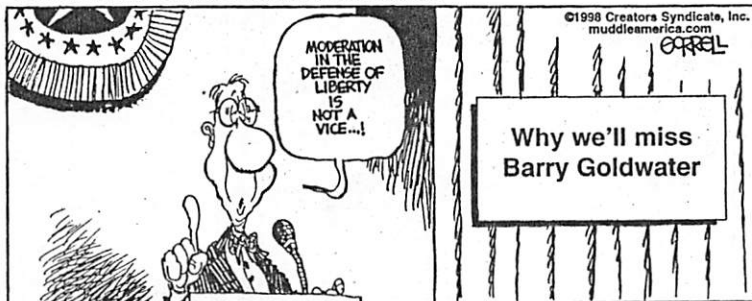
But what was really attractive about Goldwater's beliefs was not that he used profanity but precisely that his beliefs and behavior were unpredictable. As for what Mr. Rich claims were Goldwater's views about abortion and prayer in school, he misses the point. Both issues are political issues today because the federal government, through the Supreme Court, has dictated to the states what they can and cannot do about them. They are in fact major transgressions of what Mr. Rich defines as the "Goldwater credo" — "The least government is the best government" — and so is civil rights legislation.

In his autobiography, Goldwater tried to explain himself on these matters. "Traditionalists like me," he wrote, "emphasized individual free-

dom, the superiority of free enterprise, limited government, and stronger national defense. We stressed custom, rule of law, religious principles, and basic belief in the constitutional process." That's fair enough, but the caustic cracks of his later years seem to have left some of this out.

IN HIS PRIME, BARRY Goldwater knew that individual freedom and constitutional government couldn't survive without the fabric of moral beliefs and habits from which they grew, and even in his old age, he records that he disagreed with his first wife that every woman had the moral and legal right to choose an abortion. Even then, he didn't quite fit in the convenient little box where Mr. Rich insists on squeezing him, but it's the only box that the narrow mind of the left can imagine putting this unpredictable maverick of the right.

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