

His writing brought him to the attention of the incoming George W. Bush administration in 2000, and he was offered a job as a White House speechwriter, where he was credited with the famous “axis of evil” phrase that justified Bush’s foreign policy. His service put him in an uncomfortable position again when, in 2005, Bush nominated Harriet Miers to fill a vacancy on the Supreme Court. Frum’s work with Miers in the White House, where she served as staff secretary, convinced him that she was not Supreme Court caliber. “It reflected a deep problem,” he says. “[Bush] nominates her in October 2005, so this is after that bloody summer in Iraq, and after Hurricane Katrina, and it begins to raise the question—are these things all accidents? Or is something going wrong with the way this administration makes decisions?”

His willingness to criticize the administration of which he had once been a part made him a target in Republican circles, chiefly on Fox News, where the attacks got personal. And it cemented Frum’s role as a waiter, a role he maintains today. Unlike some disaffected Republicans, like Andrew Sullivan (see *Profiles in Citizenship* in Chapter 15), who continue to call themselves conservative but who have left the Republican Party behind, Frum says, “I have not given up on the movement. I am not going to.” Though he adds ruefully, “They may give up on me.” Even if that

happens, however, Frum knows what to do.

While he waits, here are some of his observations on American politics:

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### On partisanship:

It’s a question about in whose interest do you govern, how do you govern, how do you solve problems, how do you work with people that disagree with you? How important is consensus? This is not a parliamentary political system, and if you try to run it like a parliamentary system, you wreck it. In a parliamentary system the government has enormous power. . . . The job of the other side is to shoot you down, embarrass you, and trip you up—but the other side of the political aisle cannot interfere with the working of the government. There’s no filibuster, there’s no veto, and the government governs. The other side tries to bring them down and they usually succeed, and at that point you

have these very rapid alternations of power. . . .

In the congressional system, the ability to sabotage, to stop the government from governing is very great, and the American system appears to work best with a high degree of consensus. It’s not that partisanship is intrinsically evil; in Britain it’s fine. In Britain it’s indispensable; if you didn’t have intense partisanship in Britain, the government would be too strong. But in America, partisanship is a problem because the government can’t govern.

### On keeping the republic:

Do not entrap yourself in a closed information system. Closed information systems require the complicity of the audience because information now is so abundant that it takes great effort to avoid coming into contact with it. Political science suggests that people are working harder and harder to avoid coming into contact with unwelcome information. And as I look at the Republican Party, many of these problems are not problems of leadership but of followership and the citizens also need to work harder at their job.

1. “About,” *FrumForum*, [www.frumforum.com/about](http://www.frumforum.com/about).

**Source:** David Frum spoke with Christine Barbour and Gerald Wright on September 17, 2010.