

## PROFILES IN CITIZENSHIP: DAVID FRUM



David Frum is a waiter. And no, that doesn't mean the former Bush speechwriter, author of eight books and editor of the *Frum Forum*, a web site "dedicated to the modernization and renewal of the Republican party and the conservative movement,"<sup>1</sup> has opted for a second career in restaurant service.

According to Frum the political world is divided into two types of people: waiters and chasers. "A waiter is somebody who has a vision of where his country is going and parks himself at that position to wait for the country. Churchill was a waiter, Reagan was a waiter, but also Lyndon LaRouche was a waiter—it's not necessarily a good thing to be a waiter. Every crackpot, crank, and lunatic is also a waiter. The chasers are those always trying to catch up to where they think the people are at that moment." Chasers—Frum mentions Newt Gingrich, Bill Clinton, and Rush Limbaugh—adopt the values of the constituency they want to lead; waiters believe the world will eventually come around to adopting their view.

It is being a waiter that enables Frum to be at once an ardent member of the Republican Party and also one of its toughest critics. At least one criticism recently cost him a job. In the wake of the passage of the Obama health care bill, he argued publicly that by refusing to work with Democrats on the bill in hopes of denying Obama a victory, Republicans ended up having to swallow a more liberal policy than they would have if they had negotiated with Democrats. In response, he was fired from his position as a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, which caused him to be even more critical of the party, arguing that the Republican practice of not tolerating dissent among its members was leading to a closed system that would ultimately weaken the party.

It wasn't a comfortable position for Frum, but discomfort is part of the job of being a waiter.

Born into a liberal Canadian family (he became a U.S. citizen in 2007), Frum moved right in college "under the impact of events." He says, "The late 1970s felt like the end of the world, the end of western civilization. . . . Then came the Reagan years and the battle to turn that situation around, and all of us young Reaganites felt that the Reagan people did a very good job of keeping us mobilized and motivated. . . ." He went on to law school at Harvard, and by the late 1980s he had become an editorial writer at the *Wall Street Journal*. It was there that he got his first taste of running counter to party orthodoxy, exploring the criticism of U.S. economic trends that it had benefited the wealthiest Americans but had left the least wealthy falling farther behind. "It was a very important debate, and as I plunged into the study of this thing, it became very clear to me that it was true. . . . And then I was also struck by the inability of my conservative colleagues to process this information. That is, if something is true, you can either say, 'it's a bad thing,' in which case you need to figure what we do about it, or 'it doesn't matter, we don't care whether it is true,' but you don't have the option of just saying, 'I don't see it, it's not there.'" His work on the successes and limits of the Reagan Revolution resulted in his first book, *Dead Right*.