Huckabee: Neglected 'value voters' key to GOP's future

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Former presidential candidate Mike Huckabee, often mentioned as someone who could shepherd the GOP out of the political wilderness, says Republicans neglected religious conservatives in 2008 and need to maintain their support as the party regroups.

“They were welcomed to the family table two days a year, and that was the primary and Election Day,” the former Arkansas governor said at a news conference November 19. “I think there’s a point of frustration and exasperation where people are saying. ‘You know what? If you don’t want us, just say so.’”

Author of a new book, *Do the Right Thing*: *Inside the Movement That’s Bringing Common Sense Back to America*, Huckabee spoke about the past and future of the GOP.

“There should not be the disconnect between value voters and those who consider themselves the fiscal conservatives,” he said. “The truth is, most value voters are fiscal conservatives, but not all fiscal conservatives are value voters.”

Huckabee said he has no immediate plans for a second White House run or for any other office and that Republicans would be “insane” if they tried to move away from issues like abortion or marriage that are vital to religious conservatives.

“It’s been an important part of our overall message, which is that traditional values still reach many people in this country,” he said of the marriage issue.

“And I think the sanctity-of-life issue is still an issue that draws people to the Republican Party who otherwise might not necessarily feel that much of a loyalty. It’s not that it’s the only issue, but it’s an issue that we have to be faithful to.”

But Huckabee also was critical of some conservative religious leaders, including Texas megachurch pastor John Hagee, religious broadcaster Pat Robertson, Bob Jones University chancellor Bob Jones III and former GOP presidential candidate Gary Bauer, who passed him over and endorsed other GOP candidates.

“I came to the conclusion that political expediency and pragmatism had supplanted prophetic principles among those who aspired to influence the process but unwittingly had become influenced by the process and, in fact, were held captive by it,” Huckabee wrote.

Bauer, chair of the Campaign for Working Families, issued a statement last month saying he was disappointed in Huckabee’s book. “It is unfortunate . . . at a time when the GOP needs to close ranks and seek unity, that Governor Huckabee in his new book has aimed his fire at his fellow Republicans,” Bauer said.

Huckabee, once active as a Southern Baptist minister, said he expected his words would anger some readers. “I’m telling the honest facts of the story,” he said. “I don’t think I’m unfair or unkind, but I’m honest.” *–Adelle M. Banks, Religion News Service*