

My Republicans

To date in the 2012 presidential race, no great leader has arisen from either party to illuminate the path towards the bright future America deserves. The fault lies with the leaders of our political parties, and those of us who choose those leaders. As I watch and listen to the discourse between Republicans in today's race for the presidential nomination, I wonder what has happened to Lincoln's party? Where are the great leaders like Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt?

Diversity of thought in my Republican Party seems to wane by the day in this election cycle, and candidates only seem able to attack their rival's record, rather than highlight their own individual philosophies and solutions. The Republican Party has always been an odd collection of ideals and passions, with a philosophy centered on the idea of conservatism. Abraham Lincoln best defined "conservatism" in his Cooper Institute speech, when he said: "What is conservatism? Is it not adherence to the old and tried, against the new and untried?"

Barry Goldwater, who was one of the true founders of the modern conservative movement, best described the diversity of people within the Republican Party in his 1964 acceptance speech for the Republican nomination for president, when he stated,

This is a party, this Republican Party, a Party for free men, not for blind followers, and not for conformists. Back in 1858 Abraham Lincoln said this of the Republican Party - and I quote him, because he probably could have said it during the last week or so: 'It was composed of strained, discordant, and even hostile elements' in 1858. Yet all of these elements agreed on one paramount objective: To arrest the progress of slavery, and place it in the course of ultimate extinction.

I believe we remain today "a Party for free men/women, not for blind followers, and not for conformists," and yet members of the media, conservative pundits, and party leaders want to push all Republicans in the round hole of conformism, when we are truly the square peg of diversity. When Republicans bulge out of the margins these sages have defined for us, we are accused of being fringe libertarians, the religious right, moderates, or even worse RINOs (Republicans in Name Only). The vicious discord which has arisen between the 2012 Republican presidential candidates and their hateful characterizations of other viewpoints marginalizes the Republican Party, and is frankly embarrassing. We Republicans should once again consider the wisdom of Barry Goldwater on the issue of differing opinions as expressed in that 1964 acceptance speech:

The beauty of the very system we Republicans are pledged to restore and revitalize, the beauty of this Federal system of ours is in its reconciliation of diversity with unity. We must not see malice in honest differences of opinion, and no matter how great, so long as they are not inconsistent with the pledges we have given to each other in and through our Constitution. Our Republican cause is not to level out the world or make its people

conform in computer regimented sameness. Our Republican cause is to free our people and light the way for liberty throughout the world.

The “computer regimented sameness” which Goldwater referred to in this 1964 speech was communism. So why do the sages of a party whose history is based on individual freedom want its membership to conform to a narrowly defined dogma? Look to power and greed. History has shown when political philosophy is elevated to a dogma the result can be fascism, theocracies, and communism. Diversity of opinion and the right to freely express those opinions is the foundation of this nation, and both Republicans and Democrats should guard against conforming to any dogma.

We should look to the Republican philosophy that has survived the party’s roughly 148-year history to guide our future, and I believe this philosophy is comprised of four basic tenets. Those four cornerstones of thought are:

- **Conservatism** – previously described by Lincoln.
- **Peace through strength** – as in Theodore Roosevelt’s, “Speak softly and carry a big stick.”
- **Adherence to the Constitution** – best described by Lincoln:

I do not mean to say we are bound to follow implicitly in whatever our fathers did. To do so, would be to discard all the lights of current experience - to reject all progress - all improvement. What I do say is, that if we would supplant the opinions and policy of our fathers in any case, we should do so upon evidence so conclusive, and argument so clear, that even their great authority, fairly considered and weighed, cannot stand.

- **Personal freedom** – best depicted by Goldwater: “The conservative movement is founded on the simple tenet that people have the right to live life as they please as long as they don't hurt anyone else in the process.”

There is hope. There are Republicans of conscience and intelligence who can bring these basic philosophies forward to the American people, but we must arise from the muck and seek them out. Condoleezza Rice’s eloquent speech to Congress in 2005 during her nomination process for Secretary of State should inspire Republicans and all citizens, especially the part which states:

The story of Birmingham's parents and teachers and children is a story of the triumph of universal values over adversity. And those values - a belief in democracy, and liberty, and the dignity of every life, and the rights of every individual - unite Americans of all backgrounds, all faiths, and all colors. They provide us a common cause in all times, a rallying point in difficult times, and a source of hope to men and women across the globe who cherish freedom and work to advance freedom's cause.

“We the People” must rally around these values in order to overcome the adversities that face this nation.

In order to effectively govern, both Republicans and Democrats must remember their interaction needs to be a conversation, not a monologue. We must respect each other and act with more civility if we are to find the common ground necessary to solve the greatest challenge of our generation, our national debt. Republicans and Democrats are not enemies, we are Americans. To again quote Lincoln:

We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battle-field, and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearthstone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

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