



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on January 29, 2010

A Closer Look at the GOP Litmus Test

Now that the GOP has all but shelved the litmus test for candidates to receive money and support for their mid-term election campaigns, a closer look at that “test” reveals a tepid attempt to reinvigorate “conservative” principles into the big tent GOP.

The Republican National Committee, meeting in Hawaii (photo, left) to hammer out their platform, briefly considered a resolution from James Bopp, an RNC vice-chairman from Indiana and general counsel for National Right to Life, requiring candidates to state publicly their agreement with at least eight of ten listed “conservative” positions. [Bopp said](#) that his resolution was “designed to bring conservatives, some of whom have gravitated to the independent ‘tea party’ movement, into the GOP fold.” He expressed concern that “disaffected conservatives” would back third-party candidates and take support away from Republicans running in the same race. [He added](#):



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It’s the difference between success and defeat. It’s counterproductive for us to moderate our conservative message. We nominated the moderate’s poster child, John McCain, for president. It’s a prescription for defeat. What we have to do is be faithful to our conservative heritage, and when we do we will win.

Bopp said his resolution is an “effective way to regain trust with conservative voters that has been undermined” by GOP financial support for “liberal Republican ticket-switchers”, such as Lincoln Chafee (former senator from Rhode Island), Senator Arlen Specter (who switched from the Republican to the Democrat party last year and has a Freedom Index of 20), and Dede Scozzafava, a liberal Republican who suddenly dropped out of the race for New York’s 23rd Congressional District when faced with strong conservative opposition.

Even though Bopp said that these “principles” would change over time, that wasn’t enough to convince his fellow committee members to consider his list seriously.

Tea party activist Erick Erickson of RedState.com disagreed with Bopp’s proposal, fearing that it would just “provide cover” for some liberal Republican candidates by simply “checking off certain boxes.” Eric Odom of American Liberty Alliance [said](#) Bopp’s proposal was only a “good start but...it does not go far enough.”



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I see nine of those planks that I would want to be almost mandatory before it could be taken seriously. The GOP should not give its candidates any room to squirm.

Surprisingly, Bopp's litmus test got little support from RNC Chairman Michael Steele, who earlier claimed in a [radio interview](#) that "I'm a Tea Partier, I'm a town-haller, I'm a grass-roots-er." And on the *Today* show, [Steele said](#) that Republicans "screwed up" and "don't really have the support of the American people right now...we've moved away from those fundamental principles that have defined us for generations, those things that anchored us."

However, at the opening of the RNC meeting Steele said that he opposes a "purity" resolution: "Litmus tests don't work. They don't build parties, they don't build relationships, they can be devious."

Steele got support for his opposition from a number of committee members, including Henry Barbour, a nephew of Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour, who said, "We need to stick to our conservative principles without telling folks in the Massachusetts GOP that their choice for a U.S. Senate nominee cannot receive funding because of some litmus test." Other members opposing Bopp's resolution pointed out that even Scott Brown, the newly-minted Republican from Massachusetts, "would not pass Bopp's purity test."

Conservative members of the committee initially pushed Bopp's test as a way for the party "to present candidates who are clearly distinguishable from Democrats," but Steele said he opposed the idea because it would interfere with state GOP committees' selection process: "Every community should have responsibility for deciding who best represents their values, their interests, their principles. I trust them to do that." Ron Nehring, chairman of the California GOP, concurred, holding that the GOP primaries are where the candidate position should be discussed.

Miriam Hellreich, an RNC committee member from Hawaii, said the litmus test was "rather silly" and that "We have to be very, very careful about setting a litmus test of any sort for what Republican candidates we're going to support."

The *New York Times* [noted](#) that Richard Lugar (R-Ind.) and Ron Paul (R-Texas) would have failed the litmus test.

Here are [the 10 questions](#) proposed by Bopp for his "litmus test":

- We support smaller government, smaller national debt, lower deficits and lower taxes by opposing bills like Obama's "stimulus" bill.
- We support market-based health-care reform and oppose Obama-style government-run health care.
- We support market-based energy reforms by opposing cap-and-trade legislation.
- We support workers' right to secret ballot by opposing card check.
- We support legal immigration and assimilation into American society by opposing amnesty for illegal immigrants.
- We support victory in Iraq and Afghanistan by supporting military-recommended troop surges.
- We support containment of Iran and North Korea, particularly effective action to eliminate their nuclear weapons threat.
- We support retention of the Defense of Marriage Act.
- We support protecting the lives of vulnerable persons by opposing health-care rationing and denial of



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health care and government funding of abortion.

- We support the right to keep and bear arms by opposing government restrictions on gun ownership.

Outside the Beltway [commented](#) on the vagueness of many of these positions. For instance, to support position number 2 “would mean that GOP candidates would have to oppose Medicare and Medicaid — which is fine if that’s how they want to run, but it’s probably not an election winner.” Regarding position number 3, “both John McCain and Sarah Palin announced their support for a cap and trade program during the 2008 elections (although Palin has since come out against it).” Position number 6 is also problematic due to the “large strain of conservative foreign policy thinking that opposes interventionism and nation-building.” Position number 10 is also “frustratingly vague. How stringently do we define ‘government restriction on gun ownership’?”

It’s unfortunate but symptomatic of the attempts to influence the Republican party without once referring to the Constitution of the United States. [Article I, Section 8](#) outlines the limited powers of the federal government and the 10th Amendment of the Bill of Rights (The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people) confirms those limitations.

This is a long way from “checking some boxes” for a litmus test, and it illustrates how long and arduous is the path to reclaim the Republic these precious documents established 230 years ago.

*Photo of Republican National Committee Chairman Michael Steele and Hawaii Governor Linda Lingle:
AP Images*



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