



GOP Set to Refuse Conservative Litmus Test

In November of last year The New American published a report on a “litmus test” that a bloc of Republican activists wanted to impose on that Party’s potential candidates for office. Basically, the test would consist of a roster of principles (articles of faith, if you will) that Republican candidates would have to promise to adhere to before the GOP would loosen the purse strings and fund the candidate’s campaign. The vote on this controversial proposal was scheduled to be debated at the Party’s annual meeting in Honolulu in January. It’s January and the debate has begun.



There is one GOP big wig none too anxious to see the proposed measure pass — Michael Steele. Steele is the chairman of the Republican National Committee, and he reckons that the imposition of the “checklist of conservative positions” would hamstring the Party heading into the 2010 mid-term elections and melt the snowball that started rolling with the election of Scott Brown in Massachusetts. “Let me ask you: Would you join an organization that stood at the doorstep with a clipboard and checked off to make sure that you fit every criteria they had?” Steele asked rhetorically. “I am personally not in favor of litmus tests. It’s not what brought me into the party. It’s not a welcoming or an inviting activity.”

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There are likely many in the Republican Party that share their chairman’s disdain for any prior restraint on candidates based on their fidelity to a slate of promises that, given the recent behavior of Republicans (tax increases, bureaucracy increase, de facto repeal of the Fourth Amendment, inextricable entanglements in foreign wars), many likely candidates are unlikely to be able to fulfill.

The proposal, officially styled the “Reagan Resolution,” is believed to be the handiwork of the so-called “Tea Party” wing of the Republican Party, a loosely confederated group that consists of disaffected Republicans anxious to see their Party return to its conservative roots and disavow the big-government agenda of the Republican Party in its current iteration.

In order to accomplish the retrenchment they see as crucial to the growth and success of the Republican Party in taking back control of Congress and eventually the White House, the conservative leaders promoting the Reagan Resolution would require that a candidate seeking aid from the Republican National Committee agree to at least eight of the 10 principles. These principles, backers assert, are but the most basic tenets of orthodox Republicanism and are at the end of the day what distinguishes a true Republican from a RINO (Republican In Name Only). The Resolution ranges widely across the spectrum of social issues from abortion to immigration to gay marriage.

While there is undoubtedly a powerful segment of the Republican Party that views the test as the gospel, there are many still active and influential Republicans that see the list less as the Ten Commandments and more as the Theses destined to cause a rift in the Party that will leave it enervated



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on January 28, 2010

and will incite an internecine clash that will cleave the Party in such a way as to render it of little consequence in the elections of 2010.

As for the future of the Reagan Resolution, reports coming out of Honolulu don't auger well for the proposition. James Bopp, a self-proclaimed conservative from Indiana, is the author and principal sponsor of the resolution, and he reckons that his proposal will not make it out of committee and that it will thus never reach the floor for debate and vote by the whole of the committee. As a matter of fact, a committee of state Party chairmen voted unanimously to urge its defeat Wednesday.

Recognizing the hard row to hoe that's in front of him, Bopp has written a back-up proposal that will be less rigorous and thus more palatable to Republican leadership.

The story of the Reagan Resolution is the story of the Republican Party. For the most part, the leadership of the Party is bound and determined to stretch the sides of the tent and stake out as much of the electorate's territory as the fabric will stand. On the other hand, there is a burgeoning bloc of grass-roots activists that assert that the big tent policy has ripped the traditional cloth of Republican values and has exposed the Party to showers of discontent among erstwhile loyal activists.

This small but assertive sect is represented by the Tea Party movement and is convinced that the GOP is swerving out of control and that someone needs to grab the wheel and yank the car back into the right-hand lane. Steele and his cohorts, however, are sitting in the driver's seat for now and have the pedal to the metal and won't stop until their Party has returned to the legislative majority, and they are little concerned with whether or not the conservatives come along for the ride.

Photo of Michael Steele: AP Image



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