

A New Party for Colorado

All this bloviating about the future of the Republican Party and how it should reinvent itself reminds me of a family finally acknowledging that an aged relative has crossed the bar into dottiness: What should we do with the Grand Old Party?

I was a Republican- 28 years. Like so many others who now vote Democratic, I didn't leave the party—it left me. Based on the analyses this month's election, it also left college graduates, suburbanites, and Hispanics in the Red State dust. The sad fact is that a map of the few counties that voted more Republican than they did in 2004 neatly overlays maps showing the nation's highest rates of obesity, poverty, and lack of education—call it the Deliverance Belt—a sad state of affairs for the party of Lincoln and Teddy Roosevelt.

As much as the Republican Party needs reform, it won't happen. The far right chorus still bellows "We Shall Not Be Moved," with solos by the three tenors of Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, and Bill O'Reilly.

The United States needs two healthy parties advancing ideas and solving our common problems. If the Republican Party is beyond redemption, what should we do?

The answer comes from history. The Republicans came into being because the Whig Party had a split over slavery, a contentious fight they could not resolve. Progressive people, among them Abraham Lincoln, saw no point arguing with the recalcitrant's, left them to bicker among themselves, and formed a new party. Honest Abe ran on the Republican ticket, and the rest was history.

Now, today's Republican Party is history.

The times call for a new political party, one that looks forward and appeals to a new majority of Americans, ones who find themselves between the Democrats and the Republicans. The best place to launch this party—let's call it the Progressive Party—is right here in Colorado.

We've always been betwixt and between the parties. Ken Salazar is a perfect example of this. The one Democrat who won an open Senate seat in 2004, he charted a path that was neither Democratic fish nor Republican fowl.

Colorado has several political figures who would fit well in a Progressive Party: Scott McInnis, Tom Norton, John Buechner, Don Ament, Bill

Kaufman, Hank Brown, Bob Greenlee, Nancy Spence, Norma Anderson, Dottie Wham, Paul Schauer and Pat Hayes to name just a few. None of this distinguished group can be accused of foaming at the mouth over guns, gays, and God while more serious problems face our country and the world. They are fiscal conservatives who understand where we need government and where we don't They are reasonable people who could attract the support of reasonable voters.

But aren't third parties the province of Ralph Nader and other cranks? Don't candidates need the machinery of a party to succeed? The Internet has changed politics forever. Howard Dean demonstrated the fundraising potential of the Web, and Barack Obama perfected it as a means of communicating directly with voters, mobilizing their support, and convincing them to underwrite his campaign.

Launching a new party nationwide would be difficult. Getting it off the ground in Colorado first makes much more sense. Once elected, Progressive Party state representatives and senators could caucus with the Democrats or form their own group of affiliates. As voters see an appealing third path, more of them will be inclined to take it, to the betterment of the state and, eventually, the country.

Launching a new party is not some sort of political science fiction, but trying to reform the current Republican Party is. As science fiction writer Robert Heinlein once said, "Never try to teach a pig to sing; it wastes your time and it annoys the pig."

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