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This one's on you, Republicans

Loyalty now matters more than conservative principles

By Tom Giovanetti

I was raised in a conservative, religious family. In the days before President Ronald Reagan, families like mine often resisted identification with a political party, choosing instead to "support the man, not the party." They were conservatives, both fiscally and socially, they just weren't necessarily Republicans.

All that changed with the Reagan coalition. Many Christians came to see the Republican Party as their natural home because of its embrace of pro-life and pro-family policies. It also offered the promise of Supreme Court nominees who would reverse the liberal Warren and Burger courts, of which Roe v. Wade was exhibit A.

I experienced this personally. As a teenager sitting at the breakfast table, I listened to Reagan's radio broadcasts and heard a wise, confident man explaining the world and its problems to me in ways that made sense. Reagan advocated conservative solutions, and when he later put many of those policies in place, they worked. I have spent my life since as a "movement conservative," writing, speaking and running a conservative organization.

Conservatives have banked a lot of successes since then — not only social but also fiscal and international. Conservative policies strengthened the economy, defeated the Soviet Union, freed millions from communism and restored American confidence and leadership. They also nurtured a generation of legal scholars and judges who reformed judicial interpretation and ultimately the Supreme Court.

In the course of enjoying all these successes, many found their identity within the party and forgot why their forebears joined the Republican coalition in the first place. Too many who called themselves conservatives found it easy to discard long-held beliefs in order to secure victory for Republican candidates, even when those candidates offended or even scorned their values.

Many former allies have lost their ability to see it, but today I see a Republican Party that violates and ridicules the conservative principles that drew people like me into it in the first place.

My party chose as its leader an incompetent, narcissistic, chronic liar who seeks nothing but his own enrichment and the indulgence of his own ego. Transgressions spin out of this White House with such frequency that we have become inured to them.

Donald Trump indulges totalitarian thugs and communist dictators while belittling and betraying our allies. He seeks to extract rather than to empower and wallows in corruption and self-dealing to a degree that would have embarrassed his predecessor. He puts his will above all, ignoring law, norms and precedent, and when the consequences of his follies inevitably arrive, his ego demands that we disbelieve the evidence of our eyes, ears and pocketbooks.

And to preserve the well-being of their party, those tasked with providing checks on his ego and balances on his demands can muster only silence or praise.



Associated Press

Republican U.S. Senate candidate Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton speaks at the Republican midterm convention on Sept. 9 in Dallas.

When the narcissist-in-chief endorses candidates in his own image and likeness, the party flaccidly nominates them, since fealty to the leader's ego is all that matters to them. If they lose the election, they construct conspiracy theories and dodge responsibility.

Here in Texas, I am told that I must elevate to the U.S. Senate an impeached attorney general who has inexplicably enriched himself on a government salary, a man who has been credibly accused, and in some cases shown, to be a liar, a serial adulterer and a lawbreaker who cavorted in a corrupt city with wanted criminals and his debased Christian influencer girlfriend while still married to his college sweetheart. And, as icing on the cake, I must also support a candidate for railroad commissioner who has proven himself to be a racist, a misogynist and an antisemite.

Sorry, no. Not me. The Republican Party has broken the deal and betrayed the conservative coalition that drove its success and delivered its many majorities.

Too many of my fellow conservatives have mistaken an alignment of interests for some kind of perpetual covenant. Are there no acts so abhorrent that they would prevent you from supporting a candidate just because the candidate bears the Republican standard? Are there no ethical convictions or policy principles that you hold for yourself regardless of party affiliation?

For me, there are. For me, it's possible for a party to nominate candidates so completely objectionable that I cannot support them and for a party to go so far down that road that I no longer feel any affiliation with it.

Because I have refused to endorse outrageous claims, such as the assertions that the 2020 election was stolen, that the Jan. 6 rioters are heroes, that Ukrainians started the war with Russia and that American consumers do not pay American tariffs, I have lost opportunities and friendships, and my organization has lost donors.

So be it. As Russian dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn said, "Let the lie come into the world, let it even triumph, but not through me."

In the November election, I pointedly refuse to vote for Ken Paxton and Bo French, not because I support the Democrats or their positions, but because keeping the Republican Party in power isn't worth the cost to my soul and to my conscience.

For me, it's back to voting for the man or woman, not the party. It's the party's job to appeal to me as a voter, not my duty to sacrifice my principles for the party.

I have no idea how the election is going to turn out. Republicans may win all these races and thus feel empowered to slide further into decadence.

But if the election goes badly for them, it won't be because people like me weren't sufficiently loyal. It will be because the party, at least as represented by its primary voters and elected officials, has lost people like me by abandoning its heritage. This one isn't on me — this one is on you.

Tom Giovanetti is president of the Institute for Policy Innovation, a conservative, Dallas-based think tank.