

Time to dust off the GOP

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A Tale of Two Dog Shows And What It Means To You [HOW ABOUT: OLD PEOPLE SUCK?]

By Monty Warner

Recently, for something bad I must have inadvertently done to someone, I was led to attend two events billed by conservatives as major events on the Right: the Southern Republican Leadership Conference (SRLC) in New Orleans and the Heritage Foundation Resource Bank in Miami. For many grassroots activists these events are viewed as an opportunity for political and think-tank leaders to brief them on issues and trends of the day, to help better equip them for the battle ahead, both nationally and at home. As a concept, this qualifies as good—or it did in the '90s and the early part of this century, before it became a banal, largely futile exercise that feeds the egos and, one could argue, even lines the pockets of those living high on the cause...to the decided detriment of the rest of us.

Upon entry to the “VIP” reception at the SRLC in New Orleans (a cattle call in which almost anyone with a badge could skate by security pre-occupied with their to-go plate tucked behind a table skirt), I immediately noticed one thing: The average age in the room was about 60 years old. This is instructive on a number of fronts. First, it speaks to a lack of an instinct to cultivate the next generation by putting them in rooms where they can ascend the political food chain amid people with a modicum of money or power. Second, most of said power/money people weren't even in the room (save Newt, walking in like a conquering Roman Emperor, or Mary Matalin, pseudo rock-starring it and posing for pictures, or JC Watts, in his mind doing people a favor by saying hello and then saying “I want to hear Newt speak,” which was curious, as one would think he heard him enough in the '90s). Ultimately, all this in turn speaks to an unspoken irony: that while Republicans/conservatives talk constantly of decentralization, they centralize power amongst a self-anointed few with thin resumes of actual accomplishment, like a Third World dictator. Given the current political makeup, this is getting beyond an overarching political problem for the GOP and into the area of, “Hey, get off the stage. Really.”

Unlike Democrats, who saw Obama as a means to power and took it, Republicans have long been the party of “it's my turn,” with dire consequences: Dole '96, McCain '08, etc. One small-state, 60-plus governor contemplating a 2012 run was said to be, if he announced his candidacy, “immediately in the top tier of GOP candidates.” The irony there being that it is his self-absorbed generation that created this dearth of bench talent beyond people in their 60s, by shutting out Republican young.

Newt seems to have similar thoughts in this regard, if not a constant craving for the stage, despite numerous failings. The most pointed, academically speaking, is that he took exactly 3.5 years to lose something (Speaker of the House) that he spent 16 years working to acquire and, like Neidermeyer in *Animal House*, was taken out by his own troops.

And yet his ego marches on. When asked by a TV host recently to name a few promising stars of the next generation, he seemed halfway caught off-guard by the question and threw out “Paul Ryan,” because he’d clearly never thought of the answer. He will be 69 years old in 2012 (Reaganesque in his mind, to be sure) and has yet to grasp the concept that people fundamentally don’t like him. Moreover, he doesn’t understand how important, for better or worse, that actually is in contemporary society. That society will deal him a devastating defeat in ‘12 if Republicans regain Congress in the fall.

There is a generational issue at work in all of this, as there seemingly always is, with Republicans clinging to the Reagan days the way Democrats once did to Kennedy. Many GOP operatives in Washington still bottom-feed off any tangential connection to Reagan in the 1980s. It is time for them to get off the stage before they generate any more regression with their retrograde, deer-in-the-headlights approach to a rapidly changing culture that baffles them.

I have witnessed no better example of this than the Heritage Resource Bank in Miami, an annual conference of conservative/libertarian think tanks that was initially designed to pool ideas and resources, but has rapidly devolved into a group of policy people hitting the spa and looking forward to the next resort (sorry, I meant conference). After panels such as “Lights, Camera, Conservatives!” and “How to Stimulate the Economy (while under political siege) Without Relying on the Government,” guests were treated to a wandering dinner discussion called “Where Will Conservatives Lead?” headed by the Heritage Foundation’s Ed Feulner. While he’s a nice man, he’s another “put the Reagan Coalition back together” conservative who doesn’t stop to acknowledge that most people under 40 barely remember Reagan. (Side note: When I visited Heritage recently, I was taken to a sleek office area with a beautiful, sweeping view of the Capitol. Which, if I were a donor, would really piss me off.) I left the dinner discussion after 16 trite minutes because it was all I could listen to.

When he became Speaker of the House, Newt touted Peter Drucker’s book “*The Effective Executive*” as a model for innovative governance and leadership. What seems lost on his him and his generation – in part, out of sheer Boomer selfishness – is that the key to being an effective executive is to first actually become an executive. To win and know how you did it. To achieve power not for yourself, but for your cause, and above all to keep it.

We are in times when Republicans elect guys who ran their dad’s community bank and take a pay cut to come to government, who are fighting people who invented Facebook and came from the streets to Congress to change the world. Look at how that’s worked out for the GOP: the above is a textbook reason why. It’s time to get the old farts off the

political stage, even if it means putting them in wheelchairs and pushing them down the stairs.

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