

GOP must return to bedrock principles

From time to time, I get e-mail from the Colorado Republican Party. This latest one to hit my inbox is all about principles.

I like principles. I think they're important. They tell others where you stand, and even if you disagree, you can still admire people who practice what they preach. By that standard, how well does the GOP measure up?

The e-mail describes the GOP as "The Party Of All The People," and lists four key principles: "Protect the rights of the individual," "Protect the free enterprise system," "Reduce government to the lowest practical level" and "Endorse and practice fiscal responsibility." Let's go through the list and see whether Republicans walk the walk.

Right away, we run into a problem. Can the GOP legitimately claim to be "The Party Of All The People"? Most African Americans don't vote Republican, nor do most Jews. The GOP has also had trouble courting women; most women who go to the polls consistently vote Democratic.

Perhaps being the "Party Of All The People" is not a fact but a commitment, a goal that reflects the GOP's noblest and highest aspirations. Fair enough. But does "All The People" include America's gay and lesbian citizens? At least in El Paso County, the answer is an obvious no. Those of you who are Republicans, ask your gay friends how many of them feel welcomed by the Republican Party. Don't have any gay friends? I rest my case.

Let's move on to "Protect the rights of the individual." Democrats are all about protecting the rights of groups, so here's a chance for Republicans to really show how they differ from the competition. But if the phrase "rights of the individual" means anything, shouldn't it include the right of individuals to lead their private lives as they please? Regrettably, it is Democrats who lead on this issue, not Republicans.

How about "Protect the free enterprise system"? Truly a great principle. Democrats are at best mildly tolerant of free enterprise. Even the most diehard leftists now admit that capitalism is the only way to create the wealth they are so desperately eager to



OPINION

BARRY FAGIN

Contributing columnist

put to better use. Republicans, by contrast, have always understood that free enterprise fights poverty, creates opportunity and makes America strong. They should make the difference clear. Unfortunately, once again the GOP is shooting itself in the foot.

According to one Cato Institute study, last year's Republican Congress spent \$92 billion on direct and indirect subsidies to business. That kind of corporate welfare isn't protecting the free enterprise system; it's strangling it in its crib. A party that claims to protect free enterprise while giving out handouts is not principled at all. It is merely a group of cronies and hypocrites.

What about the last two planks: "Reduce government to the lowest practical level" and "Endorse and practice fiscal responsibility"? Here is the GOP's greatest failing of all. In what should have been eight years of opportunity to truly put a vision of limited government into action, the national Republican Party has overseen the biggest expansion of government in 40 years.

Thanks to Republicans succumbing to the temptations of power, Democrats can now position themselves as fiscal conservatives, in stark contrast to those reckless Republicans who spend like sailors on leave. No wonder Republicans got thumped in the last elections. With that kind of hypocrisy, they deserved to.

So what will happen in 2008? The 2006 elections were more a rejection of the direction the Republican Party has taken than an endorsement of Eastern liberalism; there is still reason to hope for a Republican comeback. But Democrats in the West are already fielding fiscally conservative, socially libertarian candidates in an effort to woo independent voters. It is these voters who are leery of the "God, Guns and Gays" Republican Party the GOP has become.

It doesn't have to be this way. If the Republicans want to win, they don't have to betray their principles. They merely have to take them seriously.

Fagin, of Colorado Springs, is a senior fellow at the Independence Institute. His column appears on alternate Thursdays. Readers may e-mail him at barry@faginfamily.net.