

Maybe it's time to try limited government

If the Republican Party in Colorado learns nothing else from this election, it should learn this: The economy is more important than anything else.

In times of economic crisis, you will not win running on abortion. You will not win running on piety. You will not win running on family issues. You will win if voters believe you can fix the economy.

Poll after exit poll showed that economic questions were uppermost on voters' minds. The economic meltdown happened during a presidential campaign, and voters handily went against the party on watch for most of the past decade. So where to go from here?

Some conservative activists are already taking about a Republican Party that returns to its roots. But which roots will it return to? The roots of social conservatism? Or the roots of limited government? The evidence says that, as a matter of policy, social conservatism and limited government are incompatible. Republicans are going to have to choose.

Consider: In the recent six years of a Republican-led government, social conservatives dominated the Republican Party. During that time, federal spending soared faster than in any administration since LBJ. Entitlement programs grew like tumors. The Republican president and Congress taxed and spent like drunken sailors on shore leave.

None of this should be surprising. Any government run by people who want massive intervention in people's personal lives is overwhelmingly likely to lead to massive intervention in people's economic lives.

After all, what is more personal than how you spend your money?

A rededication to social conservatism as federal policy would ignore the drubbing Republicans took at the polls. Instead, Republicans should consider something they haven't tried: Limited government.

Instead of spouting off on values issues and offering economic prescriptions indistinguishable from Democrats', Republicans should be citing chapter and verse of the massive regulatory state that got us into the mess we're in. For Democrats to claim that economic problems simply happen while congressional actions fix them is patently ridiculous. It doesn't hold up under even the most casual scrutiny.

Republicans should hit the Democrats hard on issues of personal responsibility, pointing out that bailouts are morally haz-



OPINION

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ardous and economically irresponsible regardless of who gets them.

Republicans should be pushing for cutting taxes and cutting spending, in the name of making a more prosperous future. They should be hitting entitlement programs hard, showing the absurd distortions they cause and show how they mortgage our children's future. They should show that, unlike Democrats, they actually understand what creates the prosperity that makes millions of people want to live in America, and they

intend to keep it that way.

Coincidentally, focusing on the economy is the best way to make much of the social conservative agenda a reality. In a world where people are able to make their own economic decisions and are held responsible for their own actions, many things social conservatives want tend to happen on their own.

In a world where goods and services get better and cheaper over time, people are more likely to start families. They are more likely to marry and stay married. They are more likely to want all the children they conceive, and to have more time to dwell on spiritual matters. They experience the vigorous exchange of ideas appropriate to a free society, they are less likely to turn to drugs or prostitution out of economic desperation and hopelessness, and of course they are free to worship (or not) in any way they choose. Isn't that a world worth working for?

None of this will happen without socially conservative voters. The grassroots Republican organizations in Colorado can't mobilize without their help. If you're a socially conservative Republican, at least think about supporting freedom in all aspects of life, including the private sphere, based on the understanding that personal values enforced through law are little better than slavery. Then make that a part of your politics.

Democratic plans to tax, spend, and manipulate the economic actions of Americans will fail, just as they always do. When that happens, the Republican Party needs to be ready with an alternative. If the free, entrepreneurial spirit of the West can resurrect itself in Colorado, then we would set a true path of prosperity for the nation. It's time to get to work.

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