

GOP in L.A. morphs into different animal

By BRIDGET JOHNSON, Columnist
LA Daily News

Article Last Updated:07/24/2007 11:25:12 PM PDT

AFTER years of hanging out at Los Angeles Republican events ranging from rallies to kaffeeklatsches, I've learned there's one constant about the makeup of our local GOP: There are no constants.

For all the stereotypes of a white-bread party - a generalization this proud Inglewood-born libertarian-conservative has never appreciated - the L.A. GOP is as diverse as they come.

There are the community activists, like our Measure R fighter David Hernandez; the Valley Villager has also fought to let voters decide whether to keep the cross on the county seal.

There's Hernandez's partner in challenging the constitutionality of Measure R, homeless activist Ted Hayes, who brought cricket to Compton and now lobbies against illegal immigration as destructive to the African-American community.

And since this is Tinseltown, you can't forget the showbiz GOPs. Industry players who've "come out" as Republican supporters include producers David Zucker, Joel Surnow and other names I'm not allowed to say at risk of ruining someone's career. Comedians Jeff "Big Daddy" Wayne and Evan Sayet have entertained audiences around town and beyond with their right-of-center, irreverent humor. Victor Elizalde, former director of worldwide business development for Sony Pictures who now runs his own company, ran against Henry Waxman in 2004, and attracted a pack of entertainment-industry volunteers to aid his campaign.

And then there are the right-of-center bloggers, ranging from SoCal Pundit Kevin Korenthal, newly appointed to the Newhall Redevelopment Committee, to GayPatriotWest Dan Blatt, who's volunteered at Outfest for six years running now.

And as I noshed on barbecue on July Fourth at the home of Shawn Steel, past chairman of the California Republican Party, I listened to politically active local Albanians and Iranians, keen on changing the city and beyond for the better.

Just scratching the surface of the variety of voters who call themselves Republican in this town, another pattern emerges: Many are quick to embrace the fusion of libertarian views with traditional conservative ones. Many are more socially moderate while being hawkish on war and defense issues, and harmonize well with the old-school conservatives. Some describe themselves as post-9-11 converts to the GOP. Zucker is passionate about the environment and raves about his car that runs on used cooking oil.

The term to describe this party melting pot could be "Giuliani's dream come true," but another term more closely associated with La-La Land could be an even better fit: trendsetter.

Could L.A. - home to the quintessential "California Conservative" - indicate the future of America's Republican Party?

Call it the moderation of America, a trend that shows Americans have grown sick of the Pat Robertsons and the Cindy Sheehans. Americans haven't traded their values or long-held beliefs to support candidates with whom they disagree on some issues. They're just (a) recognizing that they personally cross the ever-muddled party lines on some issues themselves, and (b) are prioritizing their demands of a candidate in a new fashion.

The candidate who's testing these theories, of course, is Rudy Giuliani. Earlier this month, a Gallup poll studied the makeup of the Giuliani voters, after assessing past surveys to conclude that 68 percent of Republican voters total identified themselves as "conservative" or "very conservative." Sixty-six percent of Republicans identified themselves as conservative on economic issues and 63 percent did so on social issues.

In the Gallup poll, 59 percent of Giuliani Republicans said they are very conservative or conservative.

You could say that the present-day moderation of America began with the flash pan of Ross Perot and his once-newsmaking Reform Party, as Americans weary of gridlock and warfare on Capitol Hill sought a Plan C. Nowadays, the dynamics have changed: Terrorism has sent some Democrats further to the right; GOP inaction on immigration and embrace of big government have driven more Republicans to fuse libertarian principles with traditional GOP thought.

Just another reason why the 2008 presidential election should prove fascinating: As goes L.A. Republicans' diversity of convictions and causes, will the rest of the U.S. GOP go as well? The keys to the White House may hang in the balance.

Bridget Johnson writes for the Daily News and blogs at insidesocal.com/friendlyfire. E-mail her at bridget.johnson@dailynews.com.

Close Window

Send To Printer