

New Mexico Republicans' Sophie's Choice

Sometimes there's nothing you can do when you're faced with a bad choice or a worse choice except choose one. That's the New Mexico Republicans' dilemma after losing all Congressional seats to the Democrats along with the Governorship and the Legislature. Though some Republican voters are starting to regain their sea legs and their sight, most are just plain numb and resigned to their fate as wheels on a surfboard. Translation: irrelevant.

Now THAT kind of remark won't ingratiate this writer with the party of Lincoln in the Land of Enchantment, but truth should not be something that's left unspoken or bandied about in hushed tones behind closed doors. Truth needs sunlight, just as rebuilding needs a good foundation. What then should the Republican Party in New Mexico actually DO now that it's been decimated by the great blue wave that swept its chances of winning out to sea?

Answer: it must realize that it's out of power (not powerless); that it's fragmented (with factions that don't share each other's views); that it's disorganized and demoralized; and that it's lacking important human and financial resources to mount a sufficient comeback. Add to that, its paucity of young, charismatic diverse leaders, and you have a recipe for political gruel not chateaubriand. There can be no sizzle without steak, and the Republicans have none to sell.

The opposition, on the other hand, managed to run OTWM (other than White male) candidates and captured the hearts and sympathies of their base. By appealing to 'hopes and dreams' and the 'way things ought to be,' Democrats succeeded in painting the Rs as the party of Neanderthal knuckle-draggers, social misfits and White supremacist/Hispanic-haters. As everyone knows, you just can't win any race in New Mexico by biting the Latino hand that feeds you, and it certainly can't hurt a candidate to have a half-Hispanic last name to improve the odds of victory (LUHAN-Grisham, TORRES-Small, etc.). Granted, there are some anomalies like HEINRICH and UDALL, but they are just that...anomalies. Sooner or later they, too, will be replaced by candidates bearing hyphenated last names.

But what about the Republicans? Could they benefit from a Hispanic connection? After all, there was MARTINEZ and SANCHEZ for the last eight years. Not so fast. Our last governor was also a woman and a Hispanic. Had she been an Anglo male she would have lost big time. Let's be honest. It was her gender and her ethnicity that helped to OFFSET her Republicanness. Voters (largely Democrats) were willing to suspend their belief that she was a conservative and hoped that somehow, once she was in office, she would 'discover' her roots as a typical Democrat Latina and act, accordingly. Obviously, that didn't happen, but she soon became a known commodity and was seen as a benign force towards the latter part of her first term which gave her re-election.

In truth, she failed to act Republican *enough* and even thumbed her nose at President Trump by not attending his rally in Albuquerque, thereby assuring herself a place in the Hall of Republican Ignominy. Hobbled and without direction - and without good political advisers - she dared little and demurred much and in doing so hurt her party's chances of hanging on to or winning seats in 2018. She was like a neutron bomb that destroyed Republicans' political life while leaving the empty carcass of a party apparatus standing - one that, presumably, won't recover for years to come.

New Mexican Republicans have never been known for their superb organization. On the contrary, they can't seem to get it together and join forces with their disparate factions by settling old internal power struggles. The party is like the Tom Lehrer song, 'Rioting in Africa' where the final lyric reads, "And I don't like anybody very much." To use another analogy, they are like novice volunteer firemen at a five-alarm blaze, stepping all over each other to reach the hoses only to find out that they haven't connected them to the hydrants.

What can Republicans DO to rebuild and regroup?

They must be looking for 'that one thing' that Curly Washburn spoke of in the film, 'City Slickers' - the thing that makes *it* all worthwhile, whatever *it* is. The brutal truth is that New Mexico Republicans cannot be any one thing to other New Mexico Republicans as some are Trump Republicans; others are not, and the third group isn't really sure what it is. Realizing that they cannot reorganize before they actually organize, they must accept the fact that the only way forward for them (considering their state organization doesn't have the staff, the time or the money) is to work on growing their voter base by reaching deep into the younger voter ranks and convincing them that Republicans aren't creatures from the Black Lagoon.

THAT one thing will take every ounce of effort they can muster, but they better kick it into overdrive because the Democrats aren't sitting back playing cribbage on the porch of the feed store. They are busy working on their re-election campaigns and they have the time, the money and the candidates to do more than just one thing.

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