



GOP can overcome 'party of no' label by empowering the states

By RITA M. DUNAWAY • 1/11/15 5:00 AM

Republicans know that they must rise above their current branding as “the party of no” if they hope to extend their electoral successes beyond 2014. This requires the GOP to cast a positive, compelling vision and articulate a feasible plan to implement it.

But can the beleaguered party of “conservatives” rise above its crotchety image to inspire and motivate both young voters looking for a fresh, positive vision and the turned-off, tuned-out former voters who mostly sit out Election Day in frustration?

An apt bellwether is the snowballing, nationwide effort to trigger an Article V Convention where state-selected delegations will formulate and propose constitutional amendments to restrain the federal government.

The idea is to empower the states by mending constitutional fences. While those fences once marked a small plot of federal jurisdiction, fence posts loosened by decades of drifting constitutional interpretation have freed the federal beast to graze in the meadows of state prerogatives and individual liberties.

The Article V movement is just what the doctor ordered for the Republican Party — a practical, proactive plan to use a never-before-used constitutional procedure to restore federalism.

The added bonus is that this plan has broad appeal to Constitution-lovers of every political stripe. It capitalizes on the common-sense conviction that the best public policy decisions are made closest to home. In other words, the vision is inclusive because it isn't about what government should be doing, but which government should be doing it.

In order to bring this Article V convention to fruition, 34 state legislatures have to pass applications for it. The prognosis is good.

But this positive, bridge-building effort is taking flak from a small but livid posse of “conservative” Article V naysayers. Their mission: to defeat any and every effort to use the convention mechanism for proposing constitutional amendments.

They imagine a doomsday scenario (typically featuring George Soros) where state-appointed convention delegates, sent to restore our federal system, defy their instructions and endeavor to throw out the Constitution lock, stock, and barrel (but especially the Second Amendment).

In the fashion of all good naysayers, they avoid challenges to obvious flaws in their jaded theories. They cannot explain how or why 38 states — the requirement for ratification under

Article V — would approve of this shenanigan, typically resting their “case” with more allusions to George Soros. In an attitude of holy reverence toward our Founding Fathers bordering on idolatry, they scoff at the idea that today’s state legislators could be trusted to select and instruct delegates to propose amendments that would, in fact, shore up limitations on the federal government.

They have plenty of hypothetical conspiracy theories. What they don’t have is a positive, practical idea for bringing about the limited federal government they claim to want — unless, of course, desperate, extra-constitutional measures such as “nullification,” secession or armed rebellion can be considered positive or practical.

The Article V naysayers represent everything the Republican Party must rise above if it hopes to ever recapture the hearts and minds of sufficient voters to make it a dominant political force again. Indeed, the spirit of the naysayers is what all Americans must rise above if we are determined to preserve our self-governance.

We can’t govern ourselves properly if we can only articulate what we fear and what we don’t want. And we aren’t governing ourselves at all if we’re cowering in the corner, too afraid or disgruntled to use the constitutional tools at our disposal to set things right, while a tiny group of elite, career politicians in Washington, D.C. assume ever-increasing powers over our light bulbs, our healthcare, and every other part of our lives.

C.S. Lewis describes a person who first suffers from a grumbling mood, then embraces it, until at last there is nothing left of the person at all — just “the grumble itself going on forever like a machine.”

Republicans beware: enthusiastic voters won't coalesce around a “grumble.”

Some say a “conservative” is one who resists change. One who defends the status quo. But I say being a “conservative” actually means something more, something far more noble and far more difficult; it means “conserving” what is good, true and beautiful about America. And that doesn't always mean being defensive.

Today, as we see most of the ingenious principles of our Constitution (federalism, enumerated powers, reservation of rights) interpreted out of existence, “conserving” what is good about America requires positive action. It requires using the tool that the Founding Fathers gave us to balance the power of the feds. And for the endangered species known as American conservatives, it's just the sort of action that could inspire a revival.

Staff Counsel Rita M. Dunaway is staff counsel of the Citizens for Self-Governance Convention of States Project. Thinking of submitting an op-ed to the Washington Examiner? Be sure to read our guidelines on submissions for editorials, [available at this link](#).