Moving on to Oblivion

By Mel Lavine

Special to the Times

The Republican party is moving on to oblivion. Like Mitt Romney, its standard-bearer, the party is a confusion of disparate ideas. Reducing the size of government and cutting spending and taxes is traditional fare, but the Tea Party movement is pushing the rank and file to adopt harsh positions on abortion and immigration.

As Adam Nagourney wrote in the New York Times Monday, such a party platform “could undercut the party’s need to broaden its appeal.” Many leaders “feared it was hastening a march to become a smaller, older, whiter and more male party.”

Dan Quayle, who was the elder President Bush' vice president, (1989-1993), told the paper, "The Republican Party needs to re-establish its philosophy of the big tent with principles. The philosophy you hear from time to time, which is unfortunate, is one of exclusion rather inclusion. You have to be expanding the base, expanding the party, because compared to the Democratic Party, the Republican Party is a minority party."

Another voice from Republicans past, George E. Pataki, the former Republican governor New York, agreed with the Tea Party on lowering taxes and reducing the size of government. But he worried that anti-government sentiment could get out of hand, push the party to the fringes, and alienate most voters.

"What I fear," said Pataki, "is that that very positive desire to limit the power and the role of the federal government, could turn into a philosophy that is antigovernment. Sometimes those who I fear have that anti-government view, as opposed to the limited government view, rise to the center of the nominating process. I think that is not a good thing for the Republican Party."

Today's GOP is made up of many conflicting factions. Tea Party adherents are just one of the forces competing for power. "Super PACs" bankrolled by billionaires are challenging the influence of party leaders. The babel is said to run deeper than pros can remember in a long time.

According to the New York Times the other voices include "evangelicals...supply-siders who

would accept no tax increases and a dwindling band of deficit hawks who might. There are economic libertarians who share little of the passion that social conservatives hold on issues like abortion and same-sex marriage. There are neoconservatives who want a hard line against Iran and the Palestinians, and realists who are open to diplomatic deal-cutting."

Meanwhile, the country is moving on. The influx of Latinos in Nevada, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and Florida has changed the demographics in what were conservative Republican strongholds. Some trace the beginning of the decline to 1994 when California Republicans supported an initiative, Proposition 187, to cut off services to illegal immigrants. It was voided by a federal court but not forgotten.

Richard White, a Stanford professor of history of the American West, explained it this way to the Times:

"Once California started alienating Latinos and once Latinos started moving in large numbers to Arizona and Texas, that changed the whole game."

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