

# Santa Claus and the GOP Civil War

☒ So I'm driving in my car listening to Rush two days after the election and a caller comes who describes himself as a traditional family values conservative. He is a combination of angry and deeply depressed over how the election turned out – but mostly angry. And he's calling, he says, to inform Mr. Limbaugh that he did not vote for Mitt Romney and will never vote for a moderate Republican. Then for good measure he adds that if he ever hears a Republican say he wants to "reach across the aisle" he will never vote for him either.

One day earlier, conservative radio talk show star Laura Ingraham tweeted this:

"Face it Repubs, you wish we had a candidate who—teleprompter or not—could speak as forcefully for conservatism as Obama speaks for liberalism" and "JUST A THOUGHT...Next time, GOP might want to think about nominating a conservative."

And out in Middle America, Steve Deace, a conservative radio talk show host and well-known conservative in Iowa told his listeners: "There will never be another establishment candidate like that [Romney]. ... Mitt just killed Republicans in my home state. People are angry, especially because Matt Drudge and Karl Rove told us it was all in the bag all along, after they got done smearing conservatives in the primary and dumping on Todd Akin. It's on like Donkey Kong."

Todd Akin, you may recall, was the Republican candidate for the U.S. Senate in Missouri who talked about "legitimate rape." He lost.

Welcome to the civil war for the heart and soul of the Republican Party.

It was bound to happen. Disgusted “real conservatives” saying we lost four years ago with a moderate and we lost again this time around with another moderate. We’ve had enough of that. Now we need someone who will proudly stand up for conservative values.

But if what the caller on Rush’s show, and Laura, and the Iowa radio guy really mean by an unapologetic conservative is the *most* conservative candidate in the field, they are making a very big mistake.

None of the more conservative candidates in the original GOP field – Bachmann, Santorum, Gingrich – would have come as close as Romney. They would have been trounced. What the hard right doesn’t seem to grasp is that candidates who are “real conservatives” can’t even win their party’s nomination, let alone a general election.

Why didn’t Pat Buchanan, a real conservative, become president? Why couldn’t he even win the GOP primaries? Because he scares people with his hard right rhetoric.

Why can’t we name two conservative U.S. presidents in the past 80 years? If conservatism is so popular why was there only one, Ronald Reagan?

What the GOP needs more than a conservative who can deliver uncompromising rhetoric, is a conservative with charisma – someone who can articulate conservative values but not scare the dogs and children and moderates who would be willing to vote for a Republican.

The GOP doesn’t need anymore religious nuts like Todd Akin or Richard Mourdock, the pro-life Republican who ran for the Senate from Indiana and said that pregnancy as the result of rape was part of God’s plan. He apologized, but it was too late. Like Todd Akin, he lost.

No one articulates conservative values in Americas with more

clarity and passion that Rush Limbaugh. But he couldn't win a national election for dog catcher. He's too polarizing a figure and I suspect Rush would agree with that.

But if the Republicans pick someone who says he'll reach across the aisle, then he loses that caller to Limbaugh's show – and almost certainly several million more just like him.

If the Republicans go hard line, they'll get that caller, but they'll lose millions of others who might have been willing to vote Republican.

When the other Civil War ended the South was forced to stay in the Union and give up slavery. No one can force voters to do anything. If the purists threaten to stay home if they don't get the perfect conservative candidate, Republicans will have a tough time ever winning the presidency again.

But if the GOP can somehow find the right candidate – the one who will have the guts to stand up to the more extreme elements of the religious right; the one who will take on the right-wing gay bashers, who especially turn off young voters; the one who will stand up to the purists who think compromise is a sign of moral failing – Republicans will still have another big problem.

Lots of Americans won't vote for any candidate who preaches self-reliance when they can vote for a candidate who wages class warfare and promises them free stuff. It's hard to beat Santa Claus, as Limbaugh puts it. And the Democrats are the ones saying Ho Ho Ho – vote for us, we have lots of goodies for you.

The Santa factor along with the deep split within the GOP puts Republicans behind the 8-ball before the next campaign even begins.