

An Easy Thing the GOP Can Do To Build Its Brand Back Up

❌ Back in December, I wrote a column urging the Republican Party to invest more of its resources in pop-culture messaging. The idea was to capture the attention of an increasingly unengaged, growing portion of the electorate that is far more concerned with keeping itself entertained than informed about what's going on in the country they live in.

One of the suggestions I offered was to run a series of commercials, in the form of public service announcements, framing the deep challenges our nation faces (like the national debt, over-regulation, etc.) as *causes* rather than as *issues*. The idea was part of a long-term strategy to promote simple awareness of such challenges in a lighthearted way that was direct, informative, and wasn't overtly partisan. Doing so would give conservatives an opportunity to narrate their philosophy to a segment of the population that is accustomed to identifying that philosophy with the defamatory caricature liberals have created for it.

Again, this was part of a long-term strategy. In the short-term, I think the Republican Party could use a similar mechanism to specifically help their *brand*.

As just about everybody knows, the Republican brand is not doing well right now. Half of the country views the party exactly the way the liberal media has worked hard to negatively portray it. A good portion of the other half has felt pressure to take sides between what has become known as *the establishment* and the *tea party* factions. Sure, those labels over-simplify what's really going on, but the tension is real. And though a case could be made that such tension (and the spirited debate that comes with it) is healthy for the party in the long-term, it certainly isn't doing it many

favors right now.

What I believe *will* do the GOP some favors would be to watch a video recently put out by a man named Elbert Guillory. Guillory is a state senator from the Louisiana. Earlier this month, he switched his party affiliation from 'Democrat' to 'Republican', and he detailed why in his video entitled "Why I Am a Republican".

Guillory happens to be an African American. In his speech, he explains quite eloquently why the policies of the Republican party are much more favorable to the black community than those of the Democratic party.

"At the heart of liberalism," Guillory says, "is the idea that only a great and powerful big government can be the benefactor of social justice for all Americans. But the left is only concerned with one thing: control. And they disguise this control as charity."

He goes on to say that programs like Welfare and Food Stamps aren't designed to lift Americans out of poverty, and that they've led people to sacrifice their self-initiative and self-reliance in exchange for their allegiance to "overseers" (aka politicians). He points out that the result has been control through dependency.

He does a good job of contrasting the liberal philosophy against that of the GOP, explaining that Republicans embrace the freedom of individuals, and "to be truly free is to be reliant on no one..."

Sure, such things have been pointed out before, but his words carry some extra weight for numerous reasons. Guillory doesn't fit the mold of the stereotypical Republican – you know, the *rich old white guy* that liberals insist accurately symbolizes the party. And though there are a number of Republican politicians in this country that are of racial minorities (many of whom are strong speakers), Guillory comes across

particularly well as a man of the people. He seems like a very introspective guy who could no longer bring himself to adhere to the failed, largely condescending philosophies of the Democratic Party that have deeply damaged the community he clearly cares about. Perhaps most notably, he speaks with pride about why he is now a Republican and urges others to join him.

That kind of thing strengthens the Republican brand.

I felt the same way when I was watching Arnold Schwarzenegger's speech, back during the 2004 Republican National Convention. At the time, Schwarzenegger was a still rock star – a pop-culture icon who probably compelled a lot of non-Republican moviegoers to tune in that night to listen to him speak.

In his speech, he talked about why he was proud to be a Republican. He spoke of leaving Austrian socialism and coming to America as a poor immigrant where he was drawn to the Republican tenets of free enterprise, limited government, low taxes, and a strong military. He credited those tenets as the hallmarks of what makes this country great.

“To my fellow immigrants listening tonight,” he said to the cheering crowd. “I want you to know how welcome you are in this party. We Republicans admire your ambition. We encourage your dreams. We believe in your future. And one thing I learned about America is that if you work hard and if you play by the rules, this country is truly open to you. You can achieve anything.”

He then urged others to join him by defining what it is that makes someone a Republican: “If you believe that government should be accountable to the people, not the people to the government, then you are a Republican. If you believe that a person should be treated as an individual, not as a member of an interest group, then you are a Republican. If you believe

that your family knows how to spend your money better than the government does, then you are a Republican. If you believe that our educational system should be held accountable for the progress of our children, then you are a Republican. If you believe that this country, not the United Nations, is best hope for democracy, then you are a Republican. And ... if you believe that we must be fierce and relentless and terminate terrorism, then you are a Republican!"

I thought it was a brilliant move, and I credit whoever it was that actually wrote that speech. It was a smart way of introducing independents and apolitical people to the party. I believe it was effective and strengthened the Republican brand.

The commonality between Guillory's speech and Schwarzenegger's speech is that both men compelled the people listening to think of *themselves* as Republicans – even if they hadn't self-identified as such in the past.

After all, it makes sense that in a country where twice as many people consider themselves "conservatives" as do "liberals", there are a lot of natural "Republicans" that just don't realize it, or haven't put a lot of thought into it. This is largely due to the Democrats doing a better job of defining Republicans (negatively) than the Republicans themselves have. Sure, a lot of it has to do with media largely being in the tank for the Democrats, but Republicans aren't totally helpless. They *can* do effective things to define themselves, including getting a better handle on how they promote their vision to Americans.

A dramatically different kind of marketing campaign is needed to do this – something that draws people in instead of the typical political campaigns that serve as little more than background noise. The conservative message is a good one, but conservative *messaging* in recent years has been quite poor. The commercials we see on television, for example, are overly-

serious, too in-your-face, and often resemble more of an indictment of their opposition than they do the advancement of whatever larger point that is trying to be made. They also grossly overestimate the political knowledge of most Americans, which is not good.

To look for an example of how to get their messaging right, and compel people to identify with their philosophy, they should borrow from a simple, successful approach used by the Mormon Church. I'm talking about the "I'm a Mormon" campaign.

The "I'm a Mormon" campaign has done a good job in recent years of dispelling the myths and negative stereotypes associated with the church. Its primary focus has been in the form of Internet videos, but I've also seen a number of television spots. Each ad gives a glimpse into the life of an individual Mormon, profiling their upbringing, life experiences, and where they're at now. The idea is to get people to view Mormons as their neighbors – people who are an awful lot like them, and seem to have their lives very much together. In other words, they're people who others can easily identify with.

Imagine a similar ad, in which an immigrant from Mexico (to the back-drop of him greeting people at a restaurant) tells his story of coming to the United States twenty years ago with five dollars in his pocket, working his way up from a busboy at a restaurant to eventually a manager, and then later opening his *own* restaurant. He tells of how he came from a country whose citizens are marginalized by their leaders, and are taught that the government is the primary source of wealth. He explains that government dependency is unhealthy and it doesn't create prosperity. It instead strips away people's dignity and their ability to produce. He says that if he had listened to the Democratic Party when he came to this country, he wouldn't be where he's at now. He says that he believes in a system in which the government lets people succeed by not over-taxing and over-regulating, thus

encouraging the entrepreneurial spirit this country was founded on. He ends the spot with stating his name and saying, "... and that's why *I'm* a Republican."

Imagine another ad showing a mother dropping her children off at school, while her narrative voice explains her worries about her kids' future. She talks about a broken public education system in which effective teachers are expendable, and ineffective teachers are protected. She says that valuing teachers by their seniority instead of their job performance may be in the best interest of unions, but it's not in the best interest of our children. She explains that she wants more options for her children's education, so quality schools can compete for the opportunity to provide our kids with a quality education. She states her name then says, "... and that's why *I'm* a Republican."

The GOP could run ads like this for just about every political issue there is, as way of defining *their* vision in a way that appeals directly to people with similar concerns who may not have realized that there's a movement out there that sees things the same way that they do. 

The people in these videos should be real – not actors. And for the most part, they shouldn't be made up of public figures. Sure, you could throw in someone like John Schnatter (the CEO of Papa John's Pizza) or Utah politician, Mia Love, just to invite a little extra attention. But the rest should be private citizens, and these profiled individuals should be the kind of people who don't fit the mold of the stereotypical Republican. They should be young people from a mix of different races, careers, and backgrounds. They should be people who are proud to tout their party affiliation not just in front of the camera, but also when the camera is off.

This kind of campaign can only help in building back up the Republican brand.

Sure, it will generate an abundance of Internet parodies, but what doesn't these days? What matters is that people will be given a reason to identify with the Republican Party, and perhaps want to learn more about the party platform.

As with the other suggestions I've thrown out to the GOP in the past, this isn't the silver bullet that will solve all of the party's problems. It would, however, serve as an important piece of the puzzle the Republican Party needs to complete if they want to get back to being the party in power.