

Little Difference Between Sanders and Trump

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Down in South Carolina, in the days before the Republican primary, I was shocked by the number of South Carolinians who told me they were trying to decide whether to support Bernie Sanders or Donald Trump.

This choice is, of course, possible in an open primary state such as South Carolina. But what could possibly be happening, I asked myself, that the same voter could be considering Sanders and Trump?

When I dropped out of the welfare state 33 years ago and became a conservative and a Republican, I felt I was walking out of one world and into another that was totally, irreconcilably different.

I said goodbye to the government plantation and Democrat Party politicians promising redemption with other people's money. I turned to the Republican Party, which represented, for me, traditional values, personal responsibility and limited government.

These were the values of the healthy, prosperous parts of America. And it was these values that I wanted to bring to poor black communities as antidote to the damage done by the welfare state.

But a funny thing happened over 30 years fighting for more freedom in minority communities. The healthy part of America became more like the unhealthy part, rather than the other way around.

Back in 1995, when I was working with Republicans on welfare reform, 37 percent of Americans, according to Gallup, said government should not favor any particular set of values — including traditional values. By 2015, this was up to 51 percent.

Among Republicans the change has been particularly pronounced. In 2002, 22 percent of Republicans said government should not promote any particular set of values. By 2015, this almost doubled, up to 39 percent.

The support that Donald Trump, the current Republican front-runner, is getting is being explained as anger at the Washington establishment and big government. But is that true? Are these Trump supporters really looking for limited government and ending programs that are bankrupting us?

In a Pew Research survey done last December, 53 percent of Republicans said government doesn't do enough to help the middle class.

In a Reuters poll done last year, nearly 80 percent of Republicans opposed getting rid of Social Security and Medicare. Sixty-four percent opposed getting rid of Medicaid.

But these programs consume half the federal budget. And according to the Cato Institute, over the next 10 years, Medicaid is projected to expand by 21 percent, Social Security by 30 percent and Medicare by 40 percent. Without major reforms here, dealing with America's massive fiscal imbalances will be impossible.

Bernie Sanders proposes to deal with it all by making this country a socialist welfare state, with massive new taxes on those earning higher incomes. Donald Trump doesn't seem to think he needs to propose anything beyond assuring us there is no problem he can't solve.

It all helps to explain why it is possible that the same voters could support either Sanders or Trump. Both really have a lot in common.

Sanders and Trump share a message that all our problems are because of someone else and can be solved by someone else. According to Sanders, it is big business and the wealthy that cause all our problems. According to Trump, it is Chinese imports and immigrants. For Sanders, government will solve all our problems. For Trump, Donald Trump will solve all our problems.

America's greatness lies in giving individuals freedom to take responsibility for their own lives. Economically, this means ownership. Socially, this means family.

What makes America not great is this new era of blaming everyone else for our problems and looking for someone else to solve them.

Absence of personal responsibility has always been the message of Democrats. But it is new for it to define Republicans. It certainly is not the same Republican Party that won me over 33 years ago.

How did we get so lost?