

Grand Forks Herald

LETTER: To win, ND Dems should embrace classic liberalism

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GRAND FORKS — “Despite what the opposition says, Republicans voted to increase oil taxes last session.” This was the message of the Republicans’ election team for North Dakota’s District 43, which saw victories from Lonnie Laffen and Rich Becker.

Why would they be defending tax increases in a sanctioned mailer?

Senate Minority Leader Mac Schneider, D-Grand Forks, whose District 42 team I competed against as a Republican in 2012, put incumbent Sen. Lonnie Laffen, R-Grand Forks, in that awkward position in a Herald op-ed (“Republicans can’t explain away support of oil-tax-cut bill,” Page A4, Oct. 29).

Instead of acknowledging in any way that he backed a pure tax cut, Laffen instead gave voters his mailer and a response to Schneider in the Herald (“SB 2336: The facts and the fiction,” column, Page A4, Nov. 1).

At the same time and in a just-as-ideologically unexpected way, Democrat and then-Tax Commissioner candidate Jason Astrup was proposing a simplification overhaul and flat tax for North Dakota.

What gives?

Aside from just two district legislative races, Nov. 4 was a pretty good slaughter for North Dakota Democrats across the board, as it was for the party around the country. In my view, that’s in part because over the past 10 years, our country has seen a significant trend towards classic liberalism: the kind of philosophy that embraces individual rights, more peace and more healing.

While Laffen won and Astrup lost, I still see a window of opportunity. The fact that Schneider could put his opponents — whose party loves to carry the banner of fiscal conservatism and take

credit for economic prosperity in our state — in the awkward position of boasting about tax increases speaks volumes.

This posturing by the left reminds me of former Gov. Bill Richardson of New Mexico, who was one of the most fiscally responsible Democratic governors in the nation, as rated by The Cato Institute.

Richardson also legalized marijuana for medical reasons because he felt it was the right thing to do.

His degree of classic liberalism made him incredibly popular in New Mexico. His predecessor, Gary Johnson, also brought that philosophy to the table and was very well-received.

Today, Americans also see a trend towards individual rights, as evidenced by Edward Snowden's National Security Agency revelations that call for a greater degree of privacy (much of which President Barack Obama campaigned on in 2008).

Voters also are realizing that maybe it's not such a great idea to imprison people forever for nonviolent drug offenses (see: War on Drugs), and maybe rehabilitation is the answer for more healing and productive citizenship.

Another way Democrats could embrace fiscal responsibility and individual rights is by bringing people with disabilities and seniors into the community and out of institutions such as nursing homes, which are far costlier.

On all these things, North Dakota Democrats proudly could carry the banner — and perhaps start winning once again.

Peterson is owner and publisher of After5 Entertainment Newspaper of Grand Forks. He was a Republican candidate for District 42's North Dakota House seat in 2012.