



# ***The GOP is out of touch with Conservatism***

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A number of articles have surfaced in the past year or so about what many in the media and blogosphere perceive to be a radicalization of the Republican Party, particularly by self-described conservatives alienated by the recent tea party phenomenon. In a piece written last summer during the debt ceiling debate, New York Times columnist David Brooks [chided](#) House Republicans for their actions, claiming that members of the tea party movement "do not accept the legitimacy of scholars and intellectual authorities," "have no sense of moral decency," and "have no economic theory worthy of the name." Shortly following the debt ceiling showdown, a veteran Republican operative on Capitol Hill, Mike Lofgren, ["left the cult,"](#) excoriating the GOP for "political terrorism" and accused the party of deliberately plotting to undermine Americans' faith in federal institutions in order to reap short term electoral windfalls. More recently, former Bush 43 speechwriter David Frum wrote a lengthy piece in New York Magazine on the extent to which he felt that his party was "out of touch with reality," [noting](#) that today's conservatives "have built a whole alternative knowledge system, with its own facts, its own history, [and] its own laws of economics." Julian Sanchez, a blogger at the libertarian CATO Institute, [has referred](#) to this phenomenon as 'epistemic closure,' where "reality is defined by a multimedia array of interconnected and cross promoting conservative blogs, radio programs, magazines, and of course, Fox News."

The above writers attest that today's GOP is far out of step with modern political reality, yet what is more pressing is that today's Republicans appear to be largely out of step with the ideology they profess to adhere to, which has severely impacted the party's ability to elect conservatives to Congress. Several years ago, a lengthy [piece](#) was written about the decline of America's conservative movement (written by C. Bradley Thompson, a professor of capitalism who referred to the Democrats as "socialists" in his earlier work), which noted that "the ideals to which today's conservatives subscribe" ("compassionate conservatism" and "neoconservatism") are radically different from "the basic ideals that have

traditionally been regarded as the gold standard of true conservatism: the ideals associated with Barry Goldwater's 1964 presidential campaign, which, in turn, point to the principles of America's Founding Fathers." In his best-selling book, *The Conscience of a Conservative*, Goldwater noted that his chief concern as a political conservative and United States Senator was to "maximize individual freedom" in a way that was consistent with maintaining social order. It does not appear that today's conservatives share Goldwater's priorities, however, as many recently elected Republicans are instead primarily concerned with legislating morality and enforcing a strict anti-tax orthodoxy in order to satisfy various special interest groups. At the same time, these Republicans vilify those they disagree with, such as members of the other party, various members of the media, as well as anyone within the Republican Party that does not oppose Barack Obama and the Democrats 100% of the time.

The following analysis of the positions held by today's leading Republican presidential contenders, as well as those held by "Mr. Conservative," shows how far today's conservatives have drifted from many of the ideals of the man who made the Republican Party a conservative organization in the first place. Before analyzing these conflicting views, it is important to note that today's conservative Republicans and Senator Goldwater are also radically different in their approach to governance. Today's conservatives, for example, regularly repeat some variant of "government is bad" or "we need spending cuts" whenever they are asked about a particular problem facing the country, and repeat vague platitudes about how the free market and private enterprise will solve everything as if such responses adequately address their constituents' concerns. This "all government is bad all of the time, government is the problem not the solution" talk fits nicely into the Republican narrative that they are the "small government" party while the Democrats are the "big government" party, but it is unclear how such statements adequately answer Americans' questions regarding the country's problems. An extensive study of Senator Goldwater's political philosophy reveals that conservatism does not mean that all government is bad all of the time, but rather that people should not turn to the federal government to solve all of their problems. If government intervention is absolutely necessary to address a problem, conservatives should advocate local and state action to address the issue before drafting federal legislation as a last resort to deal with the matter. The further away from the federal government a problem is addressed, the more influence the average citizen has in affecting public policy, and the more accountable elected officials have to be in solving the issue.

### **Today's Republicans vs. "Mr. Conservative" Barry Goldwater on the Issues:**

*"A public official owes the people--along with honor and integrity--candor about his views. Now, as I seek the highest office in this land as the nominee of my Party for the Presidency, it is more important than ever that you understand these positions. You want to know what the candidate believes, and how he would translate these beliefs into public policy. You, as an American citizen and voter, should demand this type of discussion from all candidates, at all levels, for this government is your government. It is not the property of the elected few.*

*"We consent to be governed. We do not elect to be ruled. But if your interest as an American citizen is confined to the tuning of a television set, the scanning of an editorial or column, without careful study of the issues and the answers offered--*

*then it may well turn out that some day your actions will indeed result in electing to be ruled."*

-Barry Goldwater, *Where I Stand* (1964).

*Note: I believe that the GOP's remaining four presidential contenders are representative of the different wings of the Party, with Mitt Romney representing the business-friendly wing, Ron Paul representing the libertarian wing, Rick Santorum representing the religious conservative wing, and Newt Gingrich representing the Tea Party wing. Examining the views of these individuals on the issues of the day should thus provide a fairly accurate picture of where today's Republicans stand.*

With every passing day, the Republican Party continues to drift away from conservative principles. The party's establishment seems to care mostly about winning elections and enriching special interests, and the party's base seems primarily concerned with fighting a culture war against Obama and the Democrats. It is unlikely that even a massive Democratic landslide in the fall will make today's Republicans wake up and start re-assessing their positions and approach to governing. Conservatives everywhere should thus begin advocating for serious campaign finance reform as a way of awakening and mobilizing like-minded individuals who do not believe that the Republican Party should be defined solely by what it opposes in order to begin electing responsible conservatives to Congress.

Conservatives should advocate campaign finance reform as a means of re-making the Republican Party into a conservative organization again because the current system that allows virtually unlimited money to be funneled into campaign coffers is what has forced Republican leaders to continually cater to the whims of the establishment and the base. As was noted previously in the "campaign finance reform" issues section, Barry Goldwater advocated placing a ceiling on campaign expenditures, shortening the length of presidential campaigns, and enacting stricter disclosure rules in order to address this problem. Federal campaign finance reform laws that included these provisions would thus be important conservative legislation, but it is highly unlikely that such a measure could garner enough votes to pass in the House, let alone the Senate, as the measure would undoubtedly be subject to a filibuster. The special interest groups that hold sway over many of today's Democrats and Republicans would certainly threaten to withhold campaign contributions from lawmakers who supported such a bill, and even if such legislation passed, there would always be the possibility that the Supreme Court would find it unconstitutional.

A constitutional amendment of some kind or another is thus necessary to address campaign finance reform and allow the Republican Party to elect conservatives to national office. If such an amendment is to be ratified, its authors and supporters must frame the need to pass such an amendment as more than a left or right-wing issue, as both Democrats and Republicans are too cozy with big money and special interests. Supporters of this proposed addition to the Constitution must make it clear to the American people that they either believe that politicians should be accountable to their constituents and communicate honest principles, or that politicians should be accountable to shady billionaires of varying political stripes, corporations, church groups, and labor unions, as well as Big Oil, Big Pharma, Big Agriculture, the health insurance industry, the education privatization industry, the NRA, the military industrial complex, and various environmental groups in order to flood the airwaves

with commercials that distort their opponents' records or grossly oversimplify the issues.

The current system of campaign finance has so weakened the ability of the Republican Party to elect conservatives to political office that perhaps a more radical approach to a constitutional amendment regarding this issue is necessary. If the Republican Party wishes to elect conservatives in all parts of the country, not just in "red states" or rural areas, a constitutional amendment that empowers the FCC to prohibit the broadcasting of political commercials on television and on radio must be passed. Drastic reforms along this line are necessary for two reasons. Firstly, America's numerous problems, such as rising energy and health care costs, overseas wars, ongoing economic troubles, and the massive federal deficit are simply too complex and urgent for today's politicians to be oversimplifying into thirty to sixty second sound bites. The ever-growing biannual flood of television advertising has made candidates for federal office increasingly dependent on funds from special interest groups as a result of increasing election costs, ultimately leading to less meaningful and effective legislation being enacted to address today's problems. The current system of unlimited spending by special interests has also allowed people with little understanding of basic civics and economics to be elected to Congress, thus leading to bills that privatize Medicare without addressing health care costs, others that call for further deregulation of Wall Street in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis without addressing "too big to fail," bills that eliminate non-existent EPA farm dust regulation, as well as legislation seeking to ban federal funding of abortion several decades after passage of the Hyde Amendment.

If political advertising ceases on television and radio, candidates for federal, state, and local offices will have to have a thorough understanding of the issues in order to win those offices, as oversimplifying their message into 30 second spots will no longer be an option to reach the clear majority of voters who do not follow politics all of the time. Without television and radio spots, candidates will be forced to debate one another in front of the voters much more often in order to articulate their political positions effectively. Only in that environment can true conservative Republicans be elected to Congress and ascend to the White House.