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Grand Old Party's looking like two new parties

By: Paul Mulshine- August 13, 2013

It's official. There are now two sides to the Republican Party. And Chris Christie's on the wrong one.

Or so says Sarah Palin. In an interview on a Fox News talk show Saturday, the former Alaska governor was asked about the dispute between Christie and Rand Paul, the Kentucky senator who is his potential rival for the 2016 GOP presidential nomination.

"I'm on team Rand," Palin replied. "Rand Paul understands. He gets the whole notion of 'Don't tread on me' government. Whereas Chris Christie is for big government and trying to go-along-to-get-along in so many respects."

Palin may be considered a kook in liberal circles. But among Republicans, she is the sole politician to share what is commonly called "rock-star" status with Christie. Anywhere Palin goes, she can fire up a crowd of the faithful. And she goes to a lot of places.

Those travels have given her an insight into where the Republican base is headed — and it's not headed Christie's way. Lately, it's become common among conservatives on talk radio and the blogosphere to speculate that Christie might convert to the Democratic Party. That's nonsense, of course. There's no place in that party for someone who rose to national prominence fighting public-employee unions.

But if you put that issue aside, Christie does indeed have a lot in common with the Democrats. Consider that front-page article in yesterday's Star-Ledger on campaign finance. It turns out that five dozen big corporate donors from Wall Street and Silicon Valley have contributed to both Christie and to Cory Booker, the mayor of Newark who's running for the Democratic nomination for U.S. Senate in today's primary.

Christie's politics have a lot in common with Booker's once you put aside the social issues — something the governor does about two seconds after anyone brings them up. Both are big-government corporatists who would fit in nicely with the Beltway crowd. So were the last two Republicans who lost presidential elections.

Palin was the running mate of one of them, John McCain. Her odyssey since that 2008 race tells a lot about how the party has changed.

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Back then, Palin supported McCain on everything from his neoconservative foreign policy to his support for immigration amnesty. Now, she opposes McCain on those and other issues. She has

gone over to the small-government, libertarian wing of the party represented by Paul and his father Ron, the former Texas congressman who got the whole fight started in that 2008 presidential primary race.

The fight is already going on in earnest. The Beltway branch of the GOP is doing everything it can to push that immigration bill through the House, but the conservatives are resisting. Christie's taking a lot of heat in the hinterlands for the "yes" vote on the bill from his U.S. Senate appointee, Jeff Chiesa.

Then there are issues such as the "Common Core" national education standards that were first adopted under George W. Bush but are now being implemented by President Obama.

The Beltway Republicans back the standards, but conservatives are calling for an end not just to the standards but to the federal Department of Education.

Among the most outspoken is New Jersey's most right-wing Republican congressman, Scott Garrett, who represents the largely rural 5th District. In a recent speech to the libertarian Cato Institute, Garrett said the Common Core standards represent "the invasion of the federal government upon the reserve power of the states to set their own educational standards." For good measure, Garrett threw in a dig at Bush's No Child Left Behind program on the same grounds. He called for the feds to distribute education funding directly to the states with no strings attached.

Inside the Beltway, this sort of thing is heresy. Out in the hinterlands, it's considered common sense.

And it's only going to get more common. The momentum among the masses is against big government. They're likely to believe Palin when she states, as she did on that show, "Chris Christie's for more government and his record proves it."

Actually his record in New Jersey doesn't provide much proof. On the state level, Christie has been quite conservative.

And the way things are going on the national level, it's looking more likely every day that Christie will be staying on the state level.