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## Gene Healy sees the Millennials as the new statist

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Next month, as the class of 2013 moves into the dorms, Wisconsin's Beloit College will release its annual "Mindset List." The list is that much-forwarded email that always makes you feel old--the one that includes horrifying factoids like, "for today's college freshmen, GPS navigation systems have always been available," and, "there has always been Pearl Jam."

More horrifying still, soon they'll all be able to vote.

The generation born from the late 1970s to the early '90s has been called "Gen Y," "GenNext," and "the Millennials." Its name is Legion. But whatever name they go by, and despite their image as web-savvy individualists, when it comes to politics, young voters are as collectivist as they come.

In May, the Center for American Progress released a lengthy survey of polling data on Millennials, concluding that they're a "Progressive Generation," eager to increase federal power.

CAP is the leading Democratic think tank, so it has a vested interest in that conclusion. But they're on to something. In the last election, 18-to-29 year-olds went for Barack Obama by a 34-point margin.

The CAP report shows that Gen Y is substantially more likely to support universal health care, labor unions, and education spending than older voters. And other surveys support CAP's "Progressive Generation" thesis.

In 2008, the nonpartisan National Election Study asked Americans whether "the free market" or "a strong government" would better handle "today's complex economic problems." By a margin of 78 to 22 percent, Millennials opted for "strong government."

Kids today are a credulous bunch. The 2007 Pew Political Values survey revealed "a generation gap in cynicism." Where 62 percent of Americans overall view the federal government as wasteful and inefficient, just 42 percent of young people agree.

No wonder, then, that GenNext responds to President Obama's call for "public service," roughly translated as "a federal paycheck."

Here, they differ dramatically from their skeptical "Generation X" predecessors. A 1999 survey asked Gen X

college seniors to name their ideal employers; they "filled the entire list with for-profit businesses like Microsoft and Cisco." What a difference a generation makes. In the same poll today, Gen Y prefers the State Department, Teach for America, and the Peace Corps. That's a problem for a country built on the entrepreneurial spirit.

What lessons can the GOP, nominally the party of limited government, learn from all this?

First, by staking so much of their electoral success on "social issues" voters, Republicans have lashed themselves to a sinking demographic. At 16 percent of voters currently, Millennials will grow to nearly 40 percent of the electorate by 2020--and they couldn't care less about the "culture wars."

Young voters are twice as likely as older ones to support gay marriage. Former Vice President Dick Cheney, of all people, has the sensible political position here: Conservatives ought to give up on marriage amendments, letting the issue get sorted out on "a state-by-state basis."

Second, given the rising strength of younger voters, beating the war drum isn't the way forward for the GOP: "Millennials have generally been the age group most hostile to the war in Iraq," CAP reports, and they're less likely than their elders to embrace a militarized war on terror.

Republicans can compromise on these issues without violating any principle that's essential to conservatism. But Millennials' romantic view of federal activism presents a more serious challenge to small-government conservatives. Luckily, this may be a problem that will work itself out on its own.

David Brooks, every liberal's favorite conservative, argues that the old Reagan-Goldwater antigovernment spirit made sense once, but today it's an anachronism. When this generation was but a gleam in its parents' eyes, Brooks points out, tax rates were 70 percent, inflation was rampant, and "the capitalist world was headed to a Swedish welfare model."


Oddly enough, that sounds like the world young voters will be facing very soon, as the Baby Boomers retire, and our wealth-destroying Social Security system forces every two Millennials to carry one aging hippie on their backs.

The rising generation is about to get a hard lesson in the costs of activist government. Before long, they may start to see the wisdom in Reagan's aphorism that "government is not the solution to our problems: government is the problem."

Examiner columnist Gene Healy is a vice president at the Cato Institute and the author of "The Cult of the Presidency."

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