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CPAC damages itself and the GOP

By: Jennifer Rubin – February 27, 2013

Actual political courage, not the kind when you declare yourself brave and then pander to your base, is rare in politics. People don't often resign out of principle. They don't tell the White House of their own party "no." And if they lead an organization they generally won't cross their members even on matters of conscience. So when it happens it is worth taking note.

S.E. Cupp, a feisty conservative pundit, announced she will not participate at the CPAC conference because it has excluded the gay conservative group GOProud. She is going to rattle some cages and potentially lose part of her audience. She is unlikely to be invited back in the future. But this is all small potatoes in the grand scheme of things. She is following her own stated principles and making a singular point: In excluding otherwise willing conservative allies, CPAC has already done more harm than it could possibly gain from right-wing activists and pols yammering in the echo chamber at one another.

As an employee of a CPAC sponsor told Right Turn, "CPAC's in a corner because it can't afford to cross groups that are big sponsors that have said they'd leave if GOProud is 'in the building.'" Well, CPAC should get some new sponsors. Entities that would do this do not have the long-term interests of the party at heart.

The CPAC gathering ironically features panels on how to attract minority voters and getting up to speed on new technology. There is even a panel titled, "A Roundtable Discussion on The Future of the Movement: Winning with Generation X/Y." (Anyone on that panel who shows up and doesn't address the issue frankly doesn't get it and shouldn't be instructing others.) Hmm. Perhaps CPAC could start by not subtracting from its already shrinking base. For casual political observers not inclined to attend or listen to speeches the only thing they will hear is that a bunch of conservatives wouldn't allow in a gay group. In a nutshell, this is what is wrong with the GOP and why forward-looking conservatives shouldn't encourage this nonsense.

David Boaz of the libertarian Cato Institute sees a larger problem. "Are Republicans losing younger voters? Sure. You know the numbers from 2008 and 2012," he tells Right Turn. He argues that it is "certainly perceived to be true, and conservatives are still paying the price" for anti-immigrant and anti-gay views. He warns, "They should try to avoid raising the price by being so dead-set against gay rights and immigration."

In some sense, CPAC is the worst possible case. No one is asking CPAC to endorse gay marriage or any other policy, merely to let gays into the room. Refusal to do so smacks of the very sort of exclusionary instincts liberals claim conservatives harbor. And if Boaz is correct that "[c]ampaigned against gay marriage is a good way to make the Democratic advantage among young people permanent," then refusing to let them into a gathering is a good way to offend Americans of all ages for whom tolerance is a key value.

It will be interesting if other participants join S.E. Cupp in protesting CPAC's exclusion or publicly object at the conference. And by the way, why afford anonymity to the groups threatening to bolt if GOProud is included? Aren't *they* the ones dividing the party and making the task of expanding the GOP's reach more difficult? Just asking.