

Opinion: Ready to change the tide in Washington

By Tom McClintock

More than a year ago, pollster Frank Luntz stood before a group of about 40 House Republicans in a cramped conference room in the Longworth building. “I need to tell you something,” he said. “I’ve been looking at polling data from congressional districts across America for the last three months. I’m convinced that you are going to be in the majority next year.” After a long pause, he added, “This time, please don’t screw it up again.”

I don’t think we will.

The message of the last two elections could not be louder or clearer. Great parties are built upon great principles and they are judged by their devotion to those principles. From its inception, the core principles of the Republican Party have been individual freedom and constitutionally limited government. The closer it has hewn to these principles, the better it has done. The further it has strayed from them well, my God.



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In the aftermath of the Bush debacle, House Republican leaders resolved to restore traditional Republican principles as the policy and political focus of the party and they achieved

something no one at the time thought possible: they united House Republicans as a determined voice of opposition to the Left and rallied the American people. Republicans rediscovered why they were Republicans, and Republican leaders rediscovered Reagan's advice to paint our positions in bold colors and not hide them in pale pastels.

Ironically, in Reagan's home state, Republicans tried to campaign to the left of the Democrats and the result was disastrous. While the rest of the country was celebrating historic Republican gains (including a shift of at least 61 U.S. House Seats, 6 U.S. Senate Seats, 680 state legislative seats, 19 state legislatures and six governors), the statewide Republican ticket in California imploded. Republicans nationally now hold more state legislative seats than in any year since 1928. In California, they hold fewer than at any time since 1978.

House Republicans were unfairly criticized as the party of "No." When somebody is driving you off a cliff, "no" is a handy word to have in your vocabulary. But it can't be the only word in the national debate over the future of the country and Republicans know it.

Over the last two years, House Republicans laid out detailed plans to revive the finances of our government and the prosperity of our economy, to return freedom of choice, competition and affordability to health care, to restore the integrity of our borders, and to return to our states their rightful powers and prerogatives.

A Republican House cannot alone enact such laws, but it no longer must labor in the obscurity of minority irrelevance. It now has the opportunity to elevate the national debate by putting forward these plans at a time when Americans are alert to the danger facing the nation and eager for an adult discussion about the fundamental mechanics of freedom – how freedom works and how we can put it back to work.

In 1858, Lincoln warned the nation that two antithetical philosophies, freedom and slavery, competed for the future and reminded us that a house divided against itself cannot stand. "I do not believe the house will fall," he said, "but I do believe that it will cease to be divided." Today two incompatible philosophies, freedom and socialism, compete for our future and the stage is set for one of the greatest debates in the history of the American Republic.

Upon the outcome of that debate rests the question of whether the United States of America will fade inexorably into history or whether it will begin its next great era of expansion, prosperity and influence.

Tom McClintock represents the California side of Lake Tahoe in the U.S. House of Representatives.