

This was sent to the Daily Post-Athenian in Athens, Tennessee, 8-19-2014.

To the Editor:

Whatever has happened to the Republicans? I have looked and looked, but I can't really find any. That is to say, that while I can find people who call themselves Republicans, I can't find true Republicans.

The Party of Lincoln seems to have lost its way.

For example, Teddy Roosevelt, a Republican President and Nobel Prize Recipient, was a strong believer in conservation. He placed 230 million acres of land under Federal control to protect it from commercial development. In 1902, he brought Federal recognition to the rights of organized labor and thus supported the union movement. In 1906, he signed the Pure Food and Drug Act, creating the beginnings of the FDA.

What we get from today's alleged "Republicans" is a complete lack of concern for the environment. We hear, "Drill, baby, drill" in the sensitive Arctic oil reserves. We get the push toward fracking and the "Halliburton exemption" that allows companies to keep secret the toxic chemicals they are injecting into the ground. We get clamoring voices wanting an oil pipeline, one that will carry dangerous heavy crude oil, built through an area containing an aquifer upon which millions depend for their water supply. We see Republicans actively work to strip workers of their union rights to things like collective bargaining. We hear how there is too much regulation, and government agencies should be disbanded because there are "free market" solutions that will be better.

Another Republican President, William Howard Taft, signed into law the 16<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the US Constitution, thus creating the Federal Income Tax. Like Roosevelt before him, he was a "trust buster," breaking up large corporations that had strangle holds on parts of the economy, such as Standard Oil, American Sugar Refining, and American Tobacco, and also like Roosevelt, he favored banking reform.

Today, we are told by "Republicans" that, "corporations are people, too," perhaps even with religious rights trumping those of their employees. And today's Republicans are fighting hard to undo even the limited protections of Dodd-Frank, claiming that its regulations are hurting the banking industry despite the fact that banks made over \$40.2 billion in profits during just the second quarter of this year.

In 1956, Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed into law the legislation that created the Interstate Highway System. It's not hard to see how the creation of that roadway system has benefited all of us here in McMinn as well as across the state and country.

Today's "Republicans," however, can't seem to manage to fund the Highway Trust Fund to keep that system maintained. Imagine what this country would be like if we had to count on the "Republican Party" of today to do something as forward thinking as the creation of the interstate highway system was, or as Teddy Roosevelt's Panama Canal was, or as Republican President Calvin Coolidge's Hoover Dam was. These projects, projects that helped make American the great nation it is, would not get done today. Today's House "Republicans" would refuse to raise the revenue to do any of them because they want to shrink government and because they have

sworn allegiance to Grover Norquist and have pledged to vote for no new revenues for any reason whatsoever.

In 1970, Republican President Richard Nixon signed the legislation that created the Environmental Protection Agency. He also expanded the vote by seeing the 20<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the US Constitution adopted, giving the right to vote to 18 year olds.

The “Republicans” of today seem determined to abolish the EPA. They are also determined to restrict the ability of people to vote through the enactment of onerous voter ID laws, which are ineffective in that they do not address the real causes of voter fraud, e.g., fraudulent absentee ballots, ballot box stuffing by corrupt election officials, and coercion.

And then there is Republican President Ronald Reagan, so often cited with esteem and affection. His overhaul of the tax code exempted many low income people from federal income tax. He also supported reasonable gun legislation in the form of the Brady Bill in 1993 and the Assault Weapons Ban in 1994, saying that the attempt on his life might not have occurred if those laws had been enacted sooner.

Today’s “Republicans” seem to regard low-income people as freeloaders and ne’er-do-wells deserving of scorn rather than assistance. Cuts in benefits and a demand that struggling people “pay their share” have become the norm. And they have fallen in line behind the gun manufacturing industry’s lobbying group, the NRA, and refused to back any legislation to improve gun safety even in the wake of so many mass killings and the deaths of so many innocent children.

We don’t have to look only to past Republican presidents to find honorable men of vision. In 1872, Aaron Sargent, a Republican Senator from California, proposed an Amendment to the US Constitution that would give the right to vote to American women. It was a long struggle, but that Amendment was finally ratified in 1920. It came down to the wire, but the last vote on that issue, the deciding vote, was cast by Harry Burn, a member of the Tennessee State Legislature from right here in McMinn County.

Back then, we had Harry Burn who demonstrated his respect for women by recognizing their right to equal participation in society and by crediting his mother and citing her advice as influencing his decision.

What kind of “Republicans” do we have today in the Tennessee Legislature?

We have the kind who would rather see citizens of Tennessee die than to expand Medicaid benefits, an expansion paid for by federal funds which would bring money into the state and help preserve regional hospitals. We have the kind who is unconcerned about the plight of people working for an unlivable minimum wage. We have the kind who use outside money in an attempt to consolidate power in their own hands by influencing the retention vote of Tennessee Supreme Court justices. The Tennessee Supreme Court was never meant to be a tool of the Legislature, and we will all be ill served by it if it should ever become that. It was sad to see that many “Republicans” here in McMinn County allowed themselves to fall prey to an attempted corruption of the balance of power that is the foundation of government in this country

The legacies of great Republican men like Teddy Roosevelt, like Dwight Eisenhower, and like

Harry Burn, are being actively and carelessly destroyed by those who identify themselves as “Republicans.”

What made these past Republicans great, I think, is that their goals were honorable and that they knew how to work with those of the opposing party to get things done. Today’s “Republicans” come up short on both of those scores.

If we really want to honor and uphold the legacies of the great leaders of the Party of Lincoln, we are going to have to first recognize that it takes more than calling oneself a Republican to make a person one. We are going to have to look at the ideals, the policies, the programs, and the accomplishments of those Republican greats and then evaluate the Republican candidates of today against that standard. And then, we are going to have to go to the polls and vote Democratic, because today’s Democrats are the ones putting people first, protecting the environment, and investing in the future.

(A special note to the TEA Party: Those Bostonians who pitched Tea overboard were *not opposed to taxes*. They were opposed to *taxation without representation*. So, to the extent that you support laws that limit voting or make it more cumbersome to do so, you dishonor the memory and sacrifice of those early patriots.)

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