



## Tony Blankley and the “High-church” Liberal Republicans

About the recent special election for Congress in District 23 in New York, conservative columnist and commentator Tony Blankley observed in a talk he gave last night at Saint Anselm College in Manchester, New Hampshire, that the Republican Party nominated "a very liberal Republican." Well, did they now?

Well, you can be a "very liberal Republican," I suppose, although you have to be something of a political and ideological contortionist to do it. It is, George Will observed years ago, a bit like being a "high-church Unitarian. It's possible, but why bother?"



Today, "liberal" is a useful word only to conservatives and those on the right who, for whatever reason, eschew the conservative label for themselves. Those on the near left, or center-left, almost never use the term. They choose, rather, to call themselves "progressive." Unless they are Republicans, in which case they may run on a platform of Looney Toons liberalism from the western end of the universe (north of Berkley and slightly to the west of any Starbucks in Seattle) and still be termed a "moderate" in the solidly respectable *New York Times*. But Tony Blankley is not from the *New York Times*. He is from the Newt Gingrich wing of the Newt Gingrich Party, called Republican, and while not candid enough to "call a spade a spade," he will at least call the far Left Deirdre Scozzafavva a "very liberal Republican."

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Well, Blankley was merely making a point about party unity and Tea Partiers and the base and the 2010 elections, using the elections of 2009 as a sort of reference point of preview of things to come. In all likelihood, Scozzafavva will not play a prominent role in 2010 or at the Republican National Convention in 2012. That was clear even before she dropped out on the weekend before the special election and endorsed Democratic candidate Bill Owens, making it a two-way race between Democrat Owens and the Conservative Party candidate, Doug Hoffman. Hoffman, the near-great Right hope, lost to the Democrat by three percentage points.

For conservative Republicans, those who, in other words are Republicans for reasons more substantive than that they like the letter "R" or elephants or circus tents or whatever, it was a case of addition by subtraction. Better to lose with Hoffman than win with "Obama Lite," a lady who was as close to Obama in ideological rectitude and "eco-fascist" liberalism as anyone save, possibly, Mrs. Obama or Obama's mama, who is no longer with us. But for party loyalists, that is, those who march under the letter "R" no matter whom the party bosses anoint, the thing to do was swallow hard and support Scozzafavva. Because she could at least be counted on to vote for the Republican candidate for Speaker of the House, even if it's the last Republican vote she casts all session.

That was too much for some career Republicans to swallow. So Dick Arme of the Potomac, the former Republican majority leader in the House of Representatives and now ex-officio Tea Partier in Chief in



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Washington, endorsed Hoffman of the Conservative Party. So did former Alaska Governor and last year's Republican vice presidential candidate, Sarah Palin. As did Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty. Palin and Pawlenty are both considered hopefuls for the GOP presidential nomination in 2012, so their endorsements are generally regarded as unconventional, even unorthodox. But as John F. Kennedy once said of a Democratic candidate in Massachusetts, "Sometimes party loyalty asks too much."

But not for Newt Gingrich, the former Speaker of the House, who urged conservatives and Republicans of all stripes to unite behind Scozzafavva, the pink elephant. To many conservatives that was like an invitation to a hangover without the party the night before. And since Gingrich is also considered a possibility for President in 2012, his endorsement, which apparently did not help Scozzafavva, may have been the kiss of death for Newt's own chances for the brass ring, since the party faithful tend to view it as an ideological sellout.

Blankley, who was Gingrich's press secretary in Newt's glory days as Speaker, took no stand in his talk at Saint Anselm, other than to say the usual routine is to stand by your man or woman who bears the party imprimatur in the hope that when your champion gets the nomination, the "moderates" or liberals within the party will stand by your champ. But Blankley, who started in politics way back in the Goldwater days of his youth, should know better. Once Goldwater's nomination appeared inevitable in 1964, party "moderates" flocked to Pennsylvania Governor Bill Scranton to try to stop Goldwater. Liberal Republicans like Senator Ken Keating of New York would not even say they supported the top of the ticket. Sixteen years later not much had changed. When Ronald Reagan captured the nomination in 1980, "progressive" Republicans supported the third-party candidacy of Illinois Congressman John Anderson.

But why are Republicans like Scozzafavva called "liberal" or even "moderate," anyway? The "moderate" label is essentially a dodge. It suggests the candidate is "middle of the road," with the *New York Times* defining the boundaries of the road. (When Dan Rather of CBS News described the *Times* as a "middle of the road" publication, columnist Joe Sobran declared that would be true if the road is in North Korea.) The moderate Republican tries to occupy the "higher ground" between Dick Armey, let us say, and Al Sharpton. What the moderate stands for is vague, but it's "centrist." As the late columnist Meg Greenfield of the *Washington Times* and *Newsweek* magazine said, the emphasis on "moderation" suggests that whatever Republicanism is, too much of it can kill you.

But for 100-proof conservatives, moderate Republicans create a stomach-turning nausea, not unlike seasickness. That is because moderate Republicans are adrift at sea — when you don't know where you're going, any breeze will take you there. Candidates with compasses need not apply. Which is why Republican "moderates," those "high-church Unitarians," are, if not extinct, a surely an "endangered species."

So what does that say about Blankley's old boss, Gingrich? Well, Blankley had remarkably little to say about the architect of the Contract With America and the engineer of the Republican tsunami of 1994 that brought Republicans to power in both the House and the Senate for the first time in 40 years. But his standing with the Party's conservative base, which is most politically active Republicans, was diminished considerably by his Republican-at-any-price endorsement of Scozzafavva in New York. His ties to Henry Kissinger will be recalled. So, too, will his support for NAFTA and other "free trade" agreements, as well as his vote in his early days in Congress to establish the Department of Education as a cabinet-level agency. Gingrich is also a reliable vote for war the way Archie Bunker described the "submissive generation" and its desire for sex "at all hours of the day and night and for no reason!" And



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Gingrich also is careful to put Israel first in all foreign policy considerations.

If that were not enough, Gingrich has also joined forces with Al Sharpton in promoting education reform to help minorities catch up in academic performance. This does not add up to a winning resume for a Republican presidential hopeful. What does look good on Newt's resume is that as Speaker, he and his fellow Republicans worked with President Clinton, who made a virtue of necessity, to produce the first balanced budget since the early days of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. But to emphasize that, Gingrich will be, in effect, reminding people that we had better government under Clinton than with either of the Bush presidencies and arguably better than under Ronald Reagan, who doubled the budget and tripled the deficit he inherited from that favorite Republican whipping boy, Jimmy Carter.

Blankley did mention a trip he made with his former boss to New Hampshire in 1995, when some thought the newly crowned speaker was exploring a possible presidential bid even then. Gingrich said he was here to watch moose, but if so, it was the most heavily publicized and closely watched moose-watching expedition in history. While here, he caught up with President Clinton in Claremont, NH and had a "debate," during which they discussed Social Security, Medicare Part B, and even engaged in a famous handshake on campaign finance reform. Newt the partisan warrior was nowhere to be seen. He went into the tank for Clinton and was in the perfect place to do that. New Hampshire's state amphibian (yes, we have one) is the red-spotted newt. Few New Hampshirites know that.



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