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Inglis says GOP must admit mistakes, learn from them

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Republicans across the nation need to shed their "fat cat" image, learn to admit mistakes and develop a "Reagan likeability" if they want to fare better in 2008 than they did in this year's mid-term elections, U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis said Monday.

"We're like that kid that got a pop and sent away from the dinner table," Inglis, R-S.C., told about a dozen people at Wade's.

"Now, we're peeking around the corner. Do we look like we learned our lesson? Because if we don't, if we come back with a smirk, we'll probably just get another pop in two years and be sent away from the table again. We've got to show that we learned something out of this."

The discussion was as much about policy -- Congress needs to stop "spending money like a drunken sailor," Inglis said -- as it was about image.

The point was to brainstorm what went wrong and what needs to change following the "loving correction" the GOP was handed by losing control of Congress.

"Republicans have got to get away from being dominated by the right wing of the party and move toward the center," said Ed Burke, an engineer in Spartanburg.

"If you had come up with centrist solutions ... you could have moved the country forward. You have to solve problems, not just highlight them."

Minimum wage was the focal point of much of the conversation, with Burke and developer Arthur Cleveland pointing out that a compromise to raise the minimum would have worked better for Republicans rather than fighting it did. It wasn't a wise battle to choose, they said, and in doing so handed Democrats an issue that they used to their advantage.

Developer Tom Lounds suggested that the GOP needs to be careful who speaks for the party and what they say.

He mentioned that in reference to Sen. George Allen of Virginia, who narrowly lost re-election this

year, though Inglis later broadened that.

President Reagan was a good example of someone who spoke to Republican principles, Inglis said, as opposed to someone who comes across as saying "I am the embodiment of virtue."

"It's not that Reagan was god, but he was an awesome politician. He genuinely liked people. He had a love affair with the American people. He could not be sanctimonious. He just couldn't," Inglis said.

Had the current president admitted mistakes, the American public would have stayed with the party longer, Inglis said.

Moderating the attitudes of those within the GOP will be harder than moderating their approach to policy, Inglis said.

During his re-election campaign, the congressman mentioned several mistakes he believes the Republican administration made during the last two years, including missteps Congress made in the handling of the war in Iraq, No Child Left Behind and Medicare Part D.

Republicans need to show they have a plan for Iraq -- and quickly, as Democrats likely will cut funding going toward the war, Inglis said Monday.

He added that he thought nation building is wrong.

"I don't think you can give the people the gift of freedom," he said. "People have to purchase their own freedom with blood and treasure. You can give them the option, but they have to make the choice."

Republicans need to show vision, not just a need to regain control, if they want to be successful in 2008, Inglis said.

State Republican Party director Scott Malyerck said in a Monday telephone interview he saw similarities between Reagan and the current president, though admitted in 2008 voters likely will look for someone different than Bush.

"It was a different time. Inflation was high, we had hostages in Iraq, and Reagan came in and said, 'Our best days are ahead of us.' His policies, his charisma -- People could identify with what he stood for," Malyerck said. "Less government, less intrusion into their lives, less taxes, a stronger defense: He worked toward that. And maybe nationally, the Republican Party has gotten away from that."

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