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## Inglis continues his defense of vote against troop surge

**Jason Spencer, Staff Writer**

Still on the defensive for breaking with the Republican Party and voting against President Bush's troop surge in Iraq, U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis on Monday took a back-to-basics approach with his Spartanburg constituents by asking them to help define what it means to be conservative.

Ronald Reagan embodied that virtue in substance and in personality, Inglis told a crowd of about 25 people at his monthly "Let's Talk" luncheon at Wade's Restaurant.

But, Inglis said of the years following the Reagan administration, "A funny thing happened on the way to our majority. Somewhere along the way, we stopped being conservative."

In some ways, Inglis is doing damage control for voting against the surge, and being only one of 17 Republicans to do so. The congressman -- who represents Greenville, Spartanburg, Union and part of Laurens counties -- subsequently voted against the Democratic plan to fund the war, calling the proposed timetable for withdrawal that was tied to the funding "unacceptable."

Inglis maintains that his core beliefs remained the same on the two seemingly opposite votes.

With Iraqis engaged in a civil war, American lives would only be put in jeopardy by "going there in a fire truck and getting caught in the crossfire," he said. The United States should not be engaged in nation-building, and the purpose of this country's military is to "crush, kill and destroy" enemies to national security, he said. Inglis has called for U.S.-created benchmarks for the Iraqi government that would carry a series of penalties, not an all-out withdrawal.

But Inglis has angered some of his supporters to the point where they are talking of putting up a potential Republican challenger when he seeks re-election next year.

And siding with Democrats against Bush to some is an unforgivable sin.

"Something's in the water up there in Washington, because when our elected officials go up there, they forget who pays their bills," said Monika Carroll, a regular at the "Let's Talk" luncheons.

"Backbone. Morals. Where are our Republicans standing up for our troops? Where are they, Bob? A lot of us in this world don't want compromise. And, Bob, yo•have aligned yourself with people who hate this country."

Inglis countered that no one questioned his loyalty to the party when he broke with the president on issues like No Child Left Behind, which the congressman calls the "worst bill ever passed," or for calling the Department of Homeland Security budget "bloated."

"There's sometimes yo•have to stand up and vote against your party," Inglis said. "Yo•can't just walk the line -- or else you'll go off the cliff like lemmings. Yo•have to have the audacity to stand up to your leader and say, 'Stop.' "

Inglis pointed out that during the Reagan administration, Republicans were talking about eliminating the federal departments of education, energy and commerce.

But instead, the Republican rule since has expanded the federal government, he said.

Invoking Ronald Reagan seems to have become commonplace when Republicans want to establish themselves as conservative. Virtually every GOP presidential contender to come through this county in recent months has likened themselves to Reagan. The cover of Time magazine this week has a photo illustration of Reagan's face with a single tear falling, teasing a story about "How the right went wrong."

But some people are more interested in what politicians see looking forward, not back.

"By always referring to the past, we're losing people," GOP activist MaryAnn Riley told Inglis on Monday. "Democrats and Republicans both are always invoking the name of Reagan. And it's losing its meaning, I feel."

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