

NEWS + FEATURES

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## Republican Bob Inglis is not a tea partier

The Optimist

BY CHRIS HAIRE

The Republican Party is suffering from a leadership problem. Is the leader of the party Michael Steele, the Republican Party chair, or Rush Limbaugh, the clown prince of political punditry? Or is the leader of the GOP a guy that the majority of Beltway Republicans would rather ignore — Ron Paul? Or is it South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford, a tea partying libertarian who would rather place a hex on his home state than accept a single cent from the stimulus fund?

And it would seem that U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis (R-S.C.) understands the identity crisis the GOP is currently facing.

In Twitter posts — Inglis writes all of his own — the Upstate Congressman asked a series of questions on the direction of the Republican Party, which has suffered its worst defeat in years and is still pissed off about it.

What is conservatism, Inglis asks. "Is it about love for country or dislike of our opponents?" "Solutions that we know will work or wedges devised to drive votes?" "The ideology of a small and angry sect or the governing philosophy of a majority of Americans?"

That Inglis even has to ask these questions — and that virtually no one else in the GOP would — shows you just how bad off the Republican Party might be.

But there's hope, according to Inglis. His answer to these questions is to "[a]dvance conservatism in a hopeful, optimistic voice." For the Congressman, conservatism is "a winsome philosophy that works and that most Americans can embrace."

Right now, though, the GOP is less concerned about optimism and winning over the majority of Americans. They just want to bitch. Ever the optimist, Inglis, who recently spoke to the *City Paper*, knows that this will one day end.

"I think there's such disappointment with the Republican majority that we had and its failure to control spending. That frustration has spread anger, and that's what we're seeing right now, the fullness of that frustration and anger," Inglis says. "I think once it's over, and we've had an opportunity to sort through what we're angry about and what's our frustration point and how can we fix it, I think we can get folks to come back to a reasonable Republican conservatism."

He adds, "Right now folks that are being driven by anger and frustration and mixing in populism with it are tending toward a libertarian-anarchy position really. I think once that has been expressed and there has been some venting of the anger, we will be able to have a good discussion of how do you go from here? ... I hope we come to a place where what we want to be is hopeful, optimistic conservatives who believe that America's best days are ahead. Who accept the challenge, to whom much is given much is required, and let's go fill that calling. That's what I'm working toward hoping for."

Hope? America's best days are ahead of us? Not surprisingly, Inglis isn't a regular on the tea party circuit — not like his finger-wagging compatriot in D.C., Sen. Jim DeMint, or Sanford, a former Congressman who was elected to office like Inglis during the Republican Revolution. Inglis didn't go to the February tea party in Greenville, which attracted 2,000, nor any of the Tax Day Tea Parties that followed.

"I think that for some of the folks that have spoken at the previous tea parties, I think there has been really an anti-government, no-government approach, really more of a libertarian plus some populism mixed in rather than conservatism," Inglis says. "I'm a Republican, not a libertarian, and there's a difference. There is a role for strong and smart federal government and one that's able to meet the challenges of the century and to provide effective regulation of commerce through transparent systems that would prevent a banking disaster like we just had. And that's a Republican position. A libertarian position might be, let the buyer beware."

Regulation? Strange talk for a Republican.

Inglis elaborates further on where a lack of regulation got us. "My view is that government has a role in seeing that markets are functioning well, and that means requiring reporting," he says. "If we had a more up-to-date, smarter, more effective system of regulation, we might have known that Bear Stearns and Merrill Lynch were leveraged 40 to 1."

According to Inglis, deregulation wasn't the answer and neither is libertarianism.

"It's a fine governing philosophy, one that normally gets three percent of the vote because most people can't take the whole of libertarians, the fullness of the philosophy, because it means you wouldn't have any publicly built roads," Inglis says. "You would have toll roads. It means legalization of drugs, prostitution, pornography ..."

Inglis has served the Greenville area in Congress since 2005. He originally served from 1993-1998. He will face at least four challengers in the Republican primary for the District 4 seat.