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Incumbents should run scared this year

By Jim Nowlan

If I were an incumbent running for re-election this year, I'd run scared. My chat this past week in Moline with five fired-up members of the Tea Party movement found them angry about Big Government, the loss of Christian family values and a raft of specific concerns ranging from gun rights to abortion and the "shoving down our throats" of health care changes.

One solution they would like heralded on billboards: "Vote the bums out!"

"I am excited, watching the American people taking back their rights," declared Cyndi Diercks of Bettendorf, IA, a volunteer Iowa-Illinois coordinator for the tea partiers.

The small group expressed frustration with GOP President George Bush's deficit spending and bank bailout. Yet President Obama is guilty in their eyes of radicalizing government with health care reform and uncontrolled spending, and for slipping "abortion on demand" back into the health care bill, among other sins.

Diercks considers Obama a product of a governmental system gone wrong. "He was reared by a single mother and paid by government for his Harvard education."

Government was seen by the gathering as a failure at most everything it tries. "The people rebuilt housing after Katrina, while FEMA failed," said Ken Moffett, a retired businessman and substitute teacher from Moline.

Welfare is another government system that failed, and should better be handled by families and churches.

The porous border with Mexico took its lumps as well. “We are weakening our ability to protect ourselves,” said Moffett. The sense was that those who favor immigration reform do so in part because they will gain new voters for their liberal causes.

Steve B. is a retiree from Rock Island who asked that his last name not be used. He worried that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment (gun rights) is being assaulted. “The gene pool of lawyers is affecting Congress and government,” Steve B. added.

The loss of Christian traditions and family values recurred as themes, as we sipped coffee at a Hardee’s.

“Are we better as a society for leaving God out?” asked Ken Moffett.

“Let’s go back to pioneer days,” added Diercks. “We have lost our lessons about personal responsibility. We have lost our eye on the family because we’re too busy pursuing materialism.”

Cyndi Diercks and Luana Stoltenberg, the latter a pro-life activist from Davenport, kept returning to that topic. “The majority of Americans are against abortion,” said Stoltenberg, “yet under the health care bill abortion is mandated.”

When asked what they would do if handed a magic wand, Ken Moffett said, “Return is to constitutional principles, and require that all candidates take a course on the U.S. Constitution.”

Mike Steffen, a special needs teacher from Moline, would “wipe out all congressmen and senators (from office).”

The group generally derided elected officials who often stay on in Washington after they retire, making big money as lobbyists. Term limits for lawmakers were also uniformly popular with the coffee drinkers.

“Government service was never meant to be a career,” explained Moffett. “Elected officials should come back to their farms and businesses.”

Diercks complained that government has become so big it is now competing with private enterprise. She cited public golf courses that tend to set the fees for all the courses, yet have government to fall back on, something the private courses lack.

The group of tea partiers emphasized their movement was neither Republican nor Democratic. The efforts are broader, they suggested, and seek to take government back from the political class for the people. But, said Moffett, they do not go so far as the old John Birch Society, or libertarians, who favor decriminalizing drugs.

Active in their communities, churches and veterans’ organizations, the group had not generally been active in elective politics, until now.

Four of the five named Glenn Beck as their favorite news personality. Their political heroes ranged from John Adams and the Founding Fathers to Lincoln, Reagan and John F. Kennedy.

As with any new groups today, the Tea Party benefits from email communications. Diercks has a large list with whom she communicates by email, “and they send on the messages to their own lists.” Her group also has monthly meetings.

To Diercks and her associates, the political system has spiraled out of control. “Too many freedoms have been taken away,” averred Diercks, “but now the sleeping giant is awake.”

If most of the Tea Party members are as intense and upset with the system as those with whom I had coffee this past week, incumbents who face conservative opponents should indeed run scared.