

SNG-Opportunity Democrat-11-13-17

I'm an "Opportunity Democrat"; what are you?

By Jim Nowlan

After a long life as a Main Street, Eisenhower Republican who has voted mostly for that party, I find I am an "Opportunity Democrat," based on a survey I took from the Pew Research Center. Go to <http://pewrsr.ch/2glDMkX> to learn what you really are politically (look for The Quiz on front page).

Pew is a \$5 billion nonpartisan, non-advocacy foundation in operation since 1948. I think they do great work in the public policy arena.

Based on their interviews, Pew found what they call, respectively, Core Conservatives, Country First Conservatives, Market Skeptic Republicans and New Era Enterprisers. On the Dem side, they categorized folks as Solid Liberals, Opportunity Democrats, Disaffected Democrats, Devout and Diverse.

Other than the Core Conservatives and Solid Liberals, I would say the rest are not so solid either way. They may lean GOP or Dem, yet can be persuaded now and then to vote for someone of the other party.

Pew found that 20 percent of "politically engaged" citizens were core conservatives and 25 percent were solid liberals. Forget about the larger sample sizes of the general public or even registered voters. Politics is played mostly by the engaged, who definitely vote, many even contributing money.

So, after I took the 15-question survey, Pew categorized me as an “Opportunity Democrat.” That means roughly that I am socially liberal, yet believe in a vibrant market, free trade and (they didn’t have a question on this) personal responsibility and accountability to society from both rich and poor.

Looking at the Pew data, here is how core conservatives and solid liberals can control their respective parties. Core conservatives may represent just 13 percent of the public, yet they make up 43 percent of politically engaged Republicans.

And though Pew doesn’t say so, I’m confident these conservatives constitute a true majority of those who are really, really active inside GOP party activities, such as organizing to win presidential and general primaries.

In other words, any GOP official who comes out today with a pro-Choice position will fire up a hard-charging opponent in his/her next primary contest, and likely lose.

[When I was a young whipper-snapper state lawmaker just prior to Roe v. Wade (1973), abortion and other social issues weren’t on the political radar screen, at least so far as I can remember.

The issue of gun rights was just emerging. So, it made more sense back then that my type might be Republican.]

On the Dem side, almost half (48%) of the politically engaged are solid liberals. And ditto for controlling their primaries and for ousting any Dem official who is pro-Life.

Thus today, distinct minorities at each end of the political spectrum control today’s politics, even though 71 percent of the “general public,” which includes non-participants in the political process, are somewhere in between.

In a recent column, I proposed a moderate “Middle Rising Party.” From the many who emailed me, there was absolute consensus on one thing: This is absolutely the worst name in the world history of naming anything!

A great alternative was suggested by my old friend Jack Gilligan of Peoria: The Party for the Common Good.

This is the daunting challenge for anyone contemplating a third-party challenge by moderates. Though maybe representing a plurality, moderates are notorious for failing to arouse passion the way parties of the right and left can. After all, they are moderate; snooze.

[In our nation’s history, the only new, third party successful at replacing one of the major parties was the Republican Party in the 1850s. This fledgling group rallied northerners around the hot-button topic of the extension of slavery, which was threatened by proposals from Illinois Democrat Stephen A. Douglas and then in 1857 by the Dred Scott decision of the U.S. Supreme Court.]

Alas, what is “our” (meaning me, I guess) rallying cry?

I can report that I have received a couple score positive, thoughtful responses to my idea of a third-party challenge. But neither the numbers nor the visceral, fire-in-the-eye responses I received to my earlier proposal to “Throw The Bums Out” (TTBO).

[We were going to TTBO unless the legislature and governor, after three years without one, came to a budget agreement. The elected officials did, finally, enact a budget, so we didn’t have to pull the trigger on that one, maybe fortunately for me.]

I am still cogitatin' about a third-party effort, which would be daunting. First, recruitment of sterling, accomplished candidates to an unknown new party would be challenging.

Second, the initiative would have to be seen as credible, though not necessarily a winner first time out. To do this ineptly would be worse than not doing it, for it would simply feed perceptions that third parties can never work.

This is my last word on the topic in this space, which isn't for political activism. Email me if interested in keeping up with my thinking: [jnowlan3@gmail.com](mailto:jnowlan3@gmail.com).

And by the way, what are you?