

SNG-Nowlan-GOP may self-destruct-5-6-13

State GOP unit may self-destruct

By Jim Nowlan

The Illinois Republican State Central Committee may self-destruct over the issues of gay marriage and a divisive chairman. But it probably doesn't matter, because over the decades the group has become a toothless tiger.

The state GOP internecine warfare is an illustration of how a national political party that is having trouble adapting to changing demographics could go the way of the Whigs in 19<sup>th</sup> America.

The Whig Party had been a major party, but it faded away rapidly in the 1840s when it couldn't figure out how to handle rapidly growing sentiment to stop the spread of slavery.

The Illinois Republican Committee is made up of one member per each of the state's 19 congressional districts. The 102 GOP county chairs elect their respective congressional district state committee members. The state group then elects a chair, who does not have to be a committee member.

Chicago attorney was elected state GOP chair several years ago. He did some good things, such as recruiting Quaker Oats heir Sandy Stuart to head up fundraising for a party unit that had often been close to debtors' prison.

On the other hand, Brady has an inflammable temper and a modus operandi of doing things on his own, without consulting his state committee members—such as recently coming out for gay marriage, something that runs afoul of the state GOP platform.

A brouhaha erupted over Brady's gay marriage stand, fueled by suburbanite state committee members Jim Oberweis and Bobbie Petersen. The two demanded that Brady step down immediately, or be fired.

More moderate GOP leaders such as U.S. Senator Mark Kirk, himself a gay marriage supporter, counseled "go slow," cut your losses, and do not make a *cause celebre* out of the issue, fearing the party would be characterized as out of touch with the majority of voters.

But the GOP's strident and effective Far Right would have none of it. Two thousand emails flooded each committee member's in-boxes, demanding support of family values and the GOP platform plank.

And they have a point. Respected political blogger Rich Miller recently surveyed a suburban legislative district and found a majority of all voters for gay marriage, but a strong majority of Republican voters against such.

So the state committee met recently, with fire-breathing Brady opponents poised to oust him, probably to national media attention.

But moderates at the heated 3-hour closed-door meeting successfully beseeched their conservative colleagues to hold off for 30 days, to give Brady a quiet exit while the moderates searched for a replacement.

State senator Matthew Murphy of Palatine, an effective, attractive politico, has tentatively been recruited to take on the thankless job of replacing Brady.

Yet the conservatives, who hold a majority of the votes on the committee, may not reconcile themselves to Murphy.

The battle will apparently continue, while a positive effort to review party approaches in the wake of the 2012 election landslide loss to Obama in Illinois languishes.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, political parties recruited candidates, promoted the party image, raised money, helped candidates raise money, and worked to get out the vote. Today, the Illinois GOP does little but maybe help get out the vote, and often that is with money from national GOP groups.

The late conservative William F. Buckley said he was for the most conservative candidate who could be elected.

But the Illinois GOP is saddled with a right wing that imposes a litmus test on its candidates—if you're not pro-life and conservative on social issues, we don't want you, and we will beat you in low-turnout primary elections, which they can.

As one moderate, strong GOP activist put it: The GOP Right represents a solid, consistent 38 percent of the overall vote that is good at winning primaries and losing general elections.

I don't foresee the GOP fading away in the near future, yet this kind of “my way or the highway behavior” doesn't bode well for a party that has already lost much of its competitiveness in Illinois.

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In the interests of full disclosure, Nowlan is one of few remaining liberal Republicans, which may color my perspectives above.