

We Must Take Care of Our Own

BY DANIEL HOROWITZ



Daniel Horowitz

What are conservatives supposed to think when they elect 240 members to Congress who ran as limited government warriors, only to find a few dozen members actually fighting for those values when it counts? Were they all a bunch of frauds?

Undoubtedly, there are many Republicans in Congress who never were conservatives from day one or who never understood the true meaning of conservatism when they ran for Congress. That probably accounts for the majority of the wayward members in varying degrees.

However, there are a number of “drifters” who genuinely enter their freshman year as insurgent conservatives—members who believe that GOP leadership is just as much the problem as Democrats. But then something happens. They meet some of these establishment veterans and become part of a conference. Far from being the devil that some conservatives think he is, John Boehner is actually a very decent likable man. Unlike other members of leadership, he is not seeking to remake the party. Heck, you certainly can’t accuse this chain-smoking Ohioan from a family of 12 siblings of being a cocktail circuit country-clubber. He is just too much a part of the status quo and fears confrontation too much to be an effective leader. That does not negate his ability to connect even with the most combative conservatives.

So when this very amicable party leader walks into a freshman’s office and shows himself not to be the enemy, things begin to change. Remember that many of our guys are truly citizen legislators and lack the resources to pump money into their campaigns. Many of them are not prolific fundraisers. When the party leader extends that friendly welcome and helps him pay off his campaign debt, he begins to like the guy. And there’s absolutely nothing wrong with that.

With that said, imagine you are one of those members and are then presented with the quandary of voting against a leadership bill that violates conservative principles, such as the Violence Against Women Act or a debt ceiling increase. Are you really going to humiliate this man who just helped you out after he tells you that he is counting on you? Will you really vote against the rule? Will you have the guts to tell the whip you are voting no as the dean of your state’s delegation calls you an ungrateful jerk? Will you be able to hold your head up high during all the raa-raa conference sessions even as you are the skunk at the party?

The point is that while we certainly expect this sort of intrepid leadership from our candidates, we must also recognize just how arduous a task it is for them to hold the line. It’s not enough for the movement to help elect these guys, and then move onto the next election cycle while forgetting about those already elected. It is this complacency on the part of the movement that has left the “meat grinder” unchallenged—the incorrigible DC juggernaut

April 2013

RedState Report | PAGE 5

through which we lose another 5 good members for every 3 we help elect.

A strategy to help reinforce our guys in the field entails a focus on three things:

- Money: If we want our members to truly remain independent from the establishment, we cannot force them to rely on the machine for campaign donations. If we want our guys to support the free market and reject all special interests, we cannot expect them to rely on parochial interests to raise money. Those of us who run PACs need to help them fundraise, not just before they are in office, but after they win the election as well. Only complete independence from leadership will ensure their judgment is not adulterated on important issues.

- Positive Reinforcement: While we continue to shoot at the pale-pastel crowd, we need to openly acknowledge those who are holding the line on their campaign promises. We need to make sure their constituents, usually from very conservative districts, acknowledge that as well. There is no better tailwind at the back of a sitting member than knowing that his/her constituents appreciate their fight against the establishment. Organizing support on the ground in their districts, encouraging people to publicly thank them, and running IEs holding them above the rest of Congress would go a long way in combating the internal

pressure they face in DC.

- Congressional Staff: There is no way a new member, even a really sharp one, can stay on top of every issue and political dynamic in a way that will keep him/her abreast of all the potential pitfalls. I can’t understate the value of a staff that shares the goals and ideology of the member. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of staffers with the requisite knowledge of the legislative process who share our values. Many of those who work on the campaigns of tea parties are not prepared to serve on The Hill, forcing some new members to staff their offices with establishment and/or K Street types. That is a recipe for turning an insurgent member into a drifter. Conservative organizations need to do a better job of recommending staff choices to our new members before leadership gets ahold of them. Campaign staff should also reach out to conservatives immediately following the election before the freshmen orientation.

As hard as it is to elect conservatives, it is even harder to keep them within the fold and out of the meat grinder. If we expect them to fight for us, we must be willing to fight for them.

Where’s Luca Brasi When You Need Him?

Daniel Horowitz is a diarist for RedState.Com.