

When do we stop being Republican?

By Troy Carlyle

I met a woman the other day – a registered nurse who happens to be straight – who, after someone mentioned something vaguely political, launched into a tirade about her personal politics.

“I’m a born and bred Republican,” she proudly announced, “though I don’t necessarily go along with everything they say.”

“Gay marriage, for example,” she continued. “I don’t see what’s so bad about that. I think if two people want to get married, they should be allowed to do that.”

“And healthcare...” she was on a roll, now. “People should be able to get treatment even if they’re uninsurable or aren’t rich. And I’ve always been against the war in Iraq. I don’t see why we invaded a country that wasn’t actively invading anyone else. Now we’ve got nukes in Iran, but we’re tied up somewhere we never had any business going in the first place.”

“Are you sure you’re Republican?” I asked her, “Because you sound a lot like a Democrat to me.”

“Oh, good heavens, yes,” she responded. “I could never go with a party that condones cheating on your wife like Bill Clinton did.... Besides,” she added as a footnote, “Democrats want to raise taxes.”

This brief exchange got me thinking about what we mean when we align with political parties. A recent article on Gay.com was called “Gay.com's dating advisors: Party foul?” The article, an advice column, began with a reader’s lamentation that a recent date had been somewhat spoiled when he discovered his date was a gay Republican. As might be expected, gay Republican readers responded in force, in part because they were hurt by the insinuation that their party affiliation would matter, and in part to explain their rationale for being Republican in the first place. The responses were filled with many thoughtful sentiments, but also a few like the ones below:

“they [Republicans] are supposed to be more financially responsible”

“I am a businessman - which means I have to be a Republican!”

This second response struck me as so ludicrous, I felt compelled to add my own comment:

The reason we have political parties is so that we can relate with each other based on a series of values. Political parties, like the French Club in high school, give us a group of people who share common interests, which, not coincidentally, also tends to make the voting process easier. By identifying yourself as Republican, you are making a

powerful statement to your partner and the rest of us that you are aligning with a party that is almost universally against gay rights, many of which are biblical literalists that don't even think you have the right to exist. You are also saying you are against social medicine, which is desperately needed by the millions of folks who suffer from AIDS, and who therefore also suffer from a healthcare system riddled with politics and exclusions. In addition, you are aligning with a party that is quick to go to war. As an Air Force Academy Graduate who loves our country, I was ashamed to live in an era when we went against everything the Academy taught me about American values by preemptively invading a country that wasn't at war. Finally, I have to add that, as the owner of a small business (a blues bar), I don't know if I understand your rationale that businessmen must be republican. Unless you're saying that businessmen must align with liars and politicians who make decisions based on bribes and pork-barreling, I think you'll find the democrats quite accommodating to business people. We have to remember that political parties are not like our nationality or our natural identity... they are "clubs" based on "platforms" that we get to change when they stop representing our beliefs. I suggest you take a hard look at the folks you've identified with. Maybe it's time for a change.

So I guess my question... my question for all of us is "When do we stop being Republican?" How far must your own beliefs diverge from those held by your party before you accept the fact that you are no longer one of them?

Of course, I understand the mechanics of the phenomenon. Many Republicans, both gay and straight, are moved by the powerful influence imposed by the religious right on the Republican party – erroneously believing that the Democrats are the "anti-religious" party. Others have bought into the myth that the Dems are financially irresponsible (an ironic assumption, considering the fact that before dubya Bush intervened, Clinton had actually balanced the budget for the first time in decades).

But beyond the myths and misconceptions, there seems to be a perception, in America, that one's party affiliation is selected at birth and can never be changed. We are asked to confer on our gay Republican brothers and sisters the same unconditional respect we expect for ourselves being gay.

But there is a difference in being gay or straight and being Republican or Democrat. While our "gayness" may be an integral and immutable part of our personage... of who we are... our political beliefs are not. Forgive us, therefore, if we hold in some degree of disdain those among us who affiliate with a political party that would deny our most fundamental civil liberties. In other words, while we would not discriminate against people because of who they love, forgive us if we fail to confer the same privileges to people who practice hate. The Republican party, much like a white supremacist group, certainly behaves in a manner consistent with a profound hatred of the gay community. To continue the comparison one step further, I would ask, "Why

affiliate with the KKK, ostensibly for the cause of changing it from within, when there was another group available that was already dedicated to changing it from 'without?'"

Even when our intentions might be pure – even when our goal is “change from within,” we join the Republican party at the risk of appearing to be hypocritical... much like joining the KKK for the same reasons. You will forgive us, therefore, if we remain disdainful of those within our community who align themselves with the GOP.

It's a simple proposition, really. Much like the nurse I spoke to a few days ago, many of us don't seem to know what we're agreeing to when we say we're “Republican” or “Democrat.” Presuming our party affiliation to be a fundamental and unchangeable part of our personal identity, we may call ourselves one thing while actually believing in the other. My point is that our party affiliation IS our belief system. Unlike our race or our sexuality or our genetic makeup, it represents our opinions on some really important stuff like basic human rights; whether we can be arrested without due process, whether we can adopt children, etc. So let's think twice before claiming to be something that we're not.

-- Troy Carlyle