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GERALDO RIVERA

AP
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NO MATTER his ultimate decision, Geraldo Rivera's interest in seeking the Republican nomination for U. S. Senate in 2014 is another episode in the ongoing intraparty tug of war between those who argue the party's survival depends on altering its fundamental approach to public policy and those who are convinced that future electoral success rests upon stricter adherence to its history and traditions.

The debate has been going on since the primary election defeats — or close calls — of moderate Republican members of Congress by challengers who ran to their right, followed by losses in states where

Republicans either should have won or been highly competitive.

Hopes for Republican control of the Senate were dashed; the party saw its margin in the House trimmed and President Obama won a second term rather decisively despite an economic climate that would, in normal circumstances, have doomed his reelection effort.

Virtually every election post mortem — including those from leading party figures — blamed the disappointing showing on the failure to deliver a positive and credible message to the American people about the direction it wished to take the nation. It came across as an out-of-touch party whose only platform was to oppose and continue to say no without offering any substantive ideas of its own.

The party paid a price for its inability to recognize or understand the changing political landscape and demographics, resulting in a narrowing of its appeal and inevitable defeat.

In discussing his interest, Rivera came down on the side of those who feel the party can restore itself only through self-appraisal and rejecting the rigid ideological philosophy that in recent years has come to dominate it.

Message of opportunity

Rivera urged the party to adopt a message of opportunity, economic growth, job creation and a brighter and more secure future for all and avoid becoming ensnared in polarizing social issues — abortion, same-sex marriage, immigration reform, strengthening laws on access to firearms, for instance.

Taking principled positions on these issues and respecting the beliefs of those who differ is understandable, he said, but concentrating on them as tickets to Election Day success crowds out the broader and more compelling message of nurturing opportunity for everyone to succeed, achieve and realize a secure future.

He echoed Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal, who, in the kind of graphic terms we in New Jersey have become accustomed to from our governor, said the Republican Party must avoid becoming “the stupid party.”

Jindal argued that success is to be found in policies of government spending restraint and creating a climate that encourages entrepreneurship, private investment in business ventures and support for those willing to devote both energy and capital in pursuit of a secure future.

Such a message and governing philosophy is lost

in the din of rhetorical combat over issues with long histories of divisiveness. The competing forces have never and will never persuade one another to change their views.

The Supreme Court found the right of a woman to terminate a pregnancy in the U. S. Constitution 40 years ago and a reversal of that finding is not likely. Same-sex marriage is already law in a number of states and will in all likelihood achieve legal status in several others, even while the court considers challenges to it.

While immigration reform has proven elusive, there is consensus that rounding up for mass deportation some 11 million undocumented aliens is a logistical nightmare, prohibitively expensive and unduly harsh on those who've been in this country most of their lives, living productive and law-abiding existences.

Changes in firearms regulations are currently under consideration in Congress and it appears that some will win approval without doing violence to the Second Amendment.

These issues have always evoked strong feelings and no one has ever seriously suggested that the right to express those feelings should be abridged in any way.

What Jindal has suggested and what Rivera has by implication supported is that these issues not become signature political guideposts for Republican candidates. Holding and articulating positions on them certainly have a place in campaigns, but not the predominant place.

There is ample time for Rivera to engage in introspection and contemplation and to decide if he wants to give up a million-dollar gig with Fox news for a job that, while prestigious, would require a dramatic economic lifestyle change.

Untested in politics

He's untested in politics, and, if he becomes a candidate, he may find campaigning to be similar to the on-camera row he became embroiled in while hosting a talk show — a row in which he was clocked by a flying chair and suffered a broken nose.

His entrance into the race would also potentially create one of the more intriguing political contests this state has