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SPA 460: Leadership Capstone

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Policy Memo

**Identify a leadership problem:**

For my final policy memo for my tenure in the SPA Leadership Program, the leadership problem I have identified is the identity crisis within the Republican Party. Ever since Donald Trump assumed the Presidency, the GOP became the party of Trump agreeing with everything he did and said, regardless of the factual accuracy. Ironically, during the primary and general election of 2016, many of his opponents and notable GOP politicians were outspoken in their disgust and opposition to Trump in how he carried himself and what he said and how he said it. Throughout his term and after his exit from the White House, the damaging rhetoric that Trump spewed was targeted at fellow members of the GOP over their lack or apparent lack of loyalty, something that was vital to Trump.

How can a political party in a country founded on and defined as a democracy survive and effectively lead when their total loyalty and belief is in one person, Donald Trump? The problems that this presents for the leadership of the GOP is their leadership identity. They have framed themselves as a party whose leadership is under the direction and control of Trump, instead of overarching ideologies and plans of action.

**Identify the Associated Leadership Challenges Created by the Problem:**

As a result of the Republican Party vowing complete loyalty to such a dangerous and polarizing figure, Donald Trump, they are simultaneously hurting themselves in terms of expanding their base. In simpler terms, the tent of the Republican party is getting smaller and smaller, given the pursuit of the party to focus on issues that drive people away more than bring people in. By focusing on issues and topics that working families do not stress about when their bills are behind and they do not know where their next meal is coming from. The GOP focusing on target missiles to hit their opponents (the Democrats) with, takes away from the role that they are supposed to play as politicians: being ambassadors for the people in the districts and or states in which they come from.

One of the problems about the party is that it has become a party that tests a person on their loyalty to President Trump and his ideals and visions. If you are not fully on the Trump bandwagon, then your identity as a member of the GOP is questioned, called out and ostracized.

With many Americans having families with children, the utilization of fear mongering by the GOP to attract voters, in fact, drives them, particularly suburban women (which are a huge voter demographic that has become a driving focus for candidates to appeal to) away.[[1]](#footnote-0) In creating false narratives about the other side, in the form of fear mongering, they create an unsafe narrative to evoke fear in the public so as to then shape themselves as the saviors that will protect the people from the other side. Examples of this can be seen from the 2020 election cycle when the GOP labeled Democrats as being socialists, which in the case of Latino voters, stoked fear in them due to socialism in their home countries and the negative impacts and trauma that caused them. Thus, at the very mention of “socialism” they would be driven in the opposite direction. Simply stated, they would be more willing to side with the GOP.

Through ignoring the real issues that matter to everyday Americans and rather spewing political problems that they have with their Washington colleagues, the GOP has turned into a cult who worships and stays mum on anything Trump does that is a success or utter failure.

**Identify a Policy Solution for the Problem:**

In regard to policy solutions for this problem what is paramount is identifying aspects that will allow for the Republican party to survive and thrive in the 21st century and attract policies that advance our country while also staying true to the essence of the Republican party. Figures such as Adam Kinzinger and grassroots advocacy can be key elements in helping to redefine the party and resolve the identity crisis that they are in the midst of.

One of the policy solutions for this problem is a young politician who has not shied away from his opinions and positions in regard to the direction that his party is going in. This politician goes by the name of Adam Kinzinger who has served the 16th district of Illinois since 2013 as Representative in the U.S. House of Representatives.[[2]](#footnote-1) Ever since the 2020 election, Kinzinger has been vocal of his opposition to the direction that his party is going in. Recognizing their flaws and critiquing the GOP, much to the disgust of his supporters back home, Kinzinger faced brutal backlash and family drama. However, the points that Kinzinger made were spot on. His call for recentering the essence of the GOP is what is needed, in a time where they appear not to be a political party but rather a cult. In being one of the few voices of opposition against Trump and about the direction in which the party was going in, Kinzinger created his own political action committee called “Country First” in which is will be raising money and supporting “anti-Trump Republicans and purge the GOP of Trump’s influence.”[[3]](#footnote-2) The Adam Kinzinger’s are the ones who are the GOP’s best hope in salvaging an already rotted party. After having lost the House, Senate and White House there should be no doubt that Trump is not good for the Republican Party. It are the Adam Kinzinger’s who can create a change in the party and move it into the 21st century so as to attract more moderate voters who might have swung left due to the rhetoric and silence in acceptance of the vicious rhetoric and moments that have happened due to the encouragement of Trump and the silence, thus representing approval, from the Republicans in Congress.

Although there are many policy solutions for this leadership problem, integrating more action at the grassroots level to identify voters and potential voters for their party is vital. When looking at the lack of impact that their party had on voters in everyday life, they need to recognize the strength in addressing solutions rather than vilifying the other side. Reaching voters at a more familiar level. By doing this, they can help repair the issue of trust or uncertainty that they face. Along with that, they should target voters' needs and move away from the unrelatable partisan warfare and discuss issues that voters care about, and become more adaptable to the issues occuring in the 21st century, a century built and defined by innovation and fast-pace change and movement forward.

The key for the GOP to overcome this identity crisis is adaptive leadership and transformational leadership. These two styles of leadership are required not only for the party to reflect on who they are and what they stand for, but also as a source of leverage for reform within their own party to recover from the turmoil that Trump caused.

**Conclusion:**

Overall, the identity crisis is not going away as long as the Republican lawmakers stick to meeting with former President Trump and taking his orders as to how to behave in order to stay in his good graces and receive an endorsement as a reward for their loyalty. A political party tying themselves to a single figure is a dangerous recipe in terms of their success and future. Overall, Adam Kinzinger in his role trying to redefine and redirect the GOP. Through this, he serves as a transformational leader in working to show voters and lawmakers the potential that the Republican party could have if they cut themselves loose from the manipulative and abusive grip of former President Donald Trump.

Works Cited

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