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OPINION**Rebuilding the Republican party?**

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— *Editor's note: Tanya Amador-Daigle has been reporting for Florida Weekly on the presidential election. She has a unique perspective on the primaries and the process for choosing a candidate, having traveled the country reporting on primaries and caucuses for the Purple States project. To learn more about Purple States go, to www.purplestates.tv.*

Last week I received an e-mail from a project called Rebuild the Party. The site is aimed at how the GOP can regain the presidency in 2012. My interest was piqued, so I explored the site a bit. Apparently, the mission of this group is to get ideas from voters to form a new direction for the party, and to formulate a strategy to take back the government from the Democrats.

What struck me as interesting, and actually raised my blood pressure a bit, was this group's total disregard or acknowledgement for the entire reason the Republicans lost the presidency. Reading their "About Us" statement, one would have thought that the last eight years had never happened. It was as if they had one colossal brain fart, and forgot how massively they had screwed things up.

As a fiscal conservative, I am angry. Not because Sen. John McCain lost the

election. In fact, Sen. McCain was a poor choice for a Libertarian such as myself. Like most of the country, I'm irate about the state of the economy, and as a limited-government person, I'm appalled that the party that once stood for small government and fiscal conservatism now resembles something like George Orwell's "1984." With unconstitutional acts like the FISA Bill and the Patriot Act, the word "socialism," in my opinion, has not been an over-used term lately.

For those who favor a welfare state where the government will take care of everything for Americans from cradle to grave, congratulations. It now appears it will become more than a pipe dream. I hate to sound so jaded, but why should we trust government now? Perhaps because we have a new leader at the helm of a ship that is sailing erratically out of control? Hmmm, maybe President-Elect Obama WILL change things. After all, he wasn't been bought and paid for by people more powerful than himself, right? (insert sarcasm here).

But I digress.

Recently, Republican leaders got together for a little pow wow in Florida to strategize for 2012. From what I read, the only one with any sense was Gov. Bobby Jindal of Louisiana. Gov. Jindal characterized it best when he said, "When the Republican Party is no longer the party of fiscal conservatism... then clearly I would argue we've lost our way. We have to match our action to our rhetoric."

With all the blah blah blah I've been hearing, I heard Gov. Jindal LOUD AND CLEAR. I mean, when voters trust Democrats to control spending and cut taxes more than Republicans, then something is wrong with the universe. Why else would lifelong conservatives vote for a Democrat, as so many of them did? I alone can name 10 people I know of who did, and I bet you can as well.

Every day I turn on the television and hear the pundits talking about the next GOP dream team. Back and forth, they debate who they will be. The media is telling us the party needs diversity; it needs to broaden its base. Is Sarah Palin the new face of the Republican Party? Will Bobby Jindal or Tim Pawlenty be on the ticket?

I have a novel idea. Stop spending our money. Fight for campaign finance reform, reduce spending, develop and implement an energy independence plan that works. Show us that you are fighting for those issues first and then, we can talk about whether or not you deserve to be back in the White House. ■

Tell us what you think

Should the U.S. government, essentially taxpayers, bail out the faltering American auto industry? Send your comments to news@floridaweekly.com

GUEST OPINION**What's good for General Motors?**

danRATHER

Special to Florida Weekly



What's good for General Motors, so the saying goes, is good for the country. Whether or not one agreed with this bit of conventional wisdom as a guide for formulating policy, there's no doubt that there was an era when the health of GM was perhaps the best barometer one could find for the overall state of the United States economy — an era that reached its apex in the post-World War II years.

Is the old maxim still true at a time when GM's stock is trading at or near 65-year lows and CEO Rick Wagoner has gone to the federal government, hat in hand, asking for a bailout?

Part of the answer rests on the reality that GM and its fellow "Big Three" automakers, Ford and Chrysler, still employ about 250,000 Americans, many in parts of the U.S. already hard-hit economically. Throw in the subsidiary employment of auto-parts manufacturers and related industries, and you're looking at millions of jobs in all.

And part rests on the perception that to let GM fail would be to bid an irrevocable farewell to America's once-proud and peerless manufactur-

ing base. In economics, as in politics, perception is often reality. In addition to the job losses it would entail, the failure of GM would likely darken the public sense of gloom about the economy, further eroding consumer confidence and thereby deepening the recession most economists say is already upon us.

For now, Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson has stated that any help the government might give to struggling automakers won't come from the \$700 billion bailout fund, created by Congress last month. Up until now, with the exception of the insurance company AIG (which became a necessary special case due to its huge holdings in toxic credit derivatives), payouts from the fund have gone only to financial institutions; Treasury fears that helping auto manufacturers would establish a precedent that would lead to failing companies from all sectors demanding a piece of the bailout pie.

As the Democratically controlled Congress works on a separate bailout for automakers, two things seem worth considering.

The first is that automakers, unlike many companies, can't just declare bankruptcy as a strategy to regroup, reorganize and re-emerge as stronger entities. The reason why is simple: Studies have shown that the great majority of consumers won't buy a

car from a manufacturer in bankruptcy. After all, would you plunk down thousands of dollars for a vehicle you couldn't be sure of getting serviced or finding parts for in a year or two? There is a degree to which GM and its brethren are a special case, in that bankruptcy could essentially equal death.

The second is that the U.S. automakers have, for years now, been spending big sums of money to lobby against the strengthening of Corporate Average Fuel Economy standards and to fight in court against individual states, such as California, that have sought to impose tougher standards of their own. With 20/20 hindsight, it seems evident that, had these manufacturers dedicated resources instead to making more fuel-efficient cars, they might not have found themselves in the predicament they landed in once prices at the pump skyrocketed.

Bailing out automakers, like bailing out Wall Street, can raise as many questions as it answers. In both cases, it seems, there is the overarching question of whether we can protect the overall economy from the mistakes of the past while preventing a replay in the future. One way may be for taxpayers to ask for something in return for the checks they are being asked to write and the loans they are being asked to guarantee. ■