Republicans, Get A Life!

by Phyllis Schlafly February 26, 1997

It's time for Republicans in Congress to Get a Life and move out of the political and ideological box they are stuck in. It's time to put past mistakes behind them and, with their majorities in both Houses, start marching to the tune of a new drumbeat.

We don't want to hear any more pusillanimous pandering to the press about "working with" Clinton or civility or bipartisanship with liberals. We elected a Republican Congress to implement a conservative Republican agenda, not to bask in photo-ops at the White House.

The public is bored with whining about the vendetta against Newt Gingrich and about the $35 million in ads that the unions ran last fall. We're tired of the worn-out, extravagant rhetoric about the "Republican revolution" and the Contract with America.

Instead of boldly dealing with reality, the Republican Congressional leadership is muddling along toward a vote on the Balanced Budget Amendment (BBA), playing games about term limits, and telling the voters to trust Republicans to carry out Clinton's spending programs for somewhat less money than he would spend.

That's not a winning strategy. It's not a strategy at all.

Republicans in Congress should face up to the fact that the 20-year campaign to pass a Balanced Budget Amendment (BBA) is doomed, so they should quit beating a dead horse. Clinton isn't going to let it pass; he can browbeat and cajole the last couple of votes he needs to defeat it by using the stick that Republicans gratuitously gave him in the last session when it passed the line-item veto.

The Balanced Budget Amendment is the creation of two fundraising organizations that have raised millions of dollars over the last two decades by peddling the notion that deficit spending is the root cause of all our ills. Their premise is false. Our biggest problem is not federal borrowing; it's the mammoth size of federal spending and the mischief it causes.

But regardless of the economic or ideological arguments, the Democrats have put Republicans over a barrel by dishonestly scaring the voters with talk about BBA's threat to Social Security. Many people now think that BBA is just a gimmick that can be manipulated by accounting legerdemain to take major items "off budget."

Real conservatives have never been enthusiastic about a Balanced Budget Amendment because it could require the budget to be balanced by raising taxes. Ex-Senator Paul Simon was always candid about his motive in supporting a BBA: he wants to raise taxes to make us pay our own way.

Then there's the sticky wicket of who would enforce a constitutional requirement for a balanced budget. The federal courts? The Supreme Court has already manifested its activist urge to impose taxes to meet alleged constitutional goals in Missouri v. Jenkins, in which it levied a tax on the people of Missouri in order to promote racial integration in public schools.

Americans don't want to give the federal courts any more power. They want to limit the jurisdiction of the federal courts and stop them from assuming legislative functions (which fiscal decisions certainly are).

It is unfortunate -- some would say tragic -- that Republicans find it so difficult to abandon bad ideas and dump losing leaders. It was obvious long before the 1996 Republican National Convention that Bob Dole was an unelectable nominee, but Republicans just couldn't bring themselves to tell him to step aside.

The same was true about the renomination of George Bush in 1992 after he had reneged on the most famous campaign pledge of the 20th century. Even though his defeat was wholly predictable, Republicans doggedly persisted in raising and spending hundreds of millions of donated dollars to ride in the political equivalent of the Charge of the Light Brigade. Ergo, Bill Clinton.

The obsession of Republican national spokesmen with the Balanced Budget Amendment is a similar loser. Republicans are again sparring about CBO numbers (which voters can't comprehend), while Clinton is sloganeering that he's for a balanced budget (balanced, of course, only after his term has ended).

Republicans like to ridicule Clinton for letting public opinion polls dictate his agenda, but Congressional Republicans have done the same thing by letting BBA become their number-one legislative goal. Sure, if a pollster asks if you want a Balanced Budget Amendment, the majority will answer yes, but it's not an issue anyone would die for.

The average American thinks that, if Republicans are so big on a Balanced Budget Amendment, why not cut out the talk and pass a balanced budget this year? The PR debacle of that strategy in the previous Congress was due to letting a good plan be buried in chattering about "seven years," "CBO numbers," and "cuts" in Medicare.

Let Clinton and the liberal Democrats have their victory on the Balanced Budget Amendment. We all know the reason they hate balanced budgets is that they want to keep their hands in our pockets.

Grassroots Americans care more about the cultural, moral, and sovereignty issues than about the fiscal issues, anyway. They care more about bringing balance to the out-of-control federal courts than about balancing budget billions they don't understand.

Get a life, Republicans. Show leadership on the issues that touch the lives and hearts of the American people.