



The Washington Post

May 7, 2009

Ridge: "We Have To Be Less Judgmental"

By: Chris Cillizza

Fresh off his decision not to run for the Senate in 2010, former Pennsylvania Gov. **Tom Ridge** told Philadelphia-based radio talk show host Michael Smerconish this afternoon that the GOP needs to be "less judgmental" in order to reclaim their majority status in the country.

"My view has always been whether you're from the right or the left, liberal or conservative that we don't demonize each other because of what they believe," said Ridge this afternoon. "And for us as a party to grow back into a majority party, we need to understand that."

Ridge, who is pro-choice, went on to oppose the idea of any "litmus test" for membership into the Republican party.

Said Ridge:

"There have been two Republican presidents who have fundamentally altered my life. One was when I got a draft notice from Richard Nixon and I went to Vietnam. The other was a phone call from George Bush and I went to Homeland Security. On neither occasion did they run any litmus test by me."

Ridge's interview with Smerconish, one of several he had planned today -- including a sitdown with Chris Matthews on "Hardball" -- highlights the ongoing battle within the Republican party between establishment and movement conservatives.

The establishment wing of the party is insistent that the only way for it to survive is to put far less focus on traditional social issues and instead spend time talking about limited government and lower taxes -- the kind of messaging that can appeal to independents.

Movement conservatives believe the recent electoral losses are indicative of a party that has lost its dedication to core principles and that the solution for Republicans is to re-assert those fundamental beliefs -- including on things like gay marriage and abortion -- and let the chips fall where they may.

This debate, which is already playing itself out in the formation of the National Council for a New America, will define where the GOP goes in 2010 and, in all likelihood, which wing of the party its presidential nominee emerges from in 2012.