  Ride for the Brand

 Jim Owens included ten principles to live by in “Cowboy Ethics: What Wall Street can learn from the Code of the West.”  One of those principles is to “Ride for the Brand,” meaning to be loyal to your outfit, whether it be a ranch, an oil and gas company, a civic organization or a political party.  It means being committed to the goals and ideals of that organization. It means that, when you sign onto that “brand,” you are agreeing to further its interests rather than your own.  If you do not agree with what that organization does or what it stands for, then you shouldn’t pretend that you do, and you should not use that “brand” to further an agenda that is contrary to its stated purpose and goals.

     The Republican Brand.  We can think of a “brand” in a variety of ways in this context.  In politics, the “brand” of any political party is found in its Platform and Resolutions. The preamble to the Republican Party’s Platform sums up our unchanging principles:

     WE believe there are Timeless Truths that will always inform and direct our party and our country regardless of current events and circumstances, changing strategies, goals, and leadership. These Truths put into action, maintain, protect, and defend inalienable rights to Life, Liberty, Property and the Pursuit of Happiness.

     We have twenty planks in the Wyoming Platform addressing our commitment to life, equality, the 2nd Amendment, private property rights, religious freedom, and family values, among others.  Our Resolutions state how those principles should apply to the issues of the day, including support for the existing number of U.S. Supreme Court Justices, opposition to tax increases, and opposition to a state income tax, among others. The Republican Platform and Resolutions are not mandated from on high, but represent the core philosophy of our organization as defined, developed, and drafted by our grassroots members.  The Platform has been largely unchanged for decades and presents what it means to be a “Republican.”  We have been steadfast in these beliefs and make no apology for them.

       Claiming the Brand.  If you claim the Republican brand in Wyoming, you are signaling to the citizens and voters that you inherently share the Republican philosophy, that you believe in certain absolute truths, and that you value those things for which the Republican Party stands.  By claiming to be a Republican, you are presenting to the public that you will work to further our conservative values and our view of government, governing, family, freedom, and liberty.  If you disagree with the Republican brand, then don’t claim it as your own for political gain.  It is wrong to claim to be a Republican, while ignoring, scorning, or refuting the very “brand” that makes up what that means.  If you do not believe in the Republican Platform, then don’t run on it or pretend to be a Republican.

     “Riding for the Republican brand” does not mean merely describing yourself as a “conservative” every two, four or six years when running for office.  It does not mean talking about conservative values when at a town hall, while voting for or fostering political outcomes that are contrary to the very “conservative values” that make up our brand.  It does not mean using your role as a prominent Republican to elect Democrats, and if you are going to work for or endorse Democrats, don’t use your involvement with the Republican Party as your credential for doing so. That is not “riding for the brand.” That is using the brand to further the interest of people who are diametrically opposed to everything that the Republican Party stands for.  If you as a Republican are supporting Democrat candidates at this point in time you are also advocating for such things as the Green New Deal (destruction of Wyoming’s economy), single-payer health care (destruction of our independent health care system), an end to fracking (destruction of the oil and gas industry being a priority for Joe Biden as declared during the debate last Thursday), an end to the coal industry (destruction of Wyoming’s economy), and boys competing in girls sports and using their bathrooms.

     We stand for conserving the representative Republic.  The Republican Party believes that the power of the people is foundational.  We are a grassroots organization, with the State Central Committee being made up of those individuals who are elected at their local county level.  We do not have a top-down dictatorial approach but respond to the wishes of our fellow Republicans in setting policy.  We live by and implement our governing documents because that is what we committed to do when we agreed to ride for the Republican brand. As party leadership, it is our duty to support the actions of the body and further their agenda.

     Unprincipled Use of the Brand. Over the last couple of years, a coordinated disinformation campaign has been pursued against the 74 members and officers of the Republican Party, some of the individual members of the County parties, and more recently the 500+ delegates and alternates to the State Convention.  Attacks have come from inside and outside of our organization.  The attacks are sometimes blatant (an example being the falsehoods spread by some in the Natrona County leadership the day after our State Convention regarding an altercation that took place the night before), and sometimes more subtle (with a former Chairman recently writing two editorials decrying the “alt-right” but never explaining what he means or to whom he is referring, thereby accusing the entire party by implication).  The term “alt-right” is a recent invention and is now being used to smear Republicans in general and conservatives in particular, while avoiding having to name names or engage in the debate.  The goal is to shut down the discussion before it starts.  It is not “alt-right” to support and work to further the Republican Platform – it is simply riding for the brand and seeking to implement those timeless truths described above.

       Perhaps one of the most significant – and entirely disingenuous attacks – has come in the form of bandying about the infamous phrase “litmus test.”  The “litmus test” crowd has been infuriated by the insistence of members of the Republican Party, most recently during the 2020 State Convention, that our elected representatives who claim to be Republicans be held accountable to our principles.

     Contrary to the hyperbole bandied about by the vocal minority, the Republican Party did nothing more than restate the “Reagan Rule.”  President Reagan counseled that Republicans should agree on the issues at least 80% of the time and agree to disagree over the other 20%.  The majority in the Wyoming Republican Party believes that, if you wear the brand, if you are running for public office under the Republican banner, and especially if you want the Party to give your campaign money, you should agree with 80% of the party Platform.  Stated another way:  If you are going to use the party’s “brand,” then you should also foster and believe in it.  If you don’t, the party should not give you money.  If the Party refuses to give a particular candidate money, the electors should consider whether that person is really as “Republican’ or “conservative” as they claim when campaigning.

     Considering some of the accusations that have made, we believe it is important to address just a few of the more recent controversies, providing a full and factual account of what has actually happened.

     State Convention. The Delegates and Alternates attended the State Convention and conducted the Party’s business.  This year was an unusual year because we were required to hold two conventions, one via Zoom in May and a second one in June with an in-person meeting.  Those who attended were allowed to participate in committee meetings and on the floor to raise issues, make their arguments, challenge votes, call for the question, seek to make changes to the Platform and Bylaws, and engage.  There was a small group at the Convention who disagreed with the decisions that were made by the vast majority of their fellow Delegates.  That small group has decided that, as the minority, they should have been able to dictate the outcome of these votes.  Of course, that is not the way any organization works and they were defeated.  They have  joined forces with Wyoming’s most liberal newspaper and are now resorting to making threats of lawsuits to get their way.  Their drumbeat of “corruption” and “unfair” is mere rhetoric and doesn’t mean anything substantive.  They simply don’t like the Republican brand as it currently stands and seek to change it.  They cannot muster the votes to do so through regular methods so they seek to use the liberal media and threats from attorneys to attempt to compensate for their lack of support.

     Disagreements on Policy.  Like any organization, there will be disagreements and differing ideas regarding direction, agenda, and policy.  Those policy issues arise at nearly every Wyoming State Central Committee meeting, where discussion is had, arguments made, and votes taken.  There is a vocal minority in the Party who adamantly opposes the decisions made by majority vote and apparently believe that, if they do not win, there is some nefarious effort afoot that must be destroyed.  This small group of members have not been able to convince the Republicans that their ideas are sound or should be pursued.  Their response has been to create a PAC (the “Frontier Republicans”) to further their agenda.  They have the right to try to convince others that their ideas are correct.  The remaining members of the State Central Committee – the overwhelming majority -- have the right to reject them.  It is the rejection they are apparently unwilling to accept.  Their response has been to try to undermine the Wyoming Republican Party and anyone who disagrees with them, not by winning votes, but by running to the liberal media, by sending out scurrilous emails, by threatening lawsuits, and by making untrue accusations.

     Censure of Central Committee Member.  During its September 2020 meeting the Central Committee voted to censure an individual, a governing member of both the Natrona County Republican Party and the State Central Committee, for providing funding to Democrat candidates.  There were several individuals who then sought to create division in the Party by claiming that such a move was sexist because this member was merely supporting women to run for office.  That accusation is false; no one voted to censure this member because she seeks to help women run for office.  The censure occurred because, as a member of our organization, she funds and teaches candidates how to run against Republicans. The “Cowgirl Run Fund” that she formed in fact rejected funding for at least two conservative women who were running for office, while funding nine (9) Democrat candidates against Republicans.  The only reason that her efforts funding women candidates are newsworthy in the political context is because she is a Republican supporting Democrats.  This member has chosen to help to elect individuals who do not share Republican values.  The Wyoming Republican Party is not required to sit idly by while she furthers a liberal non-Republican agenda to our detriment and to the detriment of our candidates.  The fact this member has been censured by the Republican Party makes her less effective as an advocate for Democrats and/or liberals. That was the intent.

     Those who support her efforts to elect Democrats now claim that this is about “freedom of speech.”  The Republican Party has never sought to prevent its members from speaking.  She can say what she likes.  The members of the Republican party, however, also have the right to speak, and may do so to challenge the use of the Republican brand to support Democrat candidates.  That is the discussion.  Those who pretend otherwise are trying to confuse the issue.

     The Republican brand is important.  It means something.  If it didn’t, then people would not use it in their efforts to convince you that you should vote for a Democrat.  The Wyoming Republican Party does not want people to use its brand that way.  When someone stands up and says “I am a leader in the Republican Party,” everyone knows what that means; it is shorthand for “trust me, I am a conservative.” All that the Republican Party is asking is that you don’t use the Republican label to seek to harm the Republican Party or to elect people who are unwilling to “ride for the Republican Brand.”

     Finally, we have listened to the accusations, heard the personal attacks, and observed the efforts to undermine the Republican Party coming from a small minority of people.  We have largely ignored them, while also ignoring how the liberal media meets every one of their public tantrums and seeks to advance the false narrative that there is significant dissension in the Republican Party.  We anticipate that they will again engage in finger pointing and name-calling as soon as this document is published.  We see no value in engaging in an ongoing tit-for-tat with the vocal minority, but feel that it was necessary to set the record straight.

     The vast majority of the members of the Republican Party understand what is meant by “riding for the brand,” and spend countless hours doing this important volunteer work for the State of Wyoming because they believe Republican values lead to good policy and good government. The reason most people devote time to serve in the various levels of the Republican party is to translate the Republican brand into governing principles applied through electing Republicans, who then in turn govern as Republicans. These squabbles are nothing but a distraction from what should be a unanimous effort to implement the Republican agenda, because our country has proven time and time again that when Republican values win, Wyoming wins.

Chairman W. Frank Eathorne