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Putting the party first

Brevard GOP infighting hurts their cause

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Recently, readers of FLORIDA TODAY have become more acquainted with the bickering and bantering going on behind the scenes within the Brevard Republican Executive Committee.

Disparaged by its elected secretary, who claims chairman Jason Steele broke his loyalty oath to the Republican Party over a poll discrediting State Rep. John Tobia as a candidate for 2010, Brevard's Republicans have shown little signs of the reorganization and strength needed to proceed with a vengeance in the upcoming election cycle.

This occurred in the midst of a showdown with state leaders concerning their endorsement of Gov. Crist for U.S. Senate.

With all due respect to the Executive Committee, having your dirty laundry aired in public does little to amass appeal and intrigue with your policies or platform.

Stories about Steele being summoned to Tallahassee to answer loyalty charges and open discouragement of legislators in Brevard only adds to the feeling of an exclusive club for those elite enough to become members.

As a Democrat, I find it upsetting for a political party of any kind to go through the type of folly and trouble that seems to have found Brevard's Republicans.

There's enough nuisance at the national level for locals to have to deal with petty, outlandish items that further degrade voter popularity at a time when Republicans seem devoid of new ideas on how to counter Democrats' rising numbers in Florida.

In June, Florida Republican Party Chairman Jim Greer issued a call to the party's faithful, lobbying that they "must not allow the success Democrats have seen in voter registration in recent months lead to success at the ballot box."

According to information from the secretary of state, who oversees elections, 40 percent of all new Florida voter registrations since October were Democrats with 26 percent of new registrants identifying as Republicans.

Grass-roots campaigns — an area Republicans have yet to master — proved to be extremely beneficial for Democrats in 2008, not necessarily in winning many seats but in closing polling margins to single digits from high double-digit Democratic deficits.

The registrants are clear — it's a time for new politics in Florida.

What's unfortunate for Steele is that what's best for Brevard's Republicans is that he step down and allow someone else without the baggage to come forward with a more cohesive plan of action that will lead local conservatives away from the arguments and scandal that seem to have made the executive committee uncharacteristically newsworthy.

The old adage “all publicity is good publicity” really couldn't be further from the truth. Brevard Republicans need their version of former Congressman Joe Scarborough, R-Florida, or GOP Gov. Tim Pawlenty of Minnesota to add an aura of good vibes.

And quickly.

Winik is a member of FLORIDA TODAY's Opinion Matters blog and a delegate to the 2009 Florida Democratic Convention.