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OPINION

Identity politics as therapy

Gay Democrats upset by Howard Dean's retooling of the DNC should remember to focus on election wins.

By [TERRY MICHAEL](#)
Friday, February 17, 2006

POLITICS AS THERAPY. That's how Rich Tafel, the former head of Log Cabin Republicans, incisively described the focus of many left-liberal political activists and organizations that presume to speak for gay men and women (or lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered persons, in their politically correct mouthful).

The latest self-inflicted wound suffered by these practitioners of identity politics involves a faculty senate-style controversy around a decision made by Democratic National Committee Chair Howard Dean. ("Faculty senate politics," as in the decibel level of debate being so high, because the stakes are so low.)

Dean has apparently dissed some members of our gay faculty senate with his reorganization of the DNC's political outreach operation, to focus less on identity groups and more on actual individual voters and state political party organizations.

I KNOW A little about such efforts, because I was press secretary at the DNC in the mid-1980s when we did something similar.

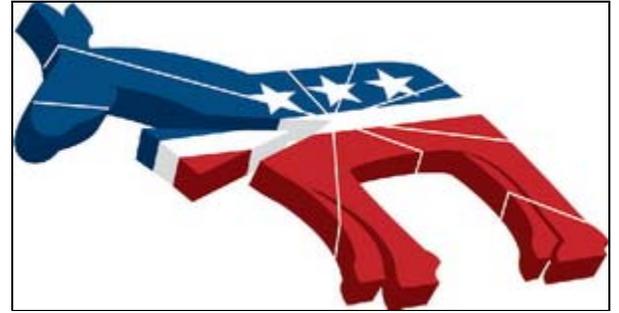
Without going into the minutia, here's what happened 20 years ago. Then-Chair Paul Kirk retooled the committee's political operation following a disastrous presidential loss in 1984, when Republicans successfully caricatured Democrats as a whole less than the sum of our parts.

Kirk decided to "de-institutionalize" (trust me, you don't want to be bored by the details) the black, Hispanic, Asian-Pacific, feminist, gay and several other identity group caucuses that had been formed inside the roughly 450-member national committee. He took away some trivial perks they were receiving at the twice-yearly committee meetings, to send a symbolic message.

While respecting the contributions of its organized interests, he decided the institutional party would re-focus its political efforts to re-connect with the broad center of the electorate.

The moderate middle in American politics, he contended, was coming to the conclusion that Democrats were more interested in a short list of favored tribes than the broad mass of individual voters who traditionally had been attracted to the party around an array of economic and foreign policy concerns, as well as civil rights, that encompassed all Americans, white and black, gay and straight, male and female.

THOSE IN THE party enthralled with identity politics reacted with the vengeance of aggrieved faculty senators, and chose to see an intelligent broad-based outreach as an insult to the party's Washington-



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Gay, gay, gay. Gay dinner parties, bars parades, books, movies and friends. Just when I'd had enough, it hit me.

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based minority advocates.

Political parties need to stand for big, important principles. They also need to win elections, by addressing voters about concerns that unite us, rather than those that split us apart, specific to our narrower, though certainly legitimate, tribal identities.

With a foolish focus on internal party affairs, left-libs in LGBT (gag me with a verbal spoon) politics seem to prize feeling good about how many staff members they get at the DNC more than winning elections that decide who gets to name Supreme Court justices and wage disastrous elective wars.

I suggest they get out of politics, and find a therapist.

[George W. Bush](#)

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