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Politics & Doritos

Michael Sean Winters | Jan. 14, 2013 Distinctly Catholic

In yesterday's Outlook section of the Washington Post [1], GOP pollster Frank Luntz wrote:

This coming week, House Republicans will gather in Williamsburg, Va., to discuss what went wrong in 2012[2] . I?ve attended more than a dozen such congressional retreats since 1993, and I can already imagine how the conversations will go. Someone will undoubtedly come to the microphone to declare that what the GOP needs is a better brand, missing the essential point that candidates and political parties are about reputation, trust and ideas. You can?t sell them like soap or detergent.

Luntz then goes on to talk about the ways that Republican leaders and candidates need to sell their policies like soap or detergent. He does not mention any new policy approaches, just different ways of talking about their policies.

This is one of the real problems with contemporary politics, and it is a bipartisan problem. Politicians are so reliant on pollsters and campaign advisors who may or may not care about ideas, but care deeply about "messaging." They will advocate manipulating an argument to win an argument, rather than asking if the argument is true. They will focus on issues that are of relatively minor significance, but which poll well, and stay away from central issues that are complicated and difficult to reduce to a nice soundbite. Call it the Curse of the Consultants. It is one of the things, mostly unseen outside the Beltway, that accounts for the sickness in our democracy and consequent inability to practice self-government.

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Links:
[1] http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-republicans-should-watch-their-language/2013/01/11/0f6f41fa-56ce-11e2-bf3e-76c0a789346f_story.html
[2] http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-11-09/opinions/35504587_1_gay-marriage-marriage-issue-gop-leadership