



The Republican Party, often called the GOP (short for “Grand Old Party”) was founded in 1854 as a coalition opposing the extension of slavery into Western territories. The Republican Party fought to protect the rights of African Americans after the Civil War. Today’s GOP is generally socially conservative, and favors smaller government, less regulation, lower taxes and less federal intervention in the economy.

In the 1850’s, the issue of slavery – and its extension into new territories and states joining the Union – ripped apart political coalitions such as Democratic-Republicans, the Federalist Party and the Whig Party.

In 1854, opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which would permit slavery in new U.S. territories by popular referendum, drove an antislavery coalition of Whigs, Free-Soilers, Americans and disgruntled Democrats to found the new Republican Party, which held its first meeting in Ripon, Wisconsin that May. Two months later, a larger group met in Jackson, Michigan, to choose the party’s first candidates for statewide office.

The Republican goal was not to abolish slavery

in the South right away, but rather to prevent its westward expansion, which they feared would lead to the domination of slaveholding interests in national politics. In the 1860 election, a split between Southern and Northern Democrats over slavery propelled the Republican candidate Abraham Lincoln to victory, though he won only around 40 percent of the popular vote.

The Civil War erupted in 1861 and lasted four grueling years. The Republicans of that time worked to pass the 13th Amendment, which outlawed slavery; the 14th Amendment, which guaranteed equal protection under the laws; and the 15th Amendment, which helped secure voting rights for all.

In 1896, Republicans were the first major party to favor women’s suffrage. The first woman elected to Congress was Republican, Jeanette Rankin in 1917.

Other issues that the Republican Party led the way on were: meat inspection, pure food and drug legislation, Federal land reserves and creation of the Department of Labor.

Presidents during most of the late 19th century, the early part of the 20th century, and from 1952 through 2009 were Republicans. Under Presidents Reagan and the Bushes, the United States became the world’s only superpower, winning the Cold War from the Soviet Union and releasing millions from oppression.

Republicans have a long and rich history with these basic principles: Individuals, not government, can make the best decisions; all people are entitled to equal rights; and decisions are best made close to home. The Republican Party, since its inception, has been at the forefront of the fight for individuals’ rights in opposition to a large, bloated government.

What Republicans Believe:

. . . The strength of our nation lies within the individual, and that each person’s dignity, freedom, ability and responsibility must be honored.

. . . In equal rights, equal justice and equal opportunity for all, regardless of race, creed, sex, age or disability.

. . . Free enterprise and encouraging individual initiative have brought this nation opportunity, economic growth and prosperity.

. . . Government must practice fiscal responsibility and allow individuals to keep more of what they earn.

. . . The proper role of government is to provide for the people only those critical functions that cannot be performed by individuals or private organizations, and that the best government is that which governs least.

. . . The most effective and responsive government is government closest to the people.

. . . Americans must retain the principles that have made us strong while developing new and innovative ideas to meet the challenges of changing times.

. . . Americans should value and preserve our national strength and pride, while working to extend peace, freedom and human rights throughout the world.

. . . The Republican Party is the best vehicle for translating these ideals into positive and successful principles of government.

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