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## Paul Rolly: Voices for moderation in Utah's GOP

By paul roly

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What began as a handful of committed Republicans concerned about the direction of their party has ballooned into a group of about three dozen folks comprising a literal who's who in the Utah GOP over the past 20 years.

But this isn't a coalition of moderate Republicans. They are self-described conservatives who believe in conservative principles but do not like the way that label has been appropriated by extremist ideologues who they fear are dividing the party.

This group is different from a smaller group of Republican women I wrote about a few Sundays ago ("GOP women: 'Our voices aren't being heard'," Opinion, Aug. 1) who are discussing better ways to nominate candidates than the current caucus/convention system that is perpetually controlled by the party's well-organized right wing. The vast majority of rank-and-file Republicans thus wind up with little say about which candidates get placed on the party's primary election ballot.

The Mainstream Conservative Coalition, as the new group is calling itself, at least for the moment, emerged out of conversations between a few GOP insiders. As word spread, more moderates expressed interest. When the group had its second organizational meeting Wednesday, more than 30 showed up and several others voiced support.

Members or their supporters include former Republican state chairmen Larry Lunt and Stan Parrish, former governors Olene Walker and Mike Leavitt, and past legislative leaders Nolan Karras, Bob Garff and Dave Buhler. The supporters also include former Lt. Gov. Val Oveson, former Republican vice chairman Todd Weiller, West Valley City Mayor Mike Winder, Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce director Lane Beattie and Salt Lake City Council member Carlton Christensen.

LaVarr Webb, publisher of an online political newsletter and former policy director in the Leavitt administration, was one of the organizers of the first two meetings, along with Hinckley Institute of Politics director Kirk Jowers.

Webb says the group has developed a draft set of principles which reflect traditional Republican values: low taxes, limited government, personal responsibility, a balanced budget and free enterprise. But the statement also endorses a reasonable level of taxes to ensure that state government runs efficiently.

Early group discussions have focused on a "reasonable approach" to a couple of hot-button issues aimed at countering the overheated right-wing rhetoric of some of the leading voices in the state GOP at present.

Bill Nixon of Policy Impact Communications in Washington, D.C., a former staffer on the U.S. Senate Finance Committee, spoke to the group about congressional earmarks, making a case that contradicts the anti-earmark utterances of U.S. Rep. Jason Chaffetz, R-Utah, and Republican U.S. Senate nominee Mike Lee.

Nixon, who received positive reviews from several coalition members, said earmarks serve a valuable function in the budget-making process, insuring that federal dollars get spent on vital local projects tied to education, infrastructure and innovation.

If Utah doesn't go after federal earmarks, as Chaffetz and Lee have suggested, the money will go to fund projects in other states rather than to lowering the federal budget. The negative net effect for Utah will be the loss of many millions of dollars for education, infrastructure and research and development.

A second intra-party issue is immigration, with Beattie and the Chamber of Commerce suggesting a softer, more comprehensive approach than the hard line being taken by Rep. Stephen Sandstrom, R-Orem, and many of his fellow right-wing ideologues at the Capitol.

Members of the Mainstream Coalition say they hope to gain a significant voice within the GOP that can serve as a buffer for Republican legislators who are uncomfortable with some of the divisive anti-federalism of their Republican peers, but haven't spoken up for fear of being labeled a malcontent, or worse, a Republican in Name Only, ripe for replacement at the state convention when the next election rolls around.

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