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Description

NBC's Maria Menounos examines the role of young Republicans in shaping the GOP message, recasting the Republican image and shifting the party's focus to more "kitchen table" issues.

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Citation

MLA
BRIAN WILLIAMS, anchor (St. Paul, Minnesota):
We're back here in St. Paul tonight with a look at that elusive political prize called the youth vote. We've said it before, every election cycle it seems one expert or another tells us this is going to be the year the young voters will actually come out, go to the polls, make a big difference, or even decide the election. Well, guess what? A lot of those experts are saying this, in fact, might be the year, and the Republicans are hoping to turn that to their advantage. Our report from NBC's Maria Menounos.

Unidentified Woman #1: We are on a roll.
Unidentified Woman #2: It's obvious that the youth has had quite an impact on this election, Democrats and Republicans.

MARIA MENOUNOS reporting:
Young Republican activists like Brian Smith say they are not giving up the fight for young voters who thus far have been crucial to Barack Obama's success.

Mr. BRIAN SMITH: What we find important--individual liberty, national security, you know, limited government--are still going to be the same, but the approach is going to be different.

MENOUNOS: Ross Douthat and Reihan Salam, both 28, agree, they're among the youngest thinkers looking for that new approach to the grand old party, saying the old Republican message doesn't work today.

Mr. REIHAN SALAM: We can make government more responsive. We want you to have ownership of government.

MENOUNOS: Looking to re-cast the GOP message in new terms, these young Republicans want to secure the working class and pivotal new voters by focusing on kitchen table issues like tax breaks for young families as opposed to handouts, arguing government spending is OK as long as it's productive.

Mr. ROSS DOUTHAT: Conservative politicians have to readjust and move to address the challenges facing America today.

Mr. SALAM: If the Republican Party doesn't wise up and start talking about those issues that matter
urgently now to young families, they're going to be extinct.

MENOUNOS: Clark Reid, a longtime southern Republican activist, knows a little about reinvention. In the '60s he was there through the GOP resurgence in the South selling conservative principles amidst racial turmoil.

Do you feel that there's a need for that kind of reform?

Mr. CLARK REID: Always reform. We got out of hand with our spending, our true beliefs.

MENOUNOS: Reid, now 80, advises young Republicans to stay folk focused.

MR. REID: Hang in. Take the long view. That's a hard thing for young people to do.

MENOUNOS: But this supporter thinks McCain needs to be the one to lead the reform now.

Unidentified Man: We want him to win, but you know that change is in the air.

MENOUNOS: Brian, some young Republicans want significant reforms, while others would settle for tweaks. Now, a lot of the young delegates I've spoken to here and that we've collectively spoken to have said that John McCain has gone a long way in re-energizing them with the addition of Governor Sarah Palin to the ticket.

WILLIAMS: And if we report on it enough, it becomes a challenge to both parties to get out that vote. Maria, thanks...