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## Whitman at Rutgers: Time's come for GOP moderates to shape party's future

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Speaking before about 200 people gathered Monday at Rutgers University, former Gov. Christine Todd Whitman called on both the Republican and Democratic parties to ditch the rhetoric.

In the second event in a speaker series hosted by the Eagleton Institute of Politics, Whitman said the national Republican Party should stop alienating itself by establishing rigid principles on every political issue, and instead work with the Democrats to find effective policies.

"The platforms try to determine a position on every imaginable issue," said Whitman, who served as New Jersey's governor from 1994 through 2001. "All that does is put lines in the sand. And if you do that over and over again, you're going to end up with nobody."

Whitman, a moderate Republican who as Environmental Protection Agency administrator from 2001 to 2003 urged former President Bush to address the issue of global warming, has been asking her party to seek middle ground since her years as governor.

"I see a good opportunity for the Republican Party to start to rebuild — to go back to being the loyal opposition," she said. "That doesn't mean to oppose everything, but to be able to offer positive opportunities for change."

Yesterday she said the last two election cycles should serve as a wakeup call for her party, noting the sweeping losses of Republican seats in the U.S. House of Representatives (54 seats lost since 2004), the U.S. Senate (as many as 14 seats lost since 2004), the statehouses (there were 28 Republican governors in 2004; now there are 21), and the state legislatures (Republicans lost their majorities in nine states).

By selecting former Maryland Lt. Gov. Michael Steele as its new chairman, she said, the party seems to have answered that call.

Steele, who is the Republican National Committee's first black chairman, co-founded the moderate-leaning Republican Leadership Council with Whitman. The political action committee is centered around fiscal responsibility but allows for diverse opinions on social issues such as abortion rights, gay marriage and embryonic stem-cell research.

As the Republican Party moves toward the center, Whitman said, the Democrats need to do the same despite their plurality in the House and the Senate.

Whitman had a Republican majority in the state Legislature throughout her tenure as governor, but still had to work with Democrats, she said. President Obama will also need to reach across the aisle in order to be productive, she said.

"Sometimes he's going to have trouble with his own party — just because they have that 'D' after their name doesn't mean they will always vote with him," Whitman said after the speech. "I got some pieces of legislation done by working with the Democrats when the Republican leadership was reluctant."