

RELEASE IN PART
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From: sbwhoeop()
Sent: Wednesday, May 19, 2010 12:32 PM
To: H
Subject: H: My short take on the primaries, sent to Bill. Sid
Attachments: wjc memo 2010 primaries 051910.docx

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CONFIDENTIAL

May 19, 2010

For: WJC
From: Sid
Re: Brief analysis of primary elections of 5/18/10

The narrative storyline of the media, primed by the Republicans, that the midterm elections of 2010 will be a verdict on incumbents (when the Democrats hold the White House and both houses of Congress), that the Democratic agenda will be repudiated and that voters will embrace the Republican Party was dealt a shock on Tuesday. Though the pundits cling to safe, generic and unthinking blather about the rebuke of “incumbents,” the results disclose deeper consequences for the parties—especially the GOP.

Regular Republicans were universally defeated—in Kentucky and Pennsylvania. Despite endorsements from the entire Republican establishment, Trey Grayson was soundly beaten by Rand Paul. Republican Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, who threw his weight behind Greyson, is the one particularly repudiated. Cheney also went out of his way to come to Kentucky to campaign for Grayson. (That’s two for two for Cheney—Kay Bailey Hutchison was routed by Rick Perry for governor of Texas, Perry running hard to the right to the point of talking up “secession.”) Rand Paul is personally attractive, but he is not a “conservative.” He embraces the Tea Party movement and uses his platform to advocate byzantine conspiracy theories about Obama being in league with Castro and Chavez over climate change against capitalism, the Federal Reserve as a socialist plot, and other John Birch Society style nostrums. He may well run for the Republican presidential nomination—he won the majority at a stacked Conservative Political Action Conference in Washington this Spring—further discombobulating a party without an obvious frontrunner for 2012 and certainly without a Reagan in the wings. Undoubtedly, Paul would do far better than his father did and might even win states, such as New Hampshire. Rand’s victory does not presage the restoration and renaissance of the GOP, but its continuing disintegration. The center of the GOP cannot hold.

The defeat of Arlen Specter, a Republican senator for 29 years and Democratic one for only one, was the consequence of the internal transformation of the Republican Party. Specter left the party of which he was its longest and once most influential representative in his state precisely because he could not win

his party's nomination in a primary. He knew he would lose to a far right wing congressman, Pat Toomey, a darling of the Club for Growth, another "movement" operation, claiming to be "libertarian," that is a front for the narrowest special interests. So Specter leaped. Ultimately, he was pushed overboard by Democratic voters because he was not accepted as a Democrat. The turncoat could not camouflage his past. Specter's defeat was the defeat of a regular Republican by Democrats who, presented with the choice of a Democrat, chose the Democrat.

The Democratic candidate in the special House election in Pennsylvania to succeed John Murtha, Mark Critz, a former aide to Murtha, was in effect running as the incumbent. He easily won, despite poor numbers in the district for Obama. The district, moreover, was the only one in the country that had voted for John Kerry in 2004 and John McCain in 2008. Critz's victory, therefore, was not merely a retention—in light of the McCain win, it can be claimed as a pick-up.

Blanche Lincoln's troubles are specific, not the result of a widespread populist uprising. She did not support certain labor union issues and most importantly failed to back health care reform. Her problem is that, like Specter in a way, she is perceived by Democrats as untrue and disloyal. Without her advocacy of derivatives reform it seems likely she would have been trounced.

Of course, Democrats have burdens in the mid-terms as a result of Obama's political and policy mishandling of his first year, continuing economic hardships despite the beginning of an upturn, the president's lack of rapport with working class voters, Obama's austere professorial style, and the near brain-dead, flatlined White House political and messaging operation—none of which I will discuss here. These factors, not to be dismissed, have nonetheless been overshadowed by the consistent voters' judgments about the regular Republican Party in the elections on Tuesday.

The radicalization of the Republican Party, becoming more radical with every election cycle, is accelerating. (Reagan now appears in the distance as a moderate.) Coming into office, among his naïve illusions, Obama assumed that perhaps half to three-quarters of the Senate Republicans would easily be persuaded to support his programs, including health care. (Cass Sunstein confided this to me recently.) Obama and his team, moreover, never imagined that the Republicans would use the filibuster to render him ineffective and discredit him as they used that instrument against the Clinton presidency in 1993-4. Obama still cherishes a lingering though tattered belief in his postpolitical, postpartisan and postracial mission; that his election marked a conclusive break with the whole history of American politics; that the profound conflicts of American politics going back to the Civil War were simply the personal controversies of contemporary political personalities whom he had superceded. Throughout his political career, until he became President, Obama had no previous experience facing the Republican Party or its right-wing. In his one race for the U.S. Senate, he had no real opponent—whack-job Alan Keyes was imported from Maryland. Then he ran against John McCain, one of the worst politicians of his time, held in contempt by his party. Since Obama's election, his experience has understandably been an education, rather different from his happy time working amiably with conservatives as president of the Harvard Law Review; one hopes it is a learning experience. In fact, the national Republican Party is not a mirror image of the national Democratic Party, its members just happening to hold different views on policy. Since Nixon, the transformation of the Republican Party has been a dominant, if not *the* dominant factor in American politics. Tuesday's election was another milestone in its mutation and, since Reagan, its long-term disintegration. Obama and the Democrats have been given a breathing space. The opportunity of completing the work of the Clinton presidency is still there—it is always there—the long-term realignment of American politics by building a broad majority Democratic coalition. In the short-term, post-May 18 primaries, the splits within the GOP need to be highlighted; the takeover by extremist forces emphasized; the rejection of traditional Republicans within their own party stressed; and the economic consequences of the extremists—not least now, the gift of Rand Paul, the Republicans' new spokesman on the scene—who would shut down Social Security, Medicare, student scholarships, and the interstate highway system—constantly targeted as a threat to economic recovery. Run, Rand, run!