

November, Again

By Miles Hopper

November has not been a kind time of year to Democrats when one of their own is in the White House. It was former Republican Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and the 'contract with America' that led a Republican surge in the 1994 mid-term elections and created a stalemate between the Republican controlled congress and Democrats in the White House. Now in 2010 as the White House is once again in the hands of a Democratic president another uprising in the Republican party is storming Congress, this time it is the Tea Party movement.

Should the Tea Party movement surprise us? No. There is a history of citizen revolt in America, and no other country so publicly and fervently wrestles with their constitution on a daily basis. It is little surprise that these two conditions have coalesced to form a constitutionally-motivated grassroots revolt against the current administration.

Will the Tea Party movement matter a great deal? Most likely not. The Tea Party candidates are by-and-large challenging in districts that the Democrats will likely to lose to Republicans anyway. Furthermore, Tea Party candidates often have little experience managing the complexities of a campaign; and they routinely represent extreme views that appeal to a very narrow portion of voters. Worse still, if a Tea Party candidate were to run as a third party candidate in November they risk splitting the conservative vote - allowing a Democrat to win in a tight race. This could create a soft opposition to incumbent Democrats. Their own electoral tactics nullifies any advantages created by the Tea Party ideology.

Despite the limited impact of the Tea Party, it is highly probable that the Democrats will lose control of the House of Representatives. Serious dissatisfaction with the state of the economy, anger over national debt and health care reform, and disappointment with the lack of change in American politics since President Obama's election amount to too much opposition for even the best Democrat fundraising and strategy to overcome. Look for the current distribution of seats in the House of Representatives to be reversed after mid-term elections with the Democrats holding approximately 175 seats and the Republicans with over 250 seats.

The campaign for Senate seats is a different story. The Democrats are predicted to hold 46 of their current 59 senators going into the next session of Congress through a combination of seats they currently hold and are not up for election in November, and seats that are up for election, but are in states that will reliably vote Democratic at the Senatorial level. There are at least five more seats that are too close to call, and in 4 of these the Democrats hold advantages.

In Nevada high profile Senator Harry Reid is campaigning against a Tea Party affiliate with little experience or money, two things Senator Reid has considerable amounts of. It is a similar scenario in Wisconsin where Senate insider Russ Feingold has the upper hand in political savvy and finances. In Delaware, the Democrats have a strong chance at taking the senate seat because a Tea Party candidate with controversial opinions will be running against a moderate Democrat. The odds increase for the Democrats if Vice President Joe Biden, a former senator from the state, actively campaigns there.

Finally, in Illinois, President Obama's former senate seat is being contested. The state voted over 60% Democrat in the 2008 general election and the Democrats will likely win this seat,

especially if the President can fit a few campaign stops into his schedule before November 2nd. This leaves the Democrats with 49 probable seats, which means they would only have to be lucky in two more states to retain a majority in the Senate.

But all this is campaigning, not governing. What matters more is how a member of congress votes once they are in office. It is likely that a Tea Party affiliated congressman will vote much the same way a staunch Republican would in this current political climate. Also, once in office, a Tea Party affiliate is as likely as any other congressman to twist their voting to collect campaign and PAC contributions and all the other perks lobbyists and specific industries heap upon congressmen in an effort to gain influence.

After the November 2nd mid-term elections, expect a Republican House of Representatives looking to win all the battles it can to bolster its party's political fortunes leading up to 2012 presidential elections, and an evenly divided or slightly Republican senate. In short, it is going to feel like déjà-vue for Democrats in the White House as immense amounts of arm-twisting and pork-barrel guarantees will be needed to pass any Democrat or Oval Office initiated piece of legislation.