

Journal Inquirer

Long-term strategy led to GOP win; Dems must counter

January 9, 2017

To understand the results of the election, Democrats should not blame a flawed candidate or credit a “populist” Republican one. The Republican victory was more than just the result of a contest of personalities. It was an outcome brought about thanks to a long-term program carved out by Karl Rove, the brilliant strategist, and other perceptive Republicans who realized the need to change more than just their candidates to win future elections.

As an ultimate ambition they aimed at the presidency, but that was not the only goal. They recognized that they had a substantial lead among the business community and, correspondingly, a substantial financial base.

Their dilemma? How to best use that base.

Control of the judiciary was of paramount importance. They recognized that existing restrictions on political contributions must be circumvented.

Republicans used numerous “fronts” for their philosophy of anti-regulation, such as the American Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute, and the Olin Group. Behind the smokescreen of these patriotic titles deeply conservative theories on laws and society became respectable. Bolstered by radio talk shows led by Glenn Beck, Steve Bannon, Newt Gingrich, and others, the use of conservative rhetoric under the credible cover of the “Heritage Foundation” and other think tanks slanted the opinions of many.

Important to this “think-tank” approach was finding a way to avoid taxation of their foundations. By having them qualify as “charitable” foundations, their contributions were declared tax-free.

A conservative Supreme Court — led by late Justice Antonin Scalia — coupled with formation of the Federalist Society conservative legal group, sponsored a laissez-faire attitude toward the law. The court ignored legal precedent and the theory of stare decisis — in essence denied as precedent the interpretation of previous rulings by the court on the Second Amendment and other matters, as well as laws limiting the amount individuals could contribute to PACs and to a political campaign.

Then, recognizing bloc voting tendencies of certain economic and ethnic minorities, they promoted a Supreme Court decision eliminating federal supervision of voting rights in Southern states that had discriminated against minority voters since the Reconstruction. These states have long voted for conservative candidates for state and federal offices.

Elimination of federal enforcement of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by the 5-4 majority of the Supreme Court — the majority being Republican-appointed justices — resulted, for example, in a turnout in an area such as Democratic Milwaukee of 41,000 fewer votes in this election.

President-elect Donald Trump carried Wisconsin by 27,000 votes.

Dissatisfaction with the status quo, especially in the industrial Midwest, provided just the electoral vote the Republicans needed to win.

Until the Democratic minority creates a program to counter restrictive voting rights, Republicans will continue to dominate the House of Representatives and probably the Senate, even though they may be the minority party in terms of registered voters.

And until Democratic Party leaders return to the nuts and bolts of political organization — such as registration of their voters, getting them to the polls, and changing the decisions of a politically charged Supreme Court that favors moneyed interests over those of the average voter — the Republican legislative majority can remain in power.

Oh yes: In 2020 the Democrats also might want to consider a candidate untarnished by the receipt of hundreds of thousands of dollars for 45-minute speeches to investment professionals. That also would help them to regain the lost blue-collar voters they are presently lamenting.