

Congressional Perspective

on November 2, 2010



As the political battle for control of the United States Congress reaches its climax on Tuesday, we thought it was important to lend some recent historical perspective to the big 2010 mid-term vote.

For starters, we'd like to commend two important articles from the not-so-distant past to your attention.

The first article, written by *New York Post* columnist Ryan Sager, was published in the summer of 2006 – shortly before Republicans lost control of Congress. It's an excerpt from Sager's book entitled "The Elephant in the Room," which examines the ideological struggles within the Republican party.

In assessing the GOP's potential pre-election vulnerabilities in advance of the 2006 mid-terms, Sager looks to the party's two regional bases – the South and the West. In doing so, he concluded (correctly) that the failure of the GOP to abide by its core principles was going to end up sapping its strength in both regions, but particularly in the West. Furthermore, Sager noted that the GOP's shift in focus toward social issues was likely going to alienate voters.

“As the Republican Party embraces the big government it once fought against, and increasingly stakes its political fortunes on cultural hot-buttons such as gay marriage and flag burning, libertarian-minded voters are up for grabs,” Sager wrote.

Here’s an excerpt from [the article](#):

... (commentator Patrick) Hynes writes that “libertarians are an unorganized, thinly populated, and dispersed lot, making them politically useless.”

Agreed. But we’re not talking about libertarians, as such. If we were, Republicans would have nothing to worry about. What we’re talking about is a strain of cultural libertarianism — a leave-me-alone ethos — that is much more strongly represented in the interior West than in the South. And we’re talking about voters, millions of them, who might not call themselves “libertarians,” but who nonetheless believe that the Republican Party no longer stands for the principles that made them affiliate with it in the first place: small government, federal restraint, fiscal responsibility.

There’s an argument to be had about whether the Democrats can capitalize on this libertarian sentiment — and my hope is that they don’t, that the Republicans find their way back toward the small-government ground they once held. But just waving your hand in the air and saying, “We don’t need the libertarians,” isn’t a response. It is, in fact, dangerously close to a non-sequitur.

Obviously, Republicans did *not* find their way back to their core principles, and Democrats most assuredly *did* capitalize on that libertarian sentiment. In fact, Republicans lost 30 seats in the U.S. House and six seats in the U.S. Senate as a result of their decision to become the party of big government *in addition* to being the party of sanctimonious moralizing.

Anyway, the second article we would encourage you to check out was written by Michael D. Tanner of the Cato Institute in the wake of the 2008 elections – which saw Republicans lose another 21 seats in the House, eight seats in the Senate as well as the White House.

At the nadir of the GOP’s political fortunes, Tanner lays out precisely why voters bailed on them.

Here’s an excerpt from [his article](#):

After eight years of a Bush administration that increased federal spending faster than any president since Lyndon Johnson, created the first new entitlement program in 40 years, increased federal control over education, and added 7,000 pages of new regulation to the Federal Register,

Republicans had lost the ability to differentiate themselves from Democrats. When Republicans suffered their first big defeat in 2006, more than 65 percent of voters believed that “the Republicans used to be the party of economic growth, fiscal discipline, and limited government, but in recent years, too many Republicans in Washington have become just like the big spenders that they used to oppose.” Apparently, they didn’t learn from that defeat, and by the 2008 election that number had risen to an astounding 80 percent, according to a poll conducted for the Club for Growth. Another poll of voters in the crucial swing states of Colorado, Florida, Ohio and Virginia (all carried by Obama) found that by a 38-30 margin, voters actually thought that Democrats would do a better job than Republicans at “keep[ing] government spending under control.” That same poll showed that roughly two-thirds of voters thought that Republicans had either “lost their way” or were simply “incompetent.”

Given a choice between two “big-government parties,” voters will choose the Democrats every time. If the choice included a Republican party that stands for the Reagan-Goldwater values of limited government and individual liberty, the outcome might be very different.

In his article, Tanner also echoes the same point about hot-button social issues that Sager made two years earlier:

... (Republicans) need to expand their base beyond the Religious Right. Throughout the campaign, social conservatives continually threatened to stay home unless Republicans met this or that demand. But in the end, roughly 74 percent of white evangelicals and born-again Christians voted Republican in 2008, essentially in line with how they have been voting for the past two or three decades, and slightly higher than the percentage in 2004.

But it was suburbanites, independents, and others, fed up not just with the war and corruption, but also with the Republican drift toward big-government, who switched.

Indeed ...

With giddy Republicans already measuring the drapes of their new Capitol Hill offices, we believe that these two articles – and countless others making these same basic points – must be at the forefront of the political discourse.

After all, America simply cannot afford to be betrayed by the GOP again – and remembering what landed Republicans in the political wilderness to begin with is the first step in holding them accountable this go-round. Hypocritical Republicans have already aborted one “[Revolution](#),” they cannot be allowed to abort another.

Furthermore, as we noted earlier this week a second “Republican Revolution” is unlikely to stop the [coming tax tsunami](#) – which will sweep across an already reeling U.S. economy on January 1 unless a lame duck Democratic Congress takes action.

We doubt that will happen, just as we doubt Republicans will be able to stop that tsunami as long as Barack Obama is in office. That’s why we believe this election should be viewed as the first step in a gradual process to return this nation to the principles it was founded on ... hopefully before it’s too late.

In that ongoing effort, Republicans can either lead, follow ... or get run over. It doesn’t matter to us.