

POST-MIDTERM ELECTION ANALYSIS

Q&A with Prime Policy Group Chairman Charlie Black



Charlie Black, Chairman of Prime Policy Group

Question: What were the key takeaways from the 2010 midterm election?

The Republicans gained at least 61 seats in the House of Representatives which means the presumptive Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) will oversee at least a 50 seat majority. The Republicans gained six seats in the Senate but the Democrats were able to hold onto their majority. Early estimates show that 42 percent of the voting age population voted in the 2010 midterms which is the highest turnout in 40 years. This was a so-called “wave” election where voters were largely motivated by the perception that Washington spending and the size of the federal government were growing out of control.

Q: Most political pundits were forecasting Republican gains in the 2010 midterm election, was the outcome what everyone expected?

The Republican House win was historic, marking the most

seats gained by either party since 1948 when Democrats grabbed 75 seats and trumping the GOP’s gain of 52 seats in 1994. A number of long serving Democrats conceded defeat on election night, including several committee chairmen. Additionally, at least 21 Democratic freshmen, many of whom rode to Washington on President Obama’s 2008 coattails, were trumped by their Republican opponents after serving only a single term. The consensus of the well respected political pundits was that the Republicans would gain between 50 and 60 seats in the House and between 5 and 7 seats in the Senate. I anticipated the gains in the House being closer to 60 than 50 and the election results exceeded my expectations in the House.

Q: Was the election a total loss for the Democrats?

The election can also be considered historic for Democrats, since it is the first time since 1930 that a sitting majority has been able to hold the Senate while

sitting majority has been able to hold the Senate while still losing the House. Republicans picked up open Senate seats in Indiana, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, and the seat vacated by President Obama in Illinois. GOP candidates also defeated Democratic incumbents Blanche Lincoln in Arkansas and Russ Feingold in Wisconsin. In addition, Republicans gained six governor's seats and 680 state legislative seats across the country. These gains were made in every state and region of the country making this election one of the worst for Democrats in history.

Q: Alaska Republican Senator Lisa Murkowski seems to have launched a successful write-in campaign, how common is that approach?

If GOP incumbent Lisa Murkowski holds her lead, she will become the first successful write-in Senate candidate since Strom Thurmond pulled it off in 1954. Write-in campaigns are extremely difficult to wage for any office at any level of elected office. If successful, this will be remarkable for a United States Senate seat. She is to be congratulated for making history.

Q: What will the "new House" look like in 2011?

Contrary to popular opinion, most incoming GOP House freshmen are not an unruly mob of outsiders but a cadre of seasoned state and local politicians who have worked their way up through their local political establishments. The freshmen class will most likely come in believing it has a clear mandate to cut spending and reduce the size of government. Speaker Boehner, as a former full committee chairman, is likely to grant the Committee Chairman great latitude to shape legislation and be the center of policy development rather than have the Leadership drive policy.

Q: What impact did the 2010 midterm election have on the Blue Dog Coalition?

The Blue Dogs experienced their most devastating election since their coalition's founding. Through retirements or defeats, they will lose over half of their membership and lose many of those members who have been leaders within the group. John Tanner (D-TN), Allen Boyd (D-FL), Baron Hill (D-IN), Stephanie Herseth-Sandlin (D-SD) and others leave a leadership void. However, expect to see

more senior Blue Dogs like Jim Matheson (D-UT), Dennis Cardoza (D-CA), Heath Shuler (D-NC), Dan Boren (D-OK), Joe Donnelly (D-IN), and Mike Ross (D-AR) play important roles in filling that void and to help the Blue Dogs in their efforts to organize for the 112th Congress.

Q: As a result of the 2010 midterm election, do you think the Senate will try to be more nonpartisan?

There will be a narrower partisan divide in the Senate which will result in closer committee ratios. Sweeping, partisan legislation like health care reform is no longer possible in the 112th Congress. Therefore, Democratic leaders may respond to their smaller numbers by seeking to move more legislation through the committee process – thus more successfully developing bipartisan, filibuster-proof compromises – and avoid taking legislation directly to the floor.

Q: In what ways do you anticipate the leadership of the congressional committees that are of interest to MCAA changing in the next year?

There shouldn't be too many surprises in the Senate since the party in control will remain the same. Senator Hatch will replace Senator Grassley as Ranking member of the Senate Finance Committee due to Republican term limitations. Senator Vitter could replace Senate Snowe as Ranking member of the Senate Small Business Committee if she decides to take the ranking position on the Senate Intelligence Committee.

It will be a different story in the House of Representatives. Here is who

we think will take over the chairmanship positions for the following committees: Education and Labor – John Kline (R-MN), Transportation and Infrastructure – John Mica (R-FL), and Ways and Means – Dave Camp (R-MI).

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Charlie is best known as one of America's leading Republican political strategists. He served as senior advisor to both President Ronald Reagan and President George H.W. Bush. In 1990, Charlie served as chief spokesman for the Republican National Committee and served as a principal public spokesman for President Bush in the 1992 presidential campaign. He served on President George W. Bush's 2000 and 2004 campaigns as a volunteer political advisor and surrogate spokesman.

