



**Our panel of experts thumps away at defeated Republicans—
but in a most constructive manner.**

W. James Antle III

THE REPUBLICANS SQUANDERED the opportunities unified control of the federal government offered them and paid a steep electoral price—an end to their 12-year reign in the House, a loss of the majority of governorships, the slow and painful attrition of their 10-seat margin in the Senate. Worse, the warning signs had been obvious for at least a year and neither the White House nor the GOP congressional leadership responded effectively.

Since the 2004 election, GOP leaders did little to elicit enthusiasm from their base and even less to appeal to swing voters who were becoming increasingly alienated from their policies. The Republicans failed to live up to their stated principles of limited government, fiscal responsibility, and personal accountability. Just as damagingly, they have neglected the important task of connecting these principles to an agenda that addresses the problems that most concern the electorate.

If Republicans aren't trusted with the nation's pocketbook or its defenses, they can't win. The spending spree of the last few years has jeopardized that trust with fiscal policy; Iraq is beginning to harm the party's reputation on national security. The resignation of Donald Rumsfeld was a belated acknowledgment of this latter point, but personnel changes are not enough—and slogans like "stay the course" do not amount to a policy. Congressional Republicans bear as much blame as President Bush.

For crestfallen conservatives, there is a silver lining. Every major conservative victory of the last 40 years has come after a Republican defeat. The move-

ment's political empowerment followed Barry Goldwater's defeat; Ronald Reagan's election in 1980 was made possible by Gerald Ford's loss four years earlier; the triumphs of 1994 followed George H.W. Bush's defeat by Bill Clinton in the previous cycle.

And conservatives thrive in opposition. They defeated Hillarycare, rebuffed the energy tax, and came within one vote in each chamber of rejecting the Clinton tax increase with fewer seats than they will hold in the next Congress. They can do it again.

The era of big government conservatism is over. Republicans can embrace that reality or continue to lose elections. ☐

W. James Antle III is assistant editor of The American Spectator.

Michael Barone

REPUBLICANS LOST. That pretty much says it. The margins were close in many cases, agonizingly close in the Senate races in Virginia and Montana. But a lot of elections are close, and over the course of history Republicans have probably won their fair share. From the returns I've looked at, the Rove-Mehlman turnout machine worked, perhaps even better than in 2004. But not all the people who were persuaded to vote seem to have voted Republican. George W. Bush, in accepting Donald Rumsfeld's resignation the day after the election and inviting Democrats to present their ideas on entitlements, seems to be taking the course set by Arnold Schwarzenegger after he was defeated in four referendums in November 2005. Having failed to beat the

opposition, he is prepared to join them. Schwarzenegger hired one of Gray Davis's top staffers to be his chief of staff. To replace Rumsfeld Bush is nominating Robert Gates, who served in the Carter administration as well as the Bush 41 administration. Not exactly a Democrat, but one likely to be more acceptable to Democrats on the Hill.

In inviting the Democrats to offer their ideas on "entitlements," Bush presumably meant Social Security. He seems to be looking for some genuine domestic achievement in his last two years, though that achievement may not be exactly what conservatives would like.

Bill Clinton tried to make his party a natural majority. He got close—Al Gore and John Kerry both got 48 percent of the vote—but fell short. George W. Bush tried to make his party a natural majority. He seemed well on the way after the 2004 elections. But now he has fallen short, too. That leaves the field open for 2008. I take the Democrats' victories as a rebuke more of the competence of the Bush administration than of its ideology. But the fact is that this administration seems mostly out of new ideas. It has accomplished a lot of the goals Bush set out in the 2000 and 2004 campaigns. It has been stymied on others. The Democrats offered little in the way of new ideas in the campaign. But the Republicans didn't offer much either.

We'll see if either side does now. Bush is trying to rope the Democrats into sharing the responsibility for ongoing governance. It will fall to presidential candidates of both parties to set agendas for the future beyond January 20, 2009. ❧

Michael Barone is senior writer at U.S. News & World Report and author of The Almanac of American Politics.

John H. Fund

WITH ALMOST ONE OUT OF TEN GOP House incumbents turned out by voters in the November election, some of the most ardent conservative supporters of the GOP are almost relieved. "I feel liberated," Rush Limbaugh told his radio audience. "I no longer have to carry the water for people who don't deserve it."

Rep. Mike Pence, chair of the conservative Republican Study Committee, was even more forthright: "We did not just lose our majority, we lost our way."

Mr. Pence made it clear that he believes Republicans must internalize the fact that "while the

scandals of the 109th Congress harmed our cause, the greatest scandal in Washington, D.C., is runaway federal spending." He noted that pork-barrel earmarks, midnight votes to pass entitlement programs, and lack of congressional oversight were "not in the Contract with America back in 1994 and Republican voters said 'enough is enough.'"

Indeed, Republican National Committee staffers report that one of the reasons they were surprised by the depth of the GOP defeat was that they met most if not all of their targets for turning out GOP voters. "The problem is that once we got them to the polls some were angry enough with us to vote Democratic or for third parties," reports one RNC staffer.

Those angry voters weren't alone. The GOP strategy firm OnMessage Inc. surveyed voters in 12 competitive districts just before November 7 and concluded that "the Republican brand is broken and needs significant rehab." One example is the poll's finding that only 22 percent of those surveyed said Republicans would credibly work to reduce the deficit, as opposed to 47 percent who thought Democrats would. The only bright spot in the survey is the finding that the electorate in the swing districts had not changed its basic ideology. Voters merely concluded that Republicans had failed, and even though they had no clear idea what Democrats planned to do in power, Democrats were the other guys—i.e., the default alternative.

Mr. Pence says the GOP losses and the exit poll results showing dissatisfaction with Republicans make clear what will be required to elect a GOP majority in 2008: "We must remember who sent us here, and convince them we are worthy once again of their confidence and votes." ❧

John H. Fund is The American Spectator's Politics columnist.

Quin Hillyer

IT IS EASY TO LOOK WITH DREAD at a Congress that will be led by liberal Democrats, and it is easy and justifiable to cast lots of blame at presidential arrogance, congressional corruption, and abandonment of principle (especially on spending) by all concerned. It is easy, in short, for conservatives to blame Washington Republicans for not governing as principled conservatives.

But blame goes only so far. Recriminations do not help build majorities. Intraparty bickering does nothing to win hearts and minds.

The only way for conservatives to regain govern-

ing majorities is for them to work, hard, to rebuild a conservative movement based on principle and political savvy, rather than on pressure tactics and whoredom to big money. Ronald Reagan did it by reaching out to Democrats who lean rightward, on whatever issue the particular individual Democrats leaned rightward. Many Democrats who won first terms in November lean rightward either culturally or on defense or on taxes. President Bush needs to woo them to build a governing majority, and their conservative Republican colleagues in the House must build bridges to them.

In short, stress principle rather than party, and encourage a coalition of conservatives that will isolate the liberal congressional leaders and make it clear how radically leftist they truly are. Encourage mini-revolts on discrete issues by moderate Democratic backbenchers.

Meanwhile, conservatives should communicate more effectively to the public. All too often, conservatives use slogans to rally the right, rather than taking the time to effectively *explain* their principles to the vast majority of Americans who are not ideological but who will respond to appeals based on principle. Conservatives must trust that their ideas will be popular if effectively advocated.

The November elections were a disaster. But they provide the opportunity for conservatives to cleanse and rejuvenate the movement, and to pick up the banner borne so well by the defeated Clay Shaw, Jim Talent, and Rick Santorum. Their cause is worth fighting for. ❧

Quin Hillyer is a senior editor of The American Spectator.

David Hogberg

THE REPUBLICAN PARTY is at a crossroads. One sign reads "Ohio," the other "Florida." If the GOP heads toward Ohio, its fate will be an ugly one. In Ohio, GOP one-party dominance has been marked by Republican legislators increasing spending to placate favored constituencies. This has led to many tax increases, causing Ohio's tax burden to jump from 24th in the nation in 1994 to third today. With no real ideas to guide them, Ohio Republican politicians like Governor Bob Taft became mired in corruption, leading to a crushing November defeat in the races for both governor and U.S. Senate.

By contrast, Florida's GOP is a "Party of Ideas." Led by Governor Jeb Bush, the party has pushed tax cuts, tort reform, Medicaid reform, and balancing the

budget without tax increases. Despite this being a great year for Democrats, Florida Republicans did very well, hanging on to all of the state-wide offices they held. Republican Charlie Crist (a good but not great candidate) won the governor's race handily, promising Floridians "less taxing, less government, and more freedom" in his victory speech.

In recent years, the national GOP had been heading in the direction of Ohio. From the Bridge to Nowhere, to a flood of earmarks, to numerous scandals, Republicans in Congress had become more about holding on to power than about promoting ideas. November's smackdown at the ballot box is the clearest signal possible that the GOP needs to turn around and head back toward Florida.

One way to start is to hammer the tax issue. President Bush's tax cuts are set to expire in 2010, and the Democrats appear dumb enough to let them. As 2010 approaches, Republicans will have to say often and in unison, "Democrats are going to raise your taxes." Attach this to comprehensive tax reform, such as a flat tax, and the GOP has a big winning issue.

Democrats also appear to be hesitating on funding the 700-mile fence that will help stop the flow of illegal immigrants. Republicans should hammer them on this as well, calling the Democrats out on this neglect of a national security issue. A guest-worker program is a good idea that the GOP should be willing to bargain on, but only *if* border security is taken care of first.

The GOP also needs to put together a comprehensive health-care reform agenda—one that emphasizes free markets and limited government. This agenda should include expanding health savings accounts, allowing people to buy health insurance across state lines, and letting small business form associations to purchase health insurance. With polls showing more Americans concerned about the rising cost of health care, the GOP won't win on this issue until it tackles it head on.

There are plenty of other issues which call for the GOP to promote new ideas, including the War on Terror, Social Security reform, social issues, and budget reform. I'll deal with those in an article for *The American Spectator* online. Suffice to say that the GOP can reclaim the mantle as the party of free markets, limited government, traditional values, and strength on national security. But only if it first reclaims the mantle as the "Party of Ideas." ❧

David Hogberg writes on politics and public policy from Washington.

David Keene

IT WASN'T A TSUNAMI, BUT IT WAS ENOUGH. Republican House and Senate incumbents learned on election night that it is just as career-ending to drown in three inches of water as it is to be washed away by the sort of wave that did in the Democrats 12 years ago. There weren't many Republicans in either house buried in anything approaching a landslide, but most of the close races went to the Democrats.

Although most Republicans had discounted the happy talk coming from the RNC and the White House, they held on to the hope that they would hold the Senate and lose the House by a handful. They pinned their hopes on the lack of evidence supporting the existence of a late Democratic wave, final weekend polls that seemed to be picking up a GOP resurgence, and their faith in RNC Chairman Ken Mehlman's already legendary ground army of volunteers. But none of that was enough to save a GOP Congress that had lost its way.

I myself had remained hopeful. The morning of Election Day found me predicting losses of fewer than 22 House seats, and I thought the GOP would hold the Senate by a seat or two. Those predictions represented the victory of political hope over experience.

In reality it was a year in which everything went wrong for Republicans. Bush and the perception that he doesn't really know what to do about Iraq hurt, and congressional leaders made things worse by spotting the Democrats almost a dozen seats because of criminal indictments, incumbent resignations, and scandals that convinced more than a few Republicans to sleep in rather than vote.

Republicans will blame everyone but themselves, but they faced a referendum not on the ideas that brought them to power, but on the sorry way in which they've gone about either ignoring or implementing those ideas as well as on their competence, integrity, and morals.

While timing and luck trump everything in politics, Iraq, Katrina, and Senate and House Republicans who appeared to look to pre-1994 Democrats as ethical and political role models were enough to leave a sour taste in the mouths of millions of voters, including Republicans who stayed home in spite of the efforts of Karl Rove and Ken Mehlman.

For their part, the Democrats made it easier for voters to reject GOP incumbents by running challengers who declared themselves in sync with their Republican opponents on everything from abortion to gun control and taxes. This is something that could

come back to haunt Democratic congressional leaders if Republicans wake up in time to exploit it. The freshmen who will be sworn in before the next Congress convenes ran not as liberals, but as moderates and even conservatives. Many of them won in districts that would have sent them packing had they announced they wanted to go to Washington to help Nancy Pelosi, Charlie Rangel, and Henry Waxman do their thing. These districts are likely to retaliate in two years if that's what these first-termers do.

It may be difficult to lead a caucus that's in power thanks largely to the addition of folks who promised those who elected them that they won't do what their new leaders have been wanting to do for a decade. They could prove a fractious bunch.

The new Republican House caucus, on the other hand, will be more homogeneously conservative than its predecessor and should be able to elect new leaders who will work to bring their party back by reminding their colleagues of the principles that got most of them to Washington in the first place.

Let the fun begin. ❧

David Keene is chairman of the American Conservative Union.

Philip Klein

THE QUESTION THAT SHOULD BE ON the minds of all conservatives in the wake of the Democrats' electoral "thumping" of Republicans is: will the impact of the results more closely resemble 1992 or 1998?

George H.W. Bush won the presidency in 1988 as the successor to Ronald Reagan, but he soon abandoned the ideology of limited government—and paid the price for it. A few days after Bush's defeat in the 1992 election, *Washington Times* columnist Donald Lambro wrote: "When Mr. Bush cynically reneged on his no-new-taxes pledge, the linchpin of that Republican coalition, he deeply eroded his conservative political base of support, destroyed his credibility on tax and spending issues, and sent the economy into the tank."

Two years later, a rejuvenated Republican Party was back on top, having regained both chambers of Congress on a platform of completing the Reagan Revolution. But after a bruising battle over the government shutdown and President Clinton's substantial re-election victory, the Republicans began to lose their will to contain the growth of government. In the run-up to the 1998 congressional races, the Repub-

lican majority that came to power on a promise to cut government waste passed a pork-laden spending bill. A fortnight before that election House Speaker Newt Gingrich predicted that Republicans would gain ten to 40 seats as is typical of opposition parties in the sixth year of a presidency. Instead, they lost five seats, as turnout among conservatives dropped 6 percent from the 1994 mid-term elections. The response this time was not a recommitment to limited government, but "compassionate conservatism."

If the 2006 election results prove one thing, it's that Republicans did not gain new supporters by creating an entitlement program, federalizing education, and setting new spending records. They merely alienated the supporters they already had.

In the months leading up to this election, many prominent conservatives argued that it would be better for Republicans to lose so they could learn their lessons and reemerge as the party of limited government. The next few months will prove crucial in determining whether the party learned the right lessons.

As 2006 comes to a close, those of us who believe in the virtues of a smaller, less intrusive, government should hope that the year turns out to be more like 1992—and less like 1998. ❧

Philip Klein is a reporter for The American Spectator.

Jeffrey Lord

YOU HAVE TO LOVE the conventional wisdom about conservatism. This "wisdom" goes something like this: Conservatism equals extremism; Republicans ran as conservatives and lost; they must turn to the center to win; finally the reign of conservative terror is over; we told you this would happen.

This old chestnut has an uncanny ability to look and sound fresh when in fact it has been spoiling on the political shelf for decades. It is always sold as something new—and it is always wrong.

Take the book *The Future of the Republican Party*. Published after the Johnson-Goldwater election, the author is the late Robert J. Donovan. The Washington bureau chief of the *Los Angeles Times*, Donovan had covered the campaign. In 132-pages, the conventionally liberal Donovan is almost blissfully unaware of the earthquake in American politics he has just witnessed. Says he:

- The ascendancy of conservatives in the GOP has "damaged, weakened and tarnished the party. For

years to come the two-party system will be crippled..."

- "The lesson of the 1964 election, written bold in the returns," is that the Republican Party cannot win the Congress or the White House until "it casts off the extreme-right-wing conservatism of Senator Goldwater and his faction."

- "[N]othing that has happened indicates a major, nationwide realignment, such as the long-dreamed-of shift bringing all liberals into the Democratic Party and all conservatives into the Republican Party."

There was more of this kind of thinking in Donovan's book, the author completely oblivious to the fact that the Goldwater movement was the beginning of the rise of modern American conservatism, which has dominated politics ever since.

Ronald Reagan is never mentioned in Donovan's book. No, the star is a GOP liberal. Donovan spotlights New York Congressman John Lindsay, "despised by many conservatives." The antidote to the GOP's insane flirtation with conservatism is to get Lindsay elected governor of New York, then president. This would not only rid the GOP of its conservative stain but give the nation a GOP version of—John F. Kennedy. (Donovan, recall, wrote the Camelot-era best-seller, *PT 109*.)

Lindsay's move up was to become mayor of New York. Every liberal nostrum of the day was applied during his tenure, leaving the Big Apple so close to ruin that it wasn't until the arrival of Rudy Giuliani 20 years later that the city recovered.

Is conservatism finished? If the late President Lindsay were here you could ask him. ❧

Jeffrey Lord is the author of The Borking Rebellion. A former Reagan White House political director, he is now a writer in Pennsylvania.

Grover Norquist

THE 2006 ELECTION WAS NOT 1974 or 1994. In 1974 liberal Democrats running as liberal Democrats defeated many "conservative" Republicans (or what passed for conservative Republicans before Reagan). In 1994 Reagan Republicans running as such defeated dozens of liberal Democrats.

This year most of the Democrats who defeated Republicans blurred what I assume are their true ideological colors. They did not campaign on tax increases and spending explosions. This was enough to get them past Republican House members weakened by the Iraq occupation and unhappiness with the growth of government.

The Republicans also failed to outline an agenda

for the future. They wanted to be thanked for past tax cuts. (Okay, thank you.) They wanted to be rewarded for past efforts to keep America safe. (Okay, gold star for you.) But there was no vision for the future. What is the next tax cut? What is the plan for winning and leaving Iraq? Elections are about the future. Not the past.

The Republicans were tarred with the failure to rein in overspending and specifically the small but visible earmarks that are the gateway drug to big spending on entitlements.

Bush and the Republican Congress did not like to lose. They didn't fail enough. Only when you bring a vote to the floor of Congress and get defeated can you argue you need more Republican congressmen and Republican senators. Only when the President's initiatives are mauled and defeated in one house or the other can the president explain that he does not actually run the behemoth, the federal government. Reagan was president for eight years. He lost things. He always referred to the federal government as "them." When you win everything you try for—you own the present mess known as the status quo. Our team referred to the government as "us."

Also this year, a handful of Republicans lost because of self-inflicted wounds. The Foley seat in Florida. The DeLay seat in Texas. Those are like the Dan Rostenkowski seat lost by the Democrats in 1994. They are one-term Democrat seats waiting to be returned to the party.

If Republicans in the House and Senate and particularly the President decide to confront the Democrats and fight them to demand—and often fail—to cut taxes, reduce spending, end earmarks, and strengthen American defenses, then they will regain the House and Senate in 2008. If they walk into a room promising bipartisanship, then they are hostage to the Democrat leadership. If they walk out of the room without capitulating to the Democrats' demands, they then fail in their promise to be "bipartisan." Promising to be "bipartisan" is to put your fate in the hands of those that hate you. ❧

Grover Norquist is the president of Americans for Tax Reform.

Robert D. Novak

AFTER A DOZEN YEARS of controlling Congress, the Republicans thought control on Capitol Hill was an entitlement. As such, they abused their 1994 return to power (after 40 years in the wilderness for GOP House members). However, that was only half

the problem that caused the Republican fiasco on November 7. The other half was public revulsion over the course of the intervention in Iraq. Both cases expose deep divisions inside the Republican Party.

The most obvious internal Republican disagreement concerns congressional earmarks for pork-barrel spending. Indeed, campaign technicians actually used the word "pork" in describing techniques used to try re-electing enough Republican members to retain their House majority. Staffers at the National Republican Congressional Committee actually compared House members to "mayors"—parceling out highways, bridges, viaducts, and other public works.

That mindset is viewed as the heart of the party's problem by a wide variety of prominent Republicans ranging from Sen. John McCain, the unconventional reformer, to Rep. Mike Pence, the leader of House conservatives. "We lost our way," said Pence, who then announced he would run for Republican minority leader on the basis that the GOP had to get back to its roots of opposing big government and big spending.

The question is whether Republicans really are ready to follow McCain and Pence in going on a diet. Being in the minority did not keep Democrats from enjoying their addiction to pork. Republican members of the appropriations committees are unlikely to curb their appetites even though they are in the minority.

In their desire to curb earmarks, McCain and Pence play down what may be the deeper, though less obvious, cleavage inside the Republican Party over the U.S. role in the world. The overriding reason why long-time Republican members of Congress lost their seats, despite the lack of any obvious political problems, was public discontent with the Iraq war. McCain has asked for more troops to be sent to Iraq, and there still remains Republican denial that President Bush's decision to go into Iraq is the cause of the party's misfortune.

Under George W. Bush, the Reaganite agenda of fighting Soviet imperialism abroad and starving government at home has been transformed into a Wilsonian desire to reform—to democratize—the world. Americans want to protect themselves from terrorists, but they clearly are not willing to pay any price to spread democracy around the world. They made that clear in voting on November 7. ❧

Robert D. Novak is a nationally syndicated columnist and a commentator for Fox News.

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