

Are More “Thumpings” Needed?

While the losses were not large for the sixth year of a sitting president the significance of Nov. 7 is huge and the consequences will be historic.

But it is crucial to sift out what the nation was saying and what it was not saying. This election was a referendum on George W. Bush, the Iraq War, and the Republican Party, and undeniably a repudiation of all three. Tuesday's rout is what happens to a hubristic party that leads a nation into an unnecessary and unwise war and presents that nation with a congressional face of self-indulgence and corruption.

But the nation that rejected Bush and the Republicans did not reject conservatism. To the contrary, it seemed to want to punish the prodigal sons for abandoning the faith of their fathers.

What did America vote against?

It voted against Bush's war of democratic imperialism and the mismanagement of that war. It voted against Jack Abramoff, Duke Cunningham, and Mark Foley. It voted against a party that postures as conservative while indulging in a six-year pig-out on the taxpayers' tab, the altarpiece of which was a \$250 million “bridge to nowhere.”

What did America not vote against? It did not vote against tax cuts or conservative judges or a security fence. How do we know? Because no Democrat in a hotly contested race said he would raise taxes, reject Supreme Court nominees like Roberts and Alito, or grant amnesty for illegal aliens.

The principal beneficiary of the election may be Nancy Pelosi, but this election was no mandate for an ultraliberal feminist who spent much of the campaign in protective custody so Americans

would not see what they would be getting when they dumped Denny Hastert.

But if this was no mandate for a new “progressive era,” as the media are trying to portray it, what was it a mandate for? The answers are apparent.

The nation agrees with the Democratic Party that the minimum wage should be raised and a cost-benefit analysis done on Bush trade deals that leave Wal-Mart cluttered with cheap Chinese goods while hollowing out American manufacturing and converting company towns into ghost towns.

The open-borders crowd is chortling that Randy Graf and J.D. Hayworth went down to defeat but deliberately ignores the far more relevant fact that Arizonans voted even tougher restrictions on state benefits for illegal aliens.

In Michigan the GOP establishment deserted Ward Connerly's principled battle to end reverse discrimination. But while the GOP went down to defeat, the Connerly ballot initiative, rooted in the idea of equal justice under law for all races, swept to a 58-42 victory. When Republicans desert Reagan Democrats, Reagan Democrats desert the GOP. Which is as it should be.

On social issues, our national division that dates to the cultural wars of the '60s endures. Embryonic stem-cell research lost a huge lead to win a slim victory in Missouri while the toughest anti-abortion law in America went down to narrow defeat in South Dakota. But gay marriage was routed in seven states, and pot for medicinal purposes was rejected

in libertarian Nevada.

Yet the effect of the Republican rout on Bush appears to have been almost destabilizing. Within 48 hours, all the campaign bluster was gone and Bush was moving to accommodate his critics.

He fired and humiliated his loyal deputy Rumsfeld, told the new Mexican president he would fight for “comprehensive” reform of U.S. immigration law, i.e., amnesty and open borders, and had Nancy Pelosi down to the Oval Office, where she was treated as a queen, despite having portrayed the president as an incompetent ignoramus.

Coupled with what appears to be the outsourcing of Iraq policy to James Baker, Bush family consigliere, the questions arise, one after the other. Is there any real core to George W. Bush? Is there any real constancy of character and purpose? And do we have another broken presidency on our hands?

For conservatives the lessons of 2006 seem clear. They failed in their duty to hold the Republican Party to account when it departed from principle and political ethics and thus failed to rescue it from the rout it has now received. The Right failed in the basic responsibility of true camaraderie: friends don't let friends drive drunk.

What conservatives should do now is what they should have been doing for six years. Stand behind the president when he fights for low taxes and conservative judges. But when he joins with Pelosi, Fox, Calderon, and McCain-Kennedy for open borders, or with Dick Durbin for “moderate justices,” give him another “thumping” like he got from conservatives when he sought to elevate Harriet Miers and just as he got from the nation on Nov. 7. ■

Minority Report

Republicans bet the House—and the Senate—and lost.

By W. James Antle III

JIM WEBB'S SUPPORTERS were slow to trickle into the ballroom at the Sheraton Premier in Tysons Corner. Some jammed the lobby, hitting the cash bar and downing free egg rolls amidst balloons and pictures of their candidate. Others gathered around televisions tuned to CNN, straining to read the results flashing at the bottom of the screen. While it would be a while before they would get news about the Senate race they came to watch, the crowd cheered raucously each time the network called an election for the Democratic nominee.

"Sur-prise!" a group seated near the bar hooted when the announcement came that Republican Katherine Harris lost her long-shot Florida Senate bid in a landslide. Sen. Bob Menendez's (D-N.J.) early win also elicited an enthusiastic response. "That's a good sign," beamed a grandmotherly woman in a Webb t-shirt. "I think he had some kind of scandal issue." A middle-aged couple exchanged grins and clinked wine glasses.

As the night wore on, these Democratic Party activists would have plenty to celebrate—it was their best election in 12 years. Democrats easily retook the House, capturing many of the seats on their most wanted list. GOP incumbents Curt Weldon and Don Sherwood fell in Pennsylvania. Abramoff-tainted former House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Texas), former congressman and convicted felon Bob Ney (R-Ohio), and disgraced ex-Congressman Mark Foley (R-Fla.) were all replaced by Democrats. Democratic gubernatorial candidates rallied in New York, Maryland,

Massachusetts, Ohio, Colorado, and Arkansas, giving the party a majority of the nation's governorships for the first time since 1995.

Democrats were disappointed in the contest for outgoing Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist's seat in Tennessee, but won close races in Montana, Rhode Island, and Missouri. Sens. Rick Santorum (R-Pa.) and Mike DeWine (R-Ohio) were trounced by double-digit margins. Vaunted Republican challengers Michael Steele of Maryland and Tom Keane Jr. of New Jersey fell short; no other GOP pickup attempt even came close. Finally, a day after the Sheraton Premier revelers headed home, the Associated Press declared that Webb had beaten Sen. George Allen (R-Va.), placing the Senate under Democratic control.

The Virginia Senate race may have been unusual due to the incumbent's large number of bizarre gaffes, but Webb was a Democratic candidate very much like the voters the GOP alienated—a former Republican who deserted the party over the Iraq War. According to nationwide exit polls, even voters who thought the economy was doing well but opposed the war favored the Democrats by a 2-to-1 margin. Iraq, big-government conservatism, and GOP corruption conspired to cost the Republicans their biggest advantages—the electorate's confidence in them to competently run national security, the government, and the economy.

As a result, 60 percent voted on the basis of national issues rather than local concerns; 57 percent of all voters opposed the Iraq War. Independent

voters swung Democratic by a 59 percent to 37 percent margin. CNN political analyst Bill Schneider told reporters, "We haven't seen that big a vote for one party among independents since exit polling began about 30 years ago."

Republicans only narrowly carried white men and lost white women. Their advantage on protecting Americans from terrorism only netted them 7 points. Evangelical Christians remained the GOP's strongest constituency, but even their backing slipped slightly from nearly three-quarters to about two-thirds. And Republicans lost more ground among voters who attend church services infrequently.

"If there was still any doubt," former House Majority Leader Dick Army wrote in the *Wall Street Journal*, "the Republican Revolution of 1994 officially ended Tuesday night." Of course, the Republicans are still better off than they were before 1994. Even after this year's disastrous elections, they will hold six more Senate seats and as many as 30 more House seats than they did at the beginning of the 103rd Congress. But many of the factors that helped the GOP 12 years ago may have hurt the party in this election.

One of the biggest factors to come back to haunt the Republicans in this cycle was their over-reliance on the South. The region's realignment toward the GOP fortified Electoral College landslides by Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, and George H.W. Bush. Southern and Border States are where Republicans won their congressional majority in 1994 and where they racked up the