

## Midterm Madness by Dan Jacoby

Poll numbers and other factors in the news seem to indicate that the Democratic Party is going to take a bath this November. In a typical midterm election, the party in power tends to lose a chunk of seats in Congress, and the conventional wisdom is that this level of loss would be a relief to Democrats.

The conventional wisdom is, as always, wrong. Democrats will not only fare far better than historical averages, but could actually pick up a seat or two in the Senate. Reasons for this conclusion include:

1. Timing;
2. Healthcare reform;
3. The tea partiers;
4. The party of no;
5. Younger voters; and
6. It's the economy, stupid!

Let's take those factors one at a time:

1. Timing.

The election is still seven months away. That's a couple of lifetimes in politics. Even without a major event, poll numbers can change dramatically in just a few months. Current poll results are completely meaningless this far out; if they meant anything, then Hillary Clinton and Rudy Giuliani would have been their respective parties' nominees for President in 2008 – and Giuliani would have won the election.

2. Healthcare reform.

Now that the healthcare bill and its reconciliation "fix" have passed, Republicans have nothing new to oppose or demean. Meanwhile, Democrats from the President on down will be able to crow over the good parts of the bill, such as ending denial of coverage for preexisting conditions. The potential downside, such as a misleading CBO report on its effects on the deficit, won't show up for years, and even if it does show up it will be masked by other factors. Republicans have managed to figure that much out, and are deserting the tactic of "repeal and replace" in droves. Support for this bill will increase over time, and the Republicans who opposed it unanimously will pay the political price.

### 3. The tea partiers.

Why isn't John McCain sounding like a maverick? Why did he introduce a bill that would allow the President to order the arrest and imprisonment of anyone, and hold that person for as long as the "war on terror" lasts, without a trial, without a lawyer, and without any other constitutional rights? (Note: The bill is S.3081.) Could it be because Senator McCain is scared of losing a primary contest to a tea party candidate – so scared that he brought Sarah Palin to Arizona to campaign for him? You betcha!

The tea partiers are not a grass roots movement, they are an Astroturf group created and mobilized by former House Majority Leader Dick Armey's "FreedomWorks" organization. While other splinter groups have cropped up here and there, the only truly organized part of this is Armey's gang.

Their effect is to scare Republicans, such as Senator McCain, into moving as far to the right wing as possible. Their hope is that only hard-core voters will turn out in the midterm election, and the tea partiers could pick up enough seats to be considered a major force. Their problem is that because they have no facts behind their wild claims they are being aligned with the truly crazy, including militant groups and potentially violent loners.

### 4. The party of no.

Self-appointed pundits, even neutral ones like Charlie Cook, say that midterm elections are referenda on the party in power. At best, however, they oversimplify the political process.

The winner of a presidential election begins the term by trying to enact all the promises made during the election, rather than continuing to campaign. Meanwhile, the party out of power, which seeks to regain power, does nothing but campaign. The usual result is that the minority party picks up seats in Congress at the midterm election, averaging about 25 seats in the House and a couple of seats in the Senate.

The Obama administration, and the Democratic leadership in Congress, did the same thing last year. The difference between this administration and previous administrations over the past century is that they woke up early. (Note: The Bush 43 administration never stopped campaigning, which is a large part of the reason they picked up seats in the first midterm election.)

Since President Obama is on the campaign trail, Republicans have to counter with an actual agenda, but they have none. They are merely the "party of no." This will hurt Republicans in November.

### 5. Younger voters.

The healthcare "reconciliation" bill had a completely unrelated item – taking the middlemen out of student loans. This will save billions of dollars a year while making student loans less expensive for students. Why was this provision put into a bill that was supposed to be specifically targeted to healthcare?

Over the past few weeks, President Obama has given several speeches, mostly on college campuses. Why there?

The answer could be that younger voters don't generally turn out for midterm elections, and these younger voters are far more likely to be Democrats than Republicans. Changing this dynamic – getting younger voters fired up – could make a huge difference in the outcome of this year's elections. Republicans voted unanimously against the bill that will save college students a lot of money; they will pay the political price.

6. It's the economy, stupid!

162,000 jobs were created last month. It's the third increase in jobs in the last five months, and the largest increase in three years. This will almost certainly get better over the course of the year, and the unemployment rate could drop below 9% before the election.

A growing economy, along with a shrinking unemployment rate, will have a side benefit – a shrinking budget deficit. Final numbers on this fiscal year's deficit will be released shortly before the election, and when that number is significantly smaller than predicted, it will take the wind out of the sails of the tea party movement as well as anyone else who opposes this administration.

All these factors add up to one outcome – Democrats will do very well this fall. The trends are all there; what is amazing is that so many supposed "experts" don't see them.