



# THE VIEW

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## WHERE HAVE ALL THE PARTIES GONE?

BY  
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There have been countless coffee shop conversations recently in which the participants have called for the destruction of both of the country's major political parties. Results so far in the 2010 mid-term elections seem to be giving us a glimpse of what political life would look like in a "post-party" world.

Let us remember that we have only eased into primary season, meaning that contests so far are only events internal to the parties themselves. Yet it is evident that even within parties there are many sides, all of which are playing "for keeps." The screams of joy and anguish more resemble those associated with a general election when one party has been vanquished by the other.

What exactly is going on? Here are a few observations. It is fairly clear that open season has been declared on incumbents. Secondly, the TEA Party is loud and boisterous just as promised, but its ability to turn out voters is far from proven. Finally, the TEA Party movement has produced some unusual candidates, and in so doing has created some renewed opportunities for incumbents who were previously on shaky ground.

The anti-incumbent sentiment is not confined to any party or method. Staunchly conservative Republican Senator Robert Bennett was ousted by a convention of delegates under the Utah primary system. His downfall within the purest of the pure ranks of his own Utah Republican Party apparatus could be tied to his support for the controversial TARP legislation and his willingness to consider bi-partisan compromises on health care issues. Similarly, Democratic Congressman Joe Sestak ended Senator Arlen Specter's career in the Pennsylvania primary election. Most other incumbents are under the gun all over the country. These two examples are just the early signs that the two major parties are coming apart from within.

As to the effects of the TEA Party movement, all that can be said at this point is that it loud and boisterous and in some quarters is having its intended disruptive effect. The jury is still

out on whether it can actually deliver votes. If anything, the Republican primary in Mississippi's 1<sup>st</sup> Congressional District should have been a grand debut for the TEA Party in Mississippi. Instead, primary election day turnout was less than 10%. Furthermore, State Senator Allen Nunnelee, who was labeled more often than not as the "establishment candidate," defeated both self-avowed TEA Party candidates without the need for a runoff. Now, however, he must share the "anti-Washington incumbent" platform with half a dozen TEA Party independents in their effort to unseat Democratic incumbent Congressman Travis Childers.

The other TEA Party related observation may be labeled as "TEA Party" mischief. The TEA Party has contributed to wins around the country of a group of decidedly unorthodox candidates. Take Nevada for example, where the political obituary had already been pronounced for Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid. Pundits of all persuasions have been referring to him in the past tense and Senators Dick Durbin and Chuck Shumer had all but commenced their campaigns to replace Reid as majority leader. But as fate would have it, the political gods smiled on Harry Reid. First, Nevada Republican mainstay Sue Lowden let fly the "chicken for medical services" comment and then reiterated it in an effort to back it up. Something else even better was in store for Reid. Sharron Angle, political gadfly of sorts and TEA Party candidate, became the Republican nominee in an upset. Perhaps strangest of her many campaign positions was her endorsement of sauna and massage therapy for convicted drug offenders in Nevada prisons – an act supported by the Church of Scientology. In short, Harry Reid is back in the game.

The same is true of Florida Governor Charlie Crist, who had to leave the Republican Party to run as an independent for that state's U.S. Senate seat and is now leading in the polls. These examples are only the tip of the iceberg. There is the case of Vaughn Ward in Idaho, who maintained in open debate that Puerto Rico was a separate free standing country, and who, more egregiously, eloquently plagiarized almost word for word then Illinois Senator Barack Obama's 2004 Democratic convention speech.

Democrats were not to be outdone in their early election antics. Arkansas Senator Blanche Lincoln was given up for dead in the face of a withering attack from the left by Arkansas Lieutenant Governor Bill Halter. Despite \$10 million in campaign money from big labor to her opponent Lincoln survived to face a tough contest in the fall.

There are many more stories that make you scratch your head, but it must be remembered that all of this acrimony and "fruit basket turnover" politics is taking place in the primaries – the inner family processes. It is clear that the TEA Party neither knows nor cares about conventional political wisdom. The TEA Party movement is not interested in government working well, but rather working much less. Its famous lack of organization mitigates against the establishment of policy positions or surfacing candidates to support those positions. Thus, the picture is one of the right attacking the center in the Republican Party, the left attacking the center in the Democratic Party and the TEA Party taking credit for the ensuing chaos. November 2010 may be the most interesting election yet.

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