



THE VIEW

Issue #38

November 14, 2007

FINDING OUR WAY THROUGH POST-ELECTION LANDSCAPE

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Election night has come and gone and the re-election of Haley Barbour has been entered into the record books. The story of the Republican triumph in seven out of the eight statewide offices has been chronicled from every angle. Very little of that ground will be re-plowed here. Instead, this space will be given to observations on the approach taken by the Barbour Republican party and to speculation regarding the coming four years.

Reference has often been made to Haley Barbour's task of infusing strength into the constitutionally weak office of Mississippi Governor. That Haley Barbour as Governor has been able to take the rules as he found them and use them to his advantage is evidence of his understanding of the extent of this task of becoming a strong Governor under the 1890 Mississippi Constitution. That document purposely created a weak governor out of fear that the then newly freed and enfranchised former slaves would have the voting power to place one of their own in office. In those days, prior to "one man, one vote" court interpretations, the legislature could always arrange itself to avoid an African-American majority, hence it was dealt the stronger hand by the 1890 Constitution.

Governor Barbour has used the massive database put together during his 2003 campaign to bypass the weaknesses created by the old constitution. Since that campaign, his staff has continued to build and refine that database, and by means of e-mail and the internet to contact constituents of legislators on issues of importance to the Governor. These constituents then contact their

respective legislators. In short, this is Mississippi's version of President Ronald Reagan's continued appeals to Congressional constituents. It is instructive to note that Haley Barbour has been present under both sets of circumstances.

Governor Barbour has used this same approach to shore up his executive branch. I use the term "his" because up until now most Governors could lay very little claim to his own executive branch. Statewide office holders are elected independently of the Governor, and in this new age of two-party politics they may conceivably be of the opposite party as the Governor. Governor Barbour was determined to produce an executive branch about which it could arguably be said that they were members of his team. The money and the manpower that many said was not necessary for him to defeat John Arthur Eaves, Jr. was used by Haley Barbour in an effort to create the tide that lifted all Republican votes. With the exception of the office of Attorney General, won by incumbent Democrat Jim Hood, Governor Barbour's plan was thoroughly successful. Barbour brought strategy, technology, money and a committed army of volunteers to bear in creating an almost completely Republican executive branch.

Does this mean that the Republicans are free to govern as they see fit, unfettered by the impediments of Democratic opposition? Can the Democrats be consigned to the "ash heaps of history" as some are claiming? The answer at this point is no or maybe not yet. The sun rose the morning after the election on a 28 to 24 Democratic majority in the Mississippi Senate. This was a net three seat swing in the Senate, which went into the election with a 27 to 25 Republican majority. In the Mississippi House of Representatives the 28 seat Democratic majority held. Thus, one finds a Democratic majority Senate that will be presided over by a Republican Lieutenant Governor. Some have mentioned rules changes to accommodate this scenario, but the more likely approach will be one of negotiated compromise that will enable Democrats on the margin to feel more comfortable in working with their Republican counterparts.

Much has been written about the battle for the all important post as Speaker of the House. I will avoid joining into the discussion regarding who appears to be the likely winner. Current Speaker Billy McCoy's role as the balancer of the debates between the Republicans and Democrats is at stake. Neither side will easily put aside the tug of war that decides the fate of this key position. It can be anticipated that there will be four years of intrigue characterized by Republican efforts to carry out the Governor's legislative agenda and Democratic Party efforts to distinguish themselves in the eyes of the people at

the grassroots. Remember, as has been pointed out here and elsewhere, near the end of these four years of give and take the respective houses will undertake legislative re-districting. The potential exists for four years of political hand-to-hand combat leading up to the most political of all legislative functions. Keep in mind that Governor Haley Barbour's power to persuade will be altered by the fact that he will not be on the ballot in 2011, and that there will likely be a number of Republicans as well as Democrats jockeying for position in the run for the open Governor's seat. Such is the nature of the continuing evolution of two-party politics in Mississippi.

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