



THE VIEW

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THE SEASON OF DÉJÀ VU

BY

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Any attempt to stay firmly planted in the middle of the political fence can be decidedly difficult. It seems that both of the fiercely partisan political parties are so determined to separate themselves from each other that they often come down with a case of amnesia. Is it an old fashion case of *déjà vu* or is it the significantly more exhilarating *schadenfreude* that the parties so eagerly anticipate?

Déjà vu means already seen and it is simply that feeling that one gets from time to time where one feels that he/she has already experienced an event that he/she is encountering. Schadenfreude, on the other hand, is a German word referring to the pleasures derived from the misfortunes of others. Unfortunately it is this latter sensation that both the Democrats and the Republicans seem to anxiously await.

When watching one of the seemingly endless episodes of political analysis on television on a recent evening I had an experience of *déjà vu* as I witnessed several moderate to liberal Democratic Party oriented analysts engage in an episode of *schadenfreude*. This particular panel was chortling gleefully about what they viewed as the dismal future prospects of the Republican Party headed by the likes of Sarah Palin of Alaska, Bobby Jindal of Louisiana and Eric Cantor of Virginia. It appeared that their mirth was fueled by their collective opinions that these three Republicans, long on youthful exuberance and short on experience, were clearly no match for the current Democratic Party juggernaut. Any observer of politics over the last several years could only wonder how these analysts could forget so quickly. One assumes that when you are able to come in from the cold world of the minority party you forget rather quickly your misery in the immediate past.

After all, it was only a few short years ago that a group of Democrats were held up to ridicule by a similar group of conservative Republican analysts. Democrats Howard Dean, Nancy Pelosi, and Harry Reid were the targets. In a similar setting as the above, the audacity of the Democratic Party making Howard Dean the party's national chairman was held up to great ridicule and faux praise for the abundance of opportunities created for further Republican successes. The howls grew louder when Dean announced a 50 state strategy for

the upcoming elections. Prior to the 2006 election the specter of then minority leader Nancy Pelosi as the first female Speaker of the U. S. House was rolled out repeatedly as the chief strategy of the Republicans to inoculate the electorate against any consideration of casting a Democratic vote. The image of a wispy and then somewhat obscure Nevada Democratic Senator Harry Reid as Senate Majority Leader was placed along side Pelosi for good measure. Just as Palin, Jindal, and Cantor were derided by the Democrats as being far out of the mainstream, Dean, Pelosi, and Reid, were viewed as prima facie evidence that the Democrats were lost in the political wilderness and Republicans believed that they deserved to be left there.

There are other instances of complete reversals by the respective parties based almost exclusively on their majority/minority status. For example, many may have heard the term “reconciliation” tossed around lately. This was a tool first put to extensive use in the U.S. Senate by the Republican Reagan administration that allowed budget packages to be approved as parts of an omnibus budget in such a way as to avoid the possibility of a filibuster. Instead, only a simple up or down vote would be required and not the normal 60 necessary for cloture. The Democrats spoke loud and long about the lack of fairness in such an approach, but President Reagan made very effective use of this in his efforts to lower deficits. Now comes President Obama’s health care reform legislation. The Democrats are touting the virtues of avoiding a filibuster possibility by using reconciliation as the approach to vote on the various health care packages. The Republicans, as one might imagine, have acquired the Democrat’s previous role of decrying the unfairness of this use of reconciliation.

One might also recall the big push for term limits in association with the Republican “Contract with America”. The “Contract” worked to the extent that the Republicans took control of both houses of Congress in the 1994 elections. How often were term limits mentioned by the newly empowered Republicans after that? The answer is very little since they got a view from the majority side and they liked what they saw enough to want to keep the reins of power for a while.

If the political pendulum continues to swing, as it always has, then the opportunities for déjà vu and schadenfreude will continue with it. It is not very risky at all to predict that Republicans Palin, Jindal, and Cantor do indeed have a bright future with the Republican Party and no doubt some day someone will recall the time when their initial forays into national politics were taken less seriously. They only have to take a glance at three Democratic counterparts who once enjoyed the same status. While they are at it they can be a little thankful that “Contract with America” author Newt Gingrich didn’t pursue the term limits provision in his plan because the ladder to the top of politics is a long one.



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