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A DECADE'S SWING OF THE POLITICAL PENDULUM

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The inevitable swing of the political pendulum has been alluded to here many times before. As we move out of those years with two zeroes in the middle ample evidence exists with which to prove the veracity of the notion that the pendulum of politics is rarely ever at rest. A look back at the first decade of the new millennium is almost breathtaking. What a decade for politics!

In the Presidential elections of the fall of 2000 the Democratic ticket of Albert Gore and Joe Lieberman received the most popular votes ever cast for a Presidential ticket up until that time. Yet that 500,000-plus margin was not enough to produce a victory in the all-important Electoral College. The electoral college and the (up until the 2000 election) record fundraising and political genius of Karl Rove, Ken Mehlman and the Bush/Cheney ticket saved the election for the Republicans.

Less than a year later the unspeakable terrorist tragedy of September 11, 2001 produced a “rally around the flag and the President” effect like none seen since the invasion of Pearl Harbor in December of 1941. The performance of President Bush in the constant spotlight of the War on Terrorism complimented the political effort undertaken by his campaign subordinates. With four years to build momentum and raise money and four years to tweak the ever more effective turnout machine the Bush/Cheney ticket, with Karl Rove at the controls, scarcely had to break a sweat in dispatching the Democratic ticket of John Kerry and John Edwards in the fall of 2004. Rove made good on his promise not to leave hundreds of thousands of Christian Evangelicals on the sidelines as he blamed himself for doing in the narrow 2000 race.

Immediately following the 2004 election Karl Rove vocalized his desire to solidify a base that could keep the GOP in power for multiple elections into the future. In the wake of the masterful handling of the Bush re-election campaign Rove got very little argument from the mass of political pundits occupying the airwaves today. In fact, many commentators on the

left as well as the right lamented the possibility of the permanent demise of the Democratic Party. The Democrats were not only portrayed as being in disarray, but as being buffoons, particularly after failed Democratic Primary candidate Howard Dean's "primal scream" in the aftermath of his loss in the Iowa Caucus. As if to underscore the reason for Republican mirth at the Democratic Party, the Democrats made that same Howard Dean the Chairman of the National Democratic Party. Dean immediately, of all things, rewarded Republican merry-making by publicly promising a no-holds-barred 50-state strategy to take back Congress from the Republicans.

It seems that everyone in a position to comment had forgotten the inevitable swing of that political pendulum. As the 2006 mid-term elections approached, the Republicans adopted a strategy of constantly reminding voters that a Democratic win would no doubt elevate House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi to the powerful position of House Speaker and Senate Minority leader Harry Reid to the Majority leader role. It was assumed that such events were too onerous to contemplate as voters went to the polls. Surely the specter of a win for Pelosi, Reid and Howard Dean would be sufficient to keep Congress safely in Republican hands. When the smoke cleared the morning after Election Day in 2006 it was indeed the Democrats in the majority by a slim two seats in the Senate and by 31 seats in the House. The pendulum continued its swing toward the Democratic side in 2008 with the election of the Democratic Presidential ticket of Barack Obama and Joe Biden over Republicans John McCain and Sarah Palin and the expansion of the Democratic majority in the House and Senate.

President Obama started fast as promised, even in the midst of the worst recession since the Great Depression of the 1930's. With the historic health care bill on the brink of passage, Obama is poised to claim an accomplishment that at least eight other presidents have failed to obtain. Thus, in the latter half of the decade the much maligned team of Howard Dean, Senator Harry Reid, Speaker Nancy Pelosi and the Obama/Biden ticket have scored wins that have perhaps pushed the political pendulum as far as they can to the Democratic side. But polls reveal significant potential trouble on the horizon.

The 2010 mid-term Congressional elections are growing closer by the day. Republicans are, even now, beginning their "we told you so" strategy with regard to health care reform, the budget deficit, and unemployment among other issues. If 2010 is coming can 2012 and the drawn out Presidential election season be far behind?

The decade began with the brilliant campaign minds of Karl Rove, Ken Mehlman, George W. Bush, Dick Cheney and others gaining the firmest of grips upon the reigns power for what appeared to be years in the future. That same decade ended with the Democrats firmly in control. But if you hear a "political expert" speak of the permanency of the current Democratic dominance you had best delete that person as unqualified to offer an opinion. A new decade will likely prove that this is so.



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