

Republicans win sweeping victory in US congressional election

Patrick Martin
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With many results still being counted or too close to call, the US congressional elections have produced a sweeping victory for the Republican Party, which regained control of the House of Representatives, gaining as many as 60 seats, and cut into the Democratic margin in the Senate.

Incumbent Senate Democrats Russell Feingold of Wisconsin and Blanche Lincoln of Arkansas were defeated, and Republicans took open Senate seats in Pennsylvania, North Dakota and Indiana. The Republican candidate was leading early Wednesday in the contest for Barack Obama's former Senate seat in Illinois.

In the House of Representatives, Republicans took at least four seats from Democrats in New York, two in New Hampshire, one in New Jersey, five in Pennsylvania, five in Ohio, two in Michigan, two in Indiana, three in Illinois, and two in Wisconsin, for a net gain of 26 seats in the industrial Northeast and Midwest. The Republicans also captured at least 15 Democratic-held seats in the South, including three each in Florida, Virginia and Tennessee, and two in Georgia and Mississippi.

Some longstanding congressional Democrats lost their seats, including House Budget Committee Chairman John Spratt in South Carolina, Appropriations subcommittee chairman Rick Boucher in the coal-mining region of Virginia, and Ike Skelton of Missouri, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee.

Republican candidates won the lion's share of the 39 state governorships, taking control of Democratic-held statehouses in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Iowa, Tennessee and New Mexico, while retaining Republican-held statehouses in Florida, Texas and Georgia. The Democrats retained New York and Massachusetts and

were leading in Illinois and California.

The electoral debacle is a devastating indictment of the Obama administration and the Democratic Party. Two years after an overwhelming victory in the presidential election, four years after the Republicans lost control of both the House and the Senate, the right-wing policies of the Democrats have created the conditions for a massive comeback by the Republicans.

The corporate-controlled media and the representatives of the two big business parties are already proclaiming that the outcome of the election demonstrates that the American people have shifted to the right, embracing the "free market" nostrums of the Republican Party and the right-wing Tea Party movement.

This contention is both stupid and ludicrous. According to these political "experts," in the midst of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, with unemployment near double-digit levels, millions facing foreclosure, and the poverty rate skyrocketing, the American people have decided that they favor eliminating unemployment compensation, cutting Social Security, closing public schools and slashing taxes for the rich.

Exit polls demonstrate that, far from a surge of popular support for the Republicans, the outcome was determined by a collapse in the vote among those who voted most heavily for Obama and the Democrats in 2006 and 2008. While young voters, those 18 to 29, comprised 18 percent of the vote in 2008, they made up only 10 percent of those who turned out at the polls on Tuesday. Those over 65 comprised 15 percent of the vote in 2008, but 24 percent of the vote in 2010.

The elderly shifted sharply against the Democratic Party

in large measure because of the reactionary character of the Obama health care “reform.” Far from being a progressive measure to extend health care to the uninsured, the Obama plan was primarily a cost-cutting measure that many of the elderly regarded, quite correctly, as a threat to Medicare benefits. While 48 percent of the elderly voted Republican in 2008, this figure jumped to 58 percent in 2010, one of the largest swings among any demographic group.

The collapse of support for the Democrats was the product of two years of betrayal of the illusions promoted in the 2008 campaign. The Democratic victories in 2006 and 2008 were fueled by popular hostility to the Bush administration’s wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Obama appealed to these sentiments in order to get elected, but once in office he continued the same militarist policies, even keeping on Pentagon chief Robert Gates and General David Petraeus, and pouring another 70,000 troops into Afghanistan.

From the beginning, Obama disavowed any effort to hold Bush officials responsible for the blatant illegality of the wars, for torture and other war crimes, or for the attacks on democratic rights undertaken as part of the “war on terror.” Obama intensified domestic spying, kept the Guantanamo Bay detention camp open, backed renewal of the Patriot Act, and declared that the commander-in-chief had the right to order assassination of American citizens.

On economic policy, Obama brought in figures identified with Wall Street like Timothy Geithner and Lawrence Summers to be his chief aides. He combined solicitude for the banks with scarcely concealed indifference to the plight of the working class. Obama moved heaven and earth to continue the bailout of Wall Street begun under Bush, while rejecting any job-creation measures by the federal government and describing unemployment as merely a “lagging economic indicator.”

In the month leading up to the midterm election, the White House seemed to go out of its way to alienate the youth and workers who turned out in 2008 to vote for Obama, who ran as the candidate for “change” and “hope.” The administration opposed a moratorium on foreclosures despite revelations about banks fabricating documentation, lifted the ban on drilling in the Gulf of Mexico imposed after the BP disaster, and promoted more

tax breaks for business in the name of “job-creation.”

Tuesday’s electoral rout will be bemoaned by Obama’s liberal apologists, from the editorial board of the *New York Times* to the *Nation*, who will join in blaming the American people for having “moved to the right.” In reality, the election has exposed the Democratic Party for what it is: an alliance of a part of the financial aristocracy with a privileged and complacent section of the upper middle class, a social category that includes the trade union bureaucracy.

Establishment liberalism is concerned about lifestyle issues and identity politics, but is utterly distant from the needs of the working people who are the vast majority of the population. It has moved so far to the right that the economic program of Obama and that of the incoming House Speaker John Boehner and the Republicans differs only on minor details.

Coming out of the election, Obama will renew the drive towards bipartisanship with which he began his administration, going out of his way from the moment of his election to rehabilitate a completely discredited Republican Party. All the “compromises” that he proposes will amount to acceptance of Republican demands for deeper reductions in social spending as well as further tax cuts and other concessions to corporate interests.

Republican leader Boehner declared that his new majority in the House of Representatives constitutes the “voice of the American people.” The truth is that the Republican victory sets the stage for a direct confrontation between the working class and the most reactionary sections of the American ruling elite.

In this conflict, the working class will find a way forward only through a resolute and implacable break with bankrupt liberalism and the Democratic Party and the building of a new and independent mass political movement based on a socialist program.



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