

It's right—not Right—to be Democrats.

**A DailyKos.com Diary Entry, a My.BarackObama.com Blog Entry,
An OpEdNews.com Article, and an E-Mail to Progressive Activists**

November 6, 2009

Given the mixed results in this off-off-year election—Republicans win governorships in traditionally Democratic New Jersey as well as in traditionally Republican Virginia; Democrats win House seats in a traditionally Republican New York district as well as in a traditionally Democratic California district—[there is more spin being spun by pundits on the Left and the Right](#) than by [Kobe Bryant goin' to the hoop](#). So what's the real deal?

The White House, unsurprisingly, says these races were [primarily decided on local issues](#)—others add, on candidates' personalities—they were not, as the GOP equally unsurprisingly says, referendums on the president. Indeed, Pres. Obama still enjoys popular support nationwide, [including in the states in question](#); but undeniably, we Democrats did suffer losses, primarily because [much of our base from 2008 stayed home and didn't vote](#).

Should we Dems follow the call of our more progressive leaders and continue to "move on" to the Left, reinvigorating our base (especially minorities, young adults, and dissatisfied independents)? Or should we heed the advice of more conservative members and move the party back to the Center, in order to cover our assets (Centrist seats that we need for majorities in the

House and Senate but that we only recently wrested from the Right)?

And since jobs and the economy were, rightly, the Number One issue—back in 2008 and now in 2009 and probably again in 2010—should we drop everything else (health care, global warming, green energy, etc.) and put all our efforts into shoring up the economy and generating jobs?

But if we spend even more on economic stimulus—better late than never, according to the likes of [Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Krugman](#) and [former-Secretary of Labor Robert Reich](#) (BTW both previous guests on our [Left Field radio show](#))—won't we invite the wrath of Blue Dogs and others barking at the record trillions we are indeed already deficit-spending?

Wouldn't we also add to the deficit by lowering taxes on small businesses, which generate most new jobs ([a suggestion of Robert Reich](#) and other economists on both the Left and the Right)? Or do we try stimulating the economy with big tax cuts for the rich? (Uh. Been there. Done that. Still paying for it. "Thanks," George Dubya.)

Or do we acknowledge that the only way to pay for past, present, and future government spending is by growing the economy, as Pres.

Clinton's policies did in the 1990s, [turning record deficits into record surpluses?](#)

And do we pay for new spending on job creation, for working class and middle class families, by raising new taxes ([or rescinding Bush tax cuts](#)), targeted primarily towards those at the top, who hold a record share of our national wealth—and still will, by the way, even after [any \(modest\) surcharges on the richest one percent \(or so\)](#) to keep health care reform deficit-neutral ([unlike any of the major initiatives of the previous president](#)). Since those at the top tend to save more than they spend (Good for them!), while [the rest of us tend to spend more than we save](#) (Good for merchants!), getting money more equitably distributed—as it has historically been, [except in recent years or in the years leading up to the Great Depression](#)—is the surest way to grow the economy, from the grassroots up (none of this "trickle down" nonsense)!

The answers, to me, are quite clear, even if they are not to the conventional wisdom (You know, that thing that said in 2007 [Obama couldn't win](#) the nomination, let alone the White House, and just a month ago said the public option was surely ["off the table"](#)). The failure of the Republicans in the 23rd House district in New York—in which Far Right kooks, like certain talk radio hosts and a certain former vice presidential candidate, endorsed a third party, Far Right candidate, forcing the more mainstream GOP candidate to drop out of the race and, egads, endorse the Democrat, handing to the Dems a seat that had been safely in the Republican column since before Grant was in his tomb—"proves" to the purveyors of the

conventional wisdom that [if a political party panders to its more radical elements, then it is doomed to lose elections, decided by moderates](#).

Uh, wasn't it also the conventional wisdom not too long ago that Geo. W. Bush, Karl Rove, and the rest of their ilk gained and held power for eight—long—years [precisely because of their uncompromising stands](#)—in stark contrast to the "triangulating" Clinton—and, thus, pulled the Center to the Right (which means [we have to pull the Center to the Left](#) just to get it to where the "Center" used to be)?

The problem with the conventional wisdom in such things—the crux of the eternal, infernal dilemma of those who sit on the political fence—is that it overlooks one pertinent point: Just because the Right is wrong, it doesn't mean the Left is, too. Heaven forbid, [we on the Left might know and promote policies that actually work](#). In the end, elections are typically decided by moderates, yes, but by their judging what actually works (Reality sucks, doesn't it, Dubya, Rush, Glenn, Bill, Sean, and Sarah?).

So what's our secret? It's no secret: [As I've written time and again](#)—and, significantly, [as candidate Obama declared](#) while riding into the White House atop a wave of popular discontent with the old and hope for the new—the *best* policies of governing are the *fairest* policies of governing. We'll all hang together or all hang separately. And since most of us are in the middle or working class, policies that benefit us the most will in the end benefit the nation as a whole the most. And please don't fall for the line that this is just self-serving ["class warfare," as](#)

[the Right likes to say](#)—as they have funneled a vast and increasing majority of U.S. wealth into a small and decreasing number of U.S. households—on the contrary, I am describing patriotism at its most pragmatic. Remember, if middle class and working families prosper, then so do the rich—because their wealth is ultimately invested in the companies [selling us goods and services](#) (that is, when we've got some money in our pockets or bank accounts to spend!).

And that lesson could not be made any clearer than by the current economic picture. Thanks to the intelligent and compassionate policies proposed by the president and enacted into law by the Congress—limited by virtually no Republican support ([despite the president's and congressional leadership's reaching out, some say too far, for bipartisanship](#))—our economy has not only been turned back from the brink of another great depression, [its worst performance in 70 years](#); but now, just half a year after its worst quarterly drop in over a quarter century, [it is actually growing again!](#)

The loss of jobs—the direct assault on working and middle class families by eight years of Republican presidential policies—is slowly grinding to a halt (probably bottoming out within the next few months), with the (first) [economic stimulus saving or creating a million or so jobs](#)—of teachers, nurses, engineers, construction workers, and other Americans willing and able to work ... and the jobs of those selling products and services to those folks etc. etc. ([the "multiplier effect"](#)). Like a great ship at sea, our great ship of state is slowly but surely turning in the right (not Right) direction.

More economic stimulus would, of course, make the economy turn around faster. But to create those new jobs, for the 10% or more of the workforce who are unemployed—[a number that will take years to whittle down to historically normal levels at the current rate of growth, without additional government stimulus](#)—are we willing to 1) increase the deficit, by not raising taxes while spending on new government-contracted jobs ([favored by 70% of the public](#)) and/or cutting taxes on small businesses that hire new workers, or 2) keep the deficit from increasing, by performing those other, stimulus actions but also increasing taxes, primarily on the rich ([favored by nearly 6 in 10 Americans to pay for health care, for instance](#)). Remember that the wealthy are not only those who can afford to pay more (those who are profiting most in our system) but are also those who aren't doing the lion's share of buying what businesses are selling—that's what working and middle class families do: When we earn more money from working at jobs, we buy more things from businesses and pay more taxes to government; that's how economies naturally grow. And not supporting policies that support those actions is [a sure way for politicians, of any party, to—rightly—lose elections](#).

By the way, a Gallup poll released this week shows that [significantly more Americans consider Pres. Obama's policies "liberal" than "moderate."](#) And of course, the conventional wisdom sees that as a liability, not an asset—particularly since Gallup polling also shows that over the last year [the electorate, particularly independents, have become more conservative, more Republican or Republican-leaning](#) (even

though those same polls show more Americans self-identify as Democrat or -leaning and [other Gallup polls shows that far more states are "solidly" or "leaning" Democratic than Republican](#)).

Regardless of the polls—Leaders can't lead us into the future if they keep on looking back at the past—voters will be, rightly, satisfied if and only if "liberal" or any other policies actually work—that is, if they get people back to work and otherwise address their families' real, everyday needs and concerns ([like often-bankrupting health care expenses and life-and-death medical outcomes](#)). Fail to deliver "the change we need" and you'll fail to deliver the votes you need—regardless of whether the district or state has been traditionally Red or Blue. Violet is the color of change, in either direction ("[Change](#)"—[a double-edged sword—was the message of discontent, in both Election 2008 and Election 2009](#)).

But regardless of all the notoriously unstable labels—and all the other political folderol that usually matters more in the Beltway than out on Main Street—[the best way for Democrats to govern the country is to just be Democrats](#). Why? Because our policies—from economic stimulus and health care reform to global warming and green jobs—work, while those of the other side—which we've had a belly-full for eight, long years—don't. And why is that? Because our policies are the fairest—investing the most in everyday people and their needs—and, thus, the wisest ([70% of the Gross Domestic Product is "personal consumption expenditures," spending by households, as has](#)

[been crippled in this recession](#) and is just beginning to come back, probably making this Christmas shopping season better, for most, than last, although not yet as good as the holiday season before that).

Oh, and as for any Democratic legislators heeding any calls to scale back, delay, or even kill health care reform, in order to be more "moderate" (allegedly, more electable), remember what happened to Democratic Centrists who helped kill Pres. Clinton's first-year signature initiative, of health care reform (when the health care crisis wasn't even as dire as it is today): It was the "moderates" who were thrown out in greater numbers in the next election than the "liberals." Even if the defeat of Clinton's health care initiative was not a major factor in those 1994 congressional losses—considered by many a simply overdue, historic realignment—[the Right today is framing any delay or defeat of Obama's health care reform as a victory for them](#) (as if retaining a system that kills tens of thousands and bankrupts a million Americans—Democrats, Republicans, and independents alike—year after year, could in good conscience be considered a "victory," for anyone but those making millions of dollars from the status quo).

Fortunately, [the demographics and political scene today pretty much rule out a sea change like in 1994](#); but that should only encourage, not discourage, moderate Democrats to be true to the roots of our quite respectable party—which gave us Medicare and Social Security and pulled us out of the Great Depression and now this great recession as well. Not a bad track record—

especially considering the GOP was vehemently opposed to every one of our efforts in each of those achievements (Now, those were true victories).

We mustn't forget that independents are independents because they don't have much respect for either party to begin with. To be quite blunt, their general lack of respect for big government leads them to not be Democrats; their general lack of respect for big business leads them to not be Republicans. Who do independents respect? Mostly, if anybody, the military (and cowboys). In other words, just like in the military, you have to *earn* the respect of independents. And you don't do that by being "lily livered" (liberal comes all-too-easily, alliterally, after that) and not getting the job done.

At this critical time in our nation's history—when the economy was on the brink, when health care expenses are bankrupting families and businesses and government, and when we either develop new green jobs or get overtaken by the environment or our international competitors—a big majority of Americans elected Democrats to get the hard work of governance done, and done right. [And that doesn't mean Right](#). It takes guts to stand up and fight for what you believe in—and if you're a more conservative Democrat, to compromise with those you share more in common with, in the Democratic, not Republican, Party (at its best, standing up for "the little guys"). But that's what the voters, of all stripes, expect. And they, we, deserve—and can afford—no less.

Fortunately, for our party and our nation, [most Americans still have confidence in Pres. Obama's handling of the economy and health care \(the elements of which—including the public option—are supported more than the entire, "confusing" package\)](#); and although opinions of Democrats in Congress are low (during this time of continuing distress in the nation), opinions of Republicans in Congress are even lower (and [lower than ever](#)).

Every politician (well, just about every one) ends his or her speech with "God bless America!" I second that motion, but also add this: God helps those who help themselves. If we really, truly believe in the fair and wise policies we talk so much about, then by God, let's act upon them! And in the very best way that we can—not some second-rate, watered-down version (For example, [the stronger the public option is, the better it will control health care costs](#)). Who knows, we might actually be right—to not be Right. Our policies—on the economy and health care and green jobs and so on—might actually work. And people might actually, rightly re-elect us.

Heaven forbid!