

PERSPECTIVE

Are Republicans "Due"?

By THOMAS SOWELL Posted 01/15/2010 04:52 PM ET



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High Stakes Even For Non-Republicans

When a baseball player has come to bat after failing to get a hit 20 times in a row, some fans say he is "due" for a hit. But statisticians say he is no more likely to get a hit in this at bat than at any other time. In other words, there is no such thing as being "due."

After the Republicans went from being the dominant party, at both the state and national levels, just a few years ago, and got clobbered at the polls by the Democrats two elections in a row, some people think the Republicans are "due" to make a comeback in this fall's elections.

Maybe it will happen. The polls show that the voting public is getting more and more fed up with the Obama administration and with both houses of Congress that are dominated by Democrats. But, when Election Day comes, nobody can vote for polls. It still takes a candidate to beat a candidate — and the question is whether the Republicans come up with the kinds of candidates that can win.

Those of us who are not Republicans nevertheless have a huge stake in this fall's elections, because the current administration in Washington is not merely deficient but dangerous, both at home and abroad.

In just one year in power, the Obama administration has not merely tripled the deficit and circumvented the Constitution with their "czars" who rule by decree, but have moved to dictate the medical treatment of all Americans — which is to say, they are moving toward getting the power of life and death, to add to all the other powers they have seized.

Increasing numbers of Americans are saying that they are having trouble recognizing the country in which they were born and grew up. They will have even more trouble recognizing America if the Washington juggernaut does not lose a substantial part of its power in this year's election.

The dangers are not only in domestic policy but even more so in the Obama administration's foreign policy. Their diddling around while fanatical leaders of a terrorist-sponsoring nation like Iran are moving toward producing nuclear bombs can take us and the world to a point of no return.

No nation on earth will let three of its cities be annihilated by nuclear bombs without surrendering. The fact that the United States has never surrendered may make it difficult for Americans even to imagine that it could happen, much less what a horror it would be to live under hate-filled fanatics like the current Iranian leaders. But Japan had likewise never surrendered in its entire history until it was hit with two nuclear bombs.

Unlike us, Iranian leaders — going back to the Ayatollah Khomeini — have said plainly that they are willing to see their country destroyed as the price of destroying the enemies of Islam — which, in their view of the world, includes the United States.

Perhaps serious sanctions might have been enough to stop the Iranian nuclear program a few years ago, by crippling their economy. But nobody in the West had the stomach for that.

The longer we wait, the higher the price goes — the price of either action or inaction.

Just three years ago, the people currently at the top in Washington — including President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton — were ready to turn tail and run in Iraq.

Former Ambassador John Bolton has written a book titled "Surrender is Not an Option." But that is an option for the kind of people at the top in the Obama administration.

It would take a leader with extraordinary courage, pride in America and dedication to the values, traditions and the people of America, to stand up to enemies who could annihilate Los Angeles, Chicago and New York with nuclear weapons.

Does this sound anything like the president who has gone around the world apologizing for this country and literally bowing to foreign leaders?

The stakes in this fall's elections go far beyond the fate of either the Republican Party or the Democratic Party. The fate of America is on the line. The Republicans need to understand that — and to understand that they are not simply "due" because of polls.

They have a job to do, and what will happen to our children and grandchildren will depend on how well they do it.

Handicapped By Inarticulateness

Some people say that there is no real difference between Republicans and Democrats. Whether that is said because of being too lazy to examine the differences or because it makes some people feel exalted to say, in effect, "a plague on both your houses," it is a dangerous self-indulgence.

When Republicans were in power, they acted too much like Democrats, with big spending and earmarks, lending weight to the notion that there is no real difference. Among the differences between the parties is that Democrats are more articulate.

Admittedly, the Democrats have an easier case to make. It takes no great amount of thought, nor much in the way of persuasive powers, to sell the idea of government handing out benefits hither and yon. It is only when you stop and think about the consequences, for this generation and generations to come, that some grim questions arise.

But if Republicans don't raise those awkward questions, and don't take the trouble to explain what is wrong with government playing Santa Claus, then the Democrats can soar on a cloud of euphoria. Sometimes it doesn't matter that you have a better product, if your competitors have better salesmen.

Republicans lag not only in the articulation department, they also lag in seeing the long-run importance of the federal bureaucracy. When the Democrats load the federal bureaucracy with liberals, those liberals stay on during Republican administrations and in many cases can shape the perceptions that reach the media and the public, by the way they present data, hire consultants and make grants.

The Bureau of the Census is a classic example. The tendentious way that data and pie charts are presented provides a steady stream of material for a political and media drumbeat about "disparities" that call for government intervention.

Data on income differences, for example, are presented in a way that suggests that the different income brackets represent enduring classes of people over time, when in fact other studies show that the vast majority of people in the lowest income brackets as of a given time rise out of those brackets over time. More people from the bottom fifth end up in the top fifth than remain at the bottom.

Household income data are presented in ways which suggest that there is very little real improvement in the American people's standard of living over time, and innumerable editorials and television commentaries have elaborated that theme. But per capita income data show far more improvement over time. The difference is that households have been getting smaller but one person always means one person.

Just by deciding what kind of data to present in what way, the Census Bureau has become, in effect, an adjunct of the liberal establishment, even when conservative Republicans are in control of the federal government. This is not necessarily deliberate political sabotage, just liberals being liberals.

Robert Rector of the Heritage Foundation has for years repeatedly exposed the fallacies of the inferences drawn from Census data. Yet when Republicans controlled the federal government — as they did for 12

consecutive years, beginning in 1981 -- did they try to appoint someone like Robert Rector to a position where they could put an end to tendentious statistics that promote misconceptions with political implications? Not at all.

Too many Republicans don't even know their own party's history. One painful consequence is that too many Republicans act as if they have to apologize for their party's civil rights record — which is in fact better than that of the Democrats.

A higher percentage of Republicans than Democrats voted for the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. It was Republicans whose "Philadelphia Plan" in the 1970s sought to break the construction unions' racial barriers that kept blacks out of skilled trades.

Just as boxers have to do training in the gym and roadwork before they are ready for a boxing match, Republicans need to do a lot of homework before they are ready for their next match against the Democrats.

Connecting The Dots For Black Voters

If the Republicans think that they are simply "due" to start winning elections, perhaps buoyed by the recent polls showing the public turning against Democrats in general and the Obama administration in particular, then they may neglect to do the things they need to do if they are to turn their hopes into realities.

One of the things that is long overdue is some Republican re-thinking — or perhaps thinking for the first time — about the approach that they have been using, with consistently disastrous results, for trying to get the black vote.

Within living memory, it was considered nothing remarkable when Republicans received 30% or 40% of the black vote. Today a Republican presidential candidate is lucky if his share of the black vote is not in single digits.

The black vote was once consistently Republican, from the time of Abraham Lincoln to Herbert Hoover. Even after Franklin D. Roosevelt won over the black vote to the Democrats, it was not considered remarkable when Eisenhower got a higher share of the black vote than any Republican president in recent times has.

It may be years before Republicans can again get a majority of the black vote. But Republicans don't need to get a majority of the black vote. If they get 20% of the black vote, the Democrats are in trouble — and if they get 30%, the Democrats have had it in the general election.

In some close congressional elections, if the Republicans increase their share of the black vote by even modest amounts, that can be the difference between victory and defeat.

There is no point today in Republicans continuing to try to win over the average black voter by acting like imitation Democrats. Those who like what the Democrats are doing are going to vote for real Democrats.

But not all black voters are the same, any more than all white voters are the same. Those black voters that Republicans have any realistic chance of winning over are people who share similar values and concerns.

They want their children to get a decent education, which they are unlikely to get so long as public schools are a monopoly run for the benefit of the teachers' unions, instead of for the education of the children. Democrats are totally in hock to the teachers' unions, which means that Republicans have a golden opportunity to go after the votes of black parents by connecting the dots and exposing one of the key reasons for bad education in inner cities and the bad consequences that follow.

But when have you ever heard a Republican candidate get up and hammer the teachers' unions for blocking every attempt to give parents — black or white — the choice of where to send their children?

The teachers' unions are going to be against the Republicans, whether Republicans hammer them or keep timidly quiet. Why not talk straight to black voters about the dire consequences of the public school monopoly that the teachers' unions and the Democrats protect at all cost, even though many private schools — notably the KIPP schools in various states — have achieved remarkable success with low-income and minority youngsters?

Blacks have been lied to so much that straight talk can gain their respect, even if they don't agree with everything you say. Republicans need all the credibility they can get. When they try to be imitation Democrats, all they do is forfeit credibility.

Most blacks don't want judges turning criminals loose in their communities to plague them and their children. These are almost invariably liberal judges, appointed mostly by Democrats.

Many of the key constituencies of the Democratic Party — the teachers' unions, the trial lawyers, and the environmentalists, for example — have agendas whose net effect is to inflict damage on blacks. Urban Renewal destroys mostly minority neighborhoods and environmentalist restrictions on building homes make housing prices skyrocket, forcing blacks out of many communities. The number of blacks in San Francisco has been cut in half since 1970.

But, unless Republicans connect the dots and lay out the facts in plain English, these facts will be like the tree that fell in an empty forest without being heard.

Fallacies Of A 'Big Tent' Approach

During this election year, and in the presidential election year of 2012, Republicans will not only do battle with the Democrats but with each other. How they handle both battles may have more to do with the outcomes on election days than do the polls showing public disenchantment with the Democrats.

A long-standing battle within the Republican Party, going back at least as far as the 1940s, is between those who want the party to clearly differentiate itself from the Democrats and those who seek a broader appeal by catering to a wider spectrum of social and ideological groups.

The "smart money" advocates a "big tent" and deplores those who want a clearer adherence to the kinds of ideas espoused by Ronald Reagan. What the "smart money" fails to explain is how Reagan won two landslide presidential elections in a row.

He certainly didn't do it by trying to act like Democrats. That's how the Republicans later turned off their own supporters, without gaining enough other voters to keep from being wiped out by the Democrats in two consecutive elections.

There is no way that Ronald Reagan could have won two landslide elections in a row if the only votes he got came from hard-core conservatives. He obviously got the votes of other people who liked what he said when he was running for the presidency and liked what he had done when he was up for re-election.

The big fear today is that the Republicans might offend Hispanics by supporting some controversial policies, such as border control or ending bilingual education. This is a very strong fear, now that Hispanics are the largest minority in the country.

But there is no way to follow any consistent principle without offending some members of virtually every racial, ethnic, regional or economic group. Yet, even on a very controversial issue like abortion, the same voters have at various times elected candidates who are "pro-life" and candidates who are "pro-choice," even if candidates who tried to waffle on the issue may not have done well.

Most voters have enough common sense to know that they are not likely to find candidates with whom they agree 100% on every issue. One of Ronald Reagan's great strengths was his ability to explain his position, so that even people who did not agree with everything he said could respect his principles — which required that they first knew what his principles were.

When you try to waffle and be all things to all people, you can end up being nothing to anybody. That is where the "smart money" crowd has gotten the Republicans in recent years.

All Hispanics are not the same. A surprisingly large share of Hispanic voters are opposed to so-called "bilingual education," and not all Hispanics are advocates of open borders. If Republicans can just make inroads into the Hispanic vote, by appealing to those with similar values, that can be the difference between victory and defeat.

Of course particular groups — racial, regional or whatever — are especially interested in how a candidate's principles will affect them. Here is where the Republicans have fallen down completely in recent years, even though they have a strong hand to play, even with minorities, if they would only play that hand, instead of trying to pander in transparent ways that only reduce their credibility.

Minorities have been the biggest losers from numerous liberal policies promoted by the Democrats — whether in maintaining the monopoly of failing public schools for the sake of the teachers' unions, restricting the building of housing for the sake of the environmentalists, turning criminals loose in minority communities for the sake of the American Civil Liberties Union and like-minded "progressives" or artificially expanding unemployment among minority young people with minimum wage laws.

All that needs to be explained — and explaining is what Republicans have been neglecting for years, except for Ronald Reagan, who knew that you can have your big tent and your principles at the same time, but only if you took the trouble to make your case to the public in plain English.

Republicans have the time to do some real homework on issues and on explaining issues. Whether they will use that time for that purpose is the big question for them — and for the country.