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## THEY SAID IT

"We've reached the place I told thee to expect,  
Where thou shouldst see the miserable race,  
Those who have lost the good of intellect." . . .

Here sighing, and here crying, and loud railing  
Smote on the starless air, with lamentation,  
So that at first I wept to hear such wailing.

Tongues mixed and mingled, horrible execration,  
Shrill Shrieks, Hoarse groans, fierce yells and hideous blether  
And clapping of hands thereto, without cessation

Made tumult through the timeless night, that hither  
And thither drives in dizzying circles sped,  
As whirlwind whips the spinning sands together.

--*The Divine Comedy, Inferno*, Dante.

## IF DEMOCRATS CONTROL THE HOUSE.

As we note in the accompanying article, we are modestly confident that the GOP will retain control of both Houses of Congress in the upcoming elections. But we are naturally concerned that we may be wrong, especially as regards control of the House, where the margin of error is quite slim. It seems that everyone has a different take on the consequences of such a victory. So we thought we would weigh in on this subject this week. Our conclusion is somewhat pessimistic, so we will begin with the good news.

On the plus side, we would point out that at least some of the hysteria that is evident among Republicans over the prospect of losing the House is not so much related to the dire consequences that such an event would wreak upon the country as it is to the trauma that it would do to the individual lives of many people who populate the ranks of the GOP establishment in Washington. Not only would thousands of Republican staffers lose their jobs on Capitol Hill, but hundreds if not thousands of highly paid, big shot Republican lobbyists in the law firms all over town would find their prestige and their importance diminished significantly in keeping with the reduced prestige and importance of the GOP members of the House, who are to them what deer are to ticks.

And then, of course, every senior member of the Bush administration would have to begin to gear up for seemingly endless rounds of antagonistic and intense scrutiny by House committees into every aspect of the administration's actions in the preceding six years, possibly culminating in an impeachment threat against President Bush.

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Needless to say, this would not be fun for Republicans. And we sincerely hope that it does not happen. But observers of this fight should understand that the forecasts of doom that come from many Washington Republicans might be slightly colored by concern for their own fate and that of their friends. Our view is that when individuals sign up as soldiers in the political wars, they subject their future prosperity and happiness to the vicissitudes of public opinion and to the competency of the leaders of the party with which they affiliate, no less so than those who sign up for the military tacitly acknowledge that they may be shot at someday.

As for the rest of us, an occasional purging of the ranks of the party we support can be disconcerting, but less so if, as in the present case, it is unlikely to result in a permanent loss of power, and is likely to serve as a lesson to those in charge of the party that they need to clean up their act. Such rifts in politics serve the same usefulness that Georg Hegel once attributed to war, noting that it “preserves the ethical health of peoples” in the same way that the “blowing of winds preserve the sea from the foulness which would be the result of a prolonged calm.”

In the same vein, we are also probably not as concerned as some Republicans are about the damage to the economy and to the nation that would be directly caused by the changes in committee leadership that would take place if the Democrats took control of the House. Several weeks ago the *Wall Street Journal* ran a lengthy editorial on this subject that was designed to strike fear into the hearts of conservatives everywhere. The *bêtes noires* of this piece were, of course, the ranking minority members of the various House committees, who would become chairmen if their party triumphed in November. These include Representatives John Conyers (Judiciary), John Dingell (Energy and Commerce), David Obey (Appropriations), George Miller (Education and Labor), Barney Frank (Financial Services), Charlie Rangel (Ways and Means), and Henry Waxman (Government Reform).

Clearly, as the *Journal* noted, these men are *uberliberals*. And if they had their way, they would, collectively, do damage to both the social fabric and the economic

health of the nation. But they won't have their way, even if they become the chairmen of powerful House committees. Their ideas are older and more tired than they are, which in some cases is saying a great deal. Most are relics from a very different political age. Their political careers reached their zenith when civil rights was a major national concern, when organized labor was a powerful national force, when Republicans were against big government, when liberals could afford to be critical of big business, when Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac were thought to be honest enterprises, when tax increases were considered to be a reasonable cure for deficits, when “we were all Keynesians,” and when liberals didn't feel the need to call themselves “progressives.”

Without question, these men would do some harm if the House fell to the Democrats, but it would be limited and reversible. In the long run, their principal accomplishment would be to help drive their party further into minority status. In fact, if the Republicans could hand pick a group of Democratic politicians to strut and fret upon the political stage in the two years prior to the next presidential election, they would be hard pressed to find a bunch that would project a less appealing image to middle-of-the-road, “swing voters” than this crowd of political hacks and has-beens. All are popular back home, but the places that each calls “back home” are among the most liberal congressional districts in the nation, far out of touch with the American mainstream.

Certainly, Judiciary Chairman John Conyers, the 79-year-old race baiter from Detroit is unhinged enough to spearhead a gratuitous impeachment campaign against a president while the country is at war. But he doesn't have the political clout, the personal charm, or the evidence necessary to bring it too fruition.

Certainly, Ways and Means Committee Chairman Charlie Rangel, the charming 76-year-old race baiter from Harlem, who recently described Fidel Castro as a “proud brilliant man,” would be a pain in the neck on a wide variety of tax and trade bills. But the all-important Bush tax cuts have been extended through 2010, and our advice is to worry about a further extension when the time comes.

Certainly, Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman John Dingell, the 80-year-old Roosevelt liberal who thinks the Canadian health care system should be the model for the United States and that it would be wrong for him to “take sides” against Hezbollah, would use his clout to get GM and Ford a little government help and to pile new and expensive regulations on other industries. But his days as the House’s most feared bully are long gone, along with his usefulness as a Democratic Party icon.

Certainly, Appropriations Chairman David Obey, the budget-busting, Keynesian liberal from Wisconsin would push for huge new, domestic, federal spending measures and greater spending on the existing ones. But one wonders how this would fit in with the Democratic Party’s newfound devotion to “fiscal responsibility,” or how it would distinguish the Democrats from most modern-day Republicans, most of whom have never seen a spending measure they didn’t like.

We could go on, but why bother? The message is that while responsible Americans should indeed be concerned about having these men in charge of the powerful House committees, they need not panic. The system is replete with checks and balances, including the presidential veto and the ultimate arbiter in the form of the great majority of the American public, who we think are unlikely to look kindly on the agendas that these men would bring to their chairmanships.

This does not mean, however, that all would be well if the Democrats took control of the House. Our principal fear is that such a victory could – we repeat, *could* – kick off a period of domestic unrest that would recall the darkest days of the anti-Vietnam War protests, casting doubt on the outcome of the war in Iraq and the fight against domestic terrorism, and spreading a blanket of political uncertainty across the nation that would be devastating to both the economy and the financial markets.

This wouldn’t have to happen. But it *could*. You see, the Democratic Party is in the midst of a monumental ideological battle between an increasingly strong, extremely radical left wing, “net-roots” movement and

a small and weak, “moderate” contingent, which is naturally concerned that the radical left is destroying the Party’s chances of ever again regaining the majority.

Until recently, the “netroots” crowd had made a lot of noise, but had few political victories to show for its efforts. The recent defeat of Joe Lieberman in the Democratic primary changed all of that. Byron York explained the dynamic that is at work here in a recent article in *National Review* entitled “The Death of the Moderate Democrat.” To wit:

The Internet organizing group MoveOn.org, a prime mover in the new netroots politics, was founded in 1998 to attack lawmakers who supported the Clinton impeachment. The biggest lefty blog, DailyKos, was founded in 2002. These websites have been agitating for years, but up until now they were associated mostly with failure. In 2000, when MoveOn promised to punish the House impeachment managers at the polls, it failed to oust even a single one. When DailyKos founder Markos Moulitsas threw his support behind several “progressive” candidates in House races around the country, nearly all of them lost. For a long time, “netroots candidate” was a synonym for “loser.”

No longer. In August, the netroots scored their biggest success so far, playing a key role in Ned Lamont’s defeat of Sen. Joseph Lieberman . . . While the netroots still haven’t defeated a Republican, Lamont’s victory has been enough to embolden the angry Left to threaten reprisals against Democrats who don’t advocate an immediate pullout of U.S. troops from Iraq. “Friends,” wrote the left-wing agitprop filmmaker Michael Moore in an open letter to Democrats, “Let the resounding defeat of Senator Joe Lieberman send a cold shiver down the spine of every Democrat who supported the invasion of Iraq and who continues to support, in any way, this senseless, immoral, unwinnable war.” To any lawmaker who does not support “an immediate end to this war,” Moore wrote,

“allow me to inform you that your days in elective office are now numbered. . . . If you don’t believe us, give Joe a call.”

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Lamont’s primary victory, amplified by threats like Moore’s, struck Democrats around the country like a bolt of lightning. “It’s going to drive the Democratic presidential primaries to the left on national security and the Iraq War,” says Marshall Wittmann of the centrist Democratic Leadership Council, “and it’s going to make it difficult for anyone to stand by their decision to vote to authorize the war.” The rise of netroots anger, Wittmann adds, will “send the message that centrist hawks are unwelcome in the Democratic party,” which could affect the party for years to come.

However, a failure by the Democrats to win control of either the House or the Senate, would reinvigorate the moderates, who would cite Democratic guru James Carville’s pre-election contention that if the Democrats “can’t win in this environment, we have to question the whole premise of the party.” And the battle would begin anew between the Soros-moveon.org-Daily Kos-Sheehan-Moore-Pelosi wing of the party and the moderates, probably led by Illinois Congressman Rahm Emanuel. No doubt, the “moderates” would lose. But the inter-party warfare would take some of the steam out of the effectiveness of the angry left’s attacks on Bush in the closing two years of his presidency.

If, on the other hand, the Democrats win control of the House, this will be viewed by virtually everyone, politician and pundit alike, as a vindication of the antiwar left’s contention that the key to victory over the Republicans is to pound away at President Bush and the war in Iraq. What’s left of the moderate wing of the Party will fade away, millions of dollars will pour into the web-based, antiwar, fundraising organizations, Democratic contenders for the presidential nomination will follow the money, and the newly enfranchised House Democrats, led by their

ultra leftwing Chairmen, will gleefully join the fray by moving ahead with noisy impeachment proceedings.

Like those whom Dante described as “The Furies,” “The Wrathful,” “The Accursed,” and the “miserable race” who have “lost the good of intellect” and whose “fears have changed to desires,” Democratic presidential contenders will compete for the support of the left-wing blogger community and their Daddy Warbucks, George Soros, with louder and louder proclamations of their hatred for George Bush, for the war in Iraq, and for “what America has become under the Republicans.”

And a dubious, battle will be joined on the political plains of America at a time when American interests worldwide are under attack by large and well funded terrorist organizations and American troops are engaged in a war in which one of the enemy’s principal tactics, publicly stated by bin Laden himself, is to “create a wedge between the American people and their government.”

In his latest book, *The Age of Fallibility*,” Soros maintains that “the main obstacle to a stable and just world order is the United States.” In an earlier book, he pledged to “puncture the bubble of American supremacy.” Even with all his money, we have no doubt that he lacks the clout to carry out his pledge. But if the United States suffers a serious military reversal in Iraq or Afghanistan during the next two years, or if terrorists succeed in another attack like September 11 or worse, or if President Bush is compelled to act in response to the threat from Iran or North Korea, our bet would be that the Democratic Party in the hands of George Soros’ leftists lackeys would take advantage of the circumstances and could do enormous damage to the nation’s interests. This is our concern.

## MIDTERMS '06.

It is generally understood among serious political prognosticators that the decisive dynamics of American elections do not fully emerge until after Labor Day, just two months before voters pull the levers. Of course, the two years of positioning, posturing, recruiting, and raising money are vitally important. But the shape of the races, the number of votes cast, and the final winners cannot be comfortably forecast until well into the final “60-day sprint.”

The implications of this basic rule of thumb are numerous and significant. For starters, one may dismiss as hackery all predictions thus far made that promise any level of certainty. Most are a mixture of irrelevant historical artifacts, hunches, and braggadocio.

Second, and more to the point, the importance of the final two months of the campaign season suggests that the American public will be inundated over next eight weeks with stories, commentaries, and analyses about the election, the likely results, and the implications of those results. As such, those who are already sick to death of the stories about how Nancy Pelosi should begin measuring the Speaker's office for new drapes should think long and hard about an extended vacation, since things are only going to get worse – much worse – between now and November 8.

Sadly, the biggest problem with this pending upsurge in election-oriented analysis is that most of it will be just plain awful. The aforementioned irrelevant historical artifacts will be coupled with equally irrelevant and statistically immaterial figures and trends, ambiguous and potentially misleading polls, and a healthy dose of wishful thinking to produce analyses and forecasts that are useless and confusing at best. The same tired analysts who were dead wrong about the 2002 and 2004 elections will produce the same tired analysis leading up to this election.

Of course, the irony here is that despite the triteness and superficiality of the efforts likely to be produced by most pundits, there is a reasonable chance that this time they might be right, not because they've somehow managed to crack the code or bothered to

learn anything about the American electorate, mind you, but purely by chance. If they are right, it will be for all the wrong reasons. Stopped clocks and all that.

What follows is a list of “facts,” figures, projections, justifications, and explanations about the midterm election that are almost certain to be among the most often offered and among the least helpful in evaluating the potential electoral outcomes. Any projection, prediction, or analysis that relies heavily on any of the following variables should be taken with the proverbial grain of salt, if not dismissed entirely.

**#1. Voters express a preference for Democrats by several (5, 10, 15) points over Republicans, and therefore the Democrats will outperform in the election.** This is the standard, tried-and-true generic ballot question that pollsters, analysts, and other media types will cite more than any other figure over the next couple months and, indeed, in any election season. And it is also one of the most useless pieces of information that anyone trying to anticipate election outcomes can possess.

First, the generic ballot question has proven, over time, to be skewed rather heavily against Republicans. For whatever reason, the question consistently underestimates the GOP's share of the two-party Congressional vote, generally by 5-10 percentage points.

In short, the generic ballot question is a blunt club used to make delicate predictions. And because it's so blunt, it has a poor track record with regard to predicting the post-election makeup of Congress. As the University of Wisconsin political scientist Charles Franklin recently put it, “If a Democratic lead in the Generic Ballot were sufficient for control of the House, the Democrats would have won the House in 5 of the last 6 Congressional elections, including 1994!”

The second major problem with the measure is that even when the skew is addressed, it is largely useless as a predictive tool. Jay Cost, a polling expert, erstwhile blogger, sometimes columnist, and University of Chicago PhD candidate, recently discussed the generic ballots predictive limitations thusly (emphasis in original):

As the Democratic lead in the generic ballot increases, two things happen. First, the size of the skew increases. When the Democrats have a small lead - the generic ballot overestimates the Democrats' share by an average of 9%. When they have a big lead - it overestimates their share by an average of 14%. Second, the variability of the skew increases. When the Democrats have a small lead, the skew varies between 0% and 11%. When they have a big lead, it varies between 2% and 24%. Both of these are violations of assumptions needed to use the generic ballot as a predictive tool. *Thus, we cannot use it as one.*

Cost concludes that generic ballot polls taken in the summer, before the campaigns have begun in earnest and before non-voters can reliably be differentiated from likely voters (which includes all of the polls up to this point) are entirely unreliable in developing reasonable expectations about eventual vote totals. Actually, "entirely unreliable" is understating it a bit. Cost actually wrote: "the generic ballot [is] an invalid measure. Not just skewed. Not just pro-Democratic. Not just in need of a slight corrective. But invalid. As in – don't-trust-it-because-it-will-shoot-you-and-your-dog-and-leave-you-both-for-dead invalid."

**#2 Large majorities of voters believe the nation is on the "wrong track," which thereby suggests that they will vote for "change," meaning that incumbents, especially incumbents of the party in power, stand to lose in significant numbers.** This proposition makes perfect sense in theory, but only in theory. In the real world, the statistical significance of the right track/wrong track measure is extremely limited. Voters may express generic unhappiness to pollsters, but the conclusion that this unhappiness will translate directly into votes either against the party in power or against the president's party is almost entirely unjustified.

Late last week, our good friend Ed Yardeni questioned the presumption (held, not incidentally, by a significant number of economists) that a flattening or inverted yield curve will necessarily presage "a full-blown profits recession." Yardeni's problem with this

presumption is that its foundations are, statistically speaking, rather weak. Specifically, he wrote, "Actually, there have been only four such episodes [of yield curve inversion] since 1970. Clearly those aren't enough observations to make it a statistically significant relationship." This is similar to the problem that exists with the "right track/wrong track measure."

The belief that the displeasure of the electorate will translate into votes against the president's party is based exclusively on the outcomes of the 1982 and 1994 midterms, in which voter dissatisfaction did, in fact, track very nicely with electoral outcomes. And this is thin gruel indeed. As Jay Cost noted recently, "the plural of anecdote is not data," which in the case of the right track/wrong track question means that there simply "aren't enough observations to make it a statistically significant relationship."

Unfortunately, that's probably the nicest thing that can be said about the right track/wrong track question. A bigger problem is the fact that while the theory is nice, in practice, the question holds very little predictive power. Indeed, there are more observations of the right track/wrong track response actually foretelling precisely the opposite results as the theory (and logic) would suggest.

As absurd as it sounds, given the data available since Gallup began asking the question during the 1982 election cycle, one might just as easily predict that this year the greater the percentage of the electorate agreeing that the country is on the "wrong track," the better the Republicans will do in November. That would be a highly suspect and statistically questionable forecast, of course, but no more so than that offered by most pundits who cite the right track/wrong track figure so approvingly as evidence of an impending Democratic tidal wave. The indefatigable Mr. Cost recently addressed this instability in the right track/wrong track measure, writing: (again, emphasis in original):

*If "right track/wrong track" is an important factor in congressional elections, we would expect it to have a high coefficient of determination when compared with the share of the two-party vote of the*

President. This would mean that, when people are satisfied, they reward the party of the President. When they are not satisfied, they punish the party of the President.

As it turns out, this is not how it works – *at all*. Changes in the final Gallup “right track/wrong track” only anticipate 11.6% of changes in the President’s party’s share of the two-party vote between 1982 and 2004. They anticipate only 11.25% of changes in the President’s party’s share of House seats. Why is that the case? Here are some fun examples. Between 1990 and 1992, voter assessments of the state of the nation actually worsened by about 8%. However, the Republicans *increased* their share of the two-party House vote by 1.3%. Between 1996 and 1998, there was a dramatic 41% turnaround in “right track/wrong track.” How much did this help the Democrats in Congress? *They lost half a point*. Between 1984 and 1986, voters started to feel nice and sunny about the state of the nation. Net positive ratings rose by about 15%. Did that help Reagan and the GOP? No. Their share of the two-party House vote dropped by 2.3% – *and* they lost the Senate.

**#3. All politics is local.** There is no question that Congressional elections are almost always principally about the two respective candidates and the voters’ evaluation of them *at the district level*. But there have always been some significant national-level variables that affect cumulative outcomes. And the significance and impact of those variables have, in our opinion, increased considerably since September 11, 2001.

In general, national trends affect the outcomes of elections at two points in time: on election day, obviously, and roughly 12-18 months before election day. Early in every election cycle, the parties must recruit candidates, and prospective candidates must determine whether it is in their respective best interests to run. Naturally, parties have more luck recruiting quality candidates when conditions appear favorable for those candidates to win. And so the

national mood at the time that commitments must be made (roughly a year to a year-and-a-half before election day) can have a significant impact on a party’s success in the recruiting wars.

In the 2002 election cycle, for example, candidate recruitment began just after the attacks of 9/11, when President Bush’s approval rating was in the 90% range. So even though the national mood had soured considerably by the following November, and even though the bulk of that souring came at the expense of the GOP, the party still had a productive election, largely because it had been able to recruit quality candidates, while its opponent had largely struck out.

In this election cycle, there is no question that the recruiting war was won by the Democrats, although not by as significant a margin as it should have been. 2005 was a rough year for President Bush. And by last November, the national mood was downbeat enough that the Democrats were able to make some headway with potential candidates, while prospective Republican heavy-hitters found excuses not to run.

In an average year, one might call the Democrats’ recruiting modestly disappointing. But given the exceptional weakness of GOP recruiting efforts (particularly in Senate campaigns), “modestly disappointing” was good enough for Democrats to claim a recruiting victory. In any case, if the Democrats manage to make significant gains this November, it will be because they recruited better than the Republicans last November, not because they have run a particularly effective national campaign.

The second point at which national forces play a role is, obviously, in the immediate run-up to election day. History has shown that the single national-level variable that has a measurable impact on the outcome of the national Congressional vote is presidential approval. And while one might, at first, think that this variable favors the Democrats, that assumption does not hold up under scrutiny. Indeed, it is at this point that 9/11 begins to play a role and things begin to look dicey for the Democrats.

Which brings us to . . .

**#4. A “nationalized election” favors the Democrats.** For over a year now, both Democrats and the members of the mainstream media have insisted that nationalization of the election, with a focus on President Bush and his leadership in Iraq and the broader war on terror, would be the key to bouncing the GOP from the majority. Once again, these folks have the dynamic at play precisely backward.

The presumption among the Democrats has long been that President Bush’s approval rating is low because Americans are fed up with the war in Iraq. From this has sprung the belief that turning the election into a referendum on Iraq will thusly benefit the Democrats. Both presumptions are wrong.

In fact, President Bush’s overall approval ratings appear to move fairly consistently in conjunction with two variables, the price of gasoline and, more importantly, his approval ratings with regard to his handling of *the war on terror and national security*. Note that this second variable is, in the eyes of pollsters and their respondents, distinguished from his handling of the war in Iraq. The recent uptick in the President’s numbers can be traced directly to the thwarting of the terror attacks in London and the concomitant reaffirmation of the gravity of the terrorist threat in the minds of many Americans. The ongoing troubles in Iraq, by contrast, have had very little effect.

Last week, Chuck Todd, a contributing editor at *NationalJournal.com* and the editor-in-chief of *The Hotline* wrote that “President Bush’s job-approval rating is hovering at 40 percent, a figure that Republican strategists believe is just barely passable. In this case, ‘passable’ is defined as keeping the House and Senate. But the real danger for the party in power is that Bush’s approval numbers can still go lower.” He’s right, of course. It *could* go lower. But we doubt that it *will*.

From now until November, terrorism is likely to remain the single dominant issue in American politics. Between today’s fifth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, the ongoing anti-terror sweeps in Great Britain,

and President Bush’s conscious effort to remind the American people of both the threat and the response to that threat, there can be little doubt that terrorism will remain front and center for at least the next couple of months.

And there can be even less doubt that the Democrats will do everything they possibly can to ensure that this dominant issue continues to be the one that destroys them. The Democrats believe quite firmly that by denigrating the war effort in Iraq they can undermine the President’s support on that issue. And they are right. But at the same time, such denigration serves as well to undermine their support, such as it is, on the broader war on terror.

The Democrats may do a bang-up job of knocking Iraq, but in so doing, they also make themselves appear to be the party of surrender. The GOP will, over the next few weeks, continue to play up the rabidly anti-war and anti-American statements of the fringe left, continue to force the Democrats to take public stands in opposition to policies that have demonstrably made Americans safer (e.g. the Patriot Act, electronic surveillance, military tribunals for terrorist leaders), and continue to use the Democrats’ own words against them, reminding voters that the Democratic Party as a whole believes the terrorist threat to be largely exaggerated.

As for the other variable that has shown a reasonable relationship to President Bush’s approval ratings, most experts are predicting the price of gasoline to continue to decline right through the election. This is an issue very few analysts and political strategists are discussing right now, but it has the potential to play an important role in the President’s popularity over the next couple months. Keep an eye on the left-leaning commentariat. When left-wing bloggers and columnists start to complain that “Big Oil” has reversed course and is now colluding to *drop* the price of gas in order to help the Bush-Cheney-Halliburton axis of evil, you will know that the relationship between gas prices and presidential approval has begun to resonate.



**#5. Republicans are divided, suggesting that their collapse is imminent.** We've harped on this point so many times before that it's hard to muster the energy to do it again. Yet the imminent collapse of the Republican coalition remains one of the media's favorite story lines. It also remains one of the weakest story lines.

The current iteration of the "collapsing coalition" meme has libertarians and other secular-minded Republicans rebelling against profligate spending, ineffective leadership on important issues, and the "increasing" influence of the Christian Right. This is all well and good, and certainly the unhappy factions of the party make some legitimate points. Republican governance over the last several years has, in fact, been just awful. But a couple of facts remain.

First, those who think that the current GOP Congress should "be punished" for its wicked ways misunderstand both the nature of modern American politics and the GOP's role in it. This is an issue we'd like to address in depth over the next few weeks, but for now, it should suffice to say that the modern Republican Party didn't kill conservatism. Conservatism was long dead before President Bush was elected, indeed, long before Newt and the revolutionaries took Congress.

Second, and more to the point, this acute unhappiness with the GOP remains largely an elite-centered phenomenon. Ordinary, rank-and-file voters may be unhappy about this or that aspect of GOP governance, but they have, as yet, shown no inclination to abandon the party. Just as we noted in the run-up to the 2002 election and in the run-up to the 2004 election, tales of the Republican coalition's demise are greatly exaggerated.

In the long term, the fraying of the coalition is a serious issue which party leaders and conservative intellectuals will have to address. In the short term, the real internecine partisan warfare can be found largely among Democrats. In addition to the obvious rift between the party apparatus and its centrist incumbent senator from Connecticut, there are other not-so-minor rifts opening in the party leadership.

Cut-and-run advocate John Murtha has launched a campaign for the Majority Leader job (presuming, of course, that his party is in the majority). And most insiders believe that he has the tacit support in this endeavor of current Minority Leader and prospective Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, who has long disliked the current Minority Whip, Steny Hoyer, the man whom Murtha would challenge.

At the same time, the left-wing "netroots" community that is ascendant among the party's various factions and which was in part responsible for Ned Lamont's primary victory in Connecticut has decided that its next victim should be Representative Rahm Emanuel, the former Clinton aide and current head of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. Taking out one centrist wasn't enough for these folks, who apparently believe that all will not be well with the party until they have purged every "moderate" Democrat and thus completely marginalized their party.

And this brings us lastly to . . .

**#6 You can't beat something with nothing.** We have to apologize for this one, since it's one we've used ourselves repeatedly. But when we've used it, we've done so with respect to the Democrats, who, in '02 and '04, ran on a platform with only one plank, namely "we're not the Republicans." And they lost both times.

Of course, the inverse has largely been the theme of the GOP campaigns since 9/11, and it has worked pretty well for them. As we noted in the August 7 issue of this newsletter, "the good news for Republicans is that they continue to run against the Democrats, which means that there may never come a point at which all hope is lost." Republicans will continue to push the idea that however bad they may be, at the very least, they are not the Democrats. And we'd be inclined to say such a campaign theme is doomed to fail were it not for the fact that it's worked twice before.

So what's the bottom line on all of this? What do we think will happen in November?

As we noted at the top of this piece, those are questions that no one can answer definitively at this point. In our domestic politics forecast piece last January, we predicted that the GOP would lose seats but hold both houses. Right now, we are not inclined to alter that expectation. Given the general themes we see developing, the general mood of the electorate, and the polling data from some of the most hotly contested races around the country, we are inclined to believe that the GOP will outperform consensus expectations, just as it did in 2002 and 2004. Whether it can manage to outperform by enough to keep Congress is another question, one to which we will know the answer in short enough order.

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