

The Democrats' Coming Defeat

There is a tide in the affairs of men, which Shakespeare

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Yes, but undertows, too. As Obama, Pelosi, and Reid rush to transform America into a European-style social democratic state, they must be nervous; they must feel the sand sliding under their feet. The 2010 elections are just over the horizon and the omens are not encouraging for them. Thomas Jefferson warned that "Great innovations should not be forced on slender majorities." Maybe so. But the Democrats may be calculating that a slender majority is better than an anorexic majority, or no majority at all.

In 2006, it was Republicans who couldn't catch a break. The Iraq War was going very badly. The federal response to Hurricane Katrina had, fairly or not, further tarnished the Bush administration's reputation for competence. And Mark Foley, a Florida Republican, was caught in a sex scandal with congressional pages. Between Sept. 17 and Oct. 8, identification with the Republican Party dropped from 48 percent (even with the Democrats) to 36 percent. Scandal has always played a large role in American politics. That November, the Democrats regained control of the House of Representatives and Speaker Pelosi promised "to restore integrity and honesty in Washington, D.C." The Democrats, she proclaimed, "intend to lead the most honest, most open and most ethical Congress in history."

Yes, well, about that -- not going so well. Rep. Charles Rangel, a familiar face of the Democratic Party after 40 years in the House, failed to report as much \$1.3 million in income in what even the New York Times editorially described as "a lengthy docket of bizarre-to-outrageous behavior." Yet Nancy Pelosi and the Democratic caucus shielded Rangel when the Republicans voted to expel him from the chairmanship of the tax-writing Ways and Means Committee.

Two enterprising young people armed with little more than a zest for combat and a video camera have single-handedly discredited and disgraced ACORN, the busiest (and it need hardly be added, least punctilious) voter registration foot soldiers for the Democratic Party. Revealed as corrupt beyond the most partisan imaginings, ACORN has been swiftly defunded, thus sidelining the organization in upcoming elections and dealing a public relations blow to the Democrats.

Sen. Harry Reid himself may not be returning to the Senate in 2011. Polls in Nevada suggest that 54 percent of voters have a negative view of the senator, and match-ups with either of his two likely opponents show him losing by 7 to 10 points.

Sen. Arlen Specter, who left the Republican Party out of a principled belief in his own indispensability, is facing a tough race as a Democrat in Pennsylvania. A primary challenge, which he fled the Republicans to avoid, has surfaced in the Democratic Party as well. Meanwhile, he trails the likely Republican nominee, Pat Toomey, by 5 points whereas Joe Sestak, his primary opponent, is running even with Toomey.

In off-year races that are interpreted as harbingers, the Virginia (likely) and New Jersey (possible) governorships may be gained by Republicans.

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Congress: approval rating stands at 21 percent. Seventy-one percent of Americans are unhappy with the way things are going in the country.
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Non-presidential contests often go badly for the party in power, and there are indications that 2010 may be even more painful than most. The extremely high turnout among African-Americans that marked the 2008 race is unlikely to be repeated without Obama on the ballot. Democrats in general seem less enthusiastic this time than Republicans. A Washington Post poll of Virginia voters found that only 50 percent of those who voted for Obama planned to vote in 2010 compared with 66 percent of those who voted for McCain. Further, the group with the most consistent record for turning out in off-year elections is older voters, and they are not happy with the health care overhaul making its way through Congress. Obama won 66 percent of the votes cast by those between the ages of 18 and 29. But younger voters tend not to vote as heavily in non-presidential years. Election maven Charlie Cook envisions 2010 as the year of the "angry white seniors" as older voters turn out in force to oppose health care reform.

Much can change in a year of course. But for now, the tide is running very much against the Democrats.

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