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Delaware Tea Party Candidate Victory Rattles GOP Establishment

Voice of America News summed up the September 14 primary results succinctly: "Conservative candidates favored by the Tea Party have gathered more ground in some of the last primary elections before November's Congressional elections."

VOA quoted the victor in Delaware's Republican senatorial primary, Christine O'Donnell, who defeated nine-term Rep. Mike Castle: "The America we are fighting for is worth restoring. I specifically want to thank the 9/12 Patriots for laying the foundation and stirring things up in Delaware, the Founders Values group, and all of the Delaware Tea Party groups."



O'Donnell also thanked former Alaska governor and vice presidential candidate [Sarah Palin, who endorsed O'Donnell](#) in a phone call to Sean Hannity's radio program on September 9, saying:

Let me go ahead and endorse Christine O'Donnell because, Sean, she's the conservative in the race. She is against Obama's cap-and-tax scheme, she is against Obamacare, she is for the free market principles that need to get plugged in to put our economy back on the right track.

Many political gurus cited by the major media, as well as mouthpieces for the establishment Republican Party, expressed pessimism that O'Donnell could carry off a win in November. Democrats, in contrast, seemed elated that they are facing a perceived pushover in the battle for Delaware's Senate seat, seen as critical to Republican efforts to regain control of the upper house.

Yahoo's senior politics writer Holly Bailey noted in a blog the day after the primary headlined: "[Tea party victory endangers GOP's goal of retaking the Senate](#)":

In the biggest electoral surprise of the night, conservative activist Christine O'Donnell defeated longtime GOP Rep. Mike Castle in Delaware's Republican Senate primary. Castle, a moderate who once served as the state's governor, had been so favored to win in November that his decision to run had reportedly influenced Democrat Beau Biden, son of Vice President Joe Biden, to abandon plans to seek his father's old seat.

But with O'Donnell's come-from-nowhere win Tuesday night, top Republicans in Washington now see virtually no chance the GOP will be able to pick up the Delaware seat this fall. As a result, they admit their already slim chance of winning back Republican control of the Senate is likely dead.

"It's hard to see a path for us," one senior Republican official, who declined to be named while discussing party strategy, told The Upshot. "Never say never, but it has become much harder for us after tonight."

But a September 15 AP account contradicted Berry's blog statement ("On Tuesday night, the National



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Republican Senatorial Committee issued a tepid statement of congratulations to O'Donnell, but a GOP official told Fox News the party has no plans of putting money into the race"). According to the [AP report](#):

NRSC chairman Sen. John Cornyn of Texas issued a statement Wednesday saying he and the committee *strongly* stand by all GOP Senate nominees, including O'Donnell.

Delaware Republican leaders have not said whether they will support O'Donnell, who defeated longtime congressman Mike Castle on Tuesday night after a bitter and divisive primary campaign.

But Cornyn said he personally congratulated O'Donnell on Wednesday and let her know *she has the national committee's support, including its maximum allowable donation of \$42,000*. [Emphasis added.]

In the last two Freedom Indexes rating members of Congress according to the Constitution compiled by *The New American* magazine, Cornyn scored 80 and 85 percent, while O'Donnell's opponent, Mike Castle, who is consistently labelled as a "moderate" by the national media, registered anemic scores of 40 and 50 percent. One might say that in today's political parlance, "moderate" is the new "liberal."

AP reported that shortly after O'Donnell had been declared the winner, the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee had begun compiling "the nasty comments fellow Republicans have made about O'Donnell." DSCC chairman Sen. Robert Menendez said in a statement: "Even the Delaware Republican Party chairman has said O'Donnell is 'not a viable candidate for any office in the state of Delaware,' and 'could not be elected dogcatcher.' "

Shortly before the race was decided, Rep. Castle said that it would be difficult for him to support O'Donnell if she won the primary: "One of the basic arguments here is that she is just not going to win the general election. I totally believe that ... I see no way she could win this general election, or maybe any general election."

However, O'Donnell remained undaunted by such negative comments. "Some people have already said we can't win the general election," she said in a speech to supporters, who responded first with chants of, "Yes, we can!" and then, "Yes, we will!"

"If those people who fought so hard against me work just as hard for me, then we can win," O'Donnell added in an obvious reference to Republicans who had opposed her.

The struggle between traditional conservatives (sometimes referred to as [paleoconservatives](#), constitutional conservatives, or simply constitutionalists) and the more liberal Republicans usually associated with the Northeastern liberal wing of the GOP (once referred to as "Rockefeller Republicans," after former New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller) has been waging within the party for many decades.

An article about "[Rockefeller Republicans](#)" in Wikipedia observes:

Rockefeller Republican (often termed "liberal Republican") refers to a faction of the United States Republican Party who held moderate to liberal views similar to those of Nelson Rockefeller. The term largely fell out of use by the end of the twentieth century, and has been replaced by the terms "moderate Republican," "liberal Republican," and the derogatory term Rino [Republican in Name Only]."

The near-final takeover of the GOP by the liberal wing occurred during the 1952 Republican National Convention, when the respected conservative statesman and likely nominee Sen. Robert Taft — "Mr. Republican," who was the product of one of America's most respected political families and the son of



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President and Chief Justice William Howard Taft — was bypassed in favor of General Dwight D. Eisenhower. A lifelong Democrat who had squelched a movement to nominate him as the Democratic Party's presidential candidate in 1948, Eisenhower first publicly declared himself a Republican in January 1952. (For a well-reasoned analysis of the political differences between Taft and Eisenhower, read "[The Republican Road Not Taken: The Foreign Policy Vision of Robert A. Taft](#)," by Michael T. Hayes.)

The liberal wing of the Republican Party attempted to discredit Taft at first by branding him with the largely meaningless label "isolationist," which had been used a decade earlier to discredit those Americans who opposed U.S. involvement in World War II. But the most damaging ammunition in the anti-Taft forces' arsenal was the repeated use of the phrase "I like Taft but he can't win." With repeated repetition, helped along by Eisenhower backers in the media, support for Taft finally eroded to the point that he was denied the nomination.

Our purpose in resurrecting this history here is to illustrate the obvious similarities between what the liberal Republican wing was able to do to their best qualified presidential candidate in 1952 and what their successors have attempted to do to the traditional conservative candidates backed by the Tea Party and others in this campaign year. And Christine O'Donnell has been the target of such maneuvering more than most.

When the Delaware Republican Party chairman said that O'Donnell is "not a viable candidate for any office in the state of Delaware," and "could not be elected dogcatcher," his statement was soon quoted by DSCC chairman Menendez. Should anyone be surprised, least of all the state party leaders?

Sometimes, conservative Republican candidates have had more to fear from RINOs in their own party than they have from Democrats. The late Senator Barry Goldwater undoubtedly would have agreed.

Related article:

[GOP Resists Tea Party in Northeastern Primaries](#)

Photo: Senate candidate Christine O'Donnell addresses supporters after winning the Republican nomination for Senate in Delaware, Sept. 14, 2010, in Dover, Del: AP Images



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