



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on October 29, 2010

Senate GOP Leaders Look to Water Down Tea Party Ideology

“You might as well know right now ... that the Tea Party, no matter how successful it is at the polls in November, will certainly betray the party of liberty,” wrote Lew Rockwell, proprietor of LewRockwell.com, on September 22.

In addition to identifying philosophical problems among Tea Party candidates, Rockwell explained that “once they take office ... the serious problems begin. They are leaned on by their new colleagues, the party elites, related financial interests, the press, and the entire system of which they are now part. Are they going to make themselves enemies of that system, or are they going to work within the system in order to achieve reform, and not just for one term but more terms down the line? Doing a good job means being part of the structure; doing a bad job means being an enemy of the very system that they now serve.” He concludes that most will choose to join the establishment, saying, “It is for this reason that newly seated ‘revolutionary’ politicians will betray those who put them in power. It happens like clockwork, same as day turns to night.”



As if to prove Rockwell’s point, [MSNBC reports](#) that the GOP establishment in the Senate is already preparing to assume the role of *Star Trek*’s [Borg](#), announcing to the newly minted Tea Party Senators: “Resistance is futile. You will be assimilated.”

Ken Strickland, NBC News Senate producer, writes that while the Tea Party candidates “defeated establishment-favored GOP contenders in their states’ primaries by promising to upset the status quo in Washington, former and current Republican aides aren’t expecting a political earthquake. They say they’re confident that [Senate Minority Leader Mitch] McConnell will deftly handle the new conservative arrivals by incorporating them — and their ideas — into the larger caucus.” This will need to take place because, a former GOP leadership aide told Strickland, McConnell must direct the Tea Party’s ideological energy “in a way that’s productive rather than destructive or harmful to Senate Republicans or the country in general.” In other words, the Republican establishment considers these upstart conservatives destructive to both the party and the country and must therefore blunt their opposition to ever larger government in order to save both.



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Just how will McConnell go about this? First, says Strickland, he'll try to bribe them with "coveted slots on committees that serve their constituents' interests." If that doesn't work, the next step is to "encourage new members to take a leading role in introducing legislation that addresses one of their campaign agenda items, but in a more scaled-back way," such as cutting funding for certain Department of Education programs rather than trying to abolish the department outright — something the Republican leadership promised to do back in 1994.

According to Strickland, "GOP sources believe McConnell will try to distill one simple theme for the new members as they bring their campaign promises into his governing body: Don't do anything that will divide Republicans and unite Democrats." That pretty well eliminates all but the most timidly conservative proposals and ensures that government will continue to grow at the expense of liberty.

Strickland further dampens hopes for any real change as a result of Tea Party victories at the polls:

Most of the GOP insiders feel that, when all the votes are tallied, the Senate Republican conference will generally look the same in the next Congress as it does now — just larger. The caucus will likely contain a small bloc of Tea Party-inspired conservatives, a small moderate bloc, and a large bloc of more traditional Republicans who typically align with leadership.

The proportions don't changeThe size simply gets bigger.

With the new conservative senators making up such a small portion of the party's representation in the Senate, they are unlikely to wield much influence. In fact, Strickland expects them to vote with the leadership most of the time because "their ultimate objectives will still be aligned with those of their caucus leaders." Don Stewart, a spokesman for McConnell, told Strickland, "The fact is that Republicans will continue to unite behind the common goals of reducing spending, slowing the growth of government and repealing and replacing the health spending bill." The reader will note that this agenda is somewhat less than ambitious — it calls only for "slowing" government growth, not reversing it, and for "replacing" ObamaCare, probably with House Republicans' "[ObamaCare lite](#)" [proposal](#).

The one bright spot in Strickland's account is that if Republicans do take the Senate — a difficult but not impossible feat — "all bets are off." With the party having the power to set the agenda, newcomers and their allies such as Sen. Jim DeMint of South Carolina (disparaged by GOP insiders who spoke with Strickland) may feel emboldened to push for significant reductions in government rather than accepting the crumbs the leadership throws to them. Republican control could, as Strickland avers, force McConnell to "[struggle] to hold the factions of his party together while trying to move major legislation," but at least the party won't be unified around offering watered-down versions of Democrats' proposals.

All in all, Strickland paints a rather depressing picture of the potential for real change in the Senate regardless of how many Tea Party candidates are seated in January. Chances are the situation in the House isn't much different, especially given that the sheer number of representatives ensures that each one's influence, and particularly that of newcomers, is greatly diminished. If this is what Tea Partiers get for all their hard work, they ought to throw the GOP overboard in 2012.

Photo of Mitch McConnell: AP Images



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