



Tea Party Favorite Moving Toward the Middle?

It is that time in the wild kingdom of politics where all the elephants and donkeys make their biennial migration toward the great electoral watering hole known as the Swing Voter. This lake lies right in the middle of Campaign Land and gets awfully crowded as scores of thirsty office seekers stampede to stake claim to their little patch of ground close enough to irrigate the quest for electoral victory.



While such treks are traditional and are only marginally noteworthy, even in the era of round the clock news broadcasts, there is a new beast nudging his way into the herd that has attracted the attention of the other animals, as well as those on safari, tracking the movements of all the contenders.

The Tea Party Movement has drawn adherents from both major political parties, most of whom attribute their conversion to the wholesale Constitutional apostasy of red and blue candidates who succumbed to the seductions of power and followed the siren call onto the shearing shoals of usurped power.

In the face of such disloyalty and betrayal, it is easy to explain the impressive growth of the Tea Party. They believe themselves to have discovered another source of water and they welcomed all those political animals tired of pandering and following the herd, to come and drink freely from their spring. The only cost, moreover, of access to the cool water of Constitutionalism was a inviolable pledge to moor oneself freely and permanently to the firm and fixed principles of small government and recognition of the boundaries of constitutionally enumerated powers.

As one after the other election was won by so-called Tea Party candidates, the reporters, pundits, and pollsters demonstrated the whys and wherefores of this meteoric and historic political realignment. As for the candidates themselves, they eschewed the predictable talking points and made names for themselves by shooting straight and talking straighter. Every syllable was as manna to the millions of weary voters brought low after years of wandering the desert in search of representatives genuinely and steadfastly committed to leading them to the promised land of a restored republic.

A few potential prophets of liberty have distinguished themselves from the pack of pretenders. None appears more likely to shoulder the mantle than Rand Paul, son of Congressman Ron Paul, the godfather of the Tea Party Movement. Rand is charging convincingly toward the Senate from Kentucky and there's seems to be very little the opposition can do to avoid being crushed under the randslide that swept the scion into the lead.

Apart from Paul, there is the ubiquitous Christine O'Donnell. The former abstinence counselor splashed suddenly onto the surface of the national consciousness after an impressive upset victory over former governor Mike Castle in Delaware's Republican senatorial primary. Unfortunately for Ms. O'Donnell,



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however, she has spent most of the time since the primary assuring her conservative base, a la Monty Python, that shes not a witch.

As reported previously in this magazine, key races in several states have seen the ascension of otherwise unknown candidates propelled to prominence by the high-octane fuel of Tea Party activism. The flame burns brightly, but is it burning off too quickly? As the hour of reckoning approaches, it seems that some of the devout might be repenting a little of their public piety and joining, albeit reluctantly, the biennial pilgrimage toward the holy stone of moderation. An act most disheartening in the case of Rand Paul.

[For Tea Party Candidate, Time to Temper the Message](#) reads the title of an article on the front page (above the fold) of the New York Times. The piece recounts the alleged distancing of Tea Party darling Rand Paul from the one that brought him to the party.

The article states that, no matter how devoted Mr. Paul is to Tea Party principles, he may be forced to yield periodically to some realities of the old-school politics that he denounces. And again: Mr. [Mitch] McConnell set up a fund-raiser in Washington for Mr. Paul with several Republican senators who, like Mr. McConnell, had supported the \$700 billion bank bailout in 2008; during the primary, Mr. Paul said he would not accept donations from anyone who had done so.

More evidence provided by the New York Times of Pauls alienation from his Tea Party supporters: During a nationally televised debate on Fox News Sunday, Mr. Paul said that if he were elected to the Senate, he would support Senator Mitch McConnell, also from Kentucky, to keep his job as Republican leader. This is interpreted as a slap in the face of Senator Jim DeMint, a popular grandee of the Tea Party who early and often has announced his support for Paul and other Tea Party-backed candidates nationwide.

The bottom line of the report:

Now, his references to the Tea Party are fewer and farther between. On a trip last week through eastern Kentucky, the trademark yellow Dont Tread on Me flags of the movement were gone. Mr. Paul did not sound his earlier battle cry that he would shut down Congress for a week if it failed to amend the Constitution to require a balanced budget. In fact, he did not mention the Tea Party at all.

Whether Rand Paul's infrequent mention of the Tea Party during recent rallies truly is a sign of his subtle shuffling toward the thundering herd predictably plodding their way toward the familiar watering hole of old school realpolitik or simply the skillful sharpening of his horns in preparation for the head-to-head combat awaiting him in the Senate, only time will tell.

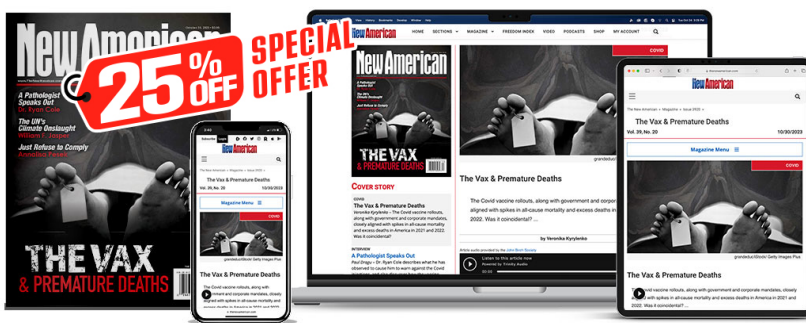


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