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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

## RED TIDE RISING

by Charles R. Kesler

**R**EPUBLICANS ARE READY TO PARTY LIKE IT'S 1929. In the House of Representatives, they will hold a majority nearly 250 seats strong, their largest showing since Herbert Hoover won the presidency in 1928. Though final numbers are not in, the GOP now controls both houses of the state legislatures of 29 states, its highest number since 1920. In all likelihood, Republicans will exceed their historic high for state legislative seats, set in 1928. And they took back the U.S. Senate, by margins comparable to what they enjoyed in the splendid Republican decade of the 1920s.

No wonder that Representative Greg Walden, the chairman of the National Republican Campaign Committee, let slip that his party's House majority "may be a hundred-year majority." He meant it was "as big as any of us have seen in our lifetimes," not that it was going to endure for a hundred years. American politics doesn't have century-long majorities, though before the Civil War the Democrats, and after it the Republicans, managed to dominate national politics for several generations.

The GOP's tenure as the dominant national party came to an inglorious end, of course, with Hoover's presidency and the Great Depression, both commencing in 1929. That milestone's recurrence ought to give conservatives a little pause amid our rejoicing over the midterm election results. Republicans have a long way to climb to regain their status as the party trusted by a majority of Americans most of the time. The New Deal left the GOP's reputation as the party "that identifies with people like me" in tatters. How to handle the New Deal is no longer a living political problem, but how to handle its legacy—the social welfare state's unfunded entitlements, the administrative state's unconstitutional powers, the Democratic party's cloying claim to be the people's tribune—is still very much with us.

In his press conference, President Obama tried not to appear too sour. What do you call a double shellacking? He avoided the question, but had the varnish to say, "to everyone who voted, I want you to know that I hear you. To the two thirds of voters who chose not to participate in the process yesterday, I hear you, too."

Obama is most interesting when he is most defiant, as in those sentences. Slyly, he meant to delegitimize the election results: what do you expect from older, white voters? The two thirds of voters who

couldn't be bothered to vote "chose not to participate" because they had been disillusioned by "the process." The people "want us to get the job done," he emphasized, like "delivering basic services the government provides to the American people." When there is partisan gridlock and stuff doesn't get done, the majority naturally can grow cynical and frustrated; and when, he said in effect, Obama—the one leader who transcends Washington politics-as-usual—is not on the ballot, well, people get hopeless. He understands. And, he implies, the uncast ballots, or most of them, would have been his for the taking.

**H**IS THEORY OF ELECTIONS IS OF A PIECE WITH HIS PECULIAR theory of executive power. If Congress can't or won't do something, something which to Obama is manifestly on the right side of history—like immigration reform—then the president has the right to do it on his own. What "I'm *not* going to do is just wait," he said to reporters. He thinks he ought to have the right to go it alone, presumably on behalf of non-voters now and in the future. But Obama's version of moderation is to admit that there are *some* things even he could not do on his own authority—and then to regret those limits, which after all were imposed long ago by the older white males (naturally) who wrote the Constitution.

Yet it is all justified on modest, pragmatic grounds: "I just want to see what works," he told the post-election audience. He may get his wish.

Delightful as the 2014 House and Senate results were, the gubernatorial and state legislative elections may have been more revealing. It is in the states where conservative reforms, some of them deeply controversial, championed by Republican governors (Scott Walker, most bravely) and legislators, are needed, are being implemented, and are beginning to work to the electorate's evident satisfaction. Contrast these results with the federal government's apparently habitual incompetence: the botched rollout of *healthcare.gov*, politics at the IRS, malpractice at the Veterans Administration, ineptitude in the Secret Service, our feckless foreign policy.

It may be that the Republican Party's most important new ally in its struggle to reestablish itself is: what works. That would be a nice contrast with 1929.

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