

"I'm being inundated with data from all the individual races. It points strongly to a Republican Senate and a Republican House... I like what I'm seeing... There will be a Republican Congress."

— Karl "The Genius" Rove, 10 days before the election.

Reasons to be cheerful...and vigilant

It was a "throw the bums out" AND a "change America's direction" election

AT AN OCTOBER FUNDRAISER IN TOPEKA, the Republican faithful lined up to shake hands with the headliner, Dick Cheney. But before getting to the Veep, they had to get past the wife of the local Congress critter. She was standing adjacent to Cheney, holding a big bottle of Purell, a hand sanitizer that claims to kill "99.99% of most common germs." Each person waiting to get their grip-and-grin with the honoree first had to accept a squirt of the goop from this lady to purify their hands! After the meet-and-greet was over, Cheney ducked backstage and rubbed a generous dollop of the antiseptic onto his own hands, cleansing him of the human contact he had just endured.

On November 7, however, it was voters doing the cleansing, washing their hands of the Bush-Cheney regime. Yes, I know that Bush & Gang are still there, and they'll be trying to do all the damage they can in their remaining two years. But by losing the House and Senate majority, they have hit a serious speed bump.

Toward the end of the campaign, the White House insisted that Republicans would retain control of Congress because voters were focused on local issues and candidates, not on Bush or his policies. "We have succeeded in making these races choices between two local candidates," bragged Karl Rove. And when a reporter suggested that Bush's disastrous war in Iraq was dragging down GOP congressional candidates, Cheney chimed in with his two cents' worth of political insight: "We're not running for office."

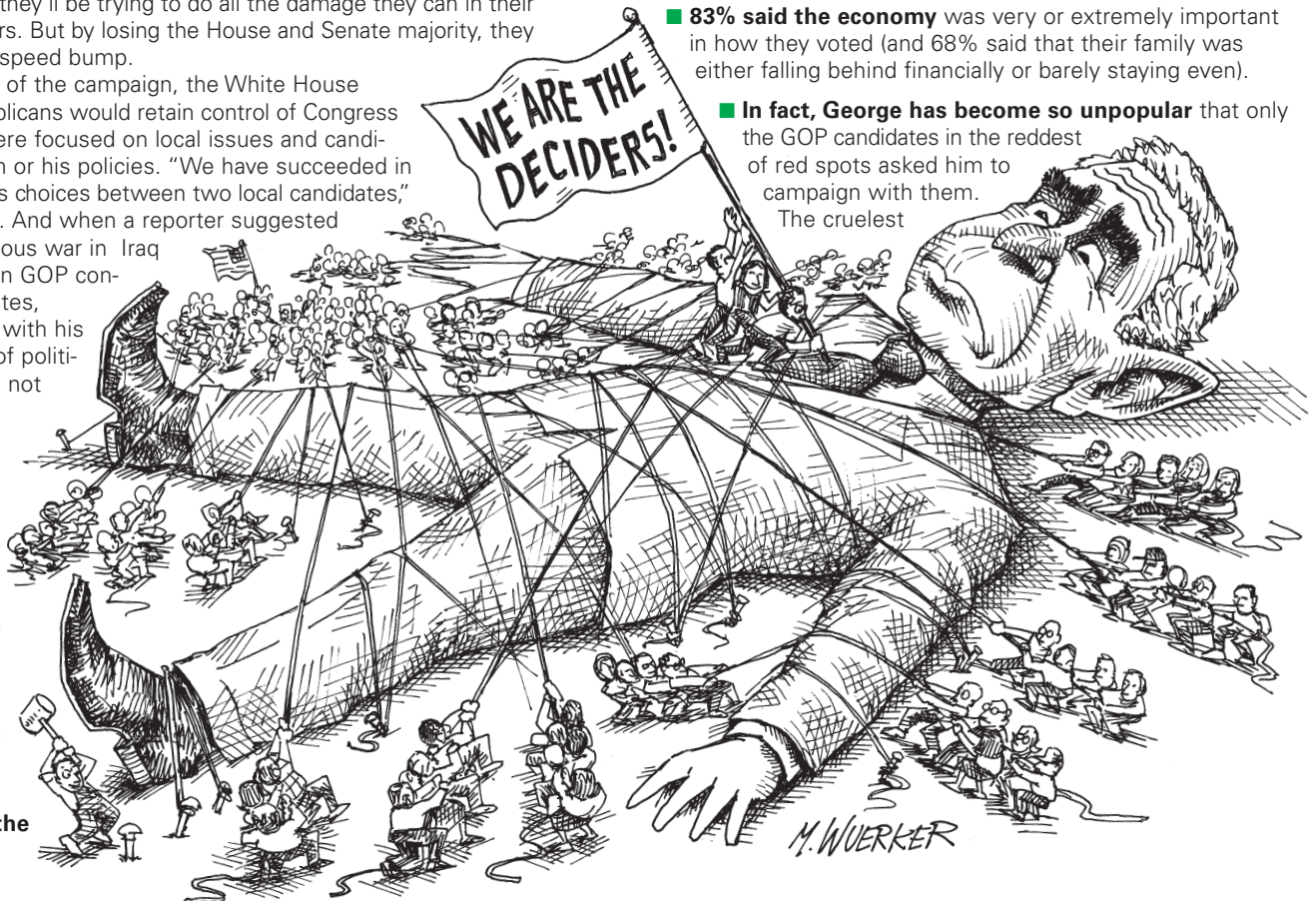
Wrong, Karl. Wrong, Dick. In its exit polls, *The New York Times* found that Bush's war, Bush's economy, and Bush himself were foremost on voters' minds as they entered the voting booths to toss out the Republican Congress.

■ **68% said that the Iraq war was either "very"**

important or "extremely" important in how they voted (only 10% said it was "not at all" important).

■ **83% said the economy was very or extremely important in how they voted (and 68% said that their family was either falling behind financially or barely staying even).**

■ **In fact, George has become so unpopular that only the GOP candidates in the reddest of red spots asked him to campaign with them.**
The cruelest



George W's "No Child Left Behind" program is being perverted into "No Bush Left Behind."

You might recall brother Neil Bush from his "Hi Yo Silverado" days, when he headed a Colorado S & L that went broke and cost us taxpayers a billion bucks to bail it out. Now Neil is in the education game.

As honcho of an outfit called Ignite! Learning, he goes around to school districts hustling a computerized learning center dubbed COW, for Curriculum On Wheels. Made up to look like a purple cow, it's wheeled into classrooms where it uses jingles and cartoon videos to "teach" students. Each COW costs \$3,800 and at least 13 school districts have used No Child Left Behind money to purchase them. That money is primarily intended to help disadvantaged kids learn reading and math—yet Neil's COWs don't teach either of these subjects. Curious.

Additional money to place COWs in various schools has come from Rev. Sun Myung Moon, the Saudi Arabian oil company, millionaire businessmen from Kuwait, China, and Russia, as well as Daddy and Momma Bush. Barbara is so committed to the enterprise that when she made a donation to help Hurricane Katrina evacuees who had moved to Houston, she required that all of the money be spent buying Neil's COWs. How charitable.

Ignite's ethics are also on display in a company video on its website. A Texas teacher named Lori gives a glowing testimonial about how COW did wonders for a young student named India. However, Lori really isn't India's teacher. She's Ignite's marketing director. Ignite says Lori was not

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blow came on the campaign's last day. Bush was to appear in Pensacola, Florida, at a Republican rally featuring the party's gubernatorial hopeful, Charlie Crist. Ten thousand partisans turned out for Bush but one person who decided at the last minute not to come was...Charlie. Seeing Bush's poll numbers in Florida below 40%, Charlie suddenly remembered that he needed to be over in Palm Beach that day. Jilted, poor George had to call in Brother Jeb to do the introduction.

Spin it as they will, this election was a resounding rejection of the Bushites' agenda. As an independent voter in New Jersey said as

Keith Ellison, a Minnesota state legislator and advocate of economic justice, is now the first Muslim ever elected to Congress.

she headed into her polling place, "I don't care if I vote for Happy the Clown, just so it's not who's there now." She added that she was voting "against the powers that put us in this situation" in Iraq.

Progressive surge

The establishment media pundits, clueless as ever, have tried their damndest to contort the Democratic sweep into a victory for conservatives! They claim that the Dems who won in red areas were victorious only because they adopted Republican-like positions on guns, abortion, or religion.

Your average rutabaga has a sharper analytical ability than that. If these pundits would venture out and talk with anyone besides themselves, they'd find that people aren't one-dimensional stick figures. Being a hunter and a defender of gun rights in a so-called red state, for example, doesn't turn you into Dick Cheney.

Take Jon Tester, the new senator from Montana. He's a big burly guy, with the boots, belly, and buzzcut

that makes him appear to be a rural conservative caricature. To add to the stereotype, he's pro-gun and anti-gay marriage.

But let's fill in this stickman drawing of Tester. He's an organic farmer. He took time off in the heat of the campaign to go home to harvest his crops. He's a working guy who's missing three fingers from a tangle he had with a meat grinder. He's been a teacher, soil-conservation leader, and president of the state senate (where he established a solidly progressive record of siding with common folks against the corporate interests).

Jon defeated three-term incumbent and corporate favorite Conrad Burns by running a flat-out populist campaign that took these stands: raise the minimum wage to a livable level, provide health care for all, fight

the drug giants for lower prescription prices, stop big interests from selling off or locking up our public lands, halt the use of the Patriot Act to invade the lives of innocent Americans, oppose NAFTA-like trade scams, ban lobbyist-paid gifts and travel, make college affordable, promote renewable energy and conservation, save Social Security from the privatizers, battle railroad monopolies that hold rural communities captive, focus tax relief on the middle class instead of on millionaires, and—a big one—give military control of Iraq to the Iraqis, bring our troops home, and fully fund veterans' health care.

Conservative? On the kitchen-table issues that matter to people (issues that require a political leader to side with ordinary folks against the corporate and governmental elites), Jon Tester is the kind of populist progressive that America needs.

The good news is that voters not only took out Bush's rubber-stamp congress-

The youth vote

Young voters (18-29) had the highest turnout in 20 years, up 4% this year from the 2002 mid-term elections. They overwhelmingly favored Democrats (60% to 38%).

sional majority, but they also brought in a crop of real progressives who'll add badly needed energy and more of an "outsider" attitude to what has been a lackluster, tired, corporate-coddling Democratic party. In addition to Tester, the Senate will feel the progressive surge that will come from Sherrod Brown (Ohio), Amy Klobuchar (Minnesota), Claire McCaskill (Missouri), and Bernie Sanders (Vermont)—all of whom ran campaigns centered on economic populism.

Likewise, the House majority will be invigorated by a new class of Democrats who campaigned on a core progressive agenda, including minimum wage, health care, Social Security, and Bush's Iraq war. Meet a few of them.

■ **Carol Shea-Porter** of New Hampshire is a teacher, social worker, and staunch war opponent. Short on money but strong in volunteer support, she had to battle her own party's establishment to win the nomination. Then her shoe-leather, issue-oriented, no-nonsense, populist approach upset the GOP's entrenched incumbent, making her the first New Hampshire woman in history to go to Congress.

■ **Tim Walz** is a high-school teacher, football coach, 24-year member of the Army National Guard...and passionate defender of liberty and justice for all. In 2004, he escorted two of his students to a Bush rally in his hometown of Mankato, Minnesota. At the checkpoint,

"I was a Republican until they lost their minds."
— former basketball star **Charles Barkley**

Do something!

To keep up with what Congressional Democrats are doing, and to learn more about developing a grassroots, progressive political movement check out:

- **Public Citizen**
www.citizen.org
202-454-5139
- **Common Cause**
www.commoncause.org
202-833-1200
- **Campaign for America's Future**
www.ourfuture.org
202-955-5665
- **Progressive Democrats of America**
www.pdamerica.org
1-877-368-9221
- **Progressive States Network**
www.progressivestates.org
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- **Progressive Majority**
www.progressivemajority.org
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www.wellstone.org
651-645-3939

however, George W's security thugs barred them from entering because one of the students had a Kerry-Edwards sticker on his wallet. "This is not how America is supposed to be," Tim said. So he has now paid Bush back by running a populist campaign that upset a six-term incumbent who was a Bush apologist and servant of special interests.

■ **John Hall** is a rock musician (founder of the band Orleans) and

longtime environmental activist who lives in New York's Hudson Valley. In 2004 the Bushites lifted one of his tunes, "Still the One," as their presidential campaign song, not bothering to get permission. Hall protested their thievery and forced them to stop. This year—with the enthusiastic backing of labor, environmental, and antiwar groups — John lifted the Republican incumbent from Congress.

■ **Jerry McNerney** is a California alternative-energy entrepreneur, an engineer...and now a giant killer. With strong grassroots support from environmentalists and other progressives, McNerney had a stunning victory over Richard Pombo, the arrogant, corporate-hugging, antigovernment absolutist who was chair of the natural resources committee.

Vigorous antiestablishment campaigns like these have brought renewed progressive strength to Washington. More importantly, though, this year's campaigns have greatly strengthened our grassroots power, even in areas where our candidates didn't make it. We've added more and better-trained campaign activists, gained experience, spread the populist message where it has long been unheard, attracted new voters (including many who had dropped out or had considered themselves conservative), and created frameworks to sustain a continuing movement.

Seizing the initiative

While this was a "throw the bums out" year, it was just as clearly a "change America's direction" year, with the majority finally

Bye-bye Blackwell

One of the sweetest results was the drubbing that Kenneth Blackwell got in the Ohio governor's race. He's the secretary of state there who manipulated the system in 2004 to keep thousands of black people from voting and who is notorious for efforts to suppress the Democratic vote. He got only 37% of the vote against Ted Strickland, a stalwart progressive who is a member of Congress and a Methodist minister.

rising up to throw off the right-wing plutocracy, autocracy, theocracy, and kleptocracy that Bush & Company have hung around America's neck.

One sign of this fed-up sentiment was the total repudiation of a bit of corporate-backed ugliness called the Taxpayer Bill of Rights. Known as TABOR, it's more like a Bill of Wrongs, for it's essentially another ploy by the antitax, hate-government elites to defund even essential public services from education to public safety. It's the creature of the ultranutty Grover Norquist and receives its main financing from a multimillionaire New York developer named (you won't believe this!) Howie Rich.

TABOR was put forth as ballot initiatives in nine states this year, but six states stripped it from their ballots because of fraud and assorted wrongdoings by the initiative's pusher. Then, by convincing margins, the voters of Maine, Nebraska, and Oregon said no to TABOR's ideological malevolence.

Meanwhile, there was widespread

positive news on the initiative front. The most resounding victories came in all six states which had initiatives to increase the minimum wage. Voters said "yes" in Arizona (66% approval), Colorado (53%), Missouri (76%), Montana (73%), Nevada (69%), and Ohio (56%). In all the states but Nevada, the initiatives also required that the minimum wage be adjusted annually for inflation.

Voters in Arizona and Nebraska (supposedly antitax, bright-red states) approved initiatives to increase funding for early childhood education. Washington State voted to require that big utilities produce 15% of their electricity from renewable sources by 2020. Oregon expanded access to a prescription-drug program for the uninsured, and Missouri okayed funding for stem-cell research.

Secretaries of state

Amazingly, America still can't seem to get this democracy thing down. People are actively discouraged from voting, and votes aren't counted as the voter intended. There were no total meltdowns this year (à la Florida in 2000 and Ohio in 2004), but serious problems persisted. Outrageous electronic voting "glitches," disgraceful voter intimidation and suppression, and crass purges of voter rolls continue to be a plague on our country's democratic pretensions.

Some of the problems turned

Guvns and statehouses

Democrats gained 7 governorships on November 7 and now hold a total of 15 statehouses. Democrats also gained the majority in both chambers of the Iowa and New Hampshire legislatures, the house chambers in Indiana, Minnesota, Michigan, and Oregon, and the senate chamber in Wisconsin.

lying...just role playing. So is Neil. He's pretending that Ignite would be getting these federal dollars, investors, donations, and sales even if his name was, say, Neil Jones.

OUR CLUELESS WAR LEADERS

The most basic rule of war is this: *Know your enemy.*

A major reason that Bush's Iraq war is such a disaster is that the commander-in-chief is clueless about the culture of Islamic people. That's no surprise, since George W has the intellectual curiosity of a butter bean. But most of the Bushite counterterrorism officials also don't know beans about their enemy.

Jeff Stein, the national security editor at Congressional Quarterly, has recently been asking these officials a rather fundamental question: "Do you know the difference between a Sunni and a Shiite?" Since the Sunni-Shiite culture clash is a 1,400-year-old conflict that is now playing out in a civil war in Iraq, with our soldiers trapped in the middle, an understanding of this difference is crucial to the war.

The head of the FBI's national security branch agreed that it is important for a man in his position to know the difference...but he didn't. He could not even tell whether neighboring Iran is Sunni or Shiite—a rather crucial distinction, since the new Iraqi government is forging alliances with Iranian theocrats.

Stein's question stumped Rep. Jo Ann Davis, who heads the subcommittee overseeing much of the CIA's work in Islamic countries. "The Sunni are more radical than the Shia. Or vice versa," she said. Rep. Terry Everett, head of a subcommittee on tactical intelligence, also stum-

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bled. "I thought it was differences in their religion, different families or something," he said. Then he added, "Now that you've explained it to me, what occurs to me is that it makes what we're doing over there extremely difficult."

Golly, Terry...really? Shouldn't you have thought about that several hundred thousand lives and \$373 billion ago? Sheesh, these people clearly don't know what they're doing.

POLITICAL NASTINESS

In Wisconsin, the GOP ran an ad claiming that Democratic incumbent Ron Kind had voted to fund studies of "the masturbation habits of old men" and "to pay teenage girls to watch pornographic movies with probes connected to their genitalia." Not true. Kind had merely voted against a bill to stop the National Institutes of Health from doing any sex studies. Yet the ad featured Ron with XXX stamped across his face. Kind, who won re-election with 65% of the vote, says, "We rip each other to shreds and then we're all supposed to come back to Washington and try to work together. It's a hell of a way to elect representatives."

In a Gallup poll, 70% of Americans said they believe "not much" or "nothing at all" of what they hear in political ads.

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Poor Tom

Tom DeLay is red-faced because his House district turned blue. Democrat Nick Lampson, who had been one of The Hammer's "re-redistricting" victims in 2004, moved into Tom's district and took his seat.

comical. In Ohio, Republican Congress critter Steve Chabot was turned away from voting because the address on his ID differed from the one on his registration card; the top election official in Missouri was asked three times to show a photo ID in order to vote, even though state law does not require one; and Gov. Mark Sanford was sent away from his South Carolina polling place because he showed up without his registration card.

Then there's the ghost of Katherine Harris. As Florida's secretary of state in 2000, she infamously rigged the vote count for George W. She then went to Congress, and this year she ran for (and lost) a U.S. Senate seat. But her bad mojo reached out and touched the election to replace her in the House. Touch-screen voting machines which she had championed as secretary of state appear to have malfunctioned on November 7 in her old congressional district, erasing the votes of some 18,000 people. Only 373 votes separated the two candidates, so a recount is underway. However, since there's

No more NAFTAs!

Fair trade vs. NAFTA-style corporate trade scams was an underreported but volatile issue in the elections. In Senate races, six fair traders defeated trade-scramming incumbents. In House races, such prominent trade scammers as Clay Shaw (Florida), Nancy Johnson (Connecticut), Chris Chocola (Indiana), Melissa Hart (Pennsylvania), and J.D. Hayworth (Arizona) suffered surprise upsets—all defeated by fair-trade advocates. The balance in Congress has now swung against trade scams.

no paper trail to these machines, it'll be hard to prove that all those people didn't just fail to vote in this particular race.

This sort of ridiculous stuff is why the little-known office of the secretary of state is key to getting a grip on our democracy—and why progressives ran for these offices in seven states this fall, winning in Iowa, Minnesota, Nevada, New Mexico, and Ohio. In Minnesota, my old friend Mark Ritchie ousted an eight-year incumbent who had turned the office into an election-eering wing of the Republican party. Crisscrossing the state, Mark tapped into a deep well of anger about the lack of fairness and integrity in the voting system and will now do the work needed to restore people's faith.

What now?

On the plus side, some good people are going to be in positions to do good things in Congress. Speaker-to-be Nancy Pelosi has come out with a "First Hundred Hours" agenda that ranges from passing a new minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour to breaking the corruption ties between lobbyists and legislation. And nearly everyone except "Slow Joe" Lieberman seems to realize that Bush's war is wrong and we must

get out of it—pronto.

Also, there are some promising changes in who runs Congress's committees, such as John Conyers (Judiciary), David Obey (Appropriations), George Miller (Education and the Workforce), Henry Waxman (Government Reform), Nydia Velázquez (Small Business), Bennie Thompson (Homeland Security), Bob Filner (Veterans' Affairs), and Charlie Rangel (Ways and Means).

Repubs become Dems

In Kansas, three former Republicans switched parties and won office this year as Democrats. "I got tired of fighting about whether Charles Darwin was right when I was 14 or 15," said switcher Mark Parkinson, who is now the state's lieutenant governor.

On the down side, there are still too many go-slow, don't-rock-the-boat, weak-kneed, money-grubbing, corporatized Democrats who won't break their habits of bedding down with the lobbyists and even the Bushites. They will push hard from inside the Democratic Caucus (while the White House, the money interests and the establishment media pushes from outside) for the majority to "be nice," move to the corporate right, and agree from the start to surrender half of what they want (and then compromise down from there).

Now is the time for progressives to be more vigilant than ever—focus on what the Democrats are doing and not doing, make loud and clear demands that they do more, and keep organizing at the grassroots level. Just a few months ago, George W declared, "I'm the decider." No, he's not. Neither are the Democrats. You are.

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