



THE TWELVE YEAR ITCH

Democrats think 2006
will be their 1994.
Here's why it won't.

by Grover G. Norquist

House and Senate were simultaneously Republican for only one term, 1953 to 1954, and the Senate was GOP from 1981 to 1987.

That focus changed with both victory in the Cold War and the Newt Gingrich-led taking of the House and Senate on November 8, 1994. Republicans gained a total of 57 House seats and ten Senate seats when one includes the five Democrat House members and two Democrat senators who switched parties to join the winning team.

Official Washington expected to shake off the Gingrich interregnum in 1996. The GOP House majority did fall by eight seats, from 236 to 228. The Senate Democrats won back two seats, while a popular Bill Clinton used his White House in most innovative ways to raise campaign cash and defeat a hapless Bob Dole 49 to 41 percent.

Two years later, in 1998, Republicans lost five House seats, shrinking the caucus to 223, while holding steady in the Senate as a focus on Clinton's failures and talk of impeachment did not help them in congressional races.

Republicans lost five Senate seats in 2000 while George W. Bush was losing the popular vote to Al Gore, and dropped two House seats to a majority of 221. In July 2001, the "famous for only 14 minutes" Vermont Sen. James Jeffords left the Republican caucus in or-

THE BIG QUESTION in Washington these days is whether Republicans can hold their vise-grip on Congress—but that's a sign not of how weak the GOP is, but how strong.

During the Cold War conservatives focused their hopes and energies on capturing and holding the presidency. There were two good reasons for concentrating on the White House rather than Congress. First, presidents made the critical decisions of war and peace, retreat, and containment. FDR gave away Eastern Europe. Truman surrendered China and half of Korea. Reagan faced down the Soviet Empire, cutting off its sources of hard currency and breaking its back economically. Bush 41 drove Iraq out of Kuwait and managed the collapse of the crippled USSR.

The second reason for a president-centric conservative movement was that the White House was achievable and Congress was beyond hope of capture. From 1948 to 1991, Republicans held the White House under Eisenhower, Nixon, Ford, Reagan, and Bush for a total of 27 of 43 years, or 63 percent of the time. The

der to give the Democrats a majority that lasted until the 2002 elections.

In 2002, the year of the Enron scandal, recession, and the “phony war” between the toppling of the Taliban government in Afghanistan and the later war in Iraq, Republicans gained seven seats in the House, giving them 228, and two in the Senate to regain a 51-vote Senate majority. Oh, yes, this GOP gain occurred even though the total stock market capitalization had declined by nearly 50 percent from March 2000 through October 2002, losing \$7.3 trillion in shareholder wealth in a nation where a majority of voters now owned stock.

In 2004, Bush’s job approval rating was below 50 percent, the war in Iraq was troubling, and Democrat billionaires like George Soros understood this was an election for both the presidency and the Supreme Court. Bush squeaked by with 51 percent of the vote and the Republicans picked up four seats in the House—with an assist from Texas Governor Rick Perry and the newly minted (November 2002) Republican majority in the Texas legislature, which redistricted Texas between 2002 and 2004. In the Senate, Republicans picked up a net four seats to re-create the 55-seat caucus they had the day before 2000.

THE PRECEDING HISTORY IS TO SUGGEST that the present Republican majorities in the House and Senate are not fragile. They have survived a recession, two wars, trillions in lost stock market wealth, a late-breaking DUI announcement, a popular-vote-losing Republican president, the Enron scandals, and the best Bill Clinton had to throw at them—twice.

The growing strength of the Republican Party has been broad and deep. Unlike the lonely Republican victories of Eisenhower and Nixon, the election of 1994 saw the Republicans win not only 52 seats in the U.S. House and eight in the Senate, but also 505 state legislators, eleven governorships, eleven state senate majorities, and eight state house majorities. In the past 12 years, Republicans have only given back four House seats, gained two senators, gained three state house majorities, held even with state senate majorities, gained 143 state legislators, and given back only two governorships. The Republican Party’s step-up in power at the national and state level in 1994 has held.

A reminder of how the party has strengthened: In 1992, there were only two states where the Republican Party had control of the state legislature and the governorship: New Hampshire and Arizona. Today the Republican Party has the governorship and both houses of the legislature in eleven states: Texas, Florida, South

Carolina, Georgia, Missouri, Indiana, Ohio, North and South Dakota, Utah, and Idaho. (One can add Nebraska with a Republican governor and a unicameral Republican, but nominally non-partisan, majority.) Democrats have similar control in seven states—down from 18 in 1992: Washington, New Mexico, Illinois, Louisiana, North Carolina, West Virginia, and Maine.

That said, official Washington is convinced that there is a good chance that the Republicans can lose the House and the Senate on November 2, 2006.

THERE ARE GOOD AND BAD REASONS to argue that the Republicans could lose control of the House. The worst argument first: The president’s party loses on average 40 seats in the House of Representatives in the sixth year of a two-term presidency. True. But that’s irrelevant. The two most recent sixth-year elections were in 1986 with Reagan and 1998 with Bill Clinton, and the trend did not hold: Republicans lost five seats each time.

There may be a reason that sixth-year partisan swings have gone from 96 in 1874 to five: The two parties have learned how to use computers to re-draw district lines to protect incumbents. House members win re-election over 90 percent of the time. Looking at 2006, Republicans are not sitting on a mountain of politically unstable, recently won House seats. When Bush won with 51 percent in 2004, there was only a net gain of four House seats and those were the gains from Texas redistricting.

Democrats point out that they only need to win a net of 15 seats to regain the majority in the House. The problem for the Democrats is the small number of targets that those 15 have to come from. Thanks to the marvels of modern gerrymandering there are probably only 16 Republican incumbents in competitive districts and seven competitive open seats being vacated by Republicans. There are 15 Democrats in competitive seats, optimistic Republicans believe, and maybe

GOP Net Gains in the 1994 Elections

U.S. House:	+57*
U.S. Senate:	+10**
State House Majorities:	+8
State Senate Majorities:	+11
Total State Legislators:	+505
Governorships:	+10

*includes 5 Democrats who switched parties

**includes 2 Democrats who switched parties

three Democrats retiring from competitive seats.

The most likely seats to change hands are the open ones. This year there have been 17 Republican retirements and ten Democrat retirements. The number of retirements is not more than usual. In 2004, there were 18 Republican and 14 Democrat retirements; in 2002, 25 Republicans and 19 Democrats. And of the 17 Republican retirements this year, Bush carried 15 of the districts in both 2000 and 2004. His median vote in all 17 was 55 percent in 2000 and 57 percent in 2004.

GOP Net Gains/Losses Since 1994

U.S. House:	-4
U.S. Senate:	+2
State House Majorities:	+3
State Senate Majorities:	Even
Total State Legislators:	+143
Governorships:	-2

There are, however, some Republicans retiring from marginal seats. Jim Nussle is leaving Iowa's first district, which gave Bush only 47 percent of the vote, to run for governor. Bob Beauprez is leaving Colorado's seventh district, which gave Bush 48 percent, to run to replace retiring Republican Governor Bill Owens. Republicans worry about Arizona's eighth district, now held by retiring Jim Kolbe (Bush 53 percent); Minnesota's sixth district, where Mark Kennedy is leaving to run for the Senate (Bush 57 percent); and Wisconsin's eighth (Bush 55 percent), whose Mark Green is also running for governor.

The Democrats' chances of gaining a net 15 seats are diminished by the Democrat incumbents likely to lose. West Virginia's Alan Mollohan, running in a district Bush won with 58 percent of the vote, was a GOP target before the *Wall Street Journal* broke the story that he had funneled \$250 million in earmarks to foundations he and his former staffers created and somehow his net worth went from negative to millions through real estate deals with the same former staffers. Chet Edwards is the one Texas Democrat congressman left standing in a strong Republican district (Bush 70 percent) that no Democrat running statewide has carried in the past ten years. Edwards's winning margins have declined in the past three elections from 54 to 52 to 51 percent. He has drawn a strong Republican opponent in Van Taylor who, unlike in 2004, is leading a united Republican Party.

Republicans have raised \$324,643,314 compared

to \$226,684,111 for the Democrats during the 2005-2006 cycle. These two numbers include all money raised by the parties and the House and Senate party committees. Comparing cash on hand (revenues minus money already spent) for April 20, 2006, the GOP leads \$94,106,281 to \$61,046,003.

Political analyst Charlie Cook points out that, in his view, of the 35 most competitive districts, Republicans must defend 24 and Democrats defend eleven. To gain 15 seats Democrats must defend all eleven of their most vulnerable seats and win 63 percent of competitive seats held by Republicans. Thus, Democrats must win 74 percent of all competitive races to gain the majority. Not impossible, but difficult.

BUT ALL THIS TALK ABOUT competitive seats, money raised, and percentages is a lot of math—and Democrats prefer social studies to math. Asked to explain how they can overcome the unlikely mathematics of gaining 15 net seats from 35 competitive races, they prefer to tell stories. Stories of a possible tsunami that will put the “wind at the backs” of the Democrats and sweep Democrats to a 1994 or 1974 style national victory overcoming local politics.

To date, Democrats have put forward four stories of “How the Democrats will win in 2006.” The first story was that after Hurricane Katrina America “rediscovered poverty” and this made Democrats popular. This didn't last more than a week or two as many Americans thought they saw looters rather than victims of Bush's tax cuts and poverty seemed to have a high correlation with places where the ideas of the Great Society were taken most seriously.

The second myth in waiting was that the 2006 election would be about competence and that FEMA's failures in Louisiana would convince Americans that Democrats are more competent than Bush Republicans. The Democrats are still working on this one. Democratic Party chair Howard Dean showed up in April for a photo opportunity cleaning out a flooded New Orleans home and announced that if Jimmy Carter were still president New Orleans would have been fixed up by now. Somehow, the idea that the Democrat leadership of New Orleans' mayor and Louisiana's governor or Jimmy Carter's 1970s are a model of competence has not caught on with voters.

It is not clear why it was Republican incompetence that made the New Orleans police disappear, or made Louisiana react more poorly to the storm than Mississippi, whose governor is a Republican.

Then in November of last year the Democrats

18 Current Republican Congressmen in Districts Kerry Won in 2004

U.S. Rep.	District	Kerry % of vote in 2004
Rob Simmons	CT-2	54%
Christopher Shays	CT-4	54%
Nancy Johnson	CT-5	49% (Bush 49%)
Bob Beauprez	CO-7	51%
Michael Castle	DE-at large	53%
Clay Shaw	FL-22	52%
Jim Nussle	IA-1	53%
Jim Leach	IA-2	55%
Mark Kirk	IL-10	53%
Anne Northup	KY-3	51%
Charles Bass	NH-2	52%
Heather Wilson	NM-1	51%
James Walsh	NY-25	50% (Bush 48%)
Jim Gerlach	PA-6	51%
Curt Weldon	PA-7	53%
Mike Fitzpatrick	PA-8	51%
Charlie Dent	PA-15	50% (Bush 50%)
Dave Reichert	WA-8	51%

latched onto Iraq as their winning issue. Republicans were in trouble when the Democrats sat silently by while mounting casualties and instability in Iraq made Americans unhappy with Bush's leadership. But suddenly, on November 17, 2005, John Murtha (D-PA) announced that he had an alternative vision for Iraq. He would have all U.S. troops withdraw immediately. Democrats proclaimed they now had a winning issue. By the next afternoon, all but three Democrats voted against Murtha's idea when it was put to a vote in the House of Representatives. The following week, Nancy Pelosi announced that the great thing about being a Democrat was the party had no position on Iraq. Iraq might not be the crown jewel of the Bush administration, but Democrats have yet to fashion an argument for themselves with the word "Iraq" in the sentence.

Next up was the "culture of corruption." This one seemed stronger. It was tried in 2002 with the Enron and accounting scandals, but this time we had Tom DeLay, Jack Abramoff, and Randy "Duke" Cunningham, a real live congressman who admitted to taking

personal bribes, not oddly timed campaign contributions. Would this work? It has certainly given Democrats and their allies in the establishment press their best talking points. There are two reasons for wonder, however.

The first was the actual results of the April 11, 2006, special election in California's 50th district to replace "Duke" Cunningham. This San Diego seat was ground zero for the "culture of corruption" charge. Cunningham was not only accused of taking hundreds of thousands of dollars in real bribes, but convicted and imprisoned for doing so. Ron Nehring, the chairman of the Republican Party of San Diego, points out that in the jungle primary the Republican candidates won 55 percent of the vote and the Democrats won 44 percent—exactly the Bush/Kerry vote of 2004. There was every reason to believe that an invigorated Democrat base would swarm to the polls, increasing the Democrat vote over historic levels. This had happened for Republicans in 1994. It was credible to predict that Republicans would stay home in shame after the congressman they had sent to Washington eight times had been exposed as a criminal—as occurred in 1974 in the wake of Watergate. Instead, there was no surge in Democratic voting nor a desire among Republicans to stay home.

And now we have the spectacle of Rep. Alan Mollohan, he of the \$250 million in suspicious earmarks. Mollohan was the ranking Democrat on the Ethics Committee. He's been forced to resign that post. So much for the Democrats' moral superiority.

Sometimes the "story" is simply that Bush is unpopular and this election will be a referendum on Bush. Maybe. But Bush's popularity rating has jumped up and down in the wake of September 11, 2001, and has not correlated with Republican election results.

One month after September 11, when Bush's popularity was at 90 percent, Democrat Mark Warner won the governorship of Virginia with 52 percent of the vote. Four years later, with Bush's popularity down at 40 percent, Warner's successor Tom Kaine won the same Virginia governor's race with 51 percent of the vote.

THE RACE FOR THE SENATE has received less attention than the fight for control of the House, and for good reason. First, winning 51 percent of House seats gives you 100 percent control of that chamber's agenda. But winning 51 Senate seats means much less in a world where the minority has the power to filibuster and demand 60 votes to pass anything contentious, and where any senator can bring the Senate to a halt with "holds" on nominations and

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41 Current Democrat Congressmen in Districts Bush Won in 2004

U.S. Rep.	District	Bush % of vote in 2004	U.S. Rep.	District	Bush % of vote in 2004
Bud Cramer	AL-5	60%	Bob Etheridge	NC-2	54%
Marion Berry	AR-1	52%	Mike McIntyre	NC-7	56%
Vic Snyder	AR-2	51%	Earl Pomeroy	ND- at large	63%
Mike Ross	AR-4	51%	Ted Strickland	OH-6	51%
Dennis Cardoza	CA-18	50%	Dan Boren	OK-2	59%
Loretta Sanchez	CA-47	50%	Darlene Hooley	OR-5	50%
John Salazar	CO-3	55%	Tim Holden	PA-17	58%
Allen Boyd	FL-2	54%	John Spratt	SC-5	57%
Sanford Bishop	GA-2	54%	Stephanie Herseth	SD-at large	60%
Jim Marshall	GA-3	55%	Lincoln Davis	TN-4	58%
Leonard Boswell	IA-3	50%	Bart Gordon	TN-6	60%
Melissa Bean	IL-8	56%	John Tanner	TN-8	53%
Dennis Moore	KS-3	55%	Ruben Hinojosa	TX-15	55%
Ben Chandler	KY-6	58%	Chet Edwards	TX-17	70%
Charlie Melancon	LA-3	58%	Solomon Ortiz	TX-27	55%
Bart Stupak	MI-1	53%	Henry Cuellar	TX-28	53%
Collin Peterson	MN-7	55%	Jim Matheson	UT-2	66%
Gene Taylor	MS-4	68%	Rick Boucher	VA-9	59%
Ike Skelton	MO-4	58%	Brian Baird	WA-3	50%
Tim Bishop	NY-1	49%	Alan Mollohan	WV-1	58%
		(Kerry 49%)	Nick Rahall	WV-3	53%

demands for votes on any measure.

But the Senate is the great missed opportunity for Republicans in 2006. Had they garnered their preferred candidates in North Dakota (present Republican Governor John Hoeven), Nebraska (former Governor Mike Johanns), and Florida (present Governor Jeb Bush or one of the two candidates now running to replace Jeb Bush), the Republicans might have started the 2006 Senate campaign up three senators—for a total of 58 Republican senators. With less powerful challengers, the GOP has a weaker shot at those three seats and must worry about their vulnerable senators: Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania, Lincoln Chafee of Rhode Island, and Conrad Burns of Montana. On the plus side, Republicans are excited about their chances at defeating Maria Cantwell of Washington state with successful businessman Mike McGavick, and Republican Senate candidates in Minnesota, Michigan, and even New Jersey are running credible challenger races.

Democrats are focused on 2006 for one more reason. If they cannot regain the House and Senate this November, the trends suggest they may be out of power for a generation. There are 41 congressional

districts now held by Democrats that voted for George Bush in 2004. There are 16 Democrat senators in states that voted for Bush in 2004. On the other hand, there are only 18 Republicans in congressional districts carried by Kerry and seven Republican senators in Kerry-Blue states.

Since 1984, the number of “conflicted” congressional districts has declined from 193 to 59. Should all House and Senate seats come into alignment with their presidential party vote, the House majority will grow by 23 to 254 and the Senate will have 55 plus nine or 64 Republicans—enough GOP senators to break a filibuster even when McCain, Snowe, Collins, and Rhode Island’s Chafee are playing bridge in the Democrat cloakroom.

And redistricting in 2012 and again in 2022 will probably move more House seats from blue states to red states.

For the Democrats seeking restoration of their House majority, it is now or never. ❁

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