

THE FAILURES AND FUTURE PROMISE BEHIND

the Republican Stumble

BY GROVER NORQUIST

At first glance, little changed on November 3. Republicans began and ended with 55 U.S. senators. Their 228 House seats edged down to 223. Out in the states, there were 32 GOP governors before the election, 17 Democrats, and one independent. Twenty-four hours later the totals were 31 Republicans, 17 Democrats, and two independents. Of the 7,376 state senators and representatives, Republicans lost a total of 12. Overall, Republicans continued their majority holds on the U.S. Senate, the House, and the bulk of the states' governorships.

Yet few Republicans were rejoicing—because they, like most observers, had expected the GOP to continue its long march through Congress and the state houses. Just weeks before the elec-

tion, a Democratic National Committee official told the *New York*

BREAKING OUT THE BUBBLY...

Times that losing fewer than 26 House seats and six Senate seats would be “a huge victory.”

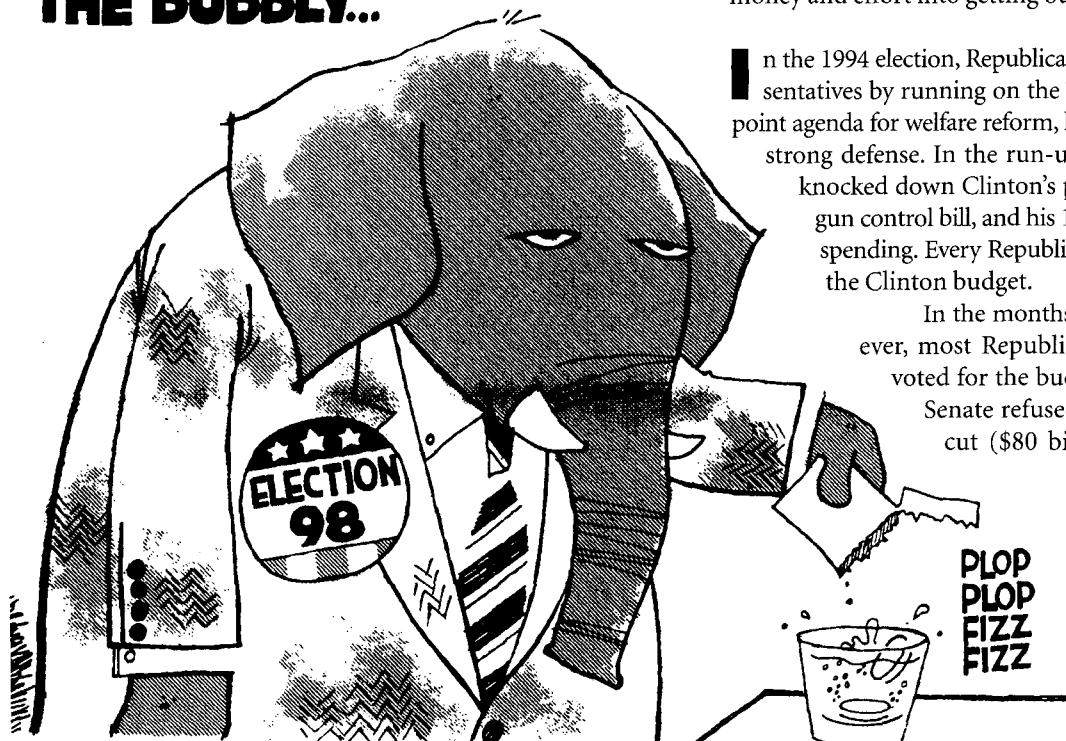
Democrats tried to “spin” that the election was a backlash against Republican talk of impeachment. Actually, the national exit polls found only 5 percent of voters singled out the Lewinsky scandal as the most important issue, and this group mostly voted Republican. Nineteen percent of the voters said the most important issue was “moral and ethical standards,” and more than four out of five in this cohort went Republican.

Some Republicans tried to blame the GOP's poor showing on the party's failure to run a strong “technical” campaign. In reality, the party and its candidates did a decent job with the mechanics of campaigning. This only highlights the two deeper reasons Republicans fell short of their optimistic expectations: They lacked a national agenda, and the Democrats poured money and effort into getting out their constituencies.

In the 1994 election, Republicans captured the House of Representatives by running on the “Contract with America,” a ten-point agenda for welfare reform, lower taxes, less regulation, and a strong defense. In the run-up to that election, Republicans knocked down Clinton's plan to socialize health care, his gun control bill, and his 1993 budget that raised taxes and spending. Every Republican in the House voted against the Clinton budget.

In the months before the 1998 election, however, most Republicans in the House and Senate voted for the budget deal with Clinton, and the Senate refused even to vote on the small tax cut (\$80 billion over five years) that the

House had passed, which made it hard for Republicans to argue that voting for them would mean lower taxes. (Back in 1994, the Senate did not participate in the Contract with America, but senators at least avoided undermining it.)



CONTEMPORARY LIBERALISM

Admittedly, even if Republicans had presented a unified front, they would have had trouble competing for attention with Clinton's admission of a relationship with Monica Lewinsky, as well as with such conveniently timed media events as the Middle East peace discussions and John Glenn's space trip. On the other hand, the fate of key campaigns and ballot initiatives suggests a more principled campaign might have worked.

Take taxes. In Montana, voters passed a constitutional amendment requiring that all tax hikes be voted on by the people. In Arkansas, the political establishment tried to repeal the existing constitutional requirement for a three-fourths vote in the state legislature to raise taxes, but 60 percent of voters said *no*. In "Taxachusetts," voters overwhelmingly chose to halve the income tax on "unearned" income.

More than 1,100 candidates for state legislatures promised to oppose tax increases and signed the Taxpayer Protection Pledge championed by my organization, Americans for Tax Reform. They joined 210 members of the House and 42 senators. Massachusetts Governor Paul Cellucci consistently challenged his Democratic opponent to explain why he would not sign the no-tax-hike pledge. Alabama's Republican Governor Fob James defeated his well-funded primary opponent by highlighting several taxes the opponent had supported in the past. James himself was defeated by the only Democratic candidate for governor who signed the pledge. In Kansas, the moderate Republican Bill Graves crushed a conservative challenge from the Republican party chairman by pointing out that his challenger had once supported a tax hike. Graves bragged he had cut taxes in every year of his governorship and defeated his Democratic opponent 73-23 percent. Texas easily re-elected Governor George W. Bush, who campaigned on his \$1 billion property tax cut and promised to cut taxes another \$2.7 billion.

National exit polls show Republicans won 65 percent of those voters who said taxes were their top concern, but that group made up only 11 percent of the electorate. If Republicans had made taxes the priority of 15 percent of voters, the GOP would likely have scored gains in the House rather than losses.

On other issues too, voters endorsed key conservative principles. Washington State voters, even as they re-elected liberal Patty Murray to the Senate and swept Democrats to power in both houses of the state legislature, voted 59-41 percent to abolish racial and gender preferences. Idaho voters reiterated support for term limits, while Alaska voted to use English in its official actions. Gay marriages were handily voted down in Hawaii and Alaska, and Georgia rejected a tax increase that would have paid for environmental land purchases. Virginia voted down the creation of super-regional governments with the power to tax and regulate growth.

Still, Republican timidity wasn't the only reason Democrats held back the Republican tide. Credit is also due to Democrats' unprecedented get-out-the-vote effort, funded with money from trial lawyers and union dues, and targeted at union members and African Americans.

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This effort considerably boosted the number of union members and blacks voting in a number of tight elections. In a 45 percent black Georgia congressional district, Democratic votes jumped from roughly 72,000 in 1994 to over 100,000 in 1998—an increase that accounted for a fifth of the Republican gubernatorial candidate's margin of defeat. All told, unions, trial lawyers, and large Democratic donors spent tens of mil-

lions of dollars on unreported, untraceable efforts to mobilize voters.

They did this because they know the stakes: their political lives. A specter haunts Democrats: If Republicans win the presidency along with the House and Senate (and redistricting will likely give Republicans an additional 15 or more House seats in 2002), then the GOP could pass tort reform—taking a \$5-10 billion a year bite out of trial lawyer fees. The Republicans could also prevent unions from using members' dues for politics without the worker's permission, costing labor activists at least \$2 billion a year. And changing the way federal funds flow to our big cities to ensure monies go directly to students, tenants, and the poor—rather than flowing through the Democratic party's precinct workers—would cut off hundreds of millions of dollars now flowing to the Democrats.

So far, Bill Clinton has made institutional reforms like these impossible. If that blockage were lifted, long-delayed measures could pass that would result in a liberation of American politics from a half-century-long liberal stranglehold. So no one should be surprised by the racist ads run by Missouri's Democratic party suggesting Republicans want to burn down black churches, or by the Democrats' phony "pollsters" who called retirees to plant the idea that voting Republican would mean that Social Security checks wouldn't arrive next month. For the fact is, contemporary liberalism would not survive losing control of both the presidency and the Congress for even a two-year period.

The good news for Republicans is that their core issues remain popular. They will succeed if led by a presidential candidate able to motivate common sense middle-class Americans to show up at the polls and outnumber the voters ginned up by desperate Democrats. The natural place for Republicans to build some enthusiasm for their agenda is at the state level. In Washington, Bill Clinton will veto GOP reforms on issues like taxes and school choice. But similar efforts to give citizens greater control over their own lives, improve education, reduce taxes, eliminate racial preferences, and reduce spending can be enacted by Republicans in state governments. Today there are 14 states—including Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Kansas, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio, and Pennsylvania—where Republicans control the governorship and both houses of the legislature.

With real achievements from our regional capitals, and a presidential candidate drawn from the ranks of America's 31 Republican state executives, the GOP can offer voters in 2000 a choice between proven success and throwback tactics.

Grover Norquist is president of Americans for Tax Reform.

Democrats Hit a Jackpot

By Peter Augustine Lawler

The soul of the Republican party today looks to be with its governors. Most of them were re-elected by huge margins, in gratitude for their effective reforms that limited state government, and their measured moral guidance. The noteworthy exceptions were the defeats of the incumbent Republican governors of Alabama and South Carolina, Fob James and David Beasley. And the state that sits between those two, Georgia, rather unexpectedly and easily replaced one Democratic governor with another.

Many explanations have been offered for these results. The Republican gubernatorial candidate in Georgia, Guy Millner, had twice before lost statewide. There was an unexpectedly large and monolithic African-American turnout in the region. But the key to all three of these exceptional Republican defeats was, oddly enough, the Georgia state lottery.

The Democrats in South Carolina and Alabama were strongly in favor of launching state-run lotteries, while Beasley and James were clearly against them. Bowing to success, Georgia's Republican candidate for governor declared his enthusiasm for the existing lottery, but the outgoing Democratic Governor Zell Miller, the originator of the games, insisted in commercial after commercial that he had anointed the Democratic candidate as the protector of his baby.



The lottery fever visible in these three states, and other parts of the country as well, reveals much about both the 1998 election and the character of American politics today. The news, on the whole, is quite unsettling. But just as a work of political art, you've got to give the Georgia lottery its due.

Narrowly approved in a 1992 referendum, its undeniable success has made Governor Miller enormously popular. Contrary to the experience of many other states, lottery sales have been large and growing (\$1.72 billion in 1997) and the money really has been spent on education projects. In particular, the lottery funds Georgia's HOPE Scholarships, which allow high school students with a B average (a sizable majority of middle-class students) to attend a state college tuition-free. Or the students may receive \$4,000 off private-college tuition in Georgia.

These scholarships have tended to keep Georgia students in Georgia for college and have been a great boon for both Georgia institutions and Georgia parents. Berry College in Rome, Georgia, the private institution where I teach, has more and better students as a result, and not only has my job become more pleasant, my salary has also increased. Admissions standards at the University of Georgia now rival those of Michigan and Virginia. Meanwhile in neighboring states, excellent colleges that have depended on Georgia students, such as Furman University in South Carolina, have had corresponding dips in the quality and quantity of applicants.