

November 2 Elections: Midterm Day of Reckoning; “Let the landslide begin”

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Barack Obama rode into office in January, 2008 on a wave of optimism. By the time the ballots are counted in Tuesday's midterm elections, Obama's personal approval ratings will have fallen to historic lows and he will be universally recognized as the man who brought ruin on the Democratic party.

While still popular among party loyalists, the president has become radioactive among independents—the critical group of “swing voters” who have fled Camp Obama en masse frustrated with both the lack of audacity and/or change. No one figured they were electing George W. Bush to a third term in office when they cast their vote for the inspiring senator from Illinois two years ago. But that's what they got. To say that supporters are disappointed in Obama's performance, is a gross understatement of the pessimism that's spread like Kudzu among the party faithful. People have become increasingly cynical as they realize that neither party provides a path to real structural change. The system is broken; Obama has merely exposed the rot at the heart of American democracy.

In truth, it's not all Obama's fault. He was picked by elites who thought they could ride his lofty-sounding rhetoric all the way to the White House. And they did, too, but that's when things began to unravel, as one campaign promise after the other was tossed aside like yesterday's coffee grounds. Obama even backpedaled on issues that would have cost him very little in terms of political capital—like gays in the military or allowing California's liberalizing of marijuana laws go unchallenged. Issues that could have rekindled the support of his dejected liberal base. But, no. Obama chose to conduct business the same way as his predecessor, Bush. The only difference was style.

In Obama's defense, it's fair to say that voters had plenty of opportunity to look behind the rhetorical fanfare to his abysmal position on the issues. He was not only a staunch supporter of the quagmire in Afghanistan (that he expanded to Pakistan); he also voted for the Patriot Act, the TARP bailout, and warrantless wiretapping. Since then, he's approved (in principle) the policy of killing US citizens suspected of terrorism, rejected habeas claims for terror suspects, authorized intelligence/counterinsurgency operations in foreign countries, and refused to honor his commitment to close the US gulag at Guantanamo Bay. He has made every accommodation imaginable for big pharma, big finance and big oil—right down to allowing himself to be used in a photo-op on a beach in Louisiana during the Gulf oil spill to convey the impression of a chief executive who “feels the pain” of locals whose lives have been destroyed by the criminal negligence of serial polluters like BP. No that's “fraud you can believe in”.

The argument could be made that the corporate Dems who fill out the current administration are more competent than the bunglers on the Bush team. But, while its true that Clinton, Holbrooke and Gates are more discreet and resourceful than Wolfowitz, Cheney and Rumsfeld, that's not what people voted for. They wanted change, and they didn't get it. What they got was a more skillful imperial managerial staff. Nothing more. So now Democratic senators, congressmen and governors face the prospect of a GOP surge, followed by two years of political gridlock during which unemployment will rise to 11%, extreme poverty will soar to levels not seen since the 19th century, more than one state government will default, and Republican rejection of a second round of fiscal stimulus will thrust the economy back into recession. At the same time, the erosion of civil liberties, the bailouts, the covert foreign interventions, the fear-mongering, the torture, and the wars will continue apace.

Tuesday's balloting is a referendum on the Obama presidency. Let the landslide begin.

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