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US Midterm Elections: Past and Present Voting With "The Seat of Their Pants"

by JACK RASMUS

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With the U.S. House of Representatives already firmly in control of the Republicans, and dominated by their ultra-conservative Teaparty faction, should Republicans in 2014 now also take the Senate, the U.S. Congress will quickly become even more aggressively pro-corporate, pro-military adventurist, and even more anti-US worker than it has been to date.

With the USA midterm Congressional elections barely a week away on November 4, it appears now almost certain that Republicans will win the minimum six key Senate races they need in order take control of the U.S. Senate from the Democrats and the Obama administration.

In a previous essay written in September, when the Democrats and the U.S. mainstream press were still maintaining the Democrats would hold on to the U.S. Senate, this writer predicted that “Obama and the Democrats face the very real possibility of losing control of the U.S. Senate in November” (see ‘Barack Obama as Jimmy Clinton’, teleSUR English, September 28, 2014). Now it is almost certain they will.

Why Democrats May Lose the US Senate

Republicans need to take back only 6 seats from the Democrats in the Senate to gain control of that institution. A week before the elections, they now hold comfortable leads in at least six and are favored to win in two more. The final outcome could be as high as ten Senate seat losses for the Democrats, as Democrats hold only slight leads in traditionally Republican states like North Carolina and Louisiana.

As the election comes down to the wire, Democrats are becoming increasingly desperate, pinning their hopes on long shot wins in historically Republican bastion states like Kansas and Georgia. Even lead editorials in the New York Times now raise the specter, in bold headlines, of a 'The Democratic Panic' now in progress. Elsewhere high ranking party insiders, like Jim Manley, former spokesperson for the Senate Democratic Party leader, Harry Reid, are quoted publicly saying that "There is a decent shot that we are going to lose the Senate".

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It is estimated that spending on the 2014 midterm elections will exceed \$4 billion, about \$2 billion raised each by Republican and Democrat candidates.

For that \$4 billion, the American public can expect a new policy aggressiveness to emerge immediately after the election, driven by a newly confident, even more conservative, pro-corporate right wing with firm control of both houses of the U.S. Congress.

With the U.S. House of Representatives already firmly in control of the Republicans, and dominated by their ultra-conservative Teaparty faction, should Republicans in 2014 now also take the Senate the U.S. Congress will quickly become even more aggressively pro-corporate, pro-military adventurist, and even more anti-US worker than it has been to date.

High on the agenda of new policies that will quickly emerge from the midterm elections, should the Republicans take the Senate, will be the following policy initiatives: new tax cuts for U.S. multinational businesses, harsher treatment of immigrant workers in the USA, more anti-environmental actions favoring shale fracking, offshore drilling, pipelines, and CO2 industrial emissions rollbacks, renewed attacks on the Medicaid health system for the poor and Medicare health services for the retired, proposals for more funding for wars in the middle east, demands for more aggressive military support for the USA engineered coup d'etat government in the Ukraine, and perhaps even a renewed attack on social security retirement benefits in the USA.

Strategists for both Republicans and Democrats agree that the 2014 midterm election is about jobs and the economy. While the stock and bond markets in the USA continue their five year surge to new record heights, providing even more capital gains income to the wealthy and their corporations, the bottom 90% of USA households continue to languish after more than five years of so-called economic recovery.

While the rich get ever richer and corporations ever more profitable, the Obama administration and the mainstream press daily trumpet that more than six million new jobs have been created since 2009. However, that same mainstream press remains conspicuously silent about the real facts about jobs and incomes in the USA. For example, in a Bloomberg News interview this past week, it was reported that 76% of the U.S. jobs created since 2009 have been what is called ‘contingent’ jobs—i.e. 60% part time and another 16% temporary jobs. Jobs that are paid 50%-65% less than full time jobs. Jobs with no benefits, substandard working conditions, and no job security.

Furthermore, while 6 million jobs have been created, according to the mainstream press, little or no mention by that same press is made about the 8 million USA workers who have dropped out and left the labor force altogether, disillusioned they could ever find work sufficient to support themselves. If the latter 8 million were considered in the unemployment rate in the USA—which they are not given the way the USA underestimates its jobless—the true unemployment rate in the USA would be in excess of 12% today instead of the current official rate of about half that.

That’s 8 million potentially unhappy voters. Add to their ranks the 4.5 million who were able only to get part time and temp jobs; add the millions whose homes have been foreclosed since 2009; add the millions of union workers who now increasingly realize they will get no benefit from Obama’s health care act and instead will have their own costs of health insurance doubled; add the millions of students now in debt to the tune of more than \$1 trillion in the USA; add those millions fed up with the continued militarist policies of the administration; and, not least, add to all the above the key constituency that more than any other enabled Obama to win a second term in 2012—i.e. the tens of millions of Hispanic workers in the USA that Obama has recently turned his back on once again.

The Strategic Latino-Hispanic Vote

The Obama administration since 2009 has deported more undocumented Latin American immigrant workers, and broken up more of their families as a result, than all preceding presidents combined. More than 2 million have been deported on Obama’s watch. 438,000 in just 2013, which was 50,000 more than 2012, which in turn was 30,000 more than in 2011. That’s millions of potential family members and friends who will not forget the hurt come November 4.

And after promising to end deportations and take executive action himself on immigration earlier this year, Obama has since retreated this past June and put all promises about immigration reform on hold.

Not surprising, a September 2014 NBC/Telemundo poll showed only 13% of Latino voters in the USA felt “very positive” about the Democratic Party.

The Hispanic vote was key in 2012 to winning those states that put Obama back into the White House. Today it is those same states—Colorado, North Carolina, Georgia, Florida, etc.—that are the key swing states up for grabs in the race for the Senate.

It is those same states in which Democrats running for the Senate are trailing well behind in voter polls. And if most Latino and Hispanic voters stay home and don't turn out to vote, which appears the likely case next week, then Democrat Senate candidates are doomed in those same key states and Democrats will lose the U.S. Senate 'hands down', as they say. Indicative of this likelihood was the headline in a Wall St. Journal this past week that declared 'Hispanic Voter Frustration Threatens Democrats Most'. The story included a report by organizers of the National Council of La Raza, who talked to prospective Latino voters house to house in Florida. The story noted that "many seemed to not be paying attention to this election. 'We've been let down so many times, I don't know who to support', said Maria Molina, 'I don't know if I'm going to vote'."

A Tale of Two Midterm Debacles: 2010 and 2014

The two midterm elections—2010 and 2014—are linked. They are part of the same dynamic and process, begun in 2010 and continuing to this day. And both the loss of the U.S. House in 2010, and likely the U.S. Senate in 2014, have their roots in the policies adopted by the Obama administration in the summer of 2010.

Obama's token fiscal stimulus in 2009, which was barely 5% of USA GDP at a time the U.S. economy was declining 15% in 2008-09, was insufficient to ensure a sustained economic recovery. (Compare his to China's 15% of GDP fiscal stimulus package at the time).

By the summer of 2010 more fiscal stimulus for the U.S. economy was clearly called for, as the 2009 stimulus began to dissipate and the U.S. economy to stall out. Unemployment began to rise once again by the tens of thousands every month throughout the summer of 2010. 25 million were still unemployed. Homeowners' foreclosures were accelerating at an average rate of 300,000 a month. Economic output was slowing everywhere, with business, consumer, and local government spending in retreat.

But despite this 2010 summer scenario, the Obama administration ignored the rising housing foreclosures, turning it over to the States' attorneys general deal with the problem. Concerning jobs, he appointed the CEO of the General Electric Corp, Jeff Immelt, to head up his 'jobs program'. Immelt's jobs program turned out to be more free trade, more tax benefits for multinational corporations, and patent reform. Job losses and home foreclosures not surprisingly continued to rise.

Instead of directly addressing the continuing dual jobs and housing crises at the time, Obama turned to providing even more free money to bankers and investors. Following the 'quantitative easing' (QE) U.S. central bank program of 2009 that bought \$1.7 trillion in bad assets from bankers and wealthy investors, Obama had the U.S. central bank provide an additional \$600 billion in late 2010. He then proposed another \$800 billion more in tax cuts for business as well.

In just two years, 2009-2010, bankers and big capital would receive at minimum a total of nearly \$4 trillion in direct subsidies, tax cuts, and free 'no interest' money. (Since 2010 they have received at least \$500 billion dollars more in further business tax cuts, \$2.2 trillion more in QE free money, and hundreds of billions more in direct subsidies).

This focus on recovery for bankers and big business, while doing virtually nothing to address working and middle classes crises in jobs, housing, and declining wages and income, was not lost on American voters in the fall of 2010. With business and investors being bailed out without limit, working and middle class America were receiving little, if anything, in terms of jobs, housing rescue, or any other substantive assistance. The November 2010 elections consequently resulted in a debacle for Democrats, who lost control of the U.S. House of Representatives by historic margins.

Democrats also lost the majority of State governorships up for election in 2010. 2010 was a census year. That meant the states, now mostly under Republican rule after the 2010 elections, could and did proceed to 'gerrymander' safe jurisdictions for Republicans in future U.S. House elections. Gerrymandering would ensure Republicans would hereafter have to worry little about ever losing the U.S. House again.

The jobs crisis in the USA has therefore still not been solved. There is only a massive 'jobs churn'—from full time to contingent jobs, from high pay to low pay, and from new entrants to the labor force to millions leaving the labor force.

The same Obama policies in 2010 that led to the Democrats loss of the U.S. House of Representatives in that year's midterm Congressional elections still continue to haunt Democrat Senate candidates this year, 2014: Jobs, housing, stagnant and declining working class wages and incomes, rising working class debt, and slowing consumption by the vast majority of U.S. households.

While Obama and the Democrats repeatedly refer to 6 million jobs having been created since 2010, they are silent on the fact that 4 million of those are part time, temporary, and thus low paid. Nor do they mention that 8 million have left the labor force altogether. The jobs crisis in the USA has therefore still not be solved. There is only a massive 'jobs churn'—from full time to contingent jobs, from high pay to low pay, and from new entrants to the labor force to millions leaving the labor force.

Nor has the Housing crisis been solved—at least for working and middle class Americans. A brief period of housing recovery in 2011-12 has resulted in a new slowdown. In the interim, housing sales were mostly to the wealthiest households or to institutional investors and foreign buyers—not the normal middle class buyer. Meanwhile, median working class families' wages and incomes have continued to decline 1%-2% every year for the past four years, and household debt levels for median families have continued to rise.

This basically stagnant state of economic affairs affecting the vast majority of U.S. workers and households has not been lost on the average voter today, in 2014, any more than it was lost on the same voter in 2010.

This time, in 2014, the large number of Senate seats that were won by Democrats in 2008 are up for re-election. Those Democrats won Senate seats in 2008 from what had been historically traditional Republican seats in pro-Republican states. Now, in 2014, most of those seats will likely revert back to Republicans again.

The Legacies of 2010 + New Grievances

The Obama and Democrat policies and programs of 2010 that led to their midterm 2010 election debacle have never really changed. Those policies in 2010 did little to create jobs, ignored the foreclosure crisis and failed to generate a sustained housing recovery, and did nothing about working families' steady decline in wages and incomes. That cost the Democrats the U.S. House of Representatives in 2010.

Today in 2014 little is fundamentally different after four years, except that the key voter constituencies Democrats are courting in 2014 Senate races—i.e. Hispanic, student youth, and union workers—have been even more abused in the interim. This time voter response could be even worse, given the overlay of other, additional legitimate grievances by large voter constituencies that previously voted for Democrats.

A close look at the 2012 elections shows that Obama won re-election largely because of Hispanic, student youth, and union labor votes delivered him the key states that made the difference in his U.S. electoral college vote results. In addition to the continuing economic legacies of 2010, these key constituencies now have additional grievances with the Democrats.

Millions of Latino immigrants and Hispanics who had high hopes that Democrats and Obama would address their needs and grievances no longer believe Democrats and Obama can deliver a solution. Millions of students with a combined more than \$1 trillion in loan debt, who are now paying tens of billions a year in excess above-market interest to the U.S. government no longer believe meaningful debt relief is possible, even though it could with a mere stroke of Obama's pen.

And union workers who delivered key Midwest states to Democrats and Obama in 2012, and have received virtually nothing from Obama since 2008 in return (except perhaps the very real prospect of losing their negotiated health benefits in the next few years due to the Obamacare health act) have seen the Obama administration reject their unions' every appeal for assistance and reconsideration since 2012.

It's not that these key constituencies will vote Republican. It's that they will likely not vote Democrat. They will vote with 'the seat of their pants', as they say, and stay home. And that means the loss of the Senate for Democrats next week.