



Tom's Thoughts...

This year of 2010 is promising some very interesting elections across the political spectrum. What a difference a little more than one year makes. In late 2008 Republicans were on the defensive. The electorate was tiring of the George W. Bush presidency, saddled with an economy that was tanking and a war on terrorism with no end in sight. President Bush responded by spending multi billions of dollars on the war effort and on bailout funds for the financial industry. The GOP had difficulty in finding a presidential candidate with wide appeal and finally nominated Sen. John McCain as its standard-bearer.

The Democrats, in contrast were riding high. Illinois Senator Barack Obama used his personality, oratorical skills, and promise for change to upset New York Senator Hilary Clinton for the Democratic presidential nomination. He then led his party to landslide victories in November that gave the Democrats firm control of the executive branch of government and both houses of Congress.

Less than 18 months later, Democrats are now on the defensive. President Obama has trumped Bush's spending and then some with his willingness to use trillions of dollars on federal bailouts and economic recovery measures. His leftist programs of big government, free spending, tax increases (real and threatened) and costly health care reform have largely fallen on deaf ears.

Republicans have been successful in governor contests in Virginia and New Jersey and this year won a special senatorial election to replace the late Ted Kennedy, an almost unheard of feat in one of the most liberal states in the union. The events since November 2008 have the GOP salivating.

However, the real mood in the country seems to be anti-incumbent and a growing frustration with governmental leaders in both parties, especially on the federal level. A grassroots movement that calls itself the Tea Party is railing against big government, costly health reform and unprecedented deficit spending. Polls show young voters (18 to 29), who backed Obama in large numbers in 2008, growing disillusioned with his presidency and politics in general. The president is losing support of independent voters, another important cog in the coalition that elected him in 2008.

And then came the bombshell announcement in Indiana a couple of weeks ago. Within days of the filing deadline for this year's primary election, Sen. Evan Bayh, D-Ind., announced he will not seek re-election. Bayh joins a growing list of incumbents in both parties who are quitting Congress, decisions that have reverberated across the political landscape. In Bayh's case, he said he loved serving the citizens of Indiana but did not love serving in Congress. A moderate politically, he blamed the increasing partisanship in both parties for his frustration with Washington.

No Democrat was able to gather the necessary signatures in time to file a candidacy for the Senate in the few days between Bayh's announcement and the Feb. 19 deadline. Democratic leaders can, and will, select a candidate to run in the November general election. However, Bayh's decision leaves Hoosier Democrats without a popular incumbent at the head of the ticket.

So how will all this play in the elections of 2010? The only certainty is that there is increased interest among Republicans running for office and the prospect of some spirited election contests.

In Indiana, the 2010 election will fill most county offices, all state representative seats, several state senate seats, U.S. representative seats, and one of the two Hoosier U.S. senate seats. Five Republicans are seeking GOP nomination for the U.S. Senate seat being vacated by Bayh, including former GOP Senator Dan Coats and Congressman John Hostettler. Others are Don Bates, Jr., Richard Behney and Marlin A. Stutzman.

Locally, there are several primary election challenges in both parties and contested general election races for almost all offices. Four Republicans are vying for nomination for Indiana's 2nd Congressional seat and the opportunity to challenge Democratic U.S. Rep. Joseph Donnelly. Donnelly is unopposed in the Democratic primary. Republican candidates are State Rep. Jackie Walorski, Jack Jordan, Tony Zirkle, and Martin Dolan.

Next month we'll look at candidates and contested races in the primary and general elections.