



WHAT NOW?

THE DEMOCRATS HAVE RECEIVED THE BOOT AS LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES IN THE BIGGEST HOUSE TURNOVER SINCE THE 1940S. NOW THE BIG QUESTION IS WHAT WILL JOHN BOEHNER AND COMPANY BRING TO THE TABLE WITH THE NEW GOP-DRIVEN HOUSE, AND CAN THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY RECOVER FROM ITS NOVEMBER NIGHTMARE?

It appears America finally got that much-touted change it was promised. Although it's safe to assume this probably isn't quite what President Obama had in mind as the nation was grooving on the high and excitement of his ambitious 2008 campaign. Two years later – a two years many have viewed as misguided and nothing more than self-serving for the policy agenda of the Democratic Party – the fad of Obama as the “Michael Jordan of politics” is waning. The youth vote was not as present in 2010 as it was just two years ago and even his biggest supporters are now questioning his administration's abilities to deliver the big talk of hope and prosperity (the big buzz words of his campaign) our country is still yearning for. And if the mid-term elections held this past November are any indication, the road to re-election in 2012 is going to be a treacherous one. The Democratic Party may have been able to retain its control of the Senate, but a record 64 House seats were turned over to the GOP, including 50 held by Democratic incumbents, many of which were seeking their first re-election.

“For whatever reason, I think the leaders had become out of touch with their districts,” says Mike Kelly, the Republican Representative-elect for Pennsylvania's 3rd District. Kelly was among the victorious GOP candidates to remove a “Pelosi-crat” – as the GOP had so endearingly termed the Democratic Congressional members in many political ads – when he upset first-time incumbent Kathy Dahlkemper. “That was the feeling across the country where Washington had this elitist-feel that they didn't have to listen to the people, they were going to do whatever they wanted to do. The people weren't feeling represented.”

Now many are left wondering how will the Democratic Party bounce back from the events of November 2. Their post-election woes have only deepened as the Party fell to in-squabbling and a failed, almost mutinous, attempt at removing former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi as the Party's

House leader – some former colleagues of Pelosi's were labeling her as “toxic” and “wrong” for the progression of the Party, indicating that if the Democrats wanted to regain the majority, they would have to distance themselves from Pelosi. That, coupled with embattled long-time Representative Charles Rangel's 11 guilty counts of violating House ethics rules (as of our deadline, no punishment had been announced for Rangel, but censure rumors were abound), has left the Party bruised, embarrassed,

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and, most surprisingly, without indication of learning from the mistakes that cost them the House.

“The Democratic caucus can approach this new leadership in two ways – one is to be the loyal opposition, fighting for an ideology with no hope of ever getting the majority again or we can once again be a national party and speak to the issues that resonate throughout the entire country and not just parts of it. I think the former was chosen with Pelosi's election as Minority Leader,” says Jason Altmire, the three-term Democratic Representative of Pennsylvania's 4th District. Altmire's centrist approach to politics has made him a much covered figure in national publications and media. He was among the few Democrats who continually voted against health care reform and he was among the 43 House Democrats who voted

against Pelosi for Minority Leader. "I don't think we are ever going to get the majority back until we have a party that understands that, in middle-America, a lot of the agenda that took place over the past two years was not viewed favorably. We have to have a policy agenda that is suitable and acceptable to those places in America, not just along the coasts.

"President Obama has two choices," continues Altmire, when asked about the best course of action for the President and his lame duck Congress. "He can do like President Clinton did and moderate himself and work with the new leadership, or he can dig in his heels and say, 'I understand the message that was sent, but I think I know better, and I'm going to keep doing what I'm doing.' I think the former approach would be the more-likely successful outcome, but it remains to be seen what he does. I would certainly hope he makes the determination to work with both sides and move to the center a little bit to try and get things accomplished."

The pressing question now is what will come of John Boehner's time at the helming of the House of Representatives. The future Speaker of the House has been known to act as an instigator of obstruction for the Democratic-led Congress. With the tables now-turned, it remains unclear whether this new Congress will act as a constructive opposition to the Obama administration or if this lame duck Congress will fall to a paralyzing government gridlock in a bid for supreme Party domination in 2012.

"There's going to be a lot of pressure on both sides to react to what the people want done. They want things fixed and I don't think there

has to be passiveness from either side to accomplish this," says Kelly. "We still have the same basic problems – people are out of work and the economy is not recovering the way we would like it to. I think President Obama should take a look at our progress and evaluate if what we are doing is working. Has it created jobs? Has it actually moved the country forward? Look at what's working and what's not and redeploy your energy and resources into something that makes sense."

"Boehner will have to figure out how far he will want to push the GOP's agenda, but if he overreaches, the same thing will happen

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to him that just happened to the Democrats," says Altmire. "That's the thing about democracy. [Voters] will always try and bring it back to the center. I understand that Boehner gets that and I think he's going to try to govern that way as the Speaker, but we will have to wait and see what the results are."

— Mark Toriski

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