

November 9, 2010

We learn more about Florida's Senator-elect. [Steve Hayes](#) spent time with Marco Rubio during Rubio's campaign, and offers an impressive portrayal. The excerpts from a speech that Rubio gave are electrifying.

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No Republican in the country offers a more compelling defense of American exceptionalism and a more powerful indictment of the Obama administration than Marco Rubio. He has had lots of practice. He ran against Obama more than he ran against either of his two opponents. On the first full day I spent with him, Rubio never once mentioned Meek, and he spoke about Charlie Crist only when responding to a question—this in a day that included a lunchtime speech at a fundraiser with Mitt Romney, a lengthy debate prep session, and two additional speeches in Plant City that evening.

Rubio speaks extemporaneously and usually without notes. And while his remarks often cover the same broad set of issues and sometimes repeat phrases, no two speeches are ever the same. When Rubio addressed several hundred local Republicans in Plant City at the Red Rose Hotel, in a room just down from a cheesy lounge with fake stars on the ceiling, it was just another event. He had done thousands of similar events and given hundreds of similar speeches before this one. He spoke for nearly 40 minutes, and the audience listened intently to every word.

I do not believe you have to demonize people in order to win elections. Quite frankly, I think that many of these people in Washington who are making bad policy are generally well intentioned. But I think they have two things wrong: a fundamental misunderstanding of how our economy functions and a fundamental misunderstanding of America's role in the world. And those two things are what led to these policies.

Number one—The economy functions like this: Jobs are not created by politicians, they are created by people that start businesses or expand existing businesses. And the job of government is to create the environment where doing that becomes easier, not harder. Number two—America's role in the world is pretty straightforward. The world is safer and it is better when America is the strongest country in the world. ...

Rubio's background allows him to make these cutting arguments without any suggestion that Obama is somehow un-American. Many politicians understand American exceptionalism on an intellectual level, but Rubio feels it.

In most every other country in the world, if your parents were workers, you grew up to be a worker. If your parents were employees, you grew up to be an employee. But in this country, the worker can become an owner, the employee can become an employer. It happens every single day. And that is what sets us apart. .□□.□□. I am a generation removed from something very different from this. My parents weren't born in a society like this. They were born in a place where what you were going to be when you grew up was decided for you. It all depended on who your parents were, who your grandparents were—how connected you were. .□□.□□. My dad was a bartender. I always look for the bar at these events. He stood behind that for 30-some-odd years, working events just like this. I often have told people that at events like this that my dad worked, there were two people standing behind tables, the bartender behind the bar and the speaker behind the podium. He literally worked 35 or 40 years—on New Year's Eves and holidays and late nights, into his seventies—behind the bar,

so that one day his children could sit at a table at one of these events. Or even better, stand behind a podium like this.

But I never remember feeling limited by any of that. Because this is a nation where anyone from anywhere can accomplish anything. I never remember feeling that because my last name ended with a vowel there was only so far I could go in life. This is an extraordinary country. And so on a personal level, what this race is about for me is whether my kids are going to get to raise their children in a country that looks like the one my parents were born in or in a country like the one that I was born in. It's literally that stark of a choice. ...

In the Washington Examiner, [Michael Barone](#) examines where Republicans won.

...But they made really sweeping gains in state legislatures, where candidate quality makes less difference. According to the National Conference on State Legislatures, Republicans gained about 125 seats in state Senates and 550 seats in state Houses -- 675 seats in total. That gives them more seats than they've won in any year since 1928.

...All those gains are hugely significant in redistricting. When the 2010 Census results are announced next month, the 435 House seats will be reapportioned to the states, and state officials will draw new district lines in each state. A nonpartisan commission authorized by voters this year will do the job in (Democratic) California, but in most states it's up to legislators and governors (although North Carolina's governor cannot veto redistricting bills).

...This will make a difference not just in redistricting. State governments face budget crunches and are supposed to act to help roll out Obamacare. Republican legislatures can cut spending and block the rollout. "I won," Barack Obama told Republican leaders seeking concessions last year. This year he didn't.

[Mark Greenbaum](#), in Salon.com, looks at redistricting and how this will likely strengthen Republican seats in Congress.

To everyone's surprise, Nancy Pelosi wants to return as the Democrats' leader in the next Congress. But if she's hoping for a big Democratic year in 2012 that would give her the speaker's gavel back, she might want to look closer at Tuesday's results: Based on the breadth and scope of their losses, it is going to be almost impossible for Democrats to retake the House in the next 10 years.

While Democrats' historic loss of at least 61 seats (results are still pending in a handful of districts) can be traced to a diverse set of factors, the majority of the Democrats defeated were either elected to Republican-friendly seats in the wave elections of 2006 and 2008 or were long-term incumbents who represented heavily GOP districts. The seats in that latter category are likely gone for good, while many in the former are clustered in a handful of states where GOP state-level gains will ensure that they are fortified in next year's redistricting trials, making them even more difficult for Democrats to take back than they were entering the '06 and '08 cycles.

...Looking at Tuesday's results from another angle, around two-thirds of the seats Democrats lost were held by members elected in the '06 and '08 elections. With a small handful of exceptions, nearly all of these districts are Republican-leaning, though most not overwhelmingly so. They represented the spoils of Democrats' own wave elections. As currently drawn, many of them could theoretically be

competitive in 2012, but Republican state legislative and gubernatorial gains could help the GOP use the forthcoming redistricting to fortify many of them. ...

Weekly Standard

It Was Rubio's Tuesday

The most important freshman senator.

by Stephen F. Hayes

Tampa

At 8:30 a.m. on Sunday, October 24, Marco Rubio sat in a nondescript classroom at the University of South Florida, seemingly staring miles beyond the wall in front of him. The CNN debate, the fifth between the three Senate candidates from Florida and the first to be broadcast nationally, would begin before a live audience in half an hour. Rubio was the picture of concentration, like a professional athlete before a big game—his jaw clenched, his head bobbing in rhythm to the music coming from the white headphones attached to his iPod. Some research suggests that classical music can stimulate higher brain function and aid concentration. But the thumping bass, audible from my seat about 10 feet away, suggested Rubio wasn't listening to Joseph Haydn.



After 20 minutes, the candidate was summoned to the stage. He removed the headphones and left his iPod on the table. I asked two of Rubio's top aides—Albert Martinez, who handled communications for Rubio during his rise in Florida politics and served as a consultant on the Senate race, and Alex Burgos, the communications director on the Senate campaign—what Rubio listened to in order to get himself in the right frame of mind for such a big moment. Burgos guessed it was probably Tupac. Martinez thought maybe NWA. Rubio, 39, like so many men his age, is a closet fan of gangsta rap.

Martinez picked up the iPod, glanced at the last tune played, and shook his head. "I don't believe this," he said, laughing. It wasn't gangsta rap, but club music. Rubio, who had spent three hours in debate prep the previous afternoon, had been gathering his final pre-debate thoughts to "Sexy Bitch," by French DJ David Guetta and rapper Akon.

Judging by his performance, it worked. Rubio's team had anticipated that Governor Charlie Crist, trailing in the polls, would come after him hard. And though Crist started the debate sticking to substance, he seemed to lose his cool with just a few minutes remaining. The tanned governor sputtered out a long and incoherent attack on Rubio and his use of a Republican party credit card earlier in the decade. Rubio had prepared a careful response—one that would have him briefly expressing disappointment that Crist was once again resorting to "personal attacks" while refusing to talk about debt and deficits, the issues voters cared about most.

But as he listened to Crist's bizarre rant, Rubio had another thought. He looked at Crist with a mixture of amusement and pity. "I've never had a heckler *at* the debate," he said. "I've always had them in the audience."

The audience erupted with laughter, then applause. With two lines, Rubio had neutralized the attack and reduced the sitting governor to a crazy man in a crowd.

Two days later, Rubio walked to the end of the Continental terminal at Miami International Airport for a morning flight to Orlando. Dressed casually in an untucked navy blue oxford, dark blue jeans, and black shoes, he showed no sign of nervousness just hours before the sixth and final three-way debate of the race.

Rubio took a seat at the gate next to his wife, Jeanette, a stunning former Miami Dolphins cheerleader who looks like she just walked off the field despite having given birth to four kids in the last ten years. She filled him in on news from that morning. Her car had been broken into at the kids' school—a window smashed by someone who had seen her purse on the front seat. She was annoyed at the inconvenience but took delight in having emptied the inexpensive purse moments before it was stolen. Rubio spoke on the phone with the mechanic, who seemed to have no idea that he was talking to Florida's next senator and a man conservatives are already talking about as presidential material. A new window for the car would take three weeks because it had to be shipped from overseas. Oh well.

Rubio turned his attention to more important matters. "Do you know if there's a Men's Wearhouse near our hotel?" he asked his body guy, Orlando "Landi" Cicilia. Rubio's carry-on contained two suits he had bought at the discount clothier, and with the enthusiasm of a lottery winner he explained that the store would press any suits purchased there at no charge. He dropped his voice an octave. "You're going to like the way you look," he said, cracking himself up. "I guarantee it."

Six hours later, Rubio was pacing in a small conference room at WESH-TV, the NBC affiliate in Orlando. His top advisers were seated around a small table, occasionally lobbing questions at the candidate.

His wife spoke up. "It's your last debate. How do you feel?"

"I feel least nervous, which is probably not a good thing," he said.

"Let's go over your opening and closing statements again," said Todd Harris, a senior adviser who had run Rubio's debate prep team for months. "They were the shakiest ever earlier this afternoon."

Everyone laughed, including Rubio. "Thanks, man. Appreciate that vote of confidence. What about bucking up the candidate before the big debate?"

Harris clicked the stopwatch and Rubio launched into his open, thanking Floridians for watching, reminding them of the stakes and then asking them for their vote. Harris clicked the stopwatch again when he finished.

“How long?” Rubio wondered. He had a minute for the real thing.

“Fifty-six seconds,” said Harris. “That was great.”

David Gregory, host of NBC’s *Meet the Press*, appeared on a muted television in the corner of the room, giving a preview of the debate to a local anchor. Rubio called for volume. Gregory praised the candidates for doing so many debates and said he wanted to make sure the candidates gave substantive answers to the questions of most immediate concern to Floridians.

It was exactly what the Rubio team wanted to hear. The polls showed them a dozen points ahead of Crist, a Republican who turned independent when it became clear he would lose the GOP primary. Rubio wanted the final debate to be either substantive or boring. Or both.

“I’m just going to work out,” he said.

Harris thought Gregory would focus on the economy and Florida’s much-publicized mortgage problems. He knew that Gregory understood the issue well because his wife had worked at Fannie Mae. And Harris told Rubio that Gregory, being a well-known national journalist, would try to demonstrate his local knowledge. Harris, along with Martinez, Burgos, and Julio Rebull, a longtime friend and key adviser to Rubio, had peppered the candidate with questions on the issue earlier that afternoon. When a producer gave Rubio a five-minute warning, Harris returned to the foreclosure issue, and they worked on his answer until it was time for the debate to begin.

Rubio gave the opening statement just as he had in the conference room, and after the other candidates spoke, Gregory turned to questions.

“I want to start with what was single-handedly responsible for the collapse of the economy, and that was the foreclosure crisis. I spent some time going through the papers today and I see some pretty tough numbers,” Gregory said, before reading several local headlines. “Speaker Rubio, Americans have lost \$6 trillion. The centerpiece of their savings and their lives wiped away when equity prices in their homes evaporated in this collapse. The Obama administration has frankly not done very much to mitigate that problem. The foreclosure problem continues—in Florida and around the nation. What would you do to solve the foreclosure problem?”

“Let’s analyze this in three parts,” he began. Rubio said the problem started with bad housing policy and was exacerbated by bad monetary policy. He allowed that there are no easy answers, but argued that the Obama administration’s solutions haven’t worked.

Then he worked out.

“The 1.3 million temporary workouts—of those, over half have defaulted,” he said. Gregory interjected. “Those are called mortgage modifications.” Rubio drew a distinction. “But they’re temporary mortgage modifications. There have been 500,000 permanent [modifications], and we just found out yesterday that of the 500,000 permanent, 11 percent of those have defaulted. So it’s clear that these plans haven’t worked largely because they’re focused on lowering the interest rates or pushing the period of the loan back. So for example, if you owed five months, they just added five months to the back of the loan.”

It was a nearly perfect answer. Gregory seemed determined to grill each of the three candidates *Meet-the-Press* style once in the hourlong debate. Rubio had passed his test.

Gregory turned to Crist. The governor had run a shamelessly demagogic ad on Social Security, suggesting that Rubio would take benefits away from seniors already receiving them. Gregory briefly walked Crist through the uncomfortable math of Social Security solvency and pressed him for details of his plan to save it. Crist fixed his face in a way to convey sincerity and seriousness. “I’m an optimistic person.” The staff in the Rubio holding room exploded with laughter. The other candidates at the table with Crist snickered.

If the race hadn’t already been over, it was now. And after a week of high drama—filled with revelations that former President Bill Clinton was leaning on the third candidate, Democrat Kendrick Meek, to drop out, at the behest of Crist and with the encouragement of the White House—voters made it official, giving Rubio nearly 50 percent of the votes cast. His eloquent victory speech won widespread praise. And within hours of his election to the Senate, there was abundant speculation that he would soon be on a Republican presidential ticket.

None of this was inevitable.

Eighteen months earlier, Rubio had driven himself around the state doing “fundraisers” that generated so little cash they barely covered his expenses. In the first poll measuring support for possible Senate candidates, Rubio registered 3 percent. In the spring of 2009, when Florida’s then-popular governor announced that he was joining the race, the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC) immediately pledged its “full support” for Crist. Top Republicans in Florida and Washington rushed to endorse Crist and publicly urged—while privately demanding—that Rubio quit the race. Crist outraised Rubio by more than ten to one in the first quarter they were both in the race, and Rubio seriously considered dropping out.

But Rubio stayed in, and several things helped him gain momentum—a guerrilla ad campaign that defined Crist at the outset, crucial early endorsements from Mike Huckabee and Jim DeMint, a well-timed cover story in *National Review*, and an unconventional low-dollar fundraising strategy. The most important factors were the candidate and his message.

While most establishment Republicans were seeking to expand the party and recruit moderate candidates, Rubio wanted to debate the direction of the party. And while many other Republican candidates shaped their message to appeal to Tea Party conservatives, Rubio didn’t have to. He had been a Tea Party conservative long before the Tea Party was born.

Marco Rubio had thought about running for the Senate in the same way that pretty much everyone in a state legislature does: It was an aspiration but not an immediate goal.

When he met with former Florida governor Jeb Bush in December 2008, Rubio left the conversation believing that Bush intended to run for the seat. The two men had become close over the previous decade, when Rubio, serving in the Florida House of Representatives, was a strong legislative ally of Governor Bush. If Bush was running, Rubio wasn’t. The two men spoke again in January, and Bush told Rubio that he had decided against a run. Bush encouraged Rubio to consider entering the race. It didn’t take much convincing.

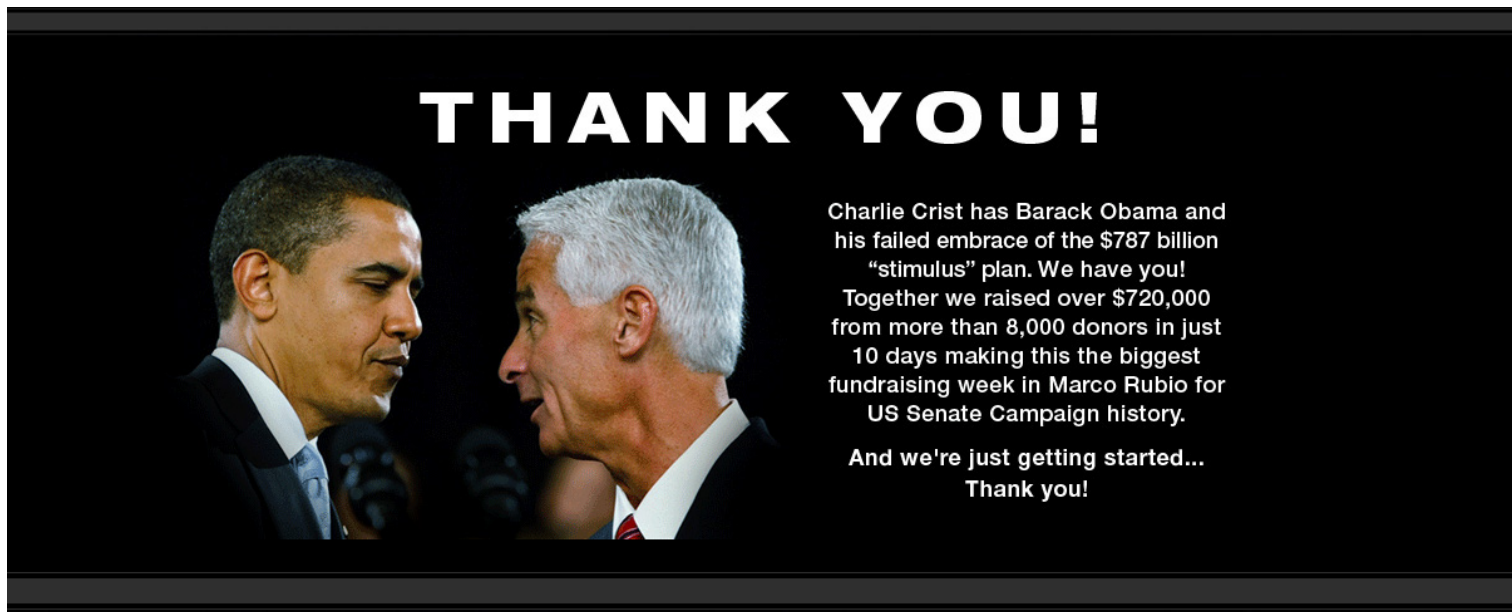
On January 23, Rubio met with Heath Thompson and Malorie Miller, political consultants from the respected Dallas-based firm Scott Howell and Company. Miller had known Rubio from her days working in the Florida legislature, and she wanted to work for Rubio if he decided to run. They pitched

him informally and began talking regularly with Rebull, Rubio's longtime confidant and a sharp South Florida Republican and former vice president of the Florida Marlins.

On February 10, 2009, Barack Obama came to Fort Myers to promote his stimulus package, which was on the verge of passage. Governor Crist appeared with Obama. Like many politicians, Crist has long been a man of malleable principles. (In the 2008 presidential contest, he had all but assured Rudy Giuliani of an endorsement, a key component of Giuliani's Florida-first strategy. But as the Florida primary neared, Giuliani was down in the polls, and John McCain was beginning to look like the nominee. Crist endorsed McCain just days before the primary.)

When Obama came to Florida, his favorable rating was at nearly 70 percent. And while Republicans in Washington opposed the stimulus, they trained their attacks on Harry Reid and Nancy Pelosi, rarely using Obama's name in their critique of his plan.

Crist embraced the \$787 billion proposal and literally hugged the popular president who had come to sell it. The crowd chanted "Yes We Can!" as Crist introduced Obama. "We know it's that important that we pass a stimulus package. . . . This is not about partisan politics. This is about rising above that, helping America, and reigniting our economy."



THANK YOU!

Charlie Crist has Barack Obama and his failed embrace of the \$787 billion "stimulus" plan. We have you!

Together we raised over \$720,000 from more than 8,000 donors in just 10 days making this the biggest fundraising week in Marco Rubio for US Senate Campaign history.

And we're just getting started...
Thank you!

It may not have been about partisan politics, but Crist's appearance was surely about politics. Within weeks Florida politicians were buzzing about the prospect that Crist would forgo a reelection bid to run for the Senate. Crist did not deny the reports and said he'd make a final decision on his future after the Florida legislative session ended in May. The Obama/Crist event—Rubio's campaign team calls it simply "Fort Myers"—would prove to be an important moment.

Rubio spent most of the spring traveling the state and raising money. On May 5, he made his formal announcement. "Races of this magnitude are decided by who presents a clearer picture of the future, and I intend to do that," he said. And in a shot at Crist, who was expected to announce his own candidacy, Rubio said: "The more Republicans become less distinguishable from Democrats, the less people will vote for Republicans. I don't agree with the notion that to grow our party we need to become more like Democrats."

Crist announced a week later. “Here in Florida, we’ve shown that when we put people first and work together, much can be accomplished, and I intend to bring that same approach to Washington.”

Rubio’s ad team—Harris, Thompson, and Miller—had been prepared for Crist’s announcement and immediately released a web ad that sought to define the choice for Florida Republicans. Over kaleidoscopic images swirling on the screen a narrator intones: “An election coming into focus. A choice for Florida’s future. Some politicians support trillions in reckless spending, borrowed money from China and the Middle East, mountains of debt for our children, and a terrible threat to a fragile economy.” With ominous music in the background, the blurry photo of Crist with Obama comes into focus. “Today, too many politicians embrace Washington’s same old broken ways. But this time, there is a leader who won’t. Let the debate begin.” As the ad ends, “Marco2010” flashes on the screen.

It was a tough way to start, but they had no choice. The most recent Quinnipiac poll showed Crist leading 54-8 percent. And Rubio was eager for a policy confrontation. When his ad team first sent him the spot several days earlier, he responded via email.

Man, let me tell you guys something. I just ran this on my computer and three things happened. 1. I got chills. 2. My wife and children painted themselves up in blue face like Braveheart. 3. I went to the closet and got out my costume from Gladiator and I could hear the crowd chant: “Maximus! Maximus!”

Let’s go kill the emperor! I love it.

Do we need a small buy to push this out? Do I need to sell my car and take out a second mortgage to pay for a bigger buy?

Within hours of Crist’s announcement, the National Republican Senatorial Committee pledged its backing. “While I believe Marco Rubio has a very bright future within the Republican party, Charlie Crist is the best candidate in 2010 to ensure that we maintain the checks and balances that Floridians deserve in the United States Senate,” said NRSC chairman Senator John Cornyn. “Governor Crist is a dedicated public servant and a dynamic leader, and the NRSC will provide our full support to ensure that he is elected the next United States senator from Florida.”

It was a big blow. “The senatorial committee endorsed him within minutes of his announcement,” Rubio recalled recently. “Followed by a flood of other people.” They included former Florida senator Mel Martinez, Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell, Senator John McCain, and Representatives Mario and Lincoln Diaz-Balart, who are, like Rubio, Cuban-Americans. Dozens of Florida Republicans jumped aboard the Crist bandwagon, eager to be on the winning team. Rubio won the endorsement of Mike Huckabee, but most people dismissed it as payback; Rubio had endorsed Huckabee in 2007.

Rubio had known the NRSC endorsement was coming. Cornyn had reached out to Jeb Bush the previous night to give him a heads up, and, coincidentally, Rubio had a meeting scheduled with Cornyn in Washington on the day that Crist announced. “I went over to the senatorial committee, and Senator Cornyn was gracious enough to come over from the Capitol to the senatorial committee to explain to me their decision and their rationale. It was a very respectful meeting. I told them they were wrong. I told them that I was going to win and that they would be shocked in a year.”

Rubio left the NRSC headquarters and walked three blocks to the Russell Senate Office Building for his next meeting. Heath Thompson, one of the political consultants who had met with Rubio back in January, was now working for the candidate. He had set up a meeting for Rubio with one of his previous clients, Senator Jim DeMint of South Carolina.

DeMint's staff had seen some YouTube videos of past Rubio speeches but DeMint knew very little about him. DeMint pressed Rubio about his commitment to the race. In the days before Crist's announcement, Rubio had faced intense pressure to drop out of the race to clear the field for the more "electable" candidate.

Rubio told DeMint and his staff that he was in the race for the duration, and he did so in a manner that left a strong impression. Rubio told DeMint that his parents had come from Cuba seeking a better life. His parents had worked in the hospitality industry. It wasn't glamorous, but they understood that the harder they worked the more opportunities they could provide for their four children. It hadn't been this way in Cuba, even before the revolution, and Rubio explained, with great passion, that he felt a moral obligation to do whatever he could to make sure his children had the same opportunities. "I remember my eyes welling up," says DeMint. Others in the room remember the same thing. "You get pretty hardened in Washington. But I thought, this guy is for real. We don't meet many people like him in Washington." It was a preview of the sunny conservatism that Rubio would come to embody on the campaign trail.

DeMint was angry that the NRSC had supported Crist. "If you listen to what the moderates have said—we need youth, we need minorities, we need women. And here we have this young Cuban American who had proved himself as speaker of the House in Florida. And the committee was dissing him and ignoring him."

One month later, with continuing calls for Rubio to drop out, DeMint offered his endorsement. "This gave me some hope," says DeMint. "We could recruit some people and help some people who could help turn this country around."

DeMint's statement endorsing Rubio was a mixture of enthusiasm and frustration.

For months now, Republicans have been looking around, asking everyone they meet who our next leaders will be. And somehow, inexplicably, many of us have grown blind to the diamonds all around us. There are already many young, conservative leaders ready to fight for freedom in Washington and in state capitals all around the country. But we'll never find them if we only look for well-known politicians or choose our party's direction based on the latest polls instead of timeless principles.

Rubio says the endorsement was critical, maybe campaign-saving. "The fact that a sitting U.S. senator would endorse somebody who had only raised \$250,000—long-term it's proven to be a lot of support. But at the beginning it was a little dose of oxygen—just enough to keep you breathing for another couple of weeks."

Then, another setback. The July fundraising reports were devastating. Crist posted a \$4.3 million quarter; Rubio had raised a paltry \$340,000 over the same period. The pressure on Rubio to get out of the race increased.

"That took us off-balance a little bit," Rubio recalls. "I got a lot of conflicting advice from people about whether this was the right thing to do, people saying, 'You should run for something else.' □"

The local media began to treat Rubio dismissively. The *St. Petersburg Times* declared Crist its "Winner of the Week" and wrote:

Raising a whopping \$4.3 million for his Republican Senate campaign, Crist surely quelled what had been the growing buzz about the threat from Republican Marco Rubio. As much as we relish covering a fight for the soul of the GOP, no candidate can use Twitter to overcome a 30-point deficit in the polls and eight-to-one financial disadvantage.

Julio Rebull, who is as close to Rubio as anyone in the campaign, considered telling his friend to quit. “I thought to myself: Is this viable for Marco to go forward with this? Should I just listen, or should I just tell him, ‘It’s time to fight this battle another day.’” Top Republicans in the state once again told Rubio to run for attorney general.

As he weighed his options the most compelling question, he says, came from his wife, who asked: “Do you want to be attorney general or do you want to be a senator?” The question answered itself.



Rubio had to do two things to survive—raise more money and simplify his message.

Rubio recalls his thinking: “We have August and we have September. We have two months to raise—to have a successful fundraising quarter that shows growth. I felt if I didn’t get to at least \$750,000 by the end of September—in that quarter—then the media would start to stop covering us. People would stop taking us seriously. So if we do that, then I think we’re in the game. And if we don’t do that, then it’s just not going to happen.”

Rubio strategists Harris and Thompson were brutally direct in a memo to the candidate on July 10, 2009. “The hard truth is that no one outside of a small number of activists cares about you right now as a stand-alone candidate. And our 2nd quarter fundraising numbers will make many care even less.” The only plausible path to victory was for Rubio to become the Anti-Crist, and the most important point of contrast would be support for the Obama agenda. Harris and Thompson wrote:

Every communication from the campaign, from the biggest speeches and interviews to the lowliest Twitter message and blog post should revolve around this theme: I am running for Senate because Washington needs more leaders who will stand up to President Obama’s liberal policies, not embrace them. . . . I will be a check on Obama’s agenda, not a rubber stamp. And I will fight for what’s right, not just what’s popular.

Rubio posted \$1 million in October. “I think the notion for the pundits was: ‘Well, now there’s a real race in Florida.’ That was important because those are the metrics that people who follow politics

understand,” says Rubio. Once he was a credible candidate, and Charlie Crist was no longer inevitable, the race turned quickly.

Over the course of the six months that followed, Rubio drove the contrast with Crist by running against Barack Obama. In October, a Quinnipiac poll showed Crist leading 50-35 percent in a head-to-head matchup. By April, Rubio led 56-33 percent.

Private polling for both Republican candidates showed the same thing. Crist was losing badly. And in a year in which conservatives were once again ascendant, he stood little chance of winning the GOP primary in August.

There had been rumors for months that Crist would leave the party to run as an independent. Crist denied the claims in a head-to-head primary debate on *Fox News Sunday* on March 28, 2010. But Rubio didn't believe him. “Chris Wallace pressed him about as hard as you could press somebody,” says Rubio. “I was sitting next to him and I can tell you, his mouth was saying one thing and his body was saying something else.”

It took a month. On the morning of April 28, Crist spoke to his pollster with *St. Petersburg Times* reporter Alex Leary in the room. A poll taken earlier in the week showed Crist winning a three-way race if he were to drop out of the Republican primary and run as an independent—36 percent for Crist, 28 for Rubio, and 23 for Democrat Meek. The following day Crist announced that he would run as an independent.

That poll would prove to be a highwater mark for Crist, who would later claim that he would have run as an independent even if he'd been leading Rubio by 20 points. Although Crist enjoyed a brief spike when the BP oil spill once again thrust him into a very public leadership role, his poll numbers trended downward through the final days of the campaign.

Marco Rubio has gotten as much positive national media attention as any Senate candidate since, well, Barack Obama. There is a natural inclination to think that he has been overhyped. That's certainly the assumption I took with me to Florida in late September for the first of two five-day stints with his campaign.

It was wrong.

If anything, Rubio is underrated. Some Democrats seem to understand this. That fact, probably more than anything else, explains why the White House encouraged Bill Clinton as early as last spring to use his influence to get Meek out of the race and clear the way for Charlie Crist to run as a Democrat.

No Republican in the country offers a more compelling defense of American exceptionalism and a more powerful indictment of the Obama administration than Marco Rubio. He has had lots of practice. He ran against Obama more than he ran against either of his two opponents. On the first full day I spent with him, Rubio never once mentioned Meek, and he spoke about Charlie Crist only when responding to a question—this in a day that included a lunchtime speech at a fundraiser with Mitt Romney, a lengthy debate prep session, and two additional speeches in Plant City that evening.

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Number one—The economy functions like this: Jobs are not created by politicians, they are created by people that start businesses or expand existing businesses. And the job of government is to create the environment where doing that becomes easier, not harder. Number two—America's role in the world is pretty straightforward. The world is safer and it is better when America is the strongest country in the world.

These are the two principles that are at stake in our country right now. And they are as important as any issues that any generation has faced before us. We are literally fighting for whether we are going to be exceptional or not.

Rubio's background allows him to make these cutting arguments without any suggestion that Obama is somehow un-American. Many politicians understand American exceptionalism on an intellectual level, but Rubio feels it.

In most every other country in the world, if your parents were workers, you grew up to be a worker. If your parents were employees, you grew up to be an employee. But in this country, the worker can become an owner, the employee can become an employer. It happens every single day. And that is what sets us apart. . . . I am a generation removed from something very different from this. My parents weren't born in a society like this. They were born in a place where what you were going to be when you grew up was decided for you. It all depended on who your parents were, who your grandparents were—how connected you were. . . . My dad was a bartender. I always look for the bar at these events. He stood behind that for 30-some-odd years, working events just like this. I often have told people that at events like this that my dad worked, there were two people standing behind tables, the bartender behind the bar and the speaker behind the podium. He literally worked 35 or 40 years—on New Year's Eves and holidays and late nights, into his seventies—behind the bar, so that one day his children could sit at a table at one of these events. Or even better, stand behind a podium like this.

But I never remember feeling limited by any of that. Because this is a nation where anyone from anywhere can accomplish anything. I never remember feeling that because my last name ended with a vowel there was only so far I could go in life. This is an extraordinary country. And so on a personal level, what this race is about for me is whether my kids are going to get to raise their children in a country that looks like the one my parents were born in or in a country like the one that I was born in. It's literally that stark of a choice.

Rubio's promise means that the left will target him and the right will lionize him. On Election Night, as Rubio spoke in front of an array of American and Florida flags, Arianna Huffington tweeted that political strategist Matthew Dowd thought Rubio looked "like a Central American dictator." Three days later, the Republican party chose Rubio to deliver its weekly address to the nation.

Rubio's father passed away two months before he was elected to the Senate. His mother turned 80 last week. Their hard work paid off and may well yield further dividends.

“Marco Rubio is a natural leader and is likely to be a leader of our party,” says DeMint. “In five years, no one will remember Jim DeMint, and Marco will be president.”

Washington Examiner

[GOP poised to reap redistricting rewards](#)

by Michael Barone



Let's try to put some metrics on last Tuesday's historic election. Two years ago, the popular vote for the House of Representatives was 54 percent Democratic and 43 percent Republican. That may sound close, but in historic perspective it's a landslide. Democrats didn't win the House popular vote in the South, as they did from the 1870s up through 1992. But they won a larger percentage in the 36 non-Southern states than -- well, as far as I can tell, than ever before.

This year we don't yet know the House popular vote down to the last digit, partly because California takes five weeks these days to count all its votes (Brazil, which voted last Sunday, counted its votes in less than five hours). But the exit poll had it at 52 percent Republican and 46 percent Democratic, which is probably within a point or so of the final number.

That's similar to 1994, and you have to go back to 1946 and 1928 to find years when Republicans did better. And the numbers those years aren't commensurate since the then-segregated and Democratic South cast few popular votes. So you could argue that this is the best Republican showing ever.

Nationally, Republicans narrowly missed winning Senate seats in heavily Democratic Washington and in Nevada and California, where less problematic nominees might have won. As in all wave years, they missed winning half a dozen House seats by a whisker (or a suddenly discovered bunch of ballots).

But they made really sweeping gains in state legislatures, where candidate quality makes less difference. According to the National Conference on State Legislatures, Republicans gained about 125 seats in state Senates and 550 seats in state Houses -- 675 seats in total. That gives them more seats than they've won in any year since 1928.

Republicans snatched control of about 20 legislative houses from Democrats. And by margins that hardly any political insiders expected. Republicans needed five seats for a majority in the Pennsylvania House and won 15; they needed four seats in the Ohio House and got 13; they needed 13 in the Michigan House and got 20; they needed two in the Wisconsin Senate and four in the Wisconsin House and gained four and 14; they needed five in the North Carolina Senate and nine in the North Carolina House and gained 11 and 15.

All those gains are hugely significant in redistricting. When the 2010 Census results are announced next month, the 435 House seats will be reapportioned to the states, and state officials will draw new district lines in each state. A nonpartisan commissions authorized by voters this year will do the job in (Democratic) California, but in most states it's up to legislators and governors (although North Carolina's governor cannot veto redistricting bills).

Republicans look to have a bigger advantage in this redistricting cycle they've ever had before. It appears that in the states that will have more than five districts (you can make only limited partisan difference in smaller states) Republicans will control redistricting in 13 states with a total of 165 House districts and Democrats will have control in only four states with a total of 40 districts. You can add Minnesota (seven or eight districts) to the first list if the final count gives Republicans the governorship and New York (27 or 28 districts) to the second list if the final count gives Democrats the state Senate.

When the Tea Party movement first made itself heard, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi dismissed it as "Astroturf," a phony organization financed by a few millionaires. She may have been projecting; those union demonstrators you see at Democratic events or heckling Republicans are often paid by the hour.

In any case, the depth and the breadth of Republican victories in state legislative races, even more than their gain of 60-plus seats in the U.S. House and six seats in the Senate, shows that the Tea Party movement was a genuine popular upheaval of vast dimensions. Particularly in traditional blue-collar areas, voters rejected longtime Democrats or abandoned lifelong partisan allegiances and elected Republicans.

This will make a difference not just in redistricting. State governments face budget crunches and are supposed to act to help roll out Obamacare. Republican legislatures can cut spending and block the rollout. "I won," Barack Obama told Republican leaders seeking concessions last year. This year he didn't.

Salon.com

[Another Democratic Congress? It could be awhile](#)

If you're hoping for a quick turnaround in 2012, you might be disappointed

by Mark Greenbaum



To everyone's surprise, Nancy Pelosi wants to return as the Democrats' leader in the next Congress. But if she's hoping for a big Democratic year in 2012 that would give her the speaker's gavel back,

she might want to look closer at Tuesday's results: Based on the breadth and scope of their losses, it is going to be almost impossible for Democrats to retake the House in the next 10 years.

While Democrats' historic loss of at least 61 seats (results are still pending in a handful of districts) can be traced to a diverse set of factors, the majority of the Democrats defeated were either elected to Republican-friendly seats in the wave elections of 2006 and 2008 or were long-term incumbents who represented heavily GOP districts. The seats in that latter category are likely gone for good, while many in the former are clustered in a handful of states where GOP state-level gains will ensure that they are fortified in next year's redistricting trials, making them even more difficult for Democrats to take back than they were entering the '06 and '08 cycles.

The losses of Democrats like Rick Boucher (southwest Virginia coal country), Lincoln Davis (increasingly conservative central Tennessee), Chet Edwards (College Station, Texas), Jim Marshall (Macon, Ga.), Earl Pomeroy (North Dakota), Ike Skelton (the Ozarks) and Gene Taylor (Biloxi and Pascagoula, Miss.) are particularly painful for Democrats, given the treacherous political terrain they face in those districts. Democrats were incredibly lucky to hold these seats as long as they did, and they were able to because incumbents like Skelton (elected in 1976), Boucher (1982), Taylor (1989), and Edwards (1990) had adeptly burrowed themselves in. Democrats were always going to lose these seats when these representatives stepped down, but the tidal wave of 2010 washed them all away in one fell swoop.

Put another way, of the 20 most Republican-leaning House seats held by Democrats on Election Day, 17 of them fell. With Partisan Voting Index scores ranging from R+9 in Stephanie Herseth-Sandlin's South Dakota at-large district to an unfathomable R+20 for Edwards' Texas seat and Taylor's south Mississippi district, it's a miracle Democrats held these seats for as long as they did. Altogether, Democrats dropped 25 seats this week with PVI ratings of R+6 or more. It's difficult to envision the party winning many of these seats back in the short- or long-term future.

Looking at Tuesday's results from another angle, around two-thirds of the seats Democrats lost were held by members elected in the '06 and '08 elections. With a small handful of exceptions, nearly all of these districts are Republican-leaning, though most not overwhelmingly so. They represented the spoils of Democrats' own wave elections. As currently drawn, many of them could theoretically be competitive in 2012, but Republican state legislative and gubernatorial gains could help the GOP use the forthcoming redistricting to fortify many of them.

New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Florida, where approximately one-third of Democrats' overall House losses occurred, are potentially prime targets for this. With Republicans winning back both the governorships and state legislative chambers in Ohio and Pennsylvania, they will have carte blanche to strengthen the lines of the seats Democrats just lost through 2020.

Republicans in Pennsylvania attempted to do this last decade, but they miscalculated and spread themselves too thin -- leaving several Republican members of Congress vulnerable in the Democratic tide of '06 and '08. Don't expect to see the same mistake twice, though. Look for the new GOP map-drawers in Harrisburg to fortify the lines of the Erie County-based 3rd District and the suburban Philadelphia districts that Democrats Pat Murphy and Joe Sestak have represented. Even the traditionally Democratic Scranton district of 13-term veteran Paul Kanjorski might be altered in order to protect Lou Barletta, the Republican who ousted Kanjorski this week. There's also the 12th District, where Democrat Mark Critz survived Tuesday's massacre; but with the state due to lose a House seat next year, expect Critz's district to be carved up in short order.

Similarly, with Republicans now in full control in Ohio, the five seats Democrats just lost based around Cincinnati, Columbus and Canton, along with the seats in the east and southeast being given up by

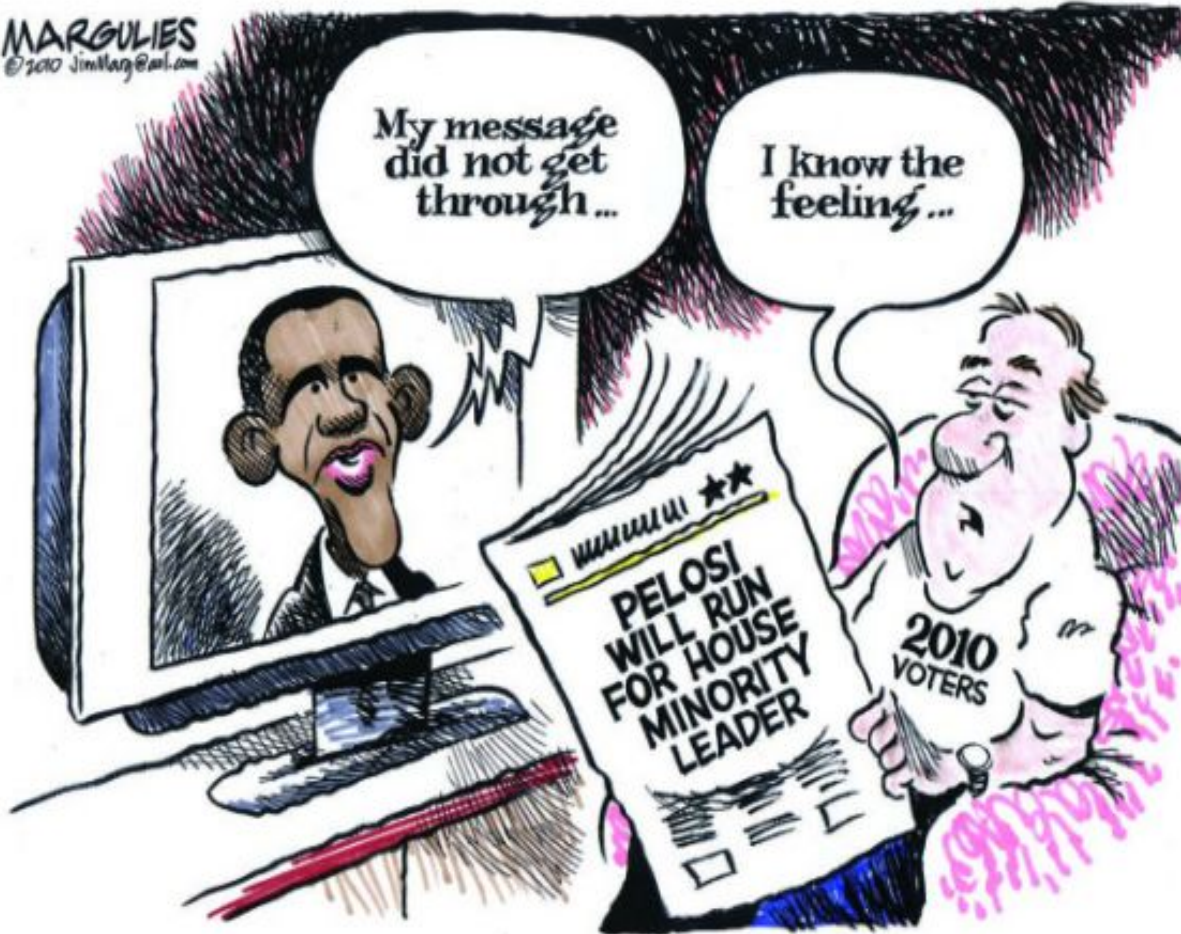
the vanquished Zack Space and Charlie Wilson, will be strengthened by the GOP to keep them in the party's column for the next decade. And with the census chopping off two Ohio districts, a couple more House Democrats will likely be in the cross hairs next year.

In New York, the situation is a bit different, as Democrat Andrew Cuomo was easily elected governor. But Democrats are in enormous peril of losing the state Senate, a development that would prevent them from imposing favorable lines that would help them reclaim the five districts they just lost (and maybe more -- Republicans lead incumbent Democrats in two outstanding races in the state). And while Florida's governorship and state legislature will remain in Republican hands, [the passage of a state constitutional amendment](#) that seeks to make it harder to draw partisan gerrymanders could be helpful to Democrats. But it's questionable whether it will drastically affect the current lines to their benefit. With the loss of four Democratic seats, the state delegation now sits at 19-to-6 in favor of Republicans. And even with Florida gaining two new seats next year, expect little turnover in the near future, as Republicans will seek to insulate their freshly-won seats.

Furthermore, Republican state legislative gains in Colorado, Indiana and Texas could also strengthen newly-won GOP seats -- this is especially true for two new GOP prizes in South Texas. In California, [the passage of Proposition 20](#), which removes redistricting power from the Legislature and awards it to a nonpartisan commission, couldn't have come at a worse time for Democrats, with Jerry Brown winning the governorship this week.

It's just hard to see how Democrats will be able to score the broad gains they'll need to win back their House majority any time soon. It might just be another 12-year wait.

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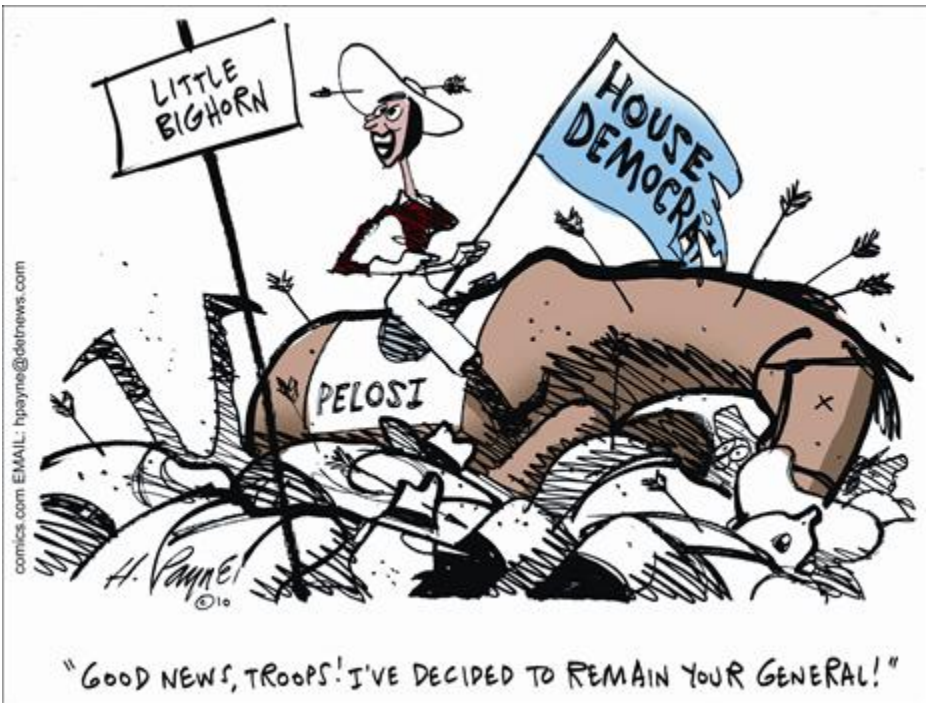
2012

ALL TOGETHER NOW, FRIENDS:
KUMBAYA, MY LORD,
KUMBAYAAAAA ...





GASP. I THINK I SAW IT MOVE.



"GOOD NEWS, TROOPS! I'VE DECIDED TO REMAIN YOUR GENERAL!"



"OH, SO NOW YOU'RE CONCERNED ABOUT UNEMPLOYMENT...!"