

Mike Berman's

WASHINGTON POLITICAL WATCH

No. 89

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STATE OF THE NATION TV viewing habits and politics

Pessimism abounds

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PRESIDENT OBAMA Job approval continues to slide

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HEALTHCARE Action in the U.S. Senate almost 35 years ago made passage of the healthcare bill possible

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THE CONGRESS Public not happy with congressional performance ----- Mid-term elections rest on President's shoulders

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RESTAURANTS

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In December 2008 local television news was the preferred daily source of news for 51% of Americans. Close behind, each with a 40% daily following, were local newspapers and cable news networks. The nightly network news programs followed with a 34% daily following, and the internet with a 31% score. The two categories that were growing were cable networks and the internet. [Gallup]

36% of Americans say they are following national politics very closely. This is the largest number in a non-Presidential election year since Gallup began tracking this question in 2001. [Gallup 9/09]

In 1999 55% of Americans said they had at least a fair amount of trust and confidence in the mass media, while 44% said they had not much or no confidence at all. By 2009 Americans had reversed their positions, with 55% saying they had not much or no confidence in the mass media and 45% expressing the contrary view. [Gallup]

This December the NBC/WSJ asked respondents from which of the following national TV news sources they get most of their information about politics and current events. Respondents said:

Broadcast networks such as ABC, CBS or NBC	36%
Fox News cable channel	27%
CNN cable channel	16%
Other national TV news sources	7%
MSNBC cable channel	5%

Where folks get most of their information does seem to affect their views (or perhaps they select news channels that they know reflect their views).

In the tables that appear at several places in this newsletter, you will find the varying views of all respondents, those for whom Fox is their primary TV news source, and those whose primary TV news source is other than Fox. [NBC/WSJ 12/09]

Total - All respondents in the survey
 Fox - Fox is primary news source
 Other - ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, MSNBC, other channels are primary news source

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Public opinion as to whether the country is headed in the right direction or is on the wrong track continues to track negatively. However, the 55% who think the country is on the wrong track in the NBC/WSJ poll is a substantial improvement from a year ago, when 80% thought the country was on the wrong track.

	NBC/WSJ <u>RD/WT</u>	NYT/CBS <u>RD/WT</u>	WP/ABC <u>RD/WT</u>
December 2009	33/55%	37/56%	xxxxxx
October	35/52%	xxxxxx	44/54%
September	39/48%	41/53%	xxxxxx
August	xxxxxx	xxxxxx	44/55%
July	39/49%	42/49%	xxxxxx
June	42/46%	44/50%	47/50%
April	43/43%	39/53%	50/48%
February 2009	41/44%	23/68%	31/67%
	<u>Total</u>	<u>Fox</u>	<u>Other</u>
Country going in right direction	33%	11%	40%
Country on wrong track	55%	84%	44%

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A substantial majority believe the country is in a state of decline.

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Fox</u>	<u>Other</u>
America in a state of decline	61%	79%	54%
America not in a state of decline	25%	19%	41%

When asked to volunteer the most important problem facing the country today, the three top choices are jobs, the economy and healthcare. There have been some changes since January.

	<u>12/09</u>	<u>1/09</u>
Jobs	24%	12%
Economy	23%	49%
Healthcare	12%	2%

[CBS/NYT 12/09]

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66% do not feel confident that "the life for our children's generation will be better than it has been for us."

46% believe that 2010 will be a better year for the country. 25% think it will be worse.

67% are at least somewhat satisfied with their current job security, while 32% are at least somewhat dissatisfied. These are about the same levels of satisfaction as a year ago.

15% think it is likely that they or someone in their household will lose his/her job in the next year. This is roughly the same number of folks who had this concern 10 years ago and 20 years ago.

32% report that they are providing some financial support for a child over the age of 21 or for relatives other than children or parents. [NBC/WSJ]

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As a result of the recession, during the past year among 18-34 year olds,

- 15% have postponed getting married,
- 14% postponed having a baby
- 12% moved in with a roommate,
- 10% moved back in with their parents. [Pew 11/09]

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Lack of money and low wages is the most important financial problem facing American families, say 17% of Americans in an open ended question. 14% say healthcare costs. [Gallup 11/09]

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CBS/New York Times conducted a poll in early December that oversampled the unemployed. It then published the findings of its regular poll and separately reported the results from unemployed persons. There are a number of questions in which the answers of the unemployed are quite different than the population at large.

	<u>Regular sample</u>	<u>Unemployed</u>
Obama job approval	50%	61%
Approve Obama handling of economy	47%	57%
Approve Obama handling of healthcare	42%	55%
Approve Obama handling of job creation	38%	47%
Recession has been a hardship	24%	49%
Do you have health insurance	87%	52%

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About 23% of homeowners owe more on their mortgages than their homes are worth. More than a half million homeowners have received notices of default. [WSJ 11/24/09]

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Charities are feeling the pinch of the current economic conditions. 21% of Americans say they will be giving less to charity this year than in past years. 13% say they are likely to give more. [WP 11/09]

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The Tea Party Movement (TPM) is an organizational effort begun on April 15, 2009, by three conservative organizations: FreedomWorks, dontGO, and Americans for Prosperity.

52% of respondents to the recent NBC/WSJ survey knew at least something about the TPM. with only 7% knowing a great deal about it. 48% knew little or nothing.

All respondents to the survey were asked whether they were positive or negative about the Tea Party Movement. Here is how they responded, as compared to the same group of respondents' assessment of the Democratic and Republican Parties.

	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Negative</u>	<u>Neutral</u>
Tea Party Movement	41%	23%	21%
Democratic Party	35%	45%	19%
Republican Party	29%	43%	27%

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While the Tea Party Movement is still a bit amorphous, it is more popular than either the Democratic or Republican Parties. 41% have positive feelings about the Tea Party Movement, while 35% express positive feelings toward the Democratic Party, and 28% are positive toward the Republicans.

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Fox</u>	<u>Other</u>
Identify as Democrat	40%	14%	50%
Identify as Republican	34%	61%	24%
Positive Feelings toward Dem party	35%	10%	45%
Negative Feelings toward Dem Party	45%	77%	32%
Positive Feelings toward Repub Party	28%	45%	22%
Negative Feelings toward Repub Party	43%	27%	40%
Pos Feel toward Tea Party Movement	41%	76%	27%
Neg Feel toward Tea Party Movement	23%	5%	31%
			[NBC/WSJ]

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From a list of 10 people who have been public officials in the last decade, respondents were asked to select one or two people for whom they had the "most" regard and respect, and one or two for whom they had the "least" regard and respect. [153 specific choices were recorded.]

The differences between the selections of all respondents versus those who have Fox as a primary TV news source, and those who do not have Fox as a primary source, are notable.

Barack Obama and Colin Powell were first and second in the minds of the total sample as being the people for whom they had the most regard. George Bush and Dick Cheney headed the list of those for whom they had the least regard.

Among Fox viewers the results were dramatically different. Heading the list of most respected were George Bush and Sarah Palin. Al Gore and Barack Obama headed the list of least respected.

Those whose primary news sources was other than Fox rank the officials in both categories roughly the same as the total sample.

The person who was effectively best regarded by all three groups was Colin Powell. Powell finished 2nd among the total group and the non-Fox viewers, and 3rd among Fox viewers. When it came to the list of the least regarded he was at the bottom of the list of all 3 groups.

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Fox</u>	<u>Other</u>
For which of these people do you have the most regard and respect			
Barack Obama	28%	4%	37%
Colin Powell	27	26	27
Bill Clinton	21	13	24
George W. Bush	17	36	11
Hillary Clinton	14	4	18
John McCain	13	16	11
Sarah Palin	13	29	7
Dick Cheney	9	23	4
Al Gore	8	1	10
Joe Biden	3	1	4

For which of these people do you
have the least regard and respect

George W. Bush	33	13	41
Dick Cheney	27	8	33
Al Gore	19	41	10
Barack Obama	19	35	12
Sarah Palin	16	7	14
Bill Clinton	14	16	13
Hillary Clinton	10	10	10
Joe Biden	9	19	5
John McCain	5	3	6
Colin Powell	1	2	1

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22% of all U.S. households do not have telephone land lines. [CDC]

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The more important religion is to an individual, the more likely that he or she will identify as a Republican. The less important religion is in a person's life, the more likely they are to identify as a Democrat.

Among the most highly religious, 49% identify as Republican and 37% as Democrats. Among those who are not very religious, 26% identify as Republicans, while 56% identify as Democrats. [Gallup 12/09]

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There have been a few changes in how we rate the honesty and ethics of various professions.

Continuing to top the list are nurses, who get a very high/high rating from 83% of respondents (-1 point from 2008). In second place are pharmacists at 66% (-4 points) and doctors at 65% (+1 point).

Police officers showed the greatest increase in their rating, reaching 63% (+7 points).

The biggest losers were clergy, who dropped from 56% to 50%, and bankers, who dropped from 23% to 19%.

As usual, car salespeople, at 6%, bottomed the list. [Gallup 12/09]

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As of August 2008

- Full-time civilian employment in the U.S. - 112,260,000
- Total part-time employment - 27,600,000
- Total employment - 139,862,000
- Total work force of all governments - 22,487,000
- Total U.S. government civilian work force w/o Post Office - 1,800,000
- Total U.S. government civilian work force with the Post Office - 2,821,000
- U.S. military - 1,454,000
- U.S. military reserves - 848,000

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THE PRESIDENT

President Obama's overall job performance rating continues to decline.

	<u>NBC/WSJ</u>	<u>NYT/CBS</u>	<u>WP/ABC</u>
Obama overall job approval			
December 2009	47/46%	50/39%	50/46%
October	51/42%	----	57/40%
September	51/41%	56/33%	54/43%
August	51/40%	----	57/40%
July	53/40%	----	58/37%
June	56/34%	63/26%	65/31%
April	61/30%	66/24%	69/26%
February 2009	60/26%	62/15%	68/25%

In addition to the surveys above, the Gallup weekly average number for December 7-13 is 49%/42%.

When matched against the approval ratings of the last 8 Presidents in mid-December of the first year of their initial terms in office, Obama is now tied with Ronald Reagan for 8th/9th place on the basis of their approval ratings, and "1st," based on disapproval ratings. [Gallup surveys]

	<u>App</u>	<u>Dis</u>
GW Bush (II)	86%	11%
Kennedy	77	11
G Bush (I)	71	20
Eisenhower	69	22
Nixon	59	23
Carter	57	27
Clinton	54	40
Reagan	49	40
Obama	49	42

The following are selected demographic cuts of Obama's job approval ratings in the Gallup surveys in the 12/7-13/09 period.

	<u>Approve</u>
Men	46%
Women	52%
18-29 year olds	59%
65 years and older	40%
White	41%
Black	70%
Hispanic	64%
Democrats	81%
Independents	46%
Republicans	18%
Liberal Democrats	86%
Pure Independents	41%
Conservative Repub	11%
Married	42%
Not Married	59%
Weekly church Att	42%
Seldom/Never Att	53%

Here is how Obama is rated based on the two news sources.

	Total	Fox	Other
Obama job approval	47%	15%	59%
Obama job disapproval	46%	80%	33%

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The December 13th WP/ABC survey recorded a 52% disapproval of Obama's performance on the economy. 46% approved. This was the first time that his performance on the economy has moved into negative territory.

The NBC/WSJ survey taken at roughly the same time found a similar shift. 51% disapproval and 42% approval. This was also the first time his disapproval score exceeded his approval score in this survey.

Obama does get positive ratings for his performance in foreign policy. 49% approve - 42% disapprove. More specifically, he gets a 46% approval - 42% disapproval score for his handling of the war in Afghanistan. [NBC/WSJ 12/09]

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The President is seen as doing a better job than the Republicans in Congress on the economy, healthcare reform, Afghanistan, and energy policy. [WP/ABC 12/09]

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19% of Americans are extremely confident that Obama has the right goals and policies to be President. 33% are not at all confident.

13% are extremely confident that the President has the right goals and policies to improve the economy, but 36% are not at all confident. [NBC/WSJ 12/09]

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Here is how Obama is rated on his handling of the Federal budget deficit.

	<u>Approve/Disapprove</u>	
December 2009	37/56%	
October	45/51%	
September	39/55%	
August	41/53%	
July	43/49%	
June	48/48%	
April 2009	51/43%	[WP/ABC]

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Personal feelings about the President remain relatively high, with little change since the middle of the year.

	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Negative</u>	
December 2009	50%	30%	
October 2009	56%	33%	
September 2009	56%	33%	
July 2009	55%	34%	
April 2009	64%	23%	
February 2009	68%	19%	
January 2009	66%	14%	[NBC/WSJ]

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As of the end of 2009, 32% of the officials that Obama has announced, nominated or had confirmed are women. This compares with 42% in the first year of Bill Clinton's Administration, and 26% in the first year of the Administration of George Bush II. [WashPost.com/headcount-2001 Brookings study]

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Finally, in several recent December surveys, 50% or more disapprove of the way Obama in handling healthcare.

	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>Approve</u>
Washington Post/ABC	53%	44%
Fox	54%	39%
CBS/NYTimes	50%	42%
Bloomberg	53%	40%
Quinnipiac	54%	38%

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HEALTHCARE

As this is being written the Senate is finishing its deliberations on healthcare "reform" legislation. The goal, to pass the bill by Christmas. Majority Leader Harry Reid has cobbled together the 60 votes necessary to survive several filibusters, the first of which was concluded at 1:00 a.m. on December 21st, and the second at 8:15 a.m. on December 22nd. There is one cloture vote to go, with the vote on final passage scheduled for 8:00 p.m. Christmas Eve.

Next stop is the House/Senate conference, with the ostensible goal of final passage of legislation prior to the State of the Union Address early next year.

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Rule XXII

On January 14, 1975, Senators Fritz Mondale (D-MN) and Jim Pearson (R-KS) launched an effort to change Rule 22 of the U.S. Senate. The Rule at the time required the vote of 66 Senators to end debate on a matter.

They were joined in their efforts by a number of Senators, including two who remain prominent in American politics, Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT) and Vice President Joe Biden, then a Senator from Delaware.

Their proposal was that debate could be ended by the vote of 3/5ths of the Senators present and voting.

The debate went on for just over 7 weeks. It ended on March 7, 1975, with a compromise. The Rule was changed so that debate could be ended with the vote of 3/5ths of the total number of Senators.

Would the Senate be headed for passage of this landmark healthcare legislation if 66 Senators were required to end debate? Not likely.

[Mondale was staffed by Bob Barnett.]

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The following is a summary of the state of public opinion about various aspects of the legislation. The survey results that are included were all published in the last two months unless otherwise noted. [A list of all the surveys is found at the end of this section.]

- * 55% say they have a good basic understanding of the changes proposed to the healthcare system
 - 56% support the change
 - 43% oppose the change
- * 44% believe the changes proposed are too complicated for a good basic understanding
 - 38% support change
 - 57% oppose change
- * In April 57% approved of the way that Obama was handling healthcare, with 29% disapproving. Now, in the same survey, 53% disapprove, while 44% approve.
- * The public trusts Obama to do a better job of handling healthcare than the Republicans by 46% to 39%. However, that is down from June, when 55% trusted Obama, while 33% trusted the Republicans.
- * By 50% to 47% Americans think it is not the government's responsibility to make sure that everyone has health coverage. However, a year ago 54% thought it was the government's responsibility.
- * 47% to 32% think that the "Obama healthcare plan" is a bad idea. In April, by a 7 point margin, Americans thought it was a good idea. However, since July a plurality has considered it to be a bad idea.
- * 60% don't think a health care overhaul plan should be adopted if only Democrats support it.
- * In April, 24% believed that the quality of healthcare would get worse based on what they heard about the Obama plan. In late October that number rose to 40%.
- * 57% think that people should have the option of being covered by a government health insurance plan: the so-called "public option."
- * If the new healthcare bill becomes law, 41% think the healthcare system will be better and 40% think it will be worse.

- * 48% would advise their Member of Congress to vote against the healthcare bill, while 46% would advise their Member to vote for it.

[WP/ABC 11/09][WP/ABC 4/09;12/09][WP/ABC 12/09;6/09][NBC/WSJ 12/09;4/09][Quinnipiac 11/09][NYT 4/09;NBC/WSJ 10/09][Quinnipiac 11/09][Gallup 11/09][Gallup 12/09]

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Medicare spends 2 or 3 percent of its budget on administration. If a government-run plan had to spend its own money to collect premiums, market itself to customers, maintain a reserve, and manage care in a way that lowers costs and raises quality – none of which Medicare now does – then you can be sure its administrative costs would be nowhere near 2 or 3 percent. [Steve Pearlstein, WP 8/19/09]

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2010 CONGRESSIONAL CAMPAIGNS

In July, Gallup reported a generic (if the vote were held today) ballot in favor of the Democrats by 50% to 44%. By October, that margin declined to 46% to 44% in favor of the Democrats. Then, in early November, came a reversal; the Republicans topped the Democrats by 48% to 44%. Most recently, the Democrats again have a slight advantage, 48% to 45%.

You'll recall that the Democratic margin before the 2008 election was 15 points, 54% to 39%.

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68% disapprove of the job being done by Congress according to the mid-December NBC/WSJ survey. Only 22% approve. This is the lowest score recorded for the Congress in that survey since January 2009, when a similar number expressed their disapproval.

Those numbers are confirmed by a recent Gallup survey which found 69% disapproval and 25% approval of the job being done by Congress. A December Fox survey paints a slightly better picture, finding only a 59% disapproval.

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34% say they rate the current Congress as one of the worst when it comes to performance and accomplishments. Another 24% say it is below average, bringing the total negative rating to 58%. This is the most negative rating recorded in the NBC/WSJ survey, which first asked this question in the fall of 1990. In October 1994, only 16% rated that Congress as being one of the worst.

81% of Americans feel that 2009 was a year in which the Democrats and Republicans in Congress represented a period of division with little willingness to

compromise. In January 2009, when asked to look ahead at the coming year, a plurality of 48% thought the year would be one of unity and working together by the two Parties.

The preference of the public remains marginally for a Democratic-controlled Congress, by 43% to 41%. In November 2008 there was a preference for Democratic control by 12 points, and in October 2006 the Democratic margin was 15 points. [NBC/WSJ 12/09]

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U.S. SENATE

In the U.S. Senate the position of Democratic incumbents who must face the voters in 2010 continues to be problematic. For all practical purposes the Connecticut race is now rated as Leaning Republican. Senator Chris Dodd (D) does not seem able to overcome the drop in popularity that followed his unsuccessful run for the Presidency.

North Dakota Democratic Senator Byron Dorgan is in good shape for re-election so long as Republican Governor John Hoeven does not enter the race. The governor has not yet made his intentions clear. This is a free race for the Governor, since he will still be governor if he makes the Senate run and loses. If he enters the race, this contest between two very popular public officials will be rated as a Toss-Up.

The Pennsylvania race will be interesting. Republican turned-Democrat Arlen Specter has a May 18th primary date with Congressman Joe Sestak. Former Republican Congressman Pat Toomey is likely to make the general election a real slug fest.

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THE U.S. SENATE

Democrats 58
Republicans 40
Independents 2 (caucus Dem)

Here is how the 37 Senate elections (19 Democratic incumbents, 18 Republican incumbents) look to me at this time (underlining reflects retirement). (D=Dem incumbent in office, R=GOP incumbent in office, I=Ind. incumbent in office)
[*Gillibrand]

Safe	Leaning		Leaning	Safe
<u>Democratic(9)</u>	<u>Democratic(4)</u>	<u>Toss-Up(9)</u>	<u>Republican(4)</u>	<u>Republican(11)</u>
Hawaii	Arkansas	Colorado	Connecticut	Alabama
Indiana	California	Delaware	Florida	Arkansas
Maryland	New York (B)*	Illinois	Louisiana	Arizona
Massachusetts	No. Dakota	Kentucky	No. Carolina	Georgia
New York(A)		Missouri		Idaho
Oregon		Nevada		Iowa
Vermont		New Hampsh.		Kansas
Washington		Ohio		Oklahoma
Wisconsin		Pennsylvania		So. Carolina
				So. Dakota
				Utah

	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>	<u>Ind</u>
Seats not up in 2010	40	21	2
Safe in 2010	9	11	0
Leaning in 2010	4	4	0
Total	53	36	2
Toss-ups	9 (4R/5D)		

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U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

When it comes to the potential re-election of their representative in Congress, 49% now think it is time to give a new person a chance, as opposed to 38% who say their representative deserves to be re-elected.

	Total	Fox	Other
Representative deserves re-election	38%	29%	41%
Give new person a chance	49%	62%	44%

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The number of seats that the Cook Political Report rates as solidly Democratic has dropped by 30 seats since the beginning of the year, from 204 to 174. The total number of solidly Republican seats has grown from 147 to 151. Two Democratic seats are now seen as in the Republican column, while 1 Republican seat is now leaning Democratic.

THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Democrats 258
 Republicans 177
 Vacancy 3

	<u>4/1/09</u>	<u>8/15/09</u>	<u>10/6/09</u>	<u>11/5/09</u>	<u>12/16/09</u>
Total Dem	255	256	256	258	257
Solid Dem	204	195	183	180	174
Likely Dem	29	37	44	45	44
Lean Dem	20	17	20	21	29
Toss Up	2	9	11	15	19
D	2	7	9	12	16
R	0	2	2	3	3
Lean GOP	6	9	10	9	8
Likely GOP	26	27	21	15	16
Solid GOP	147	138	143	150	151
Total GOP	179	176	176	177	178

[As always, thanks to the Cook Political Report, which is the best when it comes to analysis of Congressional races (as well as other electoral matters)].

Pollsters Bennett, Petts & Normington have opined that the approval rating of the President drives his party's gains or losses in mid-term elections. Their conclusion is that losses of more than 20 seats only occur when a President's approval rating slips significantly below 50%.

The following is a summary of mid-terms beginning with 1978.

1978

- President Carter
- Gallup job approval ratings 2 months before election
 - September 48/34
 - October 49/36
- Incumbent President House seat losses - 15

1982

- President Reagan
- Gallup job approval ratings 2 months before election
 - September 42/48
 - October 42/48
- Incumbent President House seat losses - 20

1986

- President Reagan
- Gallup job approval ratings 2 months before election
 - September 63/26
 - October 63/29
- Incumbent President House seat losses - 5

1990

- President Bush I
- Gallup job approval ratings 2 months before election
 - September 67/20
 - October 54/36
- Incumbent President House seat losses - 8

1994

- President Clinton
- Gallup job approval ratings 2 months before election
 - September 44/51
 - October 41/52
- Incumbent President House seat losses - 54

1998

- President Clinton
- Gallup job approval ratings 2 months before election
 - September 63/35
 - October 65/32
- Incumbent President House seat gains - 5

2002

- President Bush II
- Gallup job approval ratings 2 months before election
 - September 66/30
 - October 62/31
- Incumbent President House seat gains - 8

2006

- President Bush II
- Gallup job approval ratings 2 months before election
 - September 44/51
 - October 37/58
- Incumbent President House seat losses - 30

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RESTAURANTS

KOMI

1509 17th Street NW
Reservations 202-332-9200
Washington, DC
johnny@komirestaurant.com

I went to Komi with Libby, Heather and Tony. This restaurant is a "must" for your list of places to eat when you want a special meal.

Komi is on the 2nd floor of an unassuming building above a dry cleaner. It is reached by an outdoor wrought iron stair case. The dining room is long and relatively narrow, with a kitchen at the far end. There is an open doorway and a large window through which you can watch the food being prepared.

The walls of the restaurant are painted a light cream color and the floor is of well-honed wood planks. The lighting is such that there is a generally comfortable feeling about the room. Scattered around the room are high sconces with real burning candles.

There are two overall "dinner" options.

The 1st option is called "Dinner" - \$90 - which is only offered on Tuesday-Thursday. The 2nd option is "Degustazione" - \$125. It is offered Tuesday - Saturday. [Wine is extra.]

We selected the "Dinner." The "Degustazione" is apparently an even larger version of the "Dinner."

Dinner began with a selection of "Mezzetkakia" (a series of "small" dishes or hors d'oeuvres). There is generally about one bite per person.

Sliced yellow fin
Steamed brioche topped with creme freshe and caviar
Oysters

Tartare of Alaskan king salmon with candied pine nuts
Crispy Caesar salad (not like any Caesar salad you have ever eaten)
Tiny hoagie sandwich
Grilled octopus with braised Brussel sprouts
Prosciutto Sendanide

For a first course, Libby and Tony selected the Kabocha Agnolotti with blood oranges & speck. Heather and I had the Pappardelle with a ragu of rabbit & olives. Of course we all shared tastes.

For their entree Heather and Tony opted for the Roasted Katsikaki. Libby and I went for the Roasted Suckling Pig. (Three of the four dishes offered as entrees were for two persons. The 3rd dish for two was Cavrari Me Alati. The only dish that seemed to be designed for one person was Cauliflower Flan with smoked greens.)

1/4 of a suckling pig is roasted, skin and all, and then sliced after presentation. This was the first time I ate suckling pig. It is quite good.

The Katsikaki is cooked whole in a mound of salt and then served filleted.

The separate dessert menu offered four treats. We ordered all of them and had a tasting, Greek Doughnuts with a mocha milkshake; Frozen Baklava; Chocolate Tart with Pomegranate & green tea; Caramel Apple with malt & ginger.

Tony selected the wines.

The service was as close to perfect as a restaurant might get. Everything came with an explanation.

Johnny Monis, the owner/chef, is 24 years old.

This is not a place to go for a "quick" dinner. We were eating for about 2 ½ hours, but it did not drag. And it is not a meal that you will want to have too often.

For those who invariably request that there be one or more changes to items on the menu, this is not the place for you. First, you don't know in advance what will be delivered in the way of small dishes. And, given the nature of the items for which there is a choice, modification is not a logical option.

The men's room is near the back of the restaurant, up two stairs. The room is not very large, but of ample size. On the wall to the right of the door there is a white ceramic washbasin with a silver framed mirror above it. The towels are cloth. On the wall opposite the door there is a white ceramic commode and a white ceramic, wall-attached, urinal. There is no separator between them. The walls are covered with large square charcoal gray tiles with light accents and swirls. The floor is covered with large black tiles.

Dress is nice, but casual, like so many of the restaurants in the area and increasingly around D.C.

Reservations are accepted up to one month before the date you would like to visit. We got our reservation by calling and asking what dates might be available. The first date suggested was only 10 days from our phone call.

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On the Friday after Thanksgiving I ventured off to the Spring Valley Shopping Center to get my car serviced. As luck would have it, they were able to start working on the car immediately. It was 8:15 a.m. and I needed to kill 45 minutes.

Across Mass Avenue I saw a Starbucks and headed in that direction. But as I crossed the street I found myself in front of a restaurant/bakery I had passed many times before but never tried. And so I did.

It is called **La Pain Quotidian**
4874 Massachusetts Ave NW
Washington, DC
202-459-9179

In terms of the kind food that is served here, it is about as far away from Ben's Chili Bowl as one can get. But in its own way, it is just as good.

The restaurant is V-shaped, with two long walls being floor-to-ceiling glass windows. There are a number of 2- and 4-person tables, and two communal tables, one which holds 30 people, and the other which holds 16.

The tables and chairs are made of plain wood and the chairs are a little on the small side.

I had a small bowl of cut fruit (the fruit is cut into relatively small pieces, making it a whole lot easier to eat than the ordinary size of cut fruit); a small bowl of mixed berries; a bowl of fresh organic granola with skim milk; an egg white omelet with wild mushrooms; a pumpkin muffin (selected by my server as her favorite); hot and cold espresso; and ice tea. [I did not eat all of the foregoing at one time. I tried the restaurant a second time the next morning.]

The breakfast menu includes 6 different omelettes, all of which can be ordered with egg whites. Plain fried eggs are also available. In addition to the Granola there is an offering of organic steelcut oatmeal.

There are a variety of fresh breads and rolls available for consumption during a meal or for take-out from a bakery section.

On my 3rd visit I ordered artine (sandwich) of warm chicken, cheddar cheese and a smatterings of other goodies. It was quite large, and frankly would serve two people if you started with a bowl of soup or a small salad.

The lunch menu includes:

13 Tartines such as grilled chicken, smoked mozzarella, arugula and basil pesto; 8 salads; 4 special platters; and 3 quiches.

There are organic & biogeneric beers and wines on request.

The restaurant offers three meals a day. It is a bit pricey, but overall worth it.

On my first visit there were relatively few people in the restaurant. On Saturday, when I arrived around 10 a.m., it was quite a bit busier. There were many families with small children and it was a bit noisier than my previous visit. On my 3rd visit, late noon on a Friday, there were maybe a dozen people having lunch.

The servers were young, energetic, friendly, and attentive.

The men's room is simple but more than adequate. There is a white ceramic commode and a white ceramic washbasin with a large ornate framed mirror over it. There are small light green tiles up to 6 feet on the walls, and then tan painted walls above that height. The floor is covered with very large tan tiles.

Mike

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