

*Mike Berman's*

# **WASHINGTON POLITICAL WATCH**

No. 88

November 5, 2009

## **STATE OF THE NATION Unemploment crosses 10%**

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**A portrait of America**

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## **WHO ARE WE?**

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## **2009 ELECTIONS**

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## **PRESIDENT OBAMA**

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## **HEALTHCARE**

**Could Xmas Eve come and go  
without completion of healthcare?**

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## **THE CONGRESS**

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## **SELECT CABLE/BROADCAST RATINGS**

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## **RESTAURANTS**

**It is 7:30 a.m. on a Saturday**

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Crossing the 10% threshold, unemployment for the month of October reached 10.2%. This is the highest level of unemployment since April 1983. 190,000 jobs were cut during the month.

Unemployment may have actually reached 20%, when taking into account people who have stopped looking for jobs and those who are underemployed as a result of significant cuts in their total compensation.

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The October NBC/WSJ survey paints a portrait of how Americans feel early in the 4th quarter of 2009.

- \* 52% - country off on the wrong track
- \* 63% - the level of unemployment has not hit bottom
- \* 58% - there is still a ways to go before the economy hits bottom
- \* 49% - very dissatisfied with the state of the U.S. economy today. Additional 31% are somewhat dissatisfied.
- \* 22% - think economy will get worse (33% think it will stay the same)
- \* 62% - the President and Congress should think more about keeping budget deficit down even if it takes longer for economy to recover
- \* 48% - government doing too many things
- \* 36% - government has not done enough to help improve economy (30% say it has done enough)
- \* 65% - trust the government only some of the time
- \* 46% - at least mildly favor building a new independent political party (this is roughly the same % of folks who had this view in April 2006. 53% expressed this view in July 2007)

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Here is the track of opinion as to whether the country is headed in the right direction or off on the wrong track.

	NBC/WSJ	NYT/CBS	WP/ABC
	<u>RD/WT</u>	<u>RD/WT</u>	<u>RD/WT</u>
February	41/44%	23/68%	31/67%
April	43/43%	39/53%	50/48%
June	42/46%	44/50%	47/50%
July	39/49%	42/49%	xxxxxx
August	xxxxxx	xxxxxx	44/55%
September	39/48%	41/53%	xxxxxx
October	35/52%	xxxxxx	44/54%

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In the year since President Obama was elected there has been a change in intensity as to which of several identified issues should be the top priority for the President. The economy is still #1; healthcare and the Federal budget deficit have gone from single to double digits.

	<u>11/08</u>	<u>10/09</u>
Economy	64%	41%
Iran and Afghanistan	11%	18%
Health care	5%	17%
Federal Budget deficit	7%	14%
Energy	6%	2%

Democrats and Republicans agree on the importance of the economy, and they are in close agreement on Iran and Afghanistan. Beyond that there is little agreement between partisans. Democrats (30%) find healthcare more important than Republicans (10%); Republicans (23%) are more concerned with the deficit than Democrats (5%). [Gallup]

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There is increasing consternation about the amount of money being spent on Federal elections. It is estimated that \$5.9 billion was spent in 2007-08. Certainly that is a lot of money. But is it really that much money, given the importance of these elections, and the amount of money that is spent on other things?

In the same 2007-08 period, Americans spent \$10.8 billion on decorations, costumes and candy for Halloween.

[Tony Corrado, Colby College; National Retail Federation]

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As to relations between blacks and whites, the assessment by Americans today is about what it was in 1963. The highest level of optimism came in 2008, immediately following the election of Barack Obama. The height of pessimism came in 1996, following the acquittal of O.J. Simpson. [Gallup]

	<u>Will always be a problem</u>	<u>Solution will be worked out</u>
2009	40%	56%
2008	30%	67% (post-election)
2001	47%	47%
1996	68%	29%
1993	53%	44%
1963	42%	55%

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On October 6th, by a margin of 48% to 45%, we favored sending more U.S. troops to Afghanistan. On September 23rd, we opposed additional troops by 50% to 41%. [Gallup]

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Federal lobbyists seem to come and go. By mid-year 2007, there were 13,428 registered lobbyists. As of the end of the 3rd quarter 2009 there were 11,014 registered lobbyists, an 18% decline. While the number of registrations has always varied between reporting periods, this is the most dramatic drop since 2000. [Center for Responsive Politics; OMB Watch]

Conventional wisdom seems to be that a large part of this change is driven by the Obama Administration's stated antipathy for lobbyists. The open-ended question is whether those who have "de-registered" are still in the business or hewing carefully to a strict interpretation of the law, rather than responding to the spirit of the law.

There is one other period during this decade in which there were a large number of "de-registrations." Registrations dropped from 11,604 to 9,721 between the middle and end of 2000. The reason for that 16% drop is not obvious. It may have to do with heat being applied to some outliers who were pushing the limits of the law. Again, folks who had registered out of an abundance of caution deregistered.

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## **WHO WE ARE**

The dominant ideological group in the United States, based on self-identification, is conservatives. 40% of respondents identify themselves that way. Since 1992 there were two other years, 2003 and 2004, when self-described conservatives were the dominant ideological group. For most of that period, "moderates" were marginally at the top of the heap. Today, 36% describe themselves that way. Liberals have trailed since at least 1992. The high points for liberals were in 2007 and 2008 when 22% of Americans described themselves in that way. [Gallup]

In the October NBC/WSJ survey, 30% described themselves as Democrats and 17% as Republicans. 44% are Independents (13 points lean Dem/14% points lean GOP). 9% picked another description or were not sure.

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Who are the Democrats, Republicans and Independents ideologically? Who are the liberals, moderates and conservatives on a Party partisan basis?

Those questions should be pretty easy to answer. You run tabs for the one against the other, and it is done. However, it turns out it is not so easy. First, you have to decide how you are going to define the parameters of each of the partisan choices.

For example, if you include within the group of Republicans those Independents who "lean" Republican, and within the group of Democrats those Independents who "lean" Democratic, because that is how they tend to vote, then Independents (including those who do not answer) account for 26% of the electorate. However, if you lump together all of the folks who say they are Independents, and do not look to how they "lean", then Independents represent 52% of the electorate.

To fully calculate whether Independent "leaners" should be included as Democrats or Republicans, one would analyze the two leaning groups and see to what extent they look like those who are totally part of one partisan group or the other. That analysis is beyond the energy of the WW.

Here is the partisan/ideological split, using the broadest definition of Independents. [October NBC/WSJ]

Democrats - 30% of the electorate
47% liberal
36% moderate
14% conservative
Independents - 52% of the electorate
18% liberal
36% moderate
37% conservative
Republicans - 17% of the electorate
6% liberal
24% moderate
69% conservative

The partisan/ideological split, including "leaners" with the partisan group to which they lean, looks like this

Democrats - 43% of the electorate
43% liberal
40% moderate
14% conservative
Independents - 26% of the electorate
14% liberal
40% moderate
38% conservatives

Republicans - 31% of the electorate  
6% liberal  
25% moderate  
67% conservative

Finally, here is a look at the ideological/partisan split including Independent "leaners" with the partisan group to which they lean

Liberals  
75% Democratic  
17% Independent  
8% Republican  
Moderates  
51% Democratic  
26% Independent  
23% Republican  
Conservatives  
17% Democratic  
32% Independent  
60% Republican

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## 2009 ELECTIONS

The 2009 elections can be read as a reflection of the continuing discontent among Americans. 85% or more of the voters in New Jersey and Virginia are "very worried" about the economy for the coming year.

The elections can also be read as a reflection of a Democratic gubernatorial incumbent (New Jersey) who had a very poor job approval rating for his performance in office, and a Democratic candidate for Governor (Virginia) who simply didn't have it.

The elections can also be read as older Americans caring more than younger Americans about making the effort to get out and vote, and as Independents switching course.

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Given the surprising closeness of the New York Mayoral election, the most intriguing post-election question is whether City Comptroller Bill Thompson, the Democratic nominee, would have won if any part of the Democratic establishment from the President to the Congressional delegation had actively supported him?

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It is hard to believe that there is much to be read in the Democratic victory in the NY-23 Congressional seat. A political fiction writer probably would not have been able to find a publisher for a novel with the plot line that transpired in that race.

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It is fair to say that, while voters still like President Obama, his personal status is not transferable to others in the political arena.

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It is always the case that the composition of the electorate in a non-Presidential election year is quite different from that in Presidential election years. This was particularly notable in this year's Virginia and New Jersey elections. The following reflects the percentage of the electorate that each of the noted groups constituted in November 2008 and November 2009 in these two States.

	Virginia		New Jersey	
	'08	'09	'08	'09
18-29 years of age	21%	10%	17%	9%
45 years of age and older	49%	65%	53%	66%
Conservatives	33%	40%	25%	30%
Independents	27%	30%	28%	28%

While Independents are not a party, they do seem to think alike. They supported Democrats in 2008 and 2006. In 2009 they switched.

Here is how Independents voted in the two Gubernatorial elections last Tuesday, compared to how they voted last November. [WW is conscious that votes for President and votes for Governors are different. Nonetheless WW finds the comparison interesting.]

Virginia	2008	Obama (D)49%	McCain (R) 48%
	2009	Deeds (D)33%	McDonnell (R)66%
New Jersey	2008	Obama (D)51%	McCain (R)47%
	2009	Corzine (D)30%	Christie (R)60%

Whether these elections are a harbinger of the future in the 2010 and 2012 elections is less clear.

The following chart details, from 1960 - 2008, the results of the Gubernatorial elections in Virginia and New Jersey following each Presidential election year.

Following the 7 Presidential elections, 1960-1984, there were 5 Virginia/New Jersey Gubernatorial elections in which the person elected in each of the States was from the same Party as the recently elected President. In the other 2 cycles, one State selected a person who was of the same Party as the President.

Beginning in 1988, there has not been a single cycle when both States elected a Governor who was from the same Party as the President.

In 1988, 2000 and 2004, with a Republican President, both States elected Democratic Governors. In 1992, 1996 and 2008, with a Democrat President, both States elected Republican Governors. Go figure.

### Virginia & New Jersey Election Results 1960 to Present

			Virginia		New Jersey			Congress Results	Control After Elec.
	Pres. Election		Pres.	Gov.	Pres.	Gov			
1960	D	1961	R	D	D	D	1962	D -4/R+2	D
1964	D	1965	D	D	D	D	1966	D-48/R+47	D
1968	R	1969	R	R	R	R	1970	D+12/R-12	D
1972	R	1973	R	R	R	D	1974	D+49/R-48	D
1976	D	1977	R	D	R	D	1978	D-15/R+15	D
1980	R	1981	R	D	R	R	1982	D+27/R-26	D
1984	R	1985	R	R	R	R	1986	D+5/R-5	D
1988	R	1989	R	D	R	D	1990	D+7/R-8	D
1992	D	1993	R	R	D	R	1994	D-54/R+54	R
1996	D	1997	R	R	D	R	1998	D+5/R-5	R
2000	R	2001	R	D	D	D	2002	D-7/R+8	R
2004	R	2005	R	D	D	D	2006	D+31/R-30	D
2008	D	2009	D	R	D	R	2010		

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### THE PRESIDENT

President Obama's overall job performance numbers have been relatively constant over the last several months. In addition to the surveys below, Gallup is showing 50/41% approval and CNN/OR is at 54.45%.



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

When matched against the approval ratings of the last 8 Presidents in early November of the first year of their initial terms in office, Obama now ranks 8th. Only Clinton had numbers lower than his. Last month he was tied for 5th/6th/7th. [Gallup surveys]

	<u>App</u>	<u>Dis</u>
GW Bush (II)	87%	9%
Kennedy	79	9
G Bush (I)	70	17
Nixon	67	19
Eisenhower	61	26
Carter	55	30
Reagan	53	35
Obama	50	41
Clinton	48	45

The WP/ABC survey in mid-October gave Obama a 50% approval rating on the economy, with disapproval being 48%, the lowest approval rating on this subject since he took office.

The NBC/WSJ survey in late October found the country about dead even on his handling of the economy, with 47% approval to 46% disapproval. This is the lowest approval and highest disapproval record in this poll on this subject since Obama took office.

As to his handling of foreign policy, the NBC/WSJ survey showed Obama with a 51% approval rating and a 39% disapproval rating. The WP/ABC shows him with an approval of 57% and disapproval of 36% on his handling of international affairs. It also rates him at 52% to 36% on handling Iran.

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

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

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

	<u>Postive</u>	<u>Negative</u>
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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When asked to rate the President on a number of personal qualities, the response to Obama is still quite strong and positive, although the strength of those ratings has dropped somewhat since the first of the year.

<b>Obama Personal Qualities (%)</b>	<b>Overall</b>			<b>Independents</b>
	<b>Oct-09</b>	<b>Apr-09</b>	<b>Jan-09</b>	<b>Oct-09</b>
<b>Relate to him</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>XX</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Like personally</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Easy going/likable</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Inspirational &amp; exciting</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Strong Leadership qualities</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Improving America's Image</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>XX</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Honest &amp; Straightforward</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>38</b>

However, when it comes to qualities that might more accurately be described as performance qualities, rather than personal qualities, Obama is not doing nearly as well.

Obama Personal Qualities (%)	Overall			Independents
	Oct-09	Apr-09	Jan-09	Oct-09
Firm & Decisive	48	55	63	38
Knowledgeable & Experienced	47	56	51	40
Good Commander -in-Chief	46	55	55	30
Having ability to handle a crisis	45	54	46	32
Sharing your positions	39	48	52	28
Uniting the country	38	57	60	21
Changing business as usual	38	41	XX	29
Achieving his goals	37	60	56	28

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There has been a drop in confidence as to whether Obama will be able to meet a number of the challenges facing his Administration.

	<u>Nov 2008</u>	<u>Oct 2009</u>
Heal political divisions in the country	54%	28% (-26)
Control Federal spending	52	31 (-21)
Improve healthcare system	64	46 (-18)
Reduce unemployment	67	51 (-16)
Increase respect for U.S. abroad	76	60 (-16)
Bring U.S. troops home from Afghanistan in a way not harmful to U.S.	58	46 (-12)
Bring U.S. troops home from Iraq in a way not harmful to U.S.	66	56 (-10)
Keep U.S. safe from terrorism	62	57 (-5)
	[Gallup]	

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82% of Americans still believe it is important that Obama keep his campaign promises. They are equally divided, 48%/48%, as to whether Obama has kept the promises made during his Presidential campaign. In April, by 65% to 29%, respondents thought he had been keeping his promises. [Gallup]

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After his election the public was evenly divided, 45% to 43%, in its belief that Obama's policies would be slightly more moderate than liberal. Today, their view has changed. Now 54% see him as pursuing liberal policies, as opposed to 34% who say he pursues primarily moderate policies. [Gallup]

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Immediately after his election, 80% thought Obama would make a "sincere effort to work with Republicans." Today 60% have that view. The number who did/do not think he would make a sincere effort has doubled from 19% to 38%. [Gallup}

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While Obama's personal and performance numbers have dropped, there is still considerable support for him. When working for candidates, we learn that the last thing you want to do, because it is so hard, is to convince someone who is supporting the other candidate to be for your candidate.

You first have to get that person to consider the possibility that s/he may be wrong and get them to an "undecided" position. Then you have to convince them that they were wrong and to vote for your candidate.

During the campaign there were many people who came to believe that their aspirations could be fulfilled by voting for Obama. Now, it seems they are not yet ready to admit they might have been wrong.

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Vice President Biden's favorable rating has dropped from 53% to 42% since the beginning of the Administration. His unfavorable rating has grown from 29% to 40%. [Obama's relative drop in favorable ratings during the same period was 78% to 55%.]

There has been little drop in the positive attitude of Democrats during that period (75% to 73%). As would be expected, it dropped by 16 points among Republicans (48% to 32%).

The decline among Independents has also been rather steep, 48% to 32%. [Gallup]

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## **HEALTHCARE**

As this is being written on November 5th, the U.S. House is planning to vote on its version of healthcare reform legislation on Saturday, November 7th.

The Senate is not yet ready to bring its bill to the floor, but is likely to do so in the next week. Negotiations among the various factions within the Democratic caucus are continuing.

It is most likely that by the time of the Christmas break, both houses will have passed their versions of the bill. The conference will then take place after the 1st of the year, with a goal of having the legislation enacted before the President gives his State of the Union address.

Going back to early September, there has only been one major national media survey that found a plurality of Americans approving of the way in which the President is handling healthcare. Most recently, the NBC/WSJ survey [10/22/09] reported that Americans disapproved of the way Obama was handling the issue by 48% to 43%.

The public, as it has for some time, is far more trusting of President Obama than they are of Republicans to handle healthcare. By 62% to 21% folks do not approve of the way that Republicans in Congress are handling healthcare reform.

However, a plurality of 42% think that the President's plan is a bad idea. 38% think it is a good plan. [NBC/WSJ 10/09]

57% support the idea of the Government creating a health insurance plan to compete with private health insurance plans. [WP/ABC 10/09]

51% believe the Federal Government should guarantee health insurance for all Americans. [CBS/NYT 9/09]

By 2 to 1 there is support for raising income taxes on households making more than \$250,000 to provide health insurance for those who cannot afford it. [CBS/NYT 10/09]

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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%. In early October, that margin declined by 2 points 46% to 44%.

This was a substantial fall from the 54% - 39% Democratic margin just before the 2008 election. This is also down from a 6 point margin in July.

Based on the historical relationship between the final pre-election results in the generic ballot just before the election and the final results of the election, Democrats need to be getting 48-49% of the vote in order to achieve at least a 218 vote majority in the House.

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In its late October survey, NBC/WSJ found 65% disapproving of the job being done by Congress, with 24% approving.

A Gallup survey earlier in the month found 16% of Independents approving of the work being done by Congress.

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### U.S. SENATE

There have been no significant changes in the contests for the U.S. Senate in the last month. Increasingly, odds are that the Democrats will not be able to maintain their 60 vote position.

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### THE U.S. SENATE

Democrats 58  
 Republicans 40  
 Independents 2 (caucus Dem)

Here is how the 38 Senate elections (19 Democratic incumbents, 19 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)

<u>Safe</u> <u>Democratic(10)</u>	<u>Leaning</u> <u>Democratic(4)</u>	<u>Toss-Up(10)</u>	<u>Leaning</u> <u>Republican(3)</u>	<u>Safe</u> <u>Republican(11)</u>
Hawaii	Arkansas	Connecticut	<u>Florida</u>	Alabama
Indiana	California	<u>Delaware</u>	Louisiana	Arkansas
Maryland	Colorado	Illinois	No. Carolina	Arizona
<u>Massachusetts</u>	No. Dakota	Kentucky		Georgia
New York(A)		<u>Missouri</u>		Idaho
New York(B)		Nevada		Iowa
Oregon		<u>New Hampsh.</u>		<u>Kansas</u>
Vermont		<u>Ohio</u>		Oklahoma
Washington		<u>Pennsylvania</u>		So. Carolina
Wisconsin		Texas		So. Dakota
				Utah

	<u>Democrats</u>	<u>Republicans</u>	<u>Ind</u>
Seats not up in 2010	39	21	2
Safe in 2010	10	11	0
Leaning in 2010	4	3	0
Total	53	35	2
Toss-ups	10 (5R/5D)		

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## U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

There is a general pattern of a new President's political Party losing seats in the House in the mid-term election following his inauguration. This was true of Nixon, Carter, Reagan, Bush I, and Clinton. The only exception was the first mid-term of election of Bush II in which Democrats lost 7 seats.

Most observers who WW respects are quite certain that Obama's first mid-term election will not be an exception to this pattern.

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While the total number of Democratic seats in the House has grown from 255 in April to 258 today, the number of seats that the Cook Political Report rates as solidly Democratic has dropped from 204 to 180. The total number of solidly Republican seats has grown from 147 to 150.

### 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>
Total Dem	255	256	256	258
Solid Dem	204	195	183	180
Likely Dem	29	37	44	45
Lean Dem	20	17	20	21
Toss Up	2	9	11	15
D	2	7	9	12
R	0	2	2	3
Lean GOP	6	9	10	9
Likely GOP	26	27	21	15
Solid GOP	147	138	143	150
Total GOP	179	176	176	177

[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)].

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## SELECT CABLE/BROADCAST RATINGS

For some period of time earlier this year the White House staff became increasingly irritated with what it believed was unfair coverage of the Administration by the Fox News Channel.

Beginning on October 8th with statements in Time Magazine, and continuing on CNN on October 11th, the White House staff expressed its irritation and took on Fox.

Fox responded through various of its programs, and the encounter was on and accelerated.

Intrigued with the question of whether this encounter had the affect of increasing Fox's audience, WW set out to find out.

Based on WW's review (which will be explained below) there was no apparent increase in audience.

Here is what I did. I reviewed the daily and weekly ratings of the Fox News Channel for the 7-12 p.m. time period, and particular programs for the 2 weeks before and the 2 weeks after October 11th. Additionally, I looked at a different set of ratings for the 6-9 a.m. period.

[HH = number of TV households; rating of 1.0 = 1,149,000 households]

7- 12 p.m.

2 weeks before - average HH rating 1.28 (1,471,000HH)

2 weeks after - average HH rating 1.275 (1,465,000HH)

Glen Beck show

2 weeks before - average HH rating 1.025 (1,178,000HH)

2 weeks after - average HH rating .98 (1,126,000HH)

Sean Hannity show

2 weeks before - average rating 1.075 (1,235,000HH)

2 weeks after - average rating 1.015 (1,166,000HH)

6 - 9 a.m.

9/22-10/19/08 - rating .98 (1,126,000HH)

9/21-10/18/09 - rating .83 (953,000HH)

Here is additional information you may find of interest.



7-12 p.m. 4th quarter 2009 season to date

Fox News Channel	-	rating 1.28 (1,471,000HH)
CNN	-	rating .44 (506,000HH)
MSNBC	-	rating .44 (506,000HH)
Headline news	-	rating .35 (402,000HH)
CNBC	-	rating .13 (149,000HH)

6-7 p.m. 4th quarter 2009 season to date

NBC Nightly News	-	rating 5.47 (6,285,000HH)
ABC World News Tonight	-	rating 5.07 (5,825,000HH)
CBS Evening News	-	rating 3.91 (4,493,000HH)

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## RESTAURANTS

It is 7:00 a.m. on a Saturday morning. You have eaten carefully for days on end; chicken, fish, veggies and fruit, little or no added fat.

Suddenly, you have an unquenchable "thirst" for an old fashioned, artery-clogging, bacon and egg sandwich. You know there are a variety of restaurants in which you can get this treat. But as long as you are going to treat yourself you might as well go for the best.

So, I headed to Ben's Chili Bowl.

At 7:30 a.m. on a Saturday morning, there were no lines and there were available seats at the counter. I opted to take the sandwich home with me.

I am savoring it as I write this note. Freshly scrambled whole eggs, with gobs of bacon that was cooked some time earlier and is sitting, partially curled, in a metal pan which is kept warm, and bread covered with butter.

There are a variety of breakfast sandwiches in just about every combination of eggs from scrapple to salmon cakes. And there is French toast and hotcakes.

Subsequent to my breakfast foray I attended an event at the Lincoln Theater which is next door to the Chili Bowl. During the cocktail hour one of the items passed were miniature chili dogs, the treat for which Ben's is particularly well known. Ambrosia is probably the wrong word, but it is close.

Breakfast is served starting at 6:00 a.m. Monday - Friday and 7:00 a.m. on Saturday. It ends at 10:45 a.m. Breakfast is not served on Sunday.

Ben's Chili Bowl  
1213 U Street N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20009  
202-667-0909  
www.benschilibowl.com

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Osteria bibiana  
1100 New York Avenue N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20005  
202-216-9550  
www.bibianadc.com  
(Entrance at 12th and H)

I first visited Bibiana with Marcia and Fred. I look forward to returning.

As you enter, there is a host stand, and directly behind the stand is a long, straight bar with about 16 high chairs. Behind the bar are open areas that allow you to look into the working kitchen.

Directly to the right of the entry dining room there is a cozy seating area that holds a dozen or more people for drinks and socializing.

There are two dining rooms. The one to the left of the entry way seats about 50 in 4s and 2s. It is sometimes used for private parties.

The dining room to the right seats 70. There is a half-wall separating the room from the entry way. Along that half-wall there is a padded bench which is used for seating at a series of tables. There is a private area at the far side of this dining room that looks to seat up to 10 people. The area is separated from the rest of the room by a gauzy curtain.

The dining room to the right, in which our table was located, was quite noisy, but we were able to hear ourselves think and to hear each other.

There are large black and white photographs scattered about the restaurant and the men's room. The dominant decorating material throughout the restaurant appears to be chrome.

We began our meal by sharing a series of Piatti (appetizers):

Arancini (Saffron Rice Fritters, Parmigiano)

Baccala (Salted Cod Fritters, Pil-Pil)

Polpettine (Veal Meat Balls in Sugo Finto)

Carciofi (Artichoke Guidea)

Pomodor (Heirloom Tomato Salad)

There are 4 pieces of each of these treats.

For her main course, Marcia chose Tagliatelle Alla Bolognese (Tagliatelle with traditional bolognes, Ragu). Fred and I chose the same entree, Razza (Seared Skate, little neck clams, cauliflower, brown butter).

I was alone in ordering dessert, each of 3 available flavors of gelatto. They were served in an interesting fashion, The flavors were layered in a glass that had the appearance of a short clear drinking glass. It was easy to spoon out all 3 flavors at the same time.

The service was fast and attentive, even though the restaurant was quite full. Our serving person was particularly friendly. He remembered me from another restaurant at which he had worked.

The men's room has a bright red wall on the right as you enter. To the left are two large round white ceramic cylindrical wash basins standing about 3 feet deep with a large mirror behind them.

In most men's rooms there are one or two urinals that are relatively out in the open, easily visible. In this restroom there was no urinal in the open. There are 3 small "rooms," completely enclosed from floor to ceiling with full size doors. The doors and walls are heavy, dark wood. In each of the 2 narrower "rooms" there is a urinal. In the larger "room" there is a white ceramic commode. There is also a large picture above the commode.

The walls, other than the red wall, are painted in a very dark color, and the floors are totally covered with a dark material that appears to be planks laid end-to-end in rows.

Reservations are recommended. There is valet parking at the H Street entrance to the restaurant.

*Mike*

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