



Lyndon Baines Obama

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It was the winter of conservative discontent.

Barry Goldwater had gotten only 38 percent of the vote, and his party had suffered its worst thrashing since Alf Landon fell to FDR in 1936.

Democrats held 295 House seats, Republicans 140. They held 68 Senate seats to Republicans' 32, and 33 governors to the GOP's 17.

Democratic registration was twice that of the GOP. The liberal press was gleefully writing the obituary of "The Party That Lost Its Head."

Decades might pass, it was said, before the GOP recovered from its fatal embrace of right-wing radicalism and foolish rejection of the leadership of Govs. Nelson Rockefeller and William Scranton.

Wrote Robert Donovan in the opening lines of his book, "The Future of the Republican Party":

"The devastating defeat of Barry Goldwater at the hands of voters in all sections of the country but the Deep South has damaged, weakened and tarnished the party. For years to come ... the two-party system will be crippled."

Donovan and all the rest were wrong. The GOP came roaring back in 1966 to capture 47 House seats and eight new governorships. In 1968, Nixon led the party out of the wilderness and into a White House it would hold for 20 of the next 24 years.

Full of hubris in 1965, Lyndon Johnson had seized his moment. He had launched a Great Society that would outdo his beloved patron FDR. He would dispatch 500,000 troops to Vietnam to "bring the coonskin home on the wall" and create a "Great Society on the Mekong." Those were heady days of "guns-and-butter."

By 1968, LBJ's coalition was shredded. Gov. George Wallace had torn away the populist right. Sens. Gene McCarthy, George McGovern and Robert Kennedy had rallied the antiwar left against him. LBJ and Hubert Humphrey were left to preside over a shrinking center.

Why did LBJ fail? He overloaded the circuits. He tried to do it all. He misread a national desire for continuity after Kennedy's death as a mandate for a lunge to the left and a great leap forward with the largest expansion of government since the New Deal.

By 1968, racial riots had torn apart almost every great city. The most prestigious campuses had been rocked by student violence. Thousands of antiwar demonstrators had taken to the streets. And 100 to 200 body bags were coming home from Vietnam every week.

By the winter of 1968, Lyndon Johnson was a broken president.

History never repeats itself exactly. But Barack Obama is making the same mistakes today that LBJ made in 1965.

He has ordered 17,000 more U.S. troops into Afghanistan, as the situation deteriorates and the NATO allies pull out. He has no exit strategy. He has read a repudiation of George Bush as a mandate for a government seizure of wealth and power that exceeds anything attempted in the Great Society.

Fully half of the \$3.55 trillion in spending Obama will preside over this year will not be covered by tax revenue but by red ink. The money will have to be borrowed from abroad or printed by the Fed.

Not only is Barack running a deficit four times as large as Bush's largest, he has called for \$1 trillion in new taxes on America's most successful, who have already seen their savings and pensions ravaged.

He wants a cap-and-trade system to deal with a global-warming or climate-change crisis many scientists believe is a hoax. He is going to provide health care for all, including immigrants, millions of whom arrive uninsured every year.

He is going to plunge scores of billions more into education, though education has eaten up the wealth of an empire, as SAT scores sink further and further below the apogee of 1964, before LBJ and the feds barged in. He is going to ask Congress for authority to spend another \$750 billion rescuing the banks.

He is going to find the cure for cancer. He is going to ensure every kid gets a college education. He is going to drop half of all wage-earners off the tax rolls, while the top 2 percent, who already pay 40 percent of all income taxes, are forced to cough up more.

Obama is misreading the election returns. When America voted to cancel the White House lease of Mr. Bush, it did not vote Barack Obama a blank check.

By misinterpreting his mandate, Obama has accomplished something John McCain could not -- unite the Republican Party and instill in it a new esprit de corps. For the Obama budget is an insult to the core belief of the party -- that free people, not coercive government, should shape the character of society.

By daring Republicans to fight on the issue of a \$1.75 trillion deficit, Obama has liberated the GOP from any obligation to him. He has come out of the closet as a radical liberal spoiling for a fight over an agenda of radical change.

Sooner than any might have thought, we have clarity.

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