



GREG SCHNEIDERS

Dems have the right message for the 2006 election – ‘not’

If the Democrats wake up on November 8 having seized control of one or both houses of Congress, it will be for one reason – they had the better message. This is ironic, since throughout the campaign Democrats have been accused of having no message. That is wrong. Their message is: “We’re not them.”

What their critics really mean is that the Democrats have no program, which is true enough. But, in politics, if you’re the “out” party, you don’t need a program to have a message.

Politics in this country is a binary system – all zeros and ones, and voters get to pick one or the other. This keeps it easy – a good thing because voters have more interesting things on their minds – like their kids’ soccer games or who’s getting thrown off the island next week.

It has become a political cliché to say that elections are about the future. Not really. Elections are about the past – did you like it enough to continue it, or are you willing to risk the unknown? In that sense, voters in this midterm election face a dilemma. Most like their own congressman or senator enough to return him or her to office. But most are sufficiently disgusted with the status quo to want a new Congress – which can only happen with new congressmen.

Democrats understand this dilemma and have crafted their message accordingly. They’re not George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Mark Foley, or Jack Abramoff. Forget that none of those folks is on a ballot. If you don’t want more of the same, vote for something different. Vote Democratic. This may be remembered as the “election of

’49” – not 1949, but ’94 in reverse. In 1994, after 40 years of control of the House, the Democrats were tossed out resoundingly by the voters who had finally had enough. Newt Gingrich got a lot of credit for this because he had crafted the Republican “Contract with America,” which helped galvanize his party’s case. But, in all likelihood, the “revolution of ’94” would have occurred with or without Newt’s contract.

This year, the Democrats have offered no such clear-cut alternative policy. But they have understood the importance – in politics, as in business or life – of a clear, simple, unified message. And, they’ve had the courage of their non-convictions – refusing to be bullied into taking unnecessary stands by frustrated Republicans or high-minded media.

Is a “throw the bums out” election good for the country? It is tempting to say the country is voting for a “pig in a poke,” but the fact is that voters seldom know in advance what a new President will do, much less a new Congress.

Will a Democratic Congress end the war in Iraq, re-focus the war on terror, repeal tax cuts for the wealthy, and rid the Congress of sexual predators? Probably not. But it would restore political balance and accountability in Washington, and that’s no small matter. That’s why “we’re not them” is not only an effective message, it’s an important one. ■

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