



Seizing a Stable Majority

By Newt Gingrich

Building on their victories in the 2004 elections, Republicans can achieve a durable governing majority, if they implement health care reforms, include more minorities in developing and implementing policies, and learn from their mistakes.

Is 2004 the high-water mark for the Republican Party, meaning that 2006 and 2008 present major opportunities for the Democrats? Or are the recent election results the foundation for building a stable, governing Republican majority that will last at least a generation? President Bush's victory on election night was surely historic: he amassed the largest number of votes ever received for president and became the first president to gain seats in both the House and Senate during a reelection since Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1936.

In Congress, Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) is likely to find the Senate a more productive institution with four new votes, a new Democratic leader, and a number of Democrats up for reelection in 2006 who will have to be thinking about Democratic leader Tom Daschle's defeat last week.

House Speaker Dennis Hastert now has an opportunity to reach out to individual Democrats and build a bipartisan majority. Given an electorate in which values really do matter to a large segment, one wonders how comfortable many Democrats will be having a minority leader (Representative Nancy Pelosi) from San Francisco, one of the most liberal districts in the United States. There are a lot of Democratic legislators from property-owning districts with lots

of small businesses, self-employed people, and family farms who may find it hard to vote against the emerging twenty-first-century reform agenda represented by President Bush's ownership society, with its health savings accounts, personal retirement accounts, and personal Social Security accounts.

Building a Lasting Majority

But what about the long term? There are three earlier elections that were classic springboards to long, stable majorities: Thomas Jefferson's victory in 1800, William McKinley's in 1896, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt's reelection in 1936. In each case a personality and a cause were fused into a new system of power that then went on to govern for a generation.

Jefferson wiped out the Federalist Party, and his followers governed for twenty-four years. McKinley launched a Republican majority that lasted thirty-six years, with the only Democratic victory coming from a split in the Republican Party. Roosevelt's majority kept the White House for twenty unbroken years and the House for sixty-four (with only two Republican interruptions, neither of which lasted past one term).

Karl Rove understands this history as well as any political analyst in modern times. President Bush has been campaigning consistently since his 1999 announcement for president with a pattern that builds this kind of majority. If

Newt Gingrich is a senior fellow at AEI. A version of this article appeared in the *Washington Post* on November 9, 2004.

Republicans do three major things, they will be a governing majority for a generation or more.

First, they need to pass and implement a continuing wave of reforms and transformations that make the lives of the American people better. As a matter of life and death and the largest single part of the economy, health care is a critical area in which to build solutions. The budget can never be balanced until health care is transformed. And it is an area in which many bipartisan initiatives can be launched. Health savings accounts were a major step in this direction. Small businesses that have been using them this year have had their premiums reduced 44 percent on average from last year. The president's proposals for more health transformation in his New York acceptance speech are good steps from which to expand the majority. We can have better health at lower cost. We can solve the uninsured problem and ensure that the health of minorities becomes as good as everyone else's.

Second, starting with health care, Republicans need to include African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, and Native Americans in their policy development and policy implementation. Because African Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanics disproportionately suffer from diabetes, the right answers on diabetes and obesity are inherently good answers for America's minorities. Eliminating cancer as a cause of death (as Andy von Eschenbach, the director of the National Cancer Institute, believes we can do by 2015) has a powerful appeal to minority Americans. If

minority Americans come to believe they are included by Republicans (a much higher standard than "out-reach"), it will be impossible for left-wing minority politicians to demagogue and foment racist fears in the 2006 and 2008 elections. If minority Americans vote their values instead of their inherited partisanship, the Republican majority will last for a generation.

Third, Republicans have to be honest about performance failures, and they have to learn from their mistakes. The world is too complex and too difficult for any governing party to get every decision right. But you not only have to make the right decision: you have to have the right communications and the right implementation. Otherwise the right decision does not get you anywhere. Afghanistan was done brilliantly. Iraq involved some major mistakes after the military victory. If Republicans had been willing to make a midcourse adjustment in Iraq, the election would have been easier, and the margin would have been bigger.

People are looking for a stable governing majority. Governing means making things work. People will tolerate and understand mistakes if the mistakes can be openly admitted and then dealt with. In the end, successful majorities are pragmatically successful as well as ideologically successful.

If Republicans implement these three principles, historians will look back on 2004 as a great victory that launched a generation of center-right governance led by Republicans. But this will be a high-water mark if Republicans allow it to be.