

Return of the Perotistas

Michael Sean Winters | Nov. 3, 2009 NCR Today

The fastest growing part of the electorate are neither the Dems nor the Republicans. It is independent or unaffiliated voters. And, among all the soothsayers and talking heads tonight, the one thing to look for is how these independents vote tonight.

I base my analysis on my experience of working on a campaign in Connecticut's second congressional district, where independents hold the balance of decision in the electorate. Whoever wins them will win the election as there are neither enough registered Democrats or Republicans to carry the district. It is a classic swing district.

Which is not to say that all independent voters are necessarily swing voters. A large chunk of them are more properly identified as Perot voters. This slice of the electorate is deeply suspicious of all elites and specifically of big government, big business, big unions. They are well represented at the Tea Party protests. They usually vote Republican except when the GOP has been in power for too long and then they respond easily, albeit somewhat uncritically, to the mantra "It's time for a change." I suspect some people voted for Perot in 1992 and Barack Obama last year, but not many.

The larger group within the independent bloc is probably not going to turn up at the polls today. They are independent because they are not very politically involved or motivated. After all, if you really, really care about your Second Amendment rights, chances are you are a Republican. And, if you really, really are worried about the environment, chances are you are a Democrat.

The first group, the Perotistas, will be out in droves today and they will be voting Republican. I anticipate a Republican sweep. But, if the margins are not as large, and if the Democrats more or less hold their own with independent voters, the GOP is in trouble. Perot got 19% of the vote in 1992, which was alarming in every way. But that, combined with the 20% who currently self-identify as Republicans will not get the party across the finish line in a presidential election. Indeed, because the populist Perotistas reinforce everything that is wrong with the GOP, even if they win tonight, the real winner might be President Obama. If the leadership of the Republican party is more concerned about placating people who voted for Perot and his remarkable running mate Admiral Stockdale than they are with reaching out to moderate, centrist voters, they will be in the political wilderness for a long time.

One other thing to watch for tonight: If Doug Hoffman wins big in New York's upstate race, that is a big win for Sarah Palin who was the first national republican to break ranks and endorse him over the GOP nominee.