

## Obama Gets His Mojo Back

Michael Sean Winters | Sep. 9, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

President Obama has hit the campaign trail this week, and hit it hard. News commentators tend to focus on what is new and forget some of the landscape that remains ever present, such as the great power of the bully pulpit.

All year, a narrative has been developing that this fall's midterms will be a tsunami, that Democrats will get wiped out, that all the energy and excitement is with the GOP. Some of that is true. But, Obama has always been a strong fourth-quarter player, as we saw in the health care debate, using his voice and his arguments to persuade reluctant Democrats to vote for the bill by swaying enough of the voters that polling on the proposal evened out. In the midterms, it is more difficult to win with a fourth quarter strategy: Mr. Obama may be able to energize the base but he is not on the ballot.

The tsunami narrative also tends to obscure the complexity of certain stories. For example, over the past two days, much has been made of the fact that for the first time since 1930, more Republicans voted in primary elections than Democrats. This was seen as evidence of Republicans being especially energized and so it is. But, it is also evidence of the fact that those primaries have been small Republican civil wars in which conservatives rallied to oust not Democrats but moderate Republicans. In Florida, the GOP scrapped its planned "unity rally" after defeated gubernatorial candidate Bill McCollum declined to endorse Rick Scott who won the GOP nod. In Alaska, defeated GOP incumbent Sen. Lisa Murkowski has been searching for an alternate way onto the ballot and has not endorsed Joe Miller who beat her in the primary there. Record turnout? Yes. Wounds that have not yet turned into scars? Yes, also.

Make no mistake about it. The midterms will see Democrats lose seats. When voters are this angry and frustrated with Washington, they take it out on the incumbents and, especially, on the party in power. But, I am not yet convinced of the tsunami narrative. The GOP has nominated some very conservative candidates who will not play as well in a general election as they did in a Republican primary. Kentucky is a Senate seat they should have no trouble holding. Sen. Harry Reid should be the easiest incumbent to knock off. Alaska looked to be sending Murkowski back for six more years. Now, all three GOP strongholds are in play.

The most important thing the President has to do is make a simple argument. He and the Democrats are at least trying to dig us out of the hole. The Republicans appear to want to dig the hole deeper. We can disagree about the specifics, and the President needed to be cautioning against expecting quick results all year, and doing so more forcefully than he has until this week. But, when people are frustrated, they want the government to do something to make things right.