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This Is How You'll Feel When the GOP Wins the Senate



By Marty Kaplan

It's the morning after.

You stayed up late watching election results on TV. By the time you went to bed, the Republicans had won five of the six Senate seats they needed to take control of both houses of Congress. As the networks called each state for the GOP, it felt like a trap door had opened beneath your feet, like a Munch scream, like a nightmare — a nauseating, slow-motion wreck you were powerless to prevent.

Too rattled to sleep, you reached for the melatonin. Then, when you wake up in a sweat, the real nightmare begins. Republicans are jubilant. Their campaign was all about getting even. Now it's time for some traffic problems in Fort Barack.

It doesn't cushion the blow when you find out how hollow their mandate is: Fewer than 20 percent of registered voters voted for them. This, in a country where 33 percent reject the idea of evolution. It only infuriates you more when you learn that the electorate was older and whiter than the country. And that the combined population of states where Republican senators ousted Democrats was less than the population of California. And that some victory margins were less under a thousand votes.

They won. It turned out not to matter that fact-checkers and satirists called Pinocchio, pants-on-fire and bullsh*t on their ads. Or that the economy is improving, millions of previously uncovered Americans now have health insurance and we haven't gone to war in Syria, Ukraine or anywhere else neocons have been itching to entangle us.

All that will matter is that the Senate Republican majority will be even more obstructionist than the Senate Republican minority, and they will have the House Republican majority as enablers. They will repeatedly repeal the Affordable Care Act. They'll strip the Environmental Protection Agency and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau of staff and powers. They'll outlaw abortion, gut food stamps even more, block

a path to citizenship for 12 million immigrants and cut taxes on the 1 percent. The only thing stopping them will be Democratic filibusters. But fear of losing the next election will be on many minority minds, so a united opposition is not a given, and Democratic caving, depicted as high-minded bipartisanship, will no doubt send some odious Acts to the Oval Office.

Which the president will veto, and which one hopes will lack the two-thirds required to override. The result — the most optimistic scenario — will be epic gridlock. White House initiatives will be dead on arrival in Congress, and Republican laws will be interred in the Rose Garden. This will be particularly good news for the plutocrats whose billions are now funding the 2014 national disinformation campaign; stasis is their friend.

Last week, President Obama anticipated getting “clobbered” in the midterm elections. On Sunday, Nate Silver changed his Senate forecast from a tossup to a slight Republican advantage. Maybe these predictions will terrify enough Democratic donors to cough up now and enough Democratic voters to turn out in November. But are dystopian prophecies, including mine, ever really a deterrent? I’m afraid that not even the declaration by Oklahoma Republican Jim (*The Greatest Hoax: How the Global Warming Conspiracy Threatens Your Future*) Inhofe that he’ll be in charge of the Senate environment committee if they win; or the thought of Chuck (“There are a lot more Scalias and Thomases that we’d love to put on the bench”) Grassley chairing the judiciary committee, or of armed services and foreign relations manned up by Lindsey Graham and John McCain — I fear that these plausible horrors won’t be enough to energize Democrats.

The only way to increase the turnout of the base is to speak to its heartbreak.

Drones. Spying. No tax on carbon pollution. No immigration reform. No gun control. No public option. No campaign finance reform. No bankers behind bars.

Every Obama supporter has a list of disappointments with the administration, and a list of excuses for them — the Republican House, the NRA, political reality — that don’t cut it. Democrats won’t hold the Senate by getting a percent or two more of swing voters than Republicans, because it’s supporters, not undecideds, who turn out for midterm elections. Their only hope is to increase their passion. The young, the women, the blacks and Latinos who vaulted the president into the White House in 2008, and who had nowhere else to go in 2012, will not be rushing to the polls in 2014 unless President Obama gives them — gives us all — big reasons to fight *for* him, not just against *them*.

Insiders tell me, “Just wait until after the mid-terms, he’ll be free to pull all the stops out.” But why should a full-throated Obama who’ll get nothing from a future Republican Congress be more appealing than an Obama who gets nothing from Congress now? In his 2014 State of the Union, he said he was going to act “with or without Congress.” What’s he waiting for?

I’m sure someone has a spreadsheet showing that Democrats have a better chance of holding the Senate if Obama waits until after the election to cancel the Keystone XL pipeline. Surely some operative has numbers saying that approving the Keystone XL now is his only hope of holding on to seats in Alaska,

Louisiana, Montana and West Virginia. But polls about hypothetical presidential actions can't forecast passion very well. Political wildfire is still, thankfully, unpredictable.

I'd rather wake up on Nov. 5 sick at losing the Senate, but proud that Obama and the Democrats did all they could to make climate change, gun control, immigration and big money big issues, instead of losing because they were too afraid of losing to win.

This is a cross-post of my column in the Jewish Journal.

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