

FLORIDA JOINING RE-AWAKENING? GOP VOTERS AGAINST SS-MEDICARE CUTS, TEA PARTY CHIDES SCOTT OVER ETHICS

The elections from earlier this week may well go down in history as a watershed event in which voters finally began to understand, and then to overwhelmingly reject, the most extreme elements of Republican views that take the “pro-life” movement into a completely indefensible realm, demonize collective bargaining and promote institutional racism. Developments reported today in Florida indicate that this re-awakening may be spreading, with a survey of Republican voters indicating that they favor withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan and Iraq over cuts to Social Security or Medicare when reducing the deficit and with the Tea Party scolding Governor Rick Scott over his failed campaign promises to institute ethics reforms.

Note first the remarkable result in Ohio. In a state that provided Barack Obama an election margin of only 51% to 47% over John McCain in 2008, the restrictions on collective bargaining by public employees put in place by Governor John Kasich and a Republican legislature were voted down by a margin of 61% to 39%:

With a beer in his hand and a smile on his face at the We Are Ohio celebration at the Hyatt Regency, Ohio Democratic Chairman Chris Redfern said public workers should not be the scapegoats for the state’s economic problems. “That is the lesson John Kasich must remember after tonight, and if he doesn’t, he’ll be a one-term governor.

“If you overreach, the people will

respond. There is no one tonight who could suggest this was about Democrats versus Republicans,” Redfern said, noting the wide margin of defeat. “This is literally about what is right and what is wrong, and what Ohioans feel is important.”

The outcome of the so-called “Personhood Amendment” in Mississippi is no less striking.

In one of the most conservative, anti-abortion states in the nation (won by McCain 56% to 43% in 2008), we learned that just as Kasich and his cronies over-reached on collective bargaining, the Pro-Life movement over-reached in Mississippi, as the measure was defeated 58% to 42%:

Objectors also raised the specter of legal challenges. Most of all, many said, the amendment allowed no exceptions for abortions in cases of incest or rape – a claim not disputed by proponents, who are trying to end abortion in the state.

In a statement from the anti-initiative group Mississippians for Healthy Families, spokeswoman Valencia Robinson said, “... (W)e were successful because Mississippi voters ultimately understood that there is no contradiction in being pro-life and standing in opposition to an initiative that threatened the health and very lives of women.”

And in Arizona, voters recalled Russell Pearce, the author of SB 1070, the “papers please” extremist anti-immigration bill. Pearce lost to a more moderate Republican by a margin of 53% to 45%:

For years, Russell Pearce, Arizona’s most powerful legislator and the architect of its tough immigration law, has sought to make life so uncomfortable

for illegal immigrants in the state that they pack up and go.

But Mr. Pearce, known for his gruff, uncompromising manner, was the one sent packing on Tuesday after disgruntled voters in this suburban neighborhood outside Phoenix banded together to recall him from the State Senate and replace him with a more moderate Republican.

With that as background, consider these remarkable developments in Florida from today's news. First, a poll of Republican voters in Florida packs plenty of surprises:

But even modest changes to benefits for future retirees are opposed by 66 percent of voters, the poll shows. Only 27 percent favor future reductions, which could include raising the retirement age, though the poll didn't specifically address that issue.

Asked if they favored or opposed reducing Medicare benefits to help reduce the deficit, only 22 percent liked the idea. About 70 percent didn't.

/snip/

When specifically asked if they favored Medicare cuts over withdrawing troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, only 9 percent wanted the former and 66 percent favored the latter. The numbers were similar for Social Security.

Favoring withdrawal in Iraq and Afghanistan over cuts to Medicare by a margin of 66% to 9% is a result one might expect for a poll of Democrats in a liberal state like Massachusetts or California, not a poll of Republicans in Florida. Although Florida very narrowly went for Obama in 2008, politics at the state level is heavily dominated by Republicans, with extremely conservative Republicans wielding most

of the power. Congress would be well-advised to pay close attention to this result as the Supercommittee nears its deadline for recommendations on addressing the budget deficit. Reliance on cuts to Medicare and Social Security without advocating for ending the wars and closing tax loopholes is likely to lead to a huge bipartisan revolt of voters.

But there is even one more bit of news today that breaks out of the usual mold. It turns out that the Tea Party in Florida, which aided greatly in his election, is now turning on Rick Scott, accusing him of not following through on campaign promises of ethics reform:

On Rick Scott's first day as governor, he declared ethics and integrity "essential to maintaining the public trust" and ordered his office to find ways to implement suggestions from a grand jury assembled to investigate public corruption.

More than 10 months later, there appears to be no plan.

That frustrates some tea party activists who propelled Scott to victory. They believed Scott was talking about ethics reform in all those campaign ads where he blasted "Tallahassee insiders."

"He led Florida voters to think he was going to be a strong proponent of ethics reform, and his record shows he's very weak," said Nick Egoroff, a tea party activist from Orlando. "I haven't heard him say one word on it."

Yes, the Tea Party should have taken a hint that backing a candidate who holds the record for the largest fine ever paid to the federal government for Medicare fraud might not be the the best route to achieving ethics reform, but they must be given credit for speaking up when he has failed to deliver.

Where this re-awakening will go remains to be seen. My own explanation attributes it to a combination of people being forced to pay more attention to politics based on losing their jobs and homes, along with that awareness being amplified by the Occupy movement. When the public begins to pay more attention to what is happening in the political arena, it appears that the most extreme positions taken by conservative Republicans are rejected out of hand. That is a tremendous first step. Now all we need is a leader to promote Progressive ideals.

Oh well, you can't win them all.