

Legislative Report Marilyn Davis VP Legislation

Governors, the Hope for the Future of the GOP?

While watching the Republican Governor's Association meeting on November 13th from our room at an Oregon Bed and Breakfast, I saw Governor Rick Perry introduce Governor Sarah Palin saying, "She has led her state boldly, inspired a nation with her optimism, her frank talk, her unashamed embrace of bedrock conservative principles. And I can assure you she's just getting started."

Governor Palin made a few jokes about the campaign - reporting on her last year, she said, "I had a baby, I did some traveling, I very briefly expanded my wardrobe, I made a few speeches, met a few VIPs, including those who really impact society, like Tina Fey, but other than that, it was pretty much the same old, same old." She praised John McCain. She recounted inspiring moments involving children with special needs. And then she spent a lot of time talking about the future -the governors' future.

"Let the pundits go on with their idle talk about the next election, about what happens in 2012," she said. "Our concern should be about our state's next great reform, our next budget, our next opportunity to progress in the states that we serve, and on issues like taxes and energy and health care, immigration, education, we will not lack for opportunities to serve and to lead and to show the way."

The Washington Post's front-page story on the Republican Governors meeting carried the headline "Republican Governors Meet, Glumly." *The Post* bannered its account, "Doom and Gloom at GOP Governors' Meeting."

The gathering didn't seem particularly doomish and gloomish to me. The governors were realistic about the GOP defeats of 2006 and 2008. As Louisiana's Bobby Jindal said, "They fired us with cause." But this kind of candor from an elected official, in other circumstances, would have warranted a headline like "Candor, Self-Criticism Mark Governors' Meeting" from *The Post*. Those other circumstances, I suppose, would have been that it was a Democratic governors' meeting.

Weekly Standard writer Bill Kristol wrote about the meeting: "They're likely to be the stars of the party over the next few years--those who govern successfully and show an ability to get reelected. And Republicans could pick up governorships in states like Virginia in 2009 and Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Michigan in 2010--in all of which they have promising candidates. Pickups in any of these states would make governors even more central to

the future of the GOP. And they figure one of their members will likely be the presidential nominee in 2012. All of this made them pretty upbeat."

I agree. Successful practical governance at the state level will be the basis of our party's comeback. The Republican revival of the early and mid-1990s--after the across-the-board defeat of 1992, when the first Bush administration was voted out--was due in part to the examples of effective state governance by Tommy Thompson in Wisconsin and John Engler in Michigan, to say nothing of Rudy Giuliani's efforts in New York City. Then a governor, George W. Bush, retook the White House in 2000.

And, after the previous Democratic takeover of the White House, in 1976, it was a former governor, Ronald Reagan, who led the comeback and took the presidency. So history suggests that statehouses are where a lot of the GOP action will be over the next four years.

Bill Kristol summed up by saying, "And, of course, politics isn't just--or even mostly--about ideas. It's also about political leadership. To see Sarah Palin at the Republican Governors Association was to wonder at a natural politician. Among her peers she may be in a class by herself--like Reagan or Barack Obama. Can she rise to the occasion? The media remain desperate to deny that she can, and even to deny her a chance to try."

Interesting Governor Facts

There are 42 men and 8 women currently serving as governors. There are currently 28 Democrats and 22 Republicans serving as governors; as of January 2009, there will be 29 Democrats and 21 Republicans serving as governors.

The longest-serving current governor is John Hoeven (D), who has served as North Dakota's governor since December 15, 2000. The second-longest tenure, that of Texas Governor Rick Perry's is five days shorter. The newest governor is David Paterson (D) of New York, who was sworn in March 17, 2008 and is the first blind governor in any state. The oldest current governor is Ruth Ann Minner (D) 73, of Delaware; as of Minner's retirement in January 2009, the oldest governor will be Ted Kulongoski (D) 68, of Oregon. The youngest current governor is Bobby Jindal (R) 37, of Louisiana. The average age of the current governors is 56.

Three governors, Jon Corzine (D) of New Jersey, Arnold Schwarzenegger (R) of California and Phil Bredesen (D) of Tennessee, decline to accept their salaries because of their personal wealth.

There will be 36 governor's races in 2010, including Texas.