

## Tea Party Movement

*Will angry conservatives reshape the Republican Party?*

The Tea Party movement seemed to come out of nowhere. Suddenly, citizens angry over the multi-billion-dollar economic stimulus and the Obama administration's health-care plan were leading rallies, confronting lawmakers and holding forth on radio and TV. Closely tied to the Republican Party — though also critical of the GOP — the movement proved essential to the surprise victory of Republican Sen. Scott Brown in Massachusetts. Tea partiers say Brown's election proves the movement runs strong outside of "red states." But some political experts voice skepticism, arguing that the Tea Party's fiscal hawkishness won't appeal to most Democrats and many independents. Meanwhile, some dissension has appeared among tea partiers, with many preferring to sidestep social issues, such as immigration, and others emphasizing them. Still, the movement exerts strong appeal for citizens fearful of growing government debt and distrustful of the administration.



*Tea kettle held high, a Tea Party activist dressed like a Revolutionary War soldier rallies tax protesters in Atlanta on April 15, 2009. It was among several protests held in cities around the nation.*

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CQ Researcher • March 19, 2010 • [www.cqresearcher.com](http://www.cqresearcher.com)  
Volume 20, Number 11 • Pages 241-264



RECIPIENT OF SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE ♦ AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION SILVER GAVEL AWARD

March 19, 2010  
Volume 20, Number 11

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*CQ Researcher* (ISSN 1056-2036) is printed on acid-free paper. Published weekly, except; (Jan. wk. 1) (May wk. 4) (July wks. 1, 2) (Aug. wks. 2, 3) (Nov. wk. 4) and (Dec. wks. 4, 5), by CQ Press, a division of SAGE Publications. Annual full-service subscriptions start at \$803. For pricing, call 1-800-834-9020, ext. 1906. To purchase a *CQ Researcher* report in print or electronic format (PDF), visit [www.cqpress.com](http://www.cqpress.com) or call 866-427-7737. Single reports start at \$15. Bulk purchase discounts and electronic-rights licensing are also available. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *CQ Researcher*, 2300 N St., N.W., Suite 800, Washington, DC 20037.

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# Tea Party Movement

BY PETER KATEL

## THE ISSUES

It's lock and load time, a pumped up Dana Loesch told several thousand attendees at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Washington last month. "We're in the middle of a war. We're fighting for the hearts, minds and souls of the American people."

Forget politeness, the St. Louis-based radio host and Tea Party activist told the equally energized crowd. "It's all about amplifying your voice." Conservatives, she said, should declare often and loudly, "I don't like Barack Obama."

And as for the president's supporters, said the 31-year-old homeschooling mother, "Make them uncomfortable. . . . Attack, attack, attack. Never defend."

Many tea partiers may favor a softer approach, but Loesch's take-no-prisoners intensity reflects the dynamic and triumphant spirit emanating from the country's newest political trend, which arose in early 2009 in reaction to economic stimulus legislation, corporate bailouts and the Democrats' health insurance reform effort.

Indeed, as CPAC's enthusiastic embrace of Loesch and other tea partiers makes clear, the Tea Party movement is on the cutting edge of a conservative surge that aims to undercut, or even defeat, the Obama administration and what foes call its big-government, socialist agenda. Tea partiers are also trying to push the national Republican Party to the right, with Tea Party-affiliated candidates this year running in GOP primaries for at least 58 congressional and state offices, including three governorships. (See map, p. 244.)



Getty Images/Robert Spencer

*Republican Scott Brown celebrates in Boston on Jan. 19, 2010, after winning a special election to fill the seat of the late U.S. Sen. Edward M. Kennedy. Tea Party activity typically occurs in Republican territory — "red states" — in the South, West and Midwest. But Tea Party activists also cite Brown's upset election in Massachusetts, considered among the bluest of blue states, as indicative of their broad appeal.*

A major wing of the movement, Tea Party Patriots, has helped set up a fundraising arm, Liberty Central, in the Washington suburb of Burke, Va. Its president and CEO is Virginia Thomas, wife of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas. She appeared on the same CPAC platform with Loesch and two other movement members. Obama's "hope and change agenda certainly became a leftist agenda pretty fast," she said. "We saw what they were doing, and it was just a big ol' power grab."<sup>1</sup>

The movement proved itself a political force to be reckoned with in the special Senate election in January of Republican Scott Brown for the Massachusetts Senate seat held by the late

liberal Democratic lion, Edward M. Kennedy.<sup>2</sup>

"The Tea Party movement had a lot to do with that election," says John Hawkins, publisher of the online *Right Wing News*. "[Brown] had millions and millions of dollars flooding in from the Internet, which showed people getting energized and excited." And some on the left acknowledge that the Tea Party campaign for Brown could have stirred support among Republican and GOP-leaning independents.

"At a time of heavy recession and joblessness, giving banks a bailout rankles people across the spectrum," says Joseph Lowndes, a University of Oregon political scientist. "A lot of Brown supporters might have been in that camp."

But a vote for Brown doesn't equate to Tea Party membership, he adds, because the movement's sharply defined conservative political perspective doesn't travel well across the left-right divide. "A lot of people who are independents and disenchanted with Obama aren't going to be tea partiers," he says.

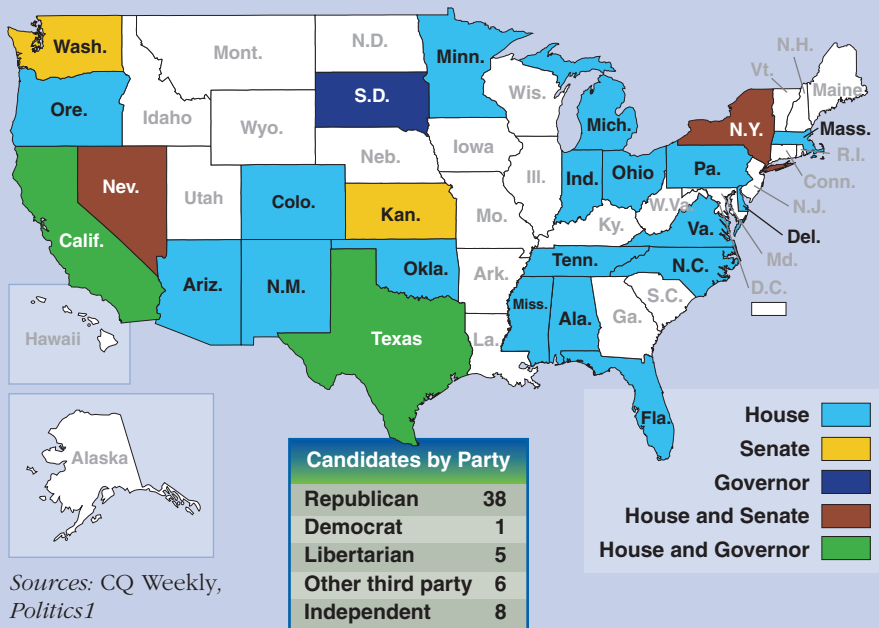
The decentralized and loosely defined Tea Party movement takes its name from the Boston Tea Party — the 1773 protest against British taxation. Tea Party Patriots is a national grassroots organization that claims to support more than 1,000 community-based Tea Party groups around the country. The Patriots-organized Tax Day protests last year drew 1.2 million people, says Tea Party activist Jenny Beth Martin of Woodstock, Ga., a founder of the group. She and her husband lost their home and filed for bankruptcy in August 2008 after their business failed. They owed \$510,000 to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). "We've



## Tea Partiers Running in 25 States

At least 58 candidates — mostly Republican — in 25 states in the upcoming election say their beliefs align with those of the Tea Party movement. Most are running for House seats, but three candidates are in contention for governorships.

### States with Tea Party-aligned Candidates in Upcoming Elections



been hit by the financial crisis and the recession,” Martin told Fox News, just like other “everyday Americans.”<sup>3</sup>

Martin was especially angered by the federal bailouts of ailing banks and financial institutions by the outgoing Bush administration just before the 2008 presidential election and then of the auto companies in 2009 by the incoming Obama administration. After her husband’s temp firm failed, “We started cleaning houses and repairing computers to make ends meet,” she told Fox News, while big corporations that were struggling got billions in aid from the federal government. “We were saying, these businesses they were bailing out, there’s already a [bankruptcy] process in place,” she said. “We’ve gone through it. It sucks and it’s not fun, but it’s part of how the system works.”

Grassroots anger at political and business elites has fueled political movements on both the right and left throughout history. A prolific right-leaning blogger, University of Tennessee law professor Glenn Harlan Reynolds, even views the Tea Party as continuing another tradition — the Great Awakening evangelical religious movements that have emerged periodically throughout American history. “It’s a symptom of dissatisfaction with politics as usual,” he says.

But Republican Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels is more cautious. “I wouldn’t overestimate the number of people involved,” he told *The New York Times*, also offering faint praise to tea partiers’ “net positive” effects on the party.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, doctrines supported by some Tea Party followers would give pause to many politicians. Featured

speakers at a Nashville Tea Party convention in February included, aside from former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin, Web news entrepreneur Joseph Farah, who said Obama may not qualify for the presidency because of his possible foreign birth. Another speaker, ex-Republican Rep. Tom Tancredo of Colorado — known for his anti-immigrant stance — urged voter literacy tests, a discriminatory practice rooted in the Jim Crow South. “Because we don’t have a civics literacy test to vote,” Tancredo said, “people who couldn’t even spell ‘vote’ — or say it in English — put a committed socialist ideologue in the White House named Barack Hussein Obama.”<sup>5</sup>

For some on the left, the Tancredo and Farah appearances — along with xenophobic and racist signs and slogans that have popped up at other Tea Party events — represent the core identity of the movement. “Tea Partiers have unjustly and unfairly targeted the Latino community to further their political agenda,” say the organizers of a new Facebook community called *Cuéntame* (“tell me about it”).<sup>6</sup>

Others insist that anti-immigrant xenophobia represents only a fringe. “I was concerned that the anti-immigrant people would try to hijack the Tea Party movement, and they have tried,” said Grover Norquist, president of Americans for Tax Reform and a longtime Washington-based conservative who favors liberalized immigration policies. “Not succeeded to date.”<sup>7</sup>

In any event, most Tea Party activists stayed away from the \$549-per-person Nashville event, organized by the group Tea Party Nation, a social-networking site focusing on social issues that some other Tea Party activists discourage; among Tea Party Nation’s “strategic partners” is Farah’s *WorldNetDaily*. “It wasn’t the kind of grassroots organization that we are, so we declined to participate,” said Mark Meckler, a cofounder of Tea Party Patriots (TPP).<sup>8</sup>

The TPP network, which represents the movement's mainstream, steers away from social issues and instead has forged a consensus largely on economic matters: Government spending should be cut, government should be limited and the free-market system should prevail. (See box, p. 248.) Specifically, members argue, the federal government shouldn't expand its role in a health-care system that they say already provides adequate care to the poor and the elderly.

"Even if this bill were to have me insured tomorrow, it's still not the right thing to do for America," says Georgia TPP activist Martin. Although she and her husband lost their health coverage when his business failed, they oppose pending health-care legislation on the grounds it would add to the federal budget. "There are a lot of people in this movement who are unemployed. They don't want to burden future generations."

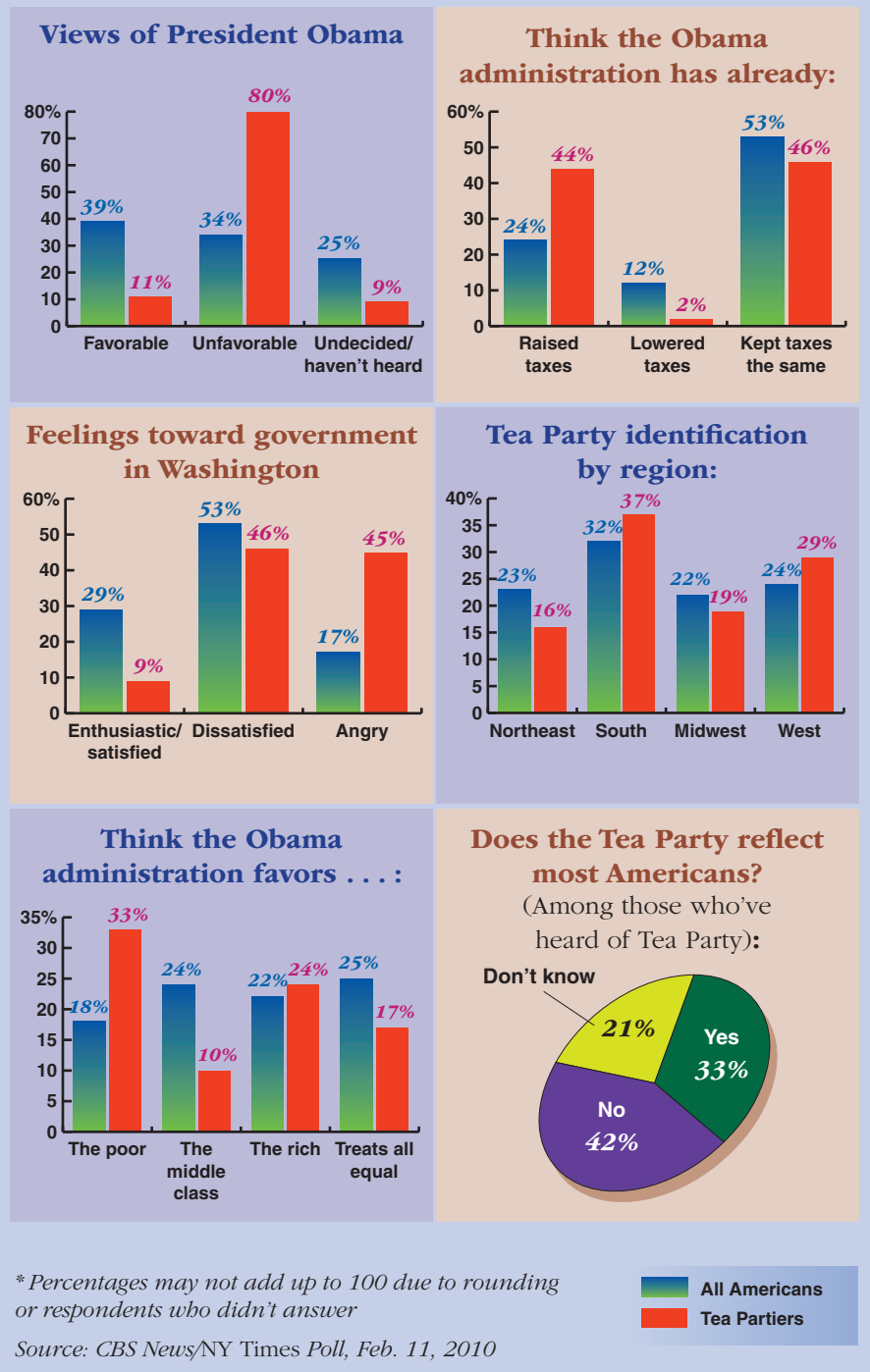
Martin shares a background in Republican politics with many other Tea Party activists — and a critical attitude toward the party. "There's no question the GOP has lost the mantle of fiscal responsibility and small government," writes John M. O'Hara, a former Labor Department staffer in the George W. Bush administration. But, he adds, "The GOP is the most likely breeding ground for the fiscally responsible constitutionalists the Tea Party movement — and America — craves."<sup>9</sup>

A rally O'Hara helped to organize last year in Washington was part of a series of protests that launched the movement. A cable TV moment provided the mobilizing spark: On Feb. 19, 2009, CNBC business reporter Rick Santelli launched a tirade against a plan by the new Obama administration to help homeowners facing foreclosure.

"How about this, President and new administration?" Santelli yelled from the floor of the Chicago Board of Trade. "Why don't you put up a Web site to have people vote on the

## Tea Partiers Have 'Unfavorable' View of Obama

More than three-quarters of Tea Party supporters have unfavorable views of President Obama, compared with a third of all Americans. Forty-four percent of tea partiers think erroneously that the administration has raised taxes, compared with 24 percent of all Americans.



Internet as a referendum to see if we really want to subsidize the losers' mortgages." <sup>10</sup>

Santelli went on: "We're thinking of having a Chicago Tea Party in July. All you capitalists that want to show up to Lake Michigan, I'm gonna start organizing." Within four days, Santelli's rant had been viewed 1.7 million times on the CNBC Web site. <sup>11</sup>

O'Hara and others used Twitter and other social-network links to find compatriots and launched their rallies on Feb. 27. Protesters showed up in more than a dozen cities — including Atlanta, Fort Worth, Nashville, New York, St. Louis, San Diego, Omaha and Tampa. <sup>12</sup> Later events included a Sept. 12 march on Washington promoted by conservative Fox News commentator Glenn Beck.

But fledgling activist Keli Carender — who blogs as "Liberty Belle" — beat them all to the punch. The 30-year-old Republican convert organized a Feb. 16 rally in her hometown, liberal Seattle, against the Obama administration's economic stimulus bill, which she dubbed "porkulus." <sup>13</sup>

Carender's playful approach — she distributed pulled pork at the event — seems distant from Loesch's militancy at the CPAC convention. So distant, in fact, that the conservative *Washington Examiner* issued a warning that echoed the remarks of some in the Republican establishment. "The approach [Loesch] suggests . . . could easily be mistaken for a rallying cry for angry yelling," the paper said. "She must realize that when it comes to making change, it's not about who yells loudest but who actually makes people want to listen. Claiming that the tea parties and conservative activists have declared war on the left only serves to marginalize the right."

As the tea partiers gear up to challenge politics as usual in the 2010 congressional elections later this year, here are some of the questions being raised about the movement:

### ***Does the Tea Party represent only a narrow segment of the population?***

Some Tea Party activists are quite candid about what they see as the movement's base. "They've been listening to Rush Limbaugh for years, they've been railing against the mainstream media for years, they've been voting Republican for years," J. P. Freire, a *Washington Examiner* editor and Tea Party activist, said at a Washington panel discussion in February organized by the America's Future Foundation, which trains young conservatives in economics. "I'm talking about mom-and-pop suburban dwellers."

Indeed, some key Tea Party issues do coincide with key Republican positions: The federal budget deficit is out of control; the administration's health-care proposal is unnecessary and fiscally risky; the \$787 billion stimulus represented a grave threat to the nation's economic health.

Only three Republican senators voted for the stimulus. And party leaders have been arguing ever since that the stimulus didn't fulfill Obama's promise to jumpstart the economy and create and save jobs. Celebrating Republican gubernatorial victories in New Jersey and Virginia last November, GOP Chairman Michael Steele condemned "an incredibly arrogant government in Washington that has put our country, our freedoms and our economy at risk with unprecedented spending." <sup>14</sup>

Tea partiers insist they don't just blame Obama and the Democrats for excessive spending. "There was a loss of enthusiasm for Republicans" triggered by deficit spending, says blogger and law professor Reynolds, who co-founded Porkbusters, a political initiative that attacked Republicans as well as Democrats for allegedly wasteful spending. "It was one of the things that cost them Congress, and cost them the whole 2008 election."

Tea Party activity typically occurs in Republican territory — "red states" — in

the South and Midwest. Like the GOP itself, Tea Party event attendees are overwhelmingly white. But Tea Party activists also cite Brown's upset election in Massachusetts, considered among the bluest of blue states, as indicative of their broad appeal.

"A lot of Democrats voted for Scott Brown," says Reynolds. "And he had massive Tea Party support. That is at least an indicator we're moving beyond the red state-blue state thing."

While labeling the Tea Party a red-state trend "isn't entirely false," he says, the number of "disaffected Democrats" is growing. "I actually think you'll see this spread to an insurgency in the Democratic Party." The theory is that the Tea Party appeals to a bipartisan sense that Congress and the White House are listening only to powerful lobbyists and not looking out for the interests of the average American.

But non-tea partiers view the movement as fitting comfortably within the Republican fold. "Given the pretty fervent conservatism that exists in this group, it is unlikely that there are a significant number of Democrats in it," says John Sides, a political scientist at George Washington University who studies political polarization. "You may be able to find people who say they voted for Obama, but I don't think that is the central tendency of the movement."

In fact, he argues, the concentration of conservatism in suburbs and smaller cities will make it difficult for the Tea Party to build strength in big urban centers. But the movement could play a big role in areas that are up for grabs. "You can imagine that activism by the Tea Party could have a measurable impact on 'blue dog' [conservative, usually Southern] Democrats in close races," he says.

Indeed, a cofounder of the TPP points to the movement's popularity outside of red-state America. "Three of the five coordinators in New York City are Democrats," says Georgia activist Martin. And she says she's ready

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for the emergence of a New York politician of either party who supports Tea Party principles but who is too socially liberal to win an election in her state.

Martin spent years as a Republican Party volunteer, heading Sen. Saxbe Chambliss' reelection campaign in her county. But she deplored his vote for the TARP (Troubled Asset Relief Program) bill — the emergency “bank bailout” legislation enacted in October 2008, signed into law by George W. Bush a month before Obama was elected. She has renounced completely partisan activity and doesn't exempt the GOP from criticism on big spending. But she acknowledges, “I think the Republican Party is probably the one most Tea Party people more closely align with.”

Georgetown University historian Michael Kazin says the movement's espousal of strict market principles determines the Tea Party's political makeup. “It's hard to think of too many people who voted for Barack Obama who really care about the budget deficit.”

Kazin, who specializes in populism and other social movements, draws a distinction between the Tea Party and other grassroots upsurges. “Social movements aren't as connected to one of the main parties as this one seems to be. I know that leaders of the Republican Party are trying to appear more moderate, but clearly if you have tens or hundreds of thousands of people whose views you would like to use, you don't push them out.”

### ***Will the Tea Party movement reshape the Republican Party?***

It remains to be seen whether the Tea Party can foment national political change. But some political observers think the movement is well-placed to drive the GOP rightward, especially on economic policy issues. Others say it's a fringe faction that ultimately will lose steam.

One outcome is fairly certain: The Tea Party movement would be seri-

ously undercut if it evolved into a third political party — historically the route taken by new movements that want to broaden the national debate. Most Tea Party activists argue against such a move. “If you create a third party you guarantee that it's going to split Republican votes and guarantee socialist Democrat victories,” says *Right Wing News* publisher Hawkins. He predicts that the Tea Party instead will effectively take over the GOP.

To be sure, the prevailing view in liberal circles is that the Republican Party has already moved far to the right. Even some senior Republicans are delivering much the same message.

“To those people who are pursuing purity, you'll become a club not a party,” Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina told *Politico*, a Washington-based online newspaper, last November. He spoke following the failed attempt by Conservative Party candidate Doug Hoffman to win a congressional seat in upstate New York, replacing the Republican incumbent, who was judged by the party establishment as too liberal. (Democrat Bill Owens won the seat.)

“Those people who are trying to embrace conservatism in a thoughtful way that fits the region and the state and the district are going to do well,” Graham said. “Conservatism is an asset. Blind ideology is not.”<sup>15</sup>

Some Washington-based conservatives question the possibility that any movement based on political principles can exert deep and lasting influence on the political process, where fulltime participants tend to act as much — or more — from self-interest as from ideology.

A movement that channels itself into a party inevitably suffers the dilution of its ideas, a conservative writer argued during the February panel discussion in Washington organized by the America's Future Foundation. “Politics is a profession, and the temptation, once we're in charge, is to say, ‘We're going to fix everything, we're going to solve

everything,’ not realizing that people involved in these parties are human beings and susceptible to compromise,” said Kelly Jane Torrance, literary editor of the Washington-based *American Conservative* magazine.

The absence of a Tea Party institutional presence makes its absorption by professional politicians inevitable, she added. “People seem to need a charismatic leader or organizer or an institution, which is why I think the movement is basically being eaten up by the Republican Party,” she said.

But some Tea Party activists argue that promoting their ideas within the GOP is essential if the movement is to avoid being marginalized. “There's got to be communication with the political party establishment,” says Karin Hoffman, a veteran Republican activist from Lighthouse Point, Fla. “The Democratic Party has done everything to ridicule the movement,” she says, while the GOP platform “matches what the grassroots movement feels.”

Hoffman orchestrated a Washington meeting this February between 50 Tea Party-affiliated activists and Republican Chairman Steele. Hoffman says she's on guard against the danger of Tea Party activists becoming nothing more than Republican auxiliaries.

“I've not been happy with how Republicans have behaved,” she says, citing the reduced-price system for prescription drugs under Medicare that President Bush pushed through in 2003. “We don't need an increase in government.”

Disillusionment with Bush is commonplace among tea partiers, who tend to have been Bush voters in 2000 and 2004. The shift in their support — or, alternatively, their view that he abandoned principles they thought he shared with them — underscores the potential obstacles to reshaping national parties. “Even with a relatively diffuse organization, they can have influence just because of visibility, and can pull conventions and rallies,” says



## Tenets of the Tea Party

The Tea Party Patriots organization says its impetus comes from “excessive government spending and taxation,” according to the TPP’s Web site. Here are the group’s three core values:

**“Fiscal Responsibility** — Fiscal Responsibility by government honors and respects the freedom of the individual to spend the money that is the fruit of their own labor. . . . Such runaway deficit spending as we now see in Washington, D.C., compels us to take action as the increasing national debt is a grave threat to our national sovereignty and the personal and economic liberty of future generations.

**Constitutionally Limited Government:** We, the members of the Tea Party Patriots, are inspired by our founding documents and regard the Constitution of the United States to be the supreme law of the land. . . . Like the founders, we support states’ rights for those powers not expressly stated in the Constitution. As the government is of the people, by the people and for the people, in all other matters we support the personal liberty of the individual, within the rule of law.

**Free Markets:** A free market is the economic consequence of personal liberty. The founders believed that personal and economic freedom were indivisible, as do we. Our current government’s interference distorts the free market and inhibits the pursuit of individual and economic liberty. Therefore, we support a return to the free-market principles on which this nation was founded and oppose government intervention into the operations of private business.”

Source: Tea Party Patriots, [www.teapartypatriots.org](http://www.teapartypatriots.org)

Sides of George Washington University. “But that’s not a recipe for transformational change.”

Sides cites the history of the Club for Growth, an organization of economic conservatives that rates lawmakers on their votes on taxes, spending and related issues. “No one would say that the Club for Growth has been able to remake the Republican Party,” Sides says, “but it has exerted influence in certain races.”

Republican consultant and blogger Soren Dayton disputes that view. “If you look at the electoral and policy successes of the conservative movement — look at the Republican Party,” Dayton

said at the America’s Future Foundation event. “Abortion, guns and taxes are settled issues. If you’re an activist on these issues, the point is actually changing the minds of Democrats.”

The reason for that ideological victory is easy to identify, Soren said. “We’re winning these [electoral] fights on the ground because the Republican Party is solid — because it’s been taken over in certain significant ways by conservatives.”

### **Does the Tea Party attract conspiracy theorists?**

Advocates of ideas and policies from far outside the mainstream are the bane

of grassroots movements of any stripe. A classic case is the takeover in the 1960s of the New Left by self-styled revolutionaries, who cited Communist Vietnam and China as economic and political models.

Conservative movements, for their part, have always faced the danger of identification with far-right defenders of segregation and, more recently, with those who question President Obama’s legitimacy on the grounds of his supposed foreign birth — a notion that has been laid to rest.

Tensions over ideas tinged with discredited notions about race and conspiracies surfaced publicly at the controversial Tea Party convention in Nashville. Speechmakers included Tancredo, the former Republican House member from Colorado. He advocated voter-literacy tests — a now-illegal procedure that was part of segregation law in the Deep South designed to deny black citizens the right to vote. And *WorldNetDaily’s* Farah insisted that Obama’s birthplace remains an unsettled issue. “The president refuses to produce documents proving he meets the Constitution’s natural-born citizen requirement,” *WorldNetDaily* said in paraphrasing his argument.<sup>16</sup>

The publication reported that “the crowd cheered wildly, whistled and applauded” when Farah made his claim. But observers from both right and left reported a different impression.

Jonathan Raban, writing in the left-leaning *New York Review of Books*, said the favorable response was not universal: “I saw as many glum and unresponsive faces in the crowd as people standing up to cheer.”<sup>17</sup> And conservative blogger, columnist and professor Reynolds says, “I did not hear a single person say a good thing about Farah or the ‘birther’ issue.”

In fact, the dispute went public. After his speech, Farah engaged in a heated argument outside the convention hall with Andrew Breitbart, pub-



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lisher of the conservative *Breitbart.com* news and commentary sites.<sup>18</sup> Breitbart called Farah's focus on Obama's citizenship "a fundamentally controversial issue that forces a unified group of people to have to break into different parts."<sup>19</sup>

The surfacing of the tensions among the tea partiers did lend substance to press reports of fringe constituencies attaching themselves to the movement, whose primary concerns publicly center on economic policy.

Les Phillip, a Tea Party candidate for the Republican nomination for a House seat in Alabama, blames the mainstream media for characterizing the Tea Party constituency as "white, racist old men." To be sure, he says, "You do have some folks on the far right." But, he adds, "Most are in the center."

Himself a black immigrant from Barbados, Phillip calls Farah's insistence on the Obama birth issue a diversion. But he voices sympathy for Tancredo's call for voter-literacy tests, despite their unsavory history. "I know more about the country than many people who were born here," he says. "If you're going to be a voter, you need to understand the history and governing documents and how the government should work."

Nevertheless, Lowndes of the University of Oregon argues that racial fears and xenophobia do play a role in some Tea Party movements, whose agendas may vary widely from place to place. "Certainly one does get the sense that the movement is made up mostly of older folks, 50 and older," he says. "I think these are people who are most likely to be uncomfortable with cultural differences and certainly with racial differences."

Racial and cultural concerns may outweigh suspicion of the business establishment, which used to predominate among many of today's Tea Party supporters. They also de-

nounce excessive government intrusion in citizens' lives, though typically with little reference to the Patriot Act, the Bush-era law that expanded government's surveillance and monitoring authority over e-mail and other communications. "If these folks are concerned about overweening executive power, then why did the movement not arise during the Bush years?" Lowndes asks.

Hawkins of *Right Wing News* counters that the same kind of inconsistency shadows the liberal activist world. Antiwar marches and protests of all kinds marked the Bush presidency, he observes. Yet, with tens of thousands of U.S. troops fighting hard in Afghanistan and still present in Iraq, "Where's the antiwar movement?" he asks.

Similarly, he argues, the presence of fringe activists who attach themselves to a broader cause is no less a problem on the left than on the right. "There's a very tiny percentage of people who generally are not welcome at tea parties," Hawkins says, adding that he distinguishes members or sympathizers of the militia movement from those who question Obama's presidential eligibility. "I guarantee you that, percentage-wise, there are as many Democrats who think Bush stole the election in 2004 as people who think Barack Obama is not a citizen. I would put those as complete equivalents."

Sides, of George Washington University argues, however, that the Tea Partys' big tent may limit the movement's effectiveness for reasons that go beyond issues of political respectability. The presence of the "birthers" and some militia members, along with people concerned about taxes and spending, likely will add to what he sees as a fundamental weakness. "There is an extraordinarily diffuse organizational structure with a lot of internecine conflict," he says. "That makes coalescing extremely difficult." ■

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# BACKGROUND

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## People's Party

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Historians trace the origins of populism to the early years of the new republic. President Andrew Jackson, who served two terms (1829-1837), helped formulate the fear that a financial elite threatened popular control of national institutions.<sup>20</sup>

Jackson's distrust of "money power" led him to veto a bill to extend the charter of a privately owned national bank that served the federal government as well as private interests. "It is to be regretted that the rich and powerful too often bend the acts of government to their selfish purposes," his veto message said.<sup>21</sup>

Jackson's admonition resounded for generations. But it wasn't until the late 19th century that a national political movement was organized to wrest control of the country from intertwined political and business classes. The People's Party of America, formed in 1892 in St. Louis, united an array of activists that included small farmers from the South and Great Plains who were overwhelmed by debt; the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, which advocated alcohol prohibition; two early union organizations, the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor; and evangelical Christians with socialist politics.

All saw themselves as oppressed by big business and its political allies. The prohibitionists viewed big business as profiting from the vice of alcoholism. But the Populists — as they were dubbed — dodged the issue of race because they counted on Southern supporters of segregation.

Still, the Populist alliance generated enough enthusiasm to drive a presidential campaign in the 1892 election. The Populist candidate, former Union

Army officer James B. Weaver, garnered 8.5 percent of the national vote, an impressive showing for a third-party candidate.

Realizing that their party stood no chance of winning the presidency on its own, the Populists forged an electoral alliance in 1896 with the Democratic Party (founded by Jackson). The Democrats' nominee was William Jennings Bryan, who had worked closely with the Populists as a House member from Nebraska.

Known for his spellbinding oratory, Bryan wanted the U.S. currency based on both gold and silver, not just gold. That would lower the value of debt-ridden farmers' obligations by lowering the value of the dollar.

"Having behind us the commercial interests and the laboring interests and all the toiling masses," Bryan said in his electrifying speech to the Democratic Convention that nominated him, "we shall answer their demands for a gold standard by saying to them, you shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns. You shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold." <sup>22</sup>

However, the Democrat-Populist alliance proved no match for the Republicans. Populists' weaknesses included their strong ties to the Farm Belt and support of strict Protestant moral codes — turn-offs to big-city voters, many of them Catholic immigrants.

Republican William McKinley won the election, which marked the high point of the People's Party's fortunes. By 1908 it had dissolved.

### Right Turn

Populist leaders spoke eloquently of corporate oppression, a classic issue of the left. But their handling of race would seem to place them on the political right. While Tom Watson, a Georgia Populist leader, made joint speaking appearances with black populists (who had their own organiza-

tion), he defended Jim Crow laws, as did party rank and file. (After the party ceased to exist, Watson incited and then defended the lynching of Jewish factory manager Leo Frank of Atlanta, wrongly accused of the rape and murder of a 13-year-old girl.) <sup>23</sup>

In other respects, the Populists' attacks on big business, as well as ties to the early labor movement, marked them as left-liberal. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal policies of 1933-1940 drew on the Populists' doctrines. They influenced his campaigns to impose regulatory controls — such as creation of the Securities and Exchange Commission — on the "economic royalists" of Wall Street. And his administration's agricultural policies, which sought to stabilize prices by subsidizing farmers for not overproducing, also grew out of the Populists' search for solutions to farmers' financial woes. <sup>24</sup>

Nevertheless, Watson's career had shown that populism can whip up hatred as well as inspire ordinary citizens to demand that government serve their interests, as was exemplified during the Roosevelt era by the career of the Rev. Charles E. Coughlin, a figure of far greater influence than Watson. The Catholic priest from Royal Oak, Mich., went from being a New Deal supporter to a furious critic, whose weekly radio speeches became wildly popular. He then took a sharp right turn into anti-Semitism in 1938, attempting to link Jews to communism — a longtime target of his wrath — and financial manipulation. <sup>25</sup>

Dislike of Jews was commonplace in pre-World War II America, but Coughlin's calls for action against Jews found little support outside the ranks of his hardcore supporters. He raised enough concern in the Catholic hierarchy, however, to lead the archbishop of Detroit to order Coughlin to end his radio broadcasts in 1941. And in 1942, at the U.S. Justice Department's request, the church ordered him to stop publishing his weekly newspaper.

Although the infamous "radio priest" never returned to the public arena, he left his mark. In depicting communism as a menace to ordinary Americans, Coughlin anticipated the early-1950s career of Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy, R-Wis., and his supporters. To be sure, some of McCarthy's followers abhorred anti-Semitism; *National Review* founder William F. Buckley Jr., a leading defender of McCarthy, was credited with purging that prejudice from mainstream conservatism. <sup>26</sup> Ethnic hatred aside, McCarthy owed an intellectual debt to Coughlin with his portrayal of working people preyed upon by communist-inspired elites or outright communist agents.

McCarthy himself saw his career go down in flames in 1954 after a conflict with the U.S. Army in which the senator accused the military of harboring communists. But McCarthyism left a foundation upon which later conservative politicians built, writes Georgetown historian Kazin.

By stirring up distrust of the highly educated graduates of elite schools who predominated in the top reaches of public life — especially the foreign policy establishment — McCarthy and his allies caused serious alarm among liberal academics. McCarthyism "succeeded in frightening many liberals into mistrusting the very kinds of white Americans — Catholic workers, military veterans, discontented families in the middle of the social structure — who had once been foot soldiers of causes such as industrial unionism, Social Security and the GI Bill." <sup>27</sup>

### The 'Silent Majority'

The tensions fanned by McCarthy burst into flame in the mid-1960s. Some of the most active and visible leaders of the civil rights movement — such as Stokely Carmichael of the

*Continued on p. 252*

# Chronology

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## 1830s-1900s

*Movements expressing citizen outrage at government and business elites begin.*

**1832**

President Andrew Jackson vetoes a bill to expand the national bank, calling it a tool of the “rich and powerful.”

**1892**

People’s Party of America (populists) formed in St. Louis by small farmers, evangelical Christians, labor unions and alcohol prohibition advocates.

**1896**

Populists unite with Democratic Party behind presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan, who is defeated.

**1908**

People’s Party dissolves, unable to develop an urban base to match its rural constituency.

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## 1930s-1950s

*Populist politicians begin directing anger toward government, and sometimes ethnic minorities, and away from big business.*

**1938**

The Rev. Charles E. Coughlin, a Catholic priest with a large radio following, switches from support of President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal to virulent opposition.

**1954**

After leaping to prominence by accusing the State Department and other agencies of harboring Soviet loyalists, Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy wrecks his career by charging the U.S. Army is also protecting communists.

**1955**

Liberal academics alarmed by McCarthyism argue that far-right tendencies lurk within all populist-oriented movements.

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## 1960s-1970s

*Civil rights and antiwar movements prompt middle-class whites to become Republicans.*

**1966**

Activists in Oakland, Calif., form Black Panther Party, embodying the worst fears of many middle-class whites about surging left-wing radicalism and “black power.”

**1968**

Violence at Democratic National Convention in Chicago deepens divide between pro- and anti-Vietnam War Democrats and further alienates middle-class whites from protest movements. . . . Alabama Gov. George C. Wallace wins 13 percent of ballots for his third-party candidacy, built on anti-Washington message.

**1969**

Referring to Americans turned off by protesters, President Richard M. Nixon calls on “great silent majority” to support his plan to end the war.

**1972**

Sen. George S. McGovern, D-S.D., the Democratic presidential candidate, wins only one state as incumbent Nixon successfully ties Democrats to privileged, unpatriotic elites who look down on “good, decent people.”

**1979**

Former Gov. Ronald Reagan, R-Calif., wins the presidency, largely by appealing to the “silent majority” constituency identified by Nixon.

## 1990s-2000s

*Populism returns as a third-party movement, and then as a group with strong political party ties.*

**1992**

Texas billionaire H. Ross Perot launches himself as a third-party presidential candidate, attacking deficit spending and outsourcing of jobs abroad. . . . Perot wins 19 percent of the vote, drawing votes from both winning candidate Bill Clinton and the defeated George H. W. Bush.

**2008**

Congressionally approved financial bailout creates discontent among grassroots Republicans and Democrats.

**2009**

Seattle woman outraged by Obama administration-proposed economic stimulus holds protest against “porkulus.” . . . CNBC reporter Rick Santelli calls for a “tea party” while denouncing administration’s rescue plan for homeowners facing foreclosure. . . . Dozens of activists network to plan “tea party” demonstrations on Feb. 27. . . . Tea Party activists take part in town hall meetings with lawmakers, denouncing administration’s health-care proposal. . . . Fox News commentator Glenn Beck promotes a “9/12” rally in Washington, which draws heavy crowd of Tea Party supporters.

**2010**

Tea Party activists contribute to surprise election victory of Republican Sen. Scott Brown in Massachusetts. . . . “Tea Party Nation” convention in Nashville sparks dissension in movement due to high ticket price and presence of anti-immigration and “birther” speakers. . . . Tea Party opponents begin organizing Coffee Party alternative.

## Tea Partiers Take Aim at Health Reform

*Movement plans a replay of last summer's town hall meetings.*

Joblessness hovers near 10 percent. Yet in a country where most Americans get health insurance through their employers, opposing health insurance reforms proposed by congressional Democrats at the urging of President Barack Obama has been a driving force in the Tea Party movement.

"The Tea Party . . . did help destroy health reform," Kelly Jane Torrance, literary editor of the *American Conservative*, claimed at a Washington panel discussion in February. "I think that's an amazing accomplishment."

Torrance's remarks at the America's Future Foundation event may have been premature. Since the event, prospects for passage of the legislation seem to have improved.

With a congressional recess starting on March 29, tea partiers are aiming for a replay of last summer's fractious "town hall" meetings with legislators, when the movement's opposition to health reform — especially its added cost to the deficit — first erupted. "We're gonna hit 'em when we know they're back in [the] district, and we're gonna hit 'em hard," Tom Gaitens, a Tampa Tea Party organizer, told Fox News.

Final passage of the legislation before the recess would short-circuit that plan. But the prospects are uncertain.

In any event, plans to destroy the health-care plan, a long-time centerpiece of the Democratic agenda, might seem counter-intuitive, given that the Tea Party hopes to grow — in a country with up to 45 million uninsured residents.<sup>1</sup>

Among them is Tea Party organizer Jenny Beth Martin of

Woodstock, Ga. Martin's family lost health coverage when her husband's business failed more than two years ago. When one of the Martins' children gets sick, "We tell the doctor we don't have insurance, and make arrangements to pay cash," Martin says.

The hardships brought on by the Great Recession hit even deeper for Martin's family. She and her husband lost their home, and for a while the couple was cleaning houses to make ends meet.

Nevertheless, she opposes the Obama plan. "I think that we do need health insurance reform," she says. "I just don't think this bill is a good idea."

Her political response, even in the face of personal hardship, illustrates a major facet of the movement, and of American conservatism in general. "People don't connect the economic crisis to the need for any kind of government intervention," says Joseph Lowndes, a political scientist at George Washington University. "People come to this movement with a pretty strong level of conservatism in place already. So there is that irony: to some extent these movements are facilitated by a poor economy, but their reaction . . . does not embrace the government's effort to fix things."

John Hawkins, publisher of the *Right Wing News* Web site, suggests another reason for conservative distrust of the health-reform plan. "I think people fear there is going to be a massive decrease in the quality of care," he said. "The idea that you'll cover more people, but the quality won't drop and it won't cost more — people don't believe that."

*Continued from p. 250*

Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee — adopted the "black power" slogan. The term was elastic — covering everything from affirmative action to armed self-defense — but many whites heard a threat.

Adding to the tension, the Black Panther Party, formed in 1966 in Oakland, Calif., paraded with firearms to illustrate its goal of "self-defense" against police officers and soon embraced the Cuban and North Korean versions of communist doctrines.<sup>28</sup>

The anti-Vietnam War movement also was gathering strength on college campuses, where potential male foot soldiers benefited from draft deferments, unlike working-class high school graduates who weren't going on to

college. Antiwar activists also began openly advocating draft-dodging and draft resistance, some even burning their draft cards in protest — stirring outrage among many among the World War II-Korean War generations.

Political and social tensions exploded in 1968. First, the April 4 assassination of civil rights leader the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. led to rioting in black communities across the country, notably in Washington, D.C., where the National Guard was called out to quell the violence. Also that spring, tensions over the Vietnam War within the Democratic Party — and within the country as a whole — came to a head during the Democratic Convention in Chicago, marked by large antiwar demonstrations and violent police repression.

Although Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey won the nomination, his campaign against Republican Richard M. Nixon was hobbled by the escalation of the war under outgoing President Lyndon B. Johnson.

Nixon's victory enabled him to indulge a deep grudge against the East Coast-based Democratic political elite. In 1969, soon after taking office, he used a term that echoed old-school populist rhetoric, urging the "great silent majority" to support his peace plan.<sup>29</sup> In effect, Nixon was effectively telling ordinary Americans repelled by the civil disorder and protests that they were the backbone of the nation, despite all the noise generated by the demonstrators.

But another high-profile politician tapped even deeper into the vein of out-



And, Hawkins says, conservatives understand another deep-seated element of American political culture. "People don't, with good reason, trust the competence of government."

Martin opposes health reformers' plans to penalize businesses that don't provide health insurance for employees and to raise taxes to help subsidize mandatory coverage for those who couldn't afford it. Although the legislation hasn't been finalized, proposals so far would pay for the expanded insurance coverage by raising taxes on high-end health insurance plans or on wealthy Americans (those earning more than \$250,000 a year). Martin also does not like the proposal to delay implementation of benefits until 2014, after some higher taxes take effect (though a prohibition would be immediate on insurance companies refusing clients with pre-existing conditions).<sup>2</sup>

Martin does favor making coverage "portable," not dependent on employment — which would be compatible with the Obama plan, in principle. And she agrees that individuals who



AP Photo/Mark Stehle

*A tea partier protests President Obama's health-care reform plans before his arrival at Arcadia University in Glenside, Pa., on March 8, 2010.*

can't qualify for insurance could benefit from high-risk insurance pools, which some states have set up. Tea Party organizer John M. O'Hara laid out these and other proposals in a book on the movement.<sup>3</sup>

The book doesn't propose dismantling Medicare, the massive health-care subsidy program for the elderly, and neither does Martin. "It's there now, and we need to deal with it as it is."

And, she adds, "I don't think there is anything wrong with government providing safety nets. I understand that sometimes things happen to people."

— Peter Katel

<sup>1</sup> Carl Bialik, "The Unhealthy Accounting of Uninsured Americans," *The Wall Street Journal*, June 24, 2009, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124579852347944191.html#articleTabs%3Darticle>. Some question that U.S. Census Bureau estimate, in part because it includes illegal aliens who wouldn't be covered under a new law.

<sup>2</sup> Alec MacGillis and Amy Goldstein, "Obama offers a new proposal on health care," *The Washington Post*, Feb. 23, 2010, p. A1.

<sup>3</sup> John M. O'Hara, *A New American Tea Party: The Counterrevolution Against Bailouts, Handouts, Reckless Spending, and More Taxes* (2010), pp. 175-201.

rage that ran through blue-collar America. Gov. George C. Wallace of Alabama had propelled himself into the national spotlight by dint of his fervent resistance to the civil rights movement. As the presidential candidate of the American Independent Party, he tried to expand his segregationist appeal (he later repudiated Jim Crow) to cast himself as the voice of the common American. He demonstrated his familiarity with his constituency by ticking off its members' occupations: "The bus driver, the truck driver, the beautician, the fireman, the policeman and the steelworker, the plumber and the communications worker and the oil worker and the little businessman." They knew more about the nation's problems, he said, than snobbish politicians, academics and journalists.<sup>30</sup>

As a third-party candidate, Wallace had no chance of winning, but he garnered nearly 10 million votes — 13 percent of ballots — showing that his appeal ran strong.<sup>31</sup> Many of those Wallace votes would have gone to Nixon if the Alabama governor hadn't launched his third-party bid, and Nixon concluded that he didn't want to face that challenge again.<sup>32</sup>

## Enduring Appeal

In 1972 Wallace had plans for another presidential run. But the outsider candidate apparently wasn't above making insider deals. In a book on Nixon's presidential campaigns, author Rick Perlstein reports that Nixon

made moves to benefit Wallace in exchange for the Alabaman dropping his third-party strategy and running instead in the Democratic presidential primary. As a Democratic candidate, Wallace wouldn't siphon off Republican votes in the general election, as he had in 1968.<sup>33</sup>

In the summer of 1971, Wallace met with Nixon during a flight to Alabama from the president's vacation home in Key Biscayne, Fla. Three months later, a federal grand jury investigating alleged tax fraud by Wallace's brother dissolved without issuing indictments. Shortly thereafter, the Justice Department announced — "suddenly and improbably," in Perlstein's words — that Alabama's civil rights enforcement plan was superior to other states' plans.

## Sarah Palin Shines at Tea Party Convention

*Some see her as a potential party leader.*

Tea partiers pride themselves on their lack of formal leadership, but that hasn't stopped speculation about who will emerge to lead the movement. So far, the speculation largely has zeroed in on Sarah Palin. And the former vice-presidential candidate's insistence that she isn't seeking a leadership role hasn't squelched the topic.

In fact, Palin has actually fueled the speculation, possibly inadvertently. After her surprise resignation last year as Alaska's governor and the publication of *Going Rogue*, her best-selling book, she addressed the Tea Party's February convention in Nashville — the only speech she's given this year at an overtly political event. Her political ideas, to the extent she has spelled them out, seem consistent with the tea partiers' call for lower taxes and smaller government.

In the eyes of Tea Party activists who skipped Nashville — in part because they objected to its \$500-plus ticket price — Palin made a mistake in going. That view was even more prevalent after the influential online political newspaper *Politico* reported she had received \$100,000 for the speech. "This has nothing to do with the grassroots movement — nothing," said Robin Stublen, who helped organize a Tea Party group in Punta Gorda, Fla. <sup>1</sup>

Palin didn't deny that account, but she wrote in *USA Today* that "any compensation for my appearance will go right back to the cause." <sup>2</sup> She didn't specify the precise destination for the money.

Some tea partiers saluted her presence in Nashville and its effects on the movement. "I think the Tea Party is gaining respect when we're able to attract some of the quality representation . . . a caliber of person such as this," said Bob Porto, an attendee from Little Rock. <sup>3</sup>

Palin's star power certainly generated media attention for the convention, even though a relatively modest 600 people attended, and the convention was controversial within the movement. Her speech, in fact, was carried live on C-SPAN, CNN and Fox News.

Palin made a point of waving off the idea that she wants to take the helm. "I caution against allowing this movement to be defined by any one leader or politician," she said. "The Tea Party movement is not a top-down operation. It's a ground-up call to action that is forcing both parties to change the way they're doing business, and that's beautiful." <sup>4</sup>

For all of her attention-getting capabilities, Palin comes with baggage. A new book by Steve Schmidt, top strategist for the McCain-Palin campaign, described her as dishonest. And another book, by journalists Mark Halperin and John Heilemann reported that she was ignorant of even basic national and international matters. "[S]he still didn't really understand why there was a North Korea and a South Korea," Heilemann said on CNN. <sup>5</sup>

Even a friendlier figure, Stephen F. Hayward of the conservative American Enterprise Institute, warned Palin that she's nowhere near as ready for a national position as Ronald Reagan was. "Palin has as much as admitted that she needs to acquire more depth, especially on foreign policy," he wrote in *The Washington Post*. "One thing above all is required: Do your homework. Reagan did his." <sup>6</sup>

But in Nashville, the crowd loved her, wrote Jonathan Raban in the liberal *New York Review of Books*. Many had been cool not only to the anti-immigrant talk of Tom Tancredo, the former Colorado congressman and 2008 GOP presidential candidate, but also the Obama-birthplace suspicions of Web news entrepreneur

In January 1972 Wallace announced he would run for the Democratic presidential nomination. In Florida, the first primary, he won first place in a five-man race, with 42 percent of the vote.

In the end, Wallace (who was shot and paralyzed midway through the campaign) won only two primaries outside the Old Confederacy, in Michigan and Maryland. The Democratic nomination went to Sen. George S. McGovern of South Dakota, an anti-Vietnam War candidate.

Unfortunately for McGovern, he came to symbolize a social gap between hard-working, ordinary Americans, and pampered liberals and radicals. In fact,

he had earned a Distinguished Flying Cross as a bomber pilot in World War II and hardly fit the stereotype. <sup>34</sup>

But McGovern's supporters did include the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, Hollywood stars among them. So the "McGovern Democrats" neatly symbolized one side of the social gap that right-wing populists had identified, and that Nixon had done his best to widen. "It is time that good, decent people stop letting themselves be bulldozed by anybody who presumes to be the self-righteous moral judge of our society," Nixon said in a radio address shortly before Election Day. <sup>35</sup>

His strategy proved spectacularly

successful. McGovern won only one state, Massachusetts, and Washington, D.C. But Nixon's even more spectacular political downfall during the Watergate scandal prevented him from taking advantage of his victory. He was forced to resign in 1974.

Though President Ronald Reagan, another Republican, adopted Nixon's "silent majority" paradigm, Reagan's overall optimism effectively sanded off the doctrine's sharp edges. And Reagan didn't have to contend with directing an unpopular war.

During the 1992 reelection campaign of Reagan's successor (and former vice president), President George H. W. Bush,

Joseph Farah, Raban reported.

But the crowd embraced Palin. “A great wave of adoration met the small black-suited woman. . . . The entire ballroom was willing Sarah to transport us to a state of delirium with whatever she chose to say.”<sup>7</sup>

The speech was something of a letdown, Raban added, because Palin’s delivery was better suited to the TV cameras than to the live audience. Still, she got a big sendoff. “The huge standing ovation (‘Run, Sarah, Run!’) was more for the concept of Palin . . . than it was for the lackluster speech,” Raban wrote.<sup>8</sup>

Palin hasn’t revealed whether she’ll run for president in 2012, but she pointedly avoids denying it. “I won’t close the door that perhaps could be open for me in the future,” she told Fox News.<sup>9</sup>

However, University of Tennessee law professor Glenn Harlan Reynolds, who covered the Nashville convention for the Web-based *Pajamas TV*, warned that Palin’s popularity could exact the same price that he argues President Obama has made his political allies pay for hero-worshipping him.

“The biggest risk that the Tea Party movement faces is that it will create its own Obama in the person of Sarah Palin and



Getty Images for NASCAR/Jerry Markland

*Sarah Palin answered questions from attendees at the National Tea Party Convention in Nashville on Feb. 6, 2010.*

get a similar result,” he says. “She made a point of saying she didn’t want to be their leader, and most people agreed. But the tendency of people to run after a charismatic leader is probably genetically hardwired.”

— Peter Katel

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Chris Good, “Is Palin’s Tea Party Speech a Mistake?” *The Atlantic*, Feb. 4, 2010, [www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2010/02/is-palins-tea-party-speech-a-mistake-tea-partiers-have-mixed-opinions/35360/](http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2010/02/is-palins-tea-party-speech-a-mistake-tea-partiers-have-mixed-opinions/35360/).

<sup>2</sup> Ben Smith and Andy Barr, “Tea partiers shell out big bucks for Sarah Palin,” *Politico*, Jan. 12, 2010, [www.politico.com/news/stories/0110/31409.html](http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0110/31409.html); Sarah Palin, “Why I’m Speaking at Tea Party Convention,” *USA Today*, Feb. 3, 2010, <http://blogs.usatoday.com/oped/2010/02/column-why-im-speaking-at-tea-party-convention.html>.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> “Sarah Palin Speaks at Tea Party Convention,” CNN, Feb. 6, 2010, <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1002/06/cnr.09.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Martin, “Steve Schmidt: Sarah Palin has trouble with truth,” *Politico*, Jan. 11, 2010, [www.politico.com/news/stories/0110/31335.html](http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0110/31335.html).

<sup>6</sup> Steven F. Hayward, “Would Reagan Vote for Sarah Palin?” *The Washington Post*, March 7, 2010, p. B1.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Raban, “At the Tea Party,” *New York Review of Books*, March 25, 2010, [www.nybooks.com/articles/23723](http://www.nybooks.com/articles/23723).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in “Palin says 2012 presidential bid a possibility,” CNN, Feb. 8, 2010, [www.cnn.com/2010/POLITICS/02/07/palin.presidential.run.tea.party/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2010/POLITICS/02/07/palin.presidential.run.tea.party/index.html).

another populist figure emerged, Texas billionaire H. Ross Perot. In his brief but influential third-party campaign for president, Perot declared, “America today is a nation in crisis with a government in gridlock. We are deeply in debt and spending beyond our means.”<sup>36</sup>

A pro-choice, law-and-order conservative, Perot paid little attention to social issues. Instead, he emphasized the need to cut government spending and strongly opposed the proposed North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Mexico and Canada. Business’ “job is to create and protect jobs in America — not

Mexico,” he said shortly before formally announcing.<sup>37</sup>

And he decried what he saw as the lavish perks of government service. “We have government turned upside down, where the people running it act and live at your expense like royalty, and many of you are working two jobs just to stay even.”<sup>38</sup>

Perot’s intolerance for criticism and a strong authoritarian streak (he praised Singapore, notorious for its rigid enforcement of laws on personal behavior) limited his appeal. Still, he wound up with 19 percent of the vote, including 29 percent of all votes by independents. “He showed the nation’s ruling elites,”

wrote *The Washington Post’s* John Mintz, “that millions of Americans are deeply disturbed by what they believe is a breakdown in American society.”<sup>39</sup>

Political professionals had assumed Perot would draw far more Republican votes away from Bush than Democratic ones from Bill Clinton. But post-election surveys showed that Perot voters — often casting what amounted to protest votes — came from both Republican- and Democratic-oriented voters.

“Those who said they voted for Perot,” *The Washington Post* reported, “split almost evenly between Bush and Clinton when asked their second choice.”<sup>40</sup> ■



## New Coffee Party Drawing Supporters

*“People are tired of the anger.”*

An alternative to the Tea Party is taking shape, as citizens who oppose its message and tactics are forming their own grassroots network — the Coffee Party.

The Tea Party’s nascent rival takes a deliberately toned-down approach to political conflict. “We’ve got to send a message to people in Washington that you have to learn how to work together, you have to learn how to talk about these issues without acting like you’re in an ultimate fighting session,” founder Annabel Park, who launched the movement from a Coffee Party Facebook page, told *The New York Times* recently.<sup>1</sup>

Tea partiers put themselves on the map with rallies, pointed questions to politicians at town hall meetings and election campaign organizing. How the coffee partiers plan to project themselves into the national debate isn’t clear yet. But there’s no question that the effort grows out of the liberal, Democratic Party-oriented part of the political spectrum — a counterpart to the veteran Republicans who launched the Tea Party. Park, a documentary filmmaker in the Washington suburb of Silver Spring, Md., had worked on the Obama campaign.

By mid-March, when enthusiasts nationwide held a coordinated series of get-togethers in — of course — coffee shops

across the country, the Coffee Party page had collected more than 100,000 fans. “Coffee partiers seem to be more in favor of government involvement — as in envisioning a greater role for government in the future of health care — but denounce the “corporatocracy” that holds sway in Washington,” *The Christian Science Monitor* reported from a Coffee Party meeting in Decatur, Ga.<sup>2</sup>

Whether the Coffee Party grows into a full-fledged movement, there’s no denying the initial appeal. The organizer of a Dallas-area gathering in March had expected 15 people at most. She got 40. “This is snowballing,” Raini Lane said. “People are tired of the anger, tired of the hate.”<sup>3</sup>

— Peter Katel

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Kate Zernike, “Coffee Party, With a Taste for Civic Participation, Is Added to the Menu,” *The New York Times*, March 2, 2010, p. A12.

<sup>2</sup> Patrik Jonsson, “Coffee party’ movement: Not far from the ‘tea party’ message?” *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 13, 2010, [www.csmonitor.com/USA/Politics/2010/0313/Coffee-party-movement-Not-far-from-the-tea-party-message](http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Politics/2010/0313/Coffee-party-movement-Not-far-from-the-tea-party-message).

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Cassie Clark, “Coffee Party energizes fans,” *Dallas Morning News*, March 14, 2010, p. B2.

## CURRENT SITUATION

### The Election Test

Across the country, Tea Party-affiliated candidates — or those who claim the movement’s mantle — are running for a range of Republican nominations, in races that will test both the movement’s strength and its potential to influence GOP politics. The races will also set the stage for the 2012 Republican presidential nomination.

So far, at least one potential Republican candidate seems to think the Tea Party will have run its course by then. Former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney is criticizing populism among both Republicans and Democrats. “Populism sometimes takes the form of being anti-immigrant . . . and that like-

wise is destructive to a nation which has built its economy through the innovation and hard work and creativity of people who have come here from foreign shores,” Romney told *The Boston Globe*.<sup>41</sup>

Some candidates seeking Tea Party votes do take an anti-immigrant line. In Arizona, former Rep. J.D. Hayworth is challenging veteran Sen. John McCain, the GOP candidate for president in 2008. “In Arizona, you can’t ignore the Republican animus against Sen. McCain on immigration,” Jason Rose, a spokesman for Hayworth, told *Roll Call*, a Washington political newspaper.<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile, another Tea Party-backed candidate, Mike Lee, is challenging Republican Sen. Bob Bennett of Utah, whose backers include the state’s senior senator, Republican Orrin Hatch. And in Kentucky, Tea Party enthusiast Rand Paul (son of libertarian Rep. Ron Paul, R-Texas) is competing against a Republican officeholder, Secretary of State Trey Grayson, for the GOP nomination

to a Senate seat left open by a Republican retirement. Florida’s GOP Gov. Charlie Crist, whom tea partiers consider insufficiently conservative, is fighting hard for the Senate nomination against Marco Rubio, a lobbyist and former state legislator who has become a national star among conservative Republicans. “America already has a Democrat Party, it doesn’t need two Democrat parties,” Rubio told CPAC in February.<sup>43</sup>

And Sen. Jim DeMint, the South Carolina Republican who has become a Senate liaison for the Tea Party, made clear to the CPAC crowd where his sympathies lie, tacitly drawing a parallel between Crist and Sen. Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, who defected from the GOP last year to save his seat. “I would rather have 30 Marco Rubios in the Senate than 60 Arlen Specters.”<sup>44</sup>

In the Deep South, where the Tea Party runs along the same conservative Republican tracks, two Tea Party-

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## *Does the Tea Party movement represent another Great Awakening?*



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WRITTEN FOR *CQ RESEARCHER*, MARCH 2010

**i**n the 18th and 19th centuries, America experienced two Great Awakenings, in which mainstream religious institutions — grown too stodgy, inbred and self-serving for many — faced a sudden flowering of new, broad-based religious fervor. Now we're experiencing a third Great Awakening, but this time it's political, not religious, in nature.

Nonetheless, the problem is the same: The existing institutions no longer serve the needs of broad swaths of the public. The choice between the two parties is increasingly seen as a choice between two gangs of thieves and charlatans. While Americans always joked about corruption and venality in politics, now those jokes don't seem as funny.

The Tea Party movement is one symptom of this phenomenon: Millions of Americans are aligning themselves with a bottom-up insurgency angered by bailouts, growing deficits and the treatment of taxpayers as cash cows. Though often treated as a red-state phenomenon, the Tea Party movement is strong even in deep-blue states like Massachusetts, where Scott Brown was elected to the Senate, or California, where one out of three voters told a recent poll that they identified with the Tea Party.

But the Tea Party movement is a symptom of a much broader phenomenon, exemplified by earlier explosions of support for Howard Dean via Meetup and Barack Obama and Sarah Palin via Facebook. They were triggered by the growing sense that politics has become a cozy game for insiders, and that the interests of most Americans are ignored.

Thus, Americans are becoming harder to ignore. Over the past year they've expressed their dissatisfaction at Tea Party rallies and town hall meetings, and at marches on Washington and state capitals. And they're planning what to do next, using the Internet and talk radio.

Traditional politics is still wedded to 20th-century top-down models, where mailing lists, organizations and message control are key. But in the 21st century, the real energy is at the grassroots, where organization can take place on the fly. When Tea Party activists decided to support Brown, they sent him money through his Web site, and put together an online "Moneybomb" campaign to bypass the Republican Party, which got behind Brown's seemingly quixotic campaign only after the momentum was established by the grassroots.

Coupled with widespread dissatisfaction at things as they are, expect a lot more of this grassroots activism, in both parties, over the coming years.



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**t**he Tea Party movement is indeed revivalist, but it revives not the egalitarian impulses of the 1740s or 1830s that fed the zeal of the Revolution and abolition. Rather it rehashes a tradition of racial, antigovernment populism that stretches from George Wallace's American Independent Party through Reagan Democrats to Sarah Palin Republicans.

In this tradition's origins mythology, a virtuous white citizenry became squeezed between liberal elites above and black dependents below as a result of civil rights and Johnson's Great Society. Since then, these Americans have resented taxation and social welfare, linking it to those whom they believe are recipients of special rights and government coddling. Thus, for the tea partiers and their immediate forebears the state is what monopoly capital was for 19th-century populists: a parasitic entity controlling their lives through opaque and malevolent machinations. It is worth noting that a significant percentage of tea partiers appear to be in their 60s or older — placing them in the generation that expressed the most negative reaction to the advances of the civil rights movement.

Why are we seeing this wave of protest now? The Tea Party movement has emerged out of the confluence of two momentous events: an enormous economic crisis and the election of a black president. The dislocations produced by the former have stoked the latent racial nationalism ignited by the latter. Obama represents both aspects of modern populist resentment — blackness and the state, and his perceived coziness with Wall Street taps into outrage felt toward banks right now. Add to this Glenn Beck's continual attacks on Obama and progressivism more generally, and you get a demonology that allows tea partiers to see tyranny wherever they look. (If "demonology" seems too strong a word here, look no further than the grotesque Joker-ized image of Obama over the word "Socialism" that has been omnipresent at Tea Party rallies.)

Will this movement transform the landscape? Third-party movements have impact when they can drive a wedge into the two-party system, creating a crisis that reframes the major political questions of the day. But the stated principles of the various Tea Party groups show them to be entirely consistent with the social conservative wing of the GOP. And there is a great overlap in leadership ties and funding sources as well, making it likely that the movement will find itself reabsorbed by the party with little independent impact.

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friendly candidates for Congress are opposing each other in north Alabama. “A lot of Tea Party activists are split between Les Phillip and Mo Brooks,” says Christie Carden, who organized a Tea Party group in Huntsville. So far, at least, she and her fellow members have not endorsed either candidate.

Complicating matters, a third Republican is running as well. Incumbent Parker Griffith was welcomed into the GOP fold after he switched from Democrat to Republican last December. Party-establishment backing for Griffith makes sense, given the GOP’s interest in providing a defector with a favorable reception, says blogger and Tennessee law professor Reynolds. But, he adds, “One of the Tea Party complaints is that there is too much *realpolitik*” — or compromising — in the GOP establishment.

Elsewhere, even where Tea Party candidates might have traction, Republican organizations won’t necessarily welcome them with open arms. “The Republican Party in Pennsylvania is pretty good at controlling its side of the ballot,” says Dan Hirschorn, editor and publisher of the Philadelphia-based political news site *pa2010*. “When . . . Tea Party candidates are in a race where there already are establishment Republicans, the political landscape the Tea Party candidates face is really formidable.”

Democrats view the tension between party professionals and conservative insurgents as a potential advantage.

“You’ve got these very divisive primaries,” Rep. Chris Van Hollen, D-Md., chairman of the House Democratic campaign organization, told *CQ Weekly*. “In many instances it’s driving the primary way to the right.”<sup>45</sup>

In some districts, Van Hollen suggested, primary victories by Tea Party-style Republicans could spell victory for centrist Democrats.



*Chris Van Hollen, D-Md., chairman of the influential House Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, helps guide House Democrats’ fundraising and strategizing. He thinks the Tea Party activists may be driving the Republicans to the right and that primary victories by Tea Party-style Republicans could spell victory for centrist Democrats in November.*

Fox News Sunday via Getty Images/Freddie Lee

## Political Realities

**F**resh from his victory in Massachusetts, Sen. Brown is now a certified hero to Republicans, especially the Tea Party movement, which worked its heart out for him. Brown’s victory was made all the sweeter by its location in the heart of blue-state America. But his first vote on Capitol Hill has conservatives talking about political realities.

Less than three weeks after he formally took office on Feb. 4, Brown joined four other Republicans in voting for a

\$15-billion jobs bill pushed by the Obama administration and Democratic Senate leader Harry Reid of Nevada. “I came to Washington to be an independent voice, to put politics aside and to do everything in my power to help create jobs for Massachusetts families,” Brown said after the vote. “This Senate jobs bill is not perfect. I wish the tax cuts were deeper and broader, but I voted for it

because it contains measures that will help put people back to work.”<sup>46</sup>

His words did nothing to stem the tide of rage that poured onto his Facebook page — 4,200 comments in less than 24 hours after his Feb. 22 vote, the vast majority of them furious. As gleefully documented by the liberal *Huffington Post* news site, the comments included “LYING LOW LIFE SCUM HYPOCRITE!” and “YOU FAILED AT THE FIRST CHANCE” and “You sir, are a sellout.”

But Michael Graham, a radio talk-show host and *Boston Herald* columnist in the Tea Party fold, mocked the outrage. “This is still Massachusetts,” Graham wrote. “Brown will have to win a general election to keep this seat. . . . This one, relatively insignificant vote sent a powerful message to casual, Democrat-leaning voters that Brown isn’t in the GOP bag. . . . It’s brilliant politics.”<sup>47</sup>

Graham is a political veteran, unlike many tea partiers. The movement, in fact, prides itself on its many political neophytes. “These are not people,” Tea Party activist Freire, the *Washington Examiner* editor, said at the Washington panel discussion in February, “who are used to getting engaged in the process.”

Although the panel discussion preceded Brown’s vote by about a week,

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it delved into the tension between principles and pragmatism that surfaced after Brown's move. Other conservative lawmakers also have disappointed conservative backers, Freire noted. Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wis., Freire said, "is a pretty reliable guy when it comes to his fiscal conservatism; he still voted for the bailout."

### **Third-Party Option**

Democrats are nourishing the fond if unlikely hope that the Tea Party will turn into a full-fledged political party. "[That] would have a negative effect on Republicans, as would threatening to do that and influencing Republican candidates to move further to the right," says Neil Oxman of Philadelphia, cofounder of The Campaign Group political consulting firm.

For that reason, the third-party idea has not caught fire among tea partiers. "We don't need another party," says Carden, the Huntsville organizer. "We just need to use the vehicles for political change that are already there."

History points to that course as the most promising. Socialists, conservatives, libertarians and other political movements have long used third-party campaigns to build national support or at least publicize their ideas. Winning the White House isn't the goal.

In state races, candidates outside the two major parties have won, though such cases at the moment can be counted on one hand. Sen. Bernard Sanders of Vermont, a socialist who ran as an independent, is serving his first Senate term after 16 years in the House. Another senator, lifelong Connecticut Democrat Joseph I. Lieberman, is technically an independent, but he dropped that affiliation after losing a primary race to an Iraq War opponent.

The outcome of a bitter political fight in upstate New York last November would seem to confirm the two-party strategy as best for Republicans. In a

special election to fill a newly vacated "safe" GOP House seat, the choice of a Republican legislator raised the hackles of conservatives nationwide, who viewed her as too liberal on abortion and gay rights. Instead, they backed a Conservative Party candidate — who eventually lost to Democrat Owens. His backers included the onetime Republican candidate Dede Scozzafava, who denounced what she viewed as betrayal by the GOP.<sup>48</sup>

"This election represents a double blow for national Republicans and their hopes of translating this summer's Tea Party energy into victories at the ballot box," Van Hollen, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee chairman, said.<sup>49</sup>

In New York state, Conservative Party candidate Hoffman's backers included Sarah Palin and former Rep. Dick Armey of Texas, a Tea Party booster and former House Republican leader who is president of FreedomWorks, a Washington-based activist-training organization whose politics run along Tea Party lines.

The New York debacle was followed by Brown's triumph in Massachusetts. That Brown ran as a Republican seemed to confirm the wisdom of channeling Tea Party activism into GOP campaigns.

Republican strategy guru Karl Rove, the top campaign and White House adviser to former President George W. Bush, is warning Tea Party groups to stay in the Republican fold. "There's a danger from them," he told *USA Today* recently, "particularly if they're used by political operators . . . to try and hijack" elections.<sup>50</sup>

Rove could have had Nevada in mind. There, a candidate from the "Tea Party of Nevada" has filed to oppose Senate Majority Leader Reid in the GOP primary.

Leaders of Nevada's Tea Party movement told the conservative *Washington Times* that they don't recognize the names on the Tea Party of Nevada filing documents. They claimed the

third party was created on Reid's behalf to siphon Republican votes. But the candidate said by mail, "I am not for Harry Reid. . . ."

My candidacy is real." The Reid campaign didn't return a call to the *Times* reporter.<sup>51</sup> Whatever the sincerity of the Nevada Tea Party, grassroots conservatives elsewhere who are disenchanted with the GOP argue that the best course is to fight within the party. "Use the Republican Party to your advantage," Chicago tea partier Eric Odom wrote on his blog. "Move in and take it over."<sup>52</sup> ■

## **OUTLOOK**

### **Short Life?**

In the hyperspeed political environment, evaluating the 10-year prospects for a newly emerged movement is an iffy proposition. Still, a consensus is emerging that the Tea Party's ideas will last longer than the movement itself.

"These ideas are endemic in American political culture," says Sides of George Washington University. "Whether we will be able to attach them to a movement or an organization we call the Tea Party is an open question."

Georgia Tea Party activist Martin acknowledges the movement may dissolve over the next decade. "If there isn't a movement 10 years from now, I hope it's faded away because people understand what the country's core values are and don't need to be reminded."

Whatever the state of national consciousness in the near future, the life cycle of social movements in their most influential phase arguably has never been very long, even before the pace of modern life quickened to its present pace. "In their dynamic, growing, inspirational, 'we-can-change-the-world' stage, they last five to seven years," says Kazin of Georgetown University.



The labor union movement's high point ran from 1933 to 1938, Kazin says. And the civil rights movement in its nationwide, unified phase ran from just 1960 to 1965. "And those were movements that were more independent of a political party structure," he adds.

As a movement closely linked to the Republican Party, the Tea Party's future will depend greatly on the course of the 2010 elections, Kazin argues. And which GOP candidates are nominated for president in 2012 will offer an even clearer gauge of the movement's influence.

Hawkins of *Right Wing News* thinks he knows where the Tea Party will be in 10 years. "I tend to doubt it will exist," he says. "It will have been absorbed into the Republican Party."

But the University of Oregon's Lowndes argues that beyond the country's Republican strongholds, the Tea Party won't acquire enough influence to reconfigure the entire party. "It will shape politics in certain places, and shape the Republican Party, but it won't take it over."

For now, however, Lowndes credits the Tea Party with effectively pulling together strands of discontent. "With enormous power concentrated in the executive branch and in corporations, there is a sense of powerlessness at work that can be picked up and interpreted different ways by different folks," he says. "These people have found a language for it that the left has not."

Jonah Goldberg, high-profile editor of *National Review Online*, urged conservatives during the America's Future Foundation panel discussion in February to come to terms with the nature of the political system. "The American people aren't as conservative as we would like them to be, and they never will be," he said, despite what seem to be favorable conditions for the right that largely grow out of the Tea Party's success.

"Things are so much better than they seemed to be a little while ago," he continued. "Will Republicans blow it? They have a great history of that. One of the things that movements do is try to keep politicians honest. That's going to be hard work because politicians are politicians."

Reynolds of the University of Tennessee Law School acknowledges that the Tea Party's promise may go unfulfilled. Conservative hopes ran high after the 1994 Republican takeover of Congress midway through the first Clinton administration, he notes. "But that didn't have long-lasting legs."

On the other hand, Reynolds says, the Reagan legacy has been long-lasting. "And this is probably bigger," he says of the Tea Party.

But there are no guarantees, he cautions. "A lot of people are involved in politics who never were before. In 10 years, some will have gone back to their lives. Of the people who stay in, the odds are that many will become politicians as usual. The question is how much this will happen." ■

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### About the Author

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

**Coffee Party**, [www.coffeepartyusa.com](http://www.coffeepartyusa.com). A new network of Tea Party opponents.

**FreedomWorks**, 601 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W., North Building, Washington, DC 20004; (202) 783-3870; [www.freedomworks.org](http://www.freedomworks.org). Created by former House Republican Leader Dick Arney, the conservative organization trains local activists.

**Politics1**, 409 N.E. 17th Ave., Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301; [www.politics1.com/index.htm](http://www.politics1.com/index.htm). Comprehensive political site offering a guide to races involving Tea Party candidates.

**Right Wing News**, [rightwingnews.com](http://rightwingnews.com). Independent Web site covers Tea Party movement, often critically.

**Talkingpointsmemo**, [www.talkingpointsmemo.com](http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com). Democratic-oriented news site provides critical but fact-based coverage of Tea Party.

**Tea Party Patriots**, [www.teapartypatriots.org](http://www.teapartypatriots.org). An extensive network of Tea Party groups around the country offering movement news and views from its Web site.

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# Research Update

Updated May 23, 2011

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## Tea Party Movement

*Here are key events, legislation and court rulings since publication of the CQ Researcher report by Peter Katel, "Tea Party Movement," March 19, 2010.*

A political activist dressed as a hero of the American Revolution joined with a small group of fellow conservatives in early May to denounce Washington politicians in the name of the Tea Party. Nothing surprising in that — except that the politicians under attack are Republicans.

"Yes, we've been deeply disappointed," said William Temple of Brunswick, Ga., at a Washington news conference. He named House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, as the main source of disenchantment. "Mr. Boehner has been a 'surrenderist' who waves the white flag before the first shots are fired." Temple, wearing a tricorner hat, boots and other 18th-century garb, leaned his musket against a wall when he took to the lectern at the National Press Club in Washington.<sup>53</sup>

The episode was one of many marking the complicated follow-up to Tea Party-driven Republican election successes in 2010. Temple and his half-dozen companions vowed that Boehner, House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan, R-Wis., and other House Republicans would pay a political price if they defied demands of the loose-knit Tea Party movement.

At the top of their wish list: massive government spending cuts.

Instead, House leaders have signaled they're willing to go along with raising the "debt ceiling," the limit on how much government can borrow. "This debt limit . . . provides the perfect opportunity to substantially reduce the size and scope of the federal government," said Bob Vander Plaats, vice chair of a Tea Party convention scheduled for Kansas City in October. A loser in last year's Republican gubernatorial primary in Iowa, Vander Plaats remains a top political player in a state whose early primaries are a critical early test for presidential candidates.<sup>54</sup>

### Testing Time

The Tea Party's ability to sustain the support it gathered last November will be tested as well. Tea Party members and sympathizers played a major part in helping shift control of the House to a 242-193 Republican majority — about 30 of whom had been endorsed by Tea Party groups. That victory, which followed months of demonstrations, marches and frenetic organizing activity by Tea Party members, was limited



*Rep. Michelle Bachmann, R-Minn., chair of the Tea Party Caucus in the House, reflects the Tea Party's independence from mainstream Republicans: She delivered a response to President Obama's State of the Union address separate from the official GOP response.*

to the House. The Senate remains in the hands of a Democratic majority though Republicans gained six seats.<sup>55</sup>

Speaker Boehner, who presides over the House GOP majority, seemed to confirm the Tea Party activists' increasingly dire view of him in a speech he gave on the evening following their press conference. As they expected, he signaled willingness to approve a debt-ceiling increase. But in a nod to the Tea Party, he conditioned approval on trillions of dollars of cuts in federal spending.<sup>56</sup>

Whether that would satisfy the activists remains to be seen. Joining with

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their staunchest congressional allies, they had previously failed in an effort to convince Boehner and other leaders to refuse to reach a temporary budget compromise with the Senate and White House. The move averted a govern-

ment shutdown. But Rep. Mike Pence, R-Ind. had urged holding fast. "It's time to pick a fight!" he had told a small rally outside the Capitol. "If liberals in the Senate want to play political games . . . , I say shut it down."<sup>57</sup>

### 'Unrealistic Expectations'

their power. "The standards they set for themselves in terms of budget cutting and deficit reduction were very high, and the expectations were unrealistic," said Robert Bixby, executive director of the Concord Coalition, a

In another show of Tea Party independence from the Republicans, Rep. Michele Bachmann, R-Minn., chair of the Tea Party Caucus in the House, delivered a response to President Obama's State of the Union address separate from the official Republican response.<sup>58</sup>

Political observers have been arguing that politicians who identify with the Tea Party may have overestimated

nonpartisan organization directed by members of the political establishment that advocates spending cuts. "Some of the leaders in the House, Boehner and Ryan, do have a bit of a problem in trying to write a tough and realistic budget that can get done, and tamping down some of the unrealistic expectations," Bixby told the *Los Angeles Times*.<sup>59</sup>

And Tea Party strategists may have overestimated the movement's appeal outside its red-state, suburban base. Sen. Scott Brown, R-Mass., who scored a stunning victory last year in a special election for the seat of the late Sen. Edward M. "Ted" Kennedy, a Democratic icon, has taken pains to distance himself from the movement. Along with

others more closely identified with the movement, Brown didn't join the Senate Tea Party Caucus. And, asked if he was a Tea Party member, he told *USA Today*, "No, I'm a Republican from Massachusetts."<sup>60</sup>

### Pressure to Deliver

For their part, Tea Party-backed lawmakers have expressed frustration at being hemmed in on one side by Democratic opposition in the Senate, and on the other by political commitments to constituents.

"If we don't do a real serious job with spending these next two years, then I think that voters in my district will feel that I didn't deliver," Rep. Joe Walsh, R-Ill., a freshman who was part of the Tea Party wave of House members in last year's election, said in January.<sup>61</sup>

By early May, Walsh was echoing activists' criticisms of Republican House leaders. In his case, he took issue with their abandonment of a proposal to transform Medicare, the program of government subsidies of health-care costs for the elderly. Under a plan that the House passed in March, senior citizens (starting in 2022) would get vouchers to buy private insurance.<sup>62</sup>

"I would be very disappointed if we didn't follow through," Walsh said, after top Republicans indicated they wouldn't try to push the Medicare plan any further. A fellow Illinois Tea Party Republican, Rep. Bobby Schilling, went further. Giving up on the proposal, he said, would amount to surrendering "to lies and deceit told by the other side."<sup>63</sup>

But the Medicare proposal was turning into a rallying cry for Democrats, as well as for some Medicare beneficiaries who had voted for Republicans in 2010. Republican lawmakers came face-to-face with that reality at town hall meetings they held in their districts during the spring recess. Some of those meetings turned into role-reversed versions of constituent meetings in 2009, at which Tea Party opposition to the administration's health-care legislation



Getty Images/Scott Olson

*Sporting patriotic red, white and blue, a Tea Party supporter attends a Tax Day rally in Chicago on April 18, 2011, calling for massive government spending cuts and tax reform. Tea Party members have been angry at House Republican leaders for signaling they may support raising the nation's debt ceiling.*

# Chronology

## 2010

**November** — Tea Party protests and marches provide momentum to Republican candidates who win a decisive House majority, though Senate remains majority-Democrat.

Tea Party Caucus; only four senators join Senate counterpart.

**Jan. 25** — House Tea Party Caucus Chair Michele Bachmann, R-Minn., delivers response to president's State of the Union speech that is separate from official Republican response.

**Feb. 22** — Newly elected Sen. Scott Brown, R-Mass., declines to join Tea Party Caucus in Senate.

**March 31** — Tea Party Republican Mike Pence of

Indiana urges House leaders negotiating with the Senate and White House to maintain demands for major spending cuts even at cost of shutting down government.

**April 28** — Arizona Legislature authorizes Tea Party license plates, but some movement members oppose the move as government intrusion.

**May 9** — Group of Tea Party leaders attacks House Republican leaders for willingness to accept raising the national debt limit.

## 2011

**Jan. 5** — Congress convenes with more than 50 House members in

seized the headlines and spurred the movement's rapid growth.

### Signs of Discord

At this year's meetings, however, crowds turned out to grill and heckle Republicans who had voted for the Medicare plan. A woman in Racine, Wis., attending a meeting held by Rep. Ryan, the author of the plan, held up a sign that read, "We use up the voucher, and then what?" In Orlando, shouts and arguments over Tea Party Republican Rep. Daniel Webster's support for the plan grew so loud that Webster at one point quit talking.<sup>64</sup>

Not all town meetings turned raucous. But the Medicare plan seemed to be turning into a liability. Even after top Republicans backed away from the proposal, Democrats vowed to keep exploiting the issue. "The Republicans are slowly realizing their plan to privatize Medicare is a political disaster," said Sen. Charles E. Schumer, D-N.Y., a spokesman for Senate Democrats. "But until they renounce their vote for it, they are still going to own it."<sup>65</sup>

Yet, as they continue marking a distance between themselves and the Republican establishment, Tea Party members are showing signs of discord within their movement.

In Arizona, some Tea Party members have rallied against the creation of automobile license plates emblazoned with a Revolutionary War slogan they've adopted — "Don't Tread on Me." Tea Party groups can sell the tags to raise money. But, Tea Party member Jim Wise of Surprise, Ariz., isn't buying one. "I realize the people behind this had the best of intentions," he said, "but it goes against what we stand for, which is limited government."<sup>66</sup>

Despite such rifts, there's little doubt that Tea Party movement supporters do agree on the issue of federal spending. The anti-Boehner press conference was only one sign of Tea Party members' determination on that score, expressed as resistance to a debt-ceiling increase. The Tea Party Express, one of the movement's national organizations, was planning a national TV ad campaign on that theme.

"The GOP is on probation," the organization's chair, Amy Kremer, told *The Atlantic*, "because under President Bush they spent a lot of money, and added \$3 trillion to the national debt." She added, "You will see that the Tea Party will have no problem whatsoever challenging the very freshmen they put in."<sup>67</sup>

— Peter Katel

## Notes

<sup>53</sup> For a video of the press conference, see "Federal Debt Ceiling and Debt," C-Span, May 9, 2011, [www.c-span.org/Events/Tea-Party-Activists-Take-on-GOP-on-Deficit/10737421394-1/](http://www.c-span.org/Events/Tea-Party-Activists-Take-on-GOP-on-Deficit/10737421394-1/).

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<sup>61</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Noam N. Levey, "Rep. Paul Ryan's Medicare privatization plan increases costs, budget office says," *Los Angeles Times*, April 7, 2011, <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/apr/07/nation/la-na-gop-budget-20110408>.

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<sup>64</sup> Mike Schneider and Dinesh Ramde, "Congressional Republicans go home to mixed reviews," The Associated Press, April 26, 2011.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Hulse and Calmes, *op. cit.*

<sup>66</sup> Quoted in Marc Lacey, "In Arizona, Tea Party License Plate Draws Opposition From its Honorees," *The New York Times*, May 4, 2011, [www.nytimes.com/2011/05/05/us/05plates.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/05/us/05plates.html).

<sup>67</sup> Eliza Newlin Carney, "Tea Party Puts the Screws to House Republicans Over Debt Ceiling," *The Atlantic.com*, May 9, 2011, [www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2011/05/tea-party-puts-the-screws-to-house-republicans-over-debt-ceiling/238640/](http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2011/05/tea-party-puts-the-screws-to-house-republicans-over-debt-ceiling/238640/).

**Update**