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An American Cyber-Column

Tipping Point?

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* You might expect a headline on the WallStreetJournal.com website over the weekend that read:

“Poll: GOP Expands Advantage Days Before Midterm Election”

* But this line at the top of an MSNBC.com piece on the state of major Senate campaigns might surprise you:

“The momentum in these races, however, has swung mostly in the Republican Party’s direction, giving the GOP a clear path to winning the majority.”

* And here is how the Washington-based website Politico.com wrote its headline:

“Polls Give Republicans Edge in Critical States”

* What got everyone’s attention were two polls taken in the major battleground states and released over the weekend.
* South Dakota, Montana, and West Virginia are seats currently held by Democrats but there is almost no chance that they will retain any of them so they represent three of the six net seats the GOP has to pick up to be the majority in the Senate.
* Keeping in mind there are still eight days to go, here are the states in question: Alaska, Arkansas, Colorado, Iowa, Louisiana, New Hampshire and North Carolina.
* The GOP has to pick up three of those six and not lose either Kansas or Georgia.
* In five of those six races the GOP candidate has a small lead. Inside the margin of error for the most part; but they are moving in the Republicans’ direction.
* For example, in North Carolina the incumbent, Kay Hagen and the GOP challenger Thom Tillis are now tied at 43-43. Hagen has held a small, but stubborn lead all election season.
* In Kansas, the Independent candidate, Greg Orman, is clinging to a one percentage point lead over incumbent Republican Sen. Pat Roberts 45-44.
* In Iowa, Republican Joni Ernst has a three point lead over Democrat Bruce Braley by 49-46.
* Polls are like buoys in a squall: They bob up and down with even minor changes in the sea surface.
* So why the disturbance in the political force?
* Democratic pollster Peter Hart who helped conduct one of the polls said,

“The Democrats, who badly need some momentum, find little comfort in these results some ten days out from the election. The thread holding things together for them is both more slender and now even frayed.”

* Is it Ebola? Isis? President Obama?
* Probably some of all three.
* The Presidents average approval rating (as of last night on RealClearPolitics.com) was 41.2 –about where it has been stuck throughout the election season.
* As unpopular as the Republican “brand” might be, voters are unhappy with Democrats.
* Janet Hook, reporting on one of the polls in the WSJ wrote:

“Some 52% of likely voters in the survey said they wanted the election to produce a Republican-led Congress, while 41% favored Democratic control.”

* That is an 11 percentage point bulge for GOP candidates. Hook also pointed out that represents a gain of six percentage points from a poll just a week earlier when Republicans enjoyed only a five point lead.
* As we know, this is not a national election. In fact, we <i>never</i> have a national election.
* These elections will be decided state-by-state. Both Republicans and Democrats are touting what is known as the “ground game” – the house-by-house effort to identify supportive voters and get them to vote, either in advance or on election day.
* This is different from the “air war” which centers around TV advertising and is typically negative, but also includes automated phone calls, direct mail, and increasingly, Internet and social media advertising.
* In 2012 I was told repeatedly by Democrats that Republicans were underestimating young and minority turnout for President Obama’s re-election. They were right.
* Mid-term elections – called that because they occur in the middle of a Presidential term – tend to have a far lower turnout due to a diminished amount of enthusiasm – or interest in the election.
* Almost everyone can name the President. Far fewer can name one, much less both, of their U.S. Senators, and Members of Congress can safely go shopping for Halloween candy without fear of being mobbed.
* As we have seen time and time again, polls are not predictive. They sense the mood of the electorate when they are taken. This weekend might well be looked back upon as the tipping point in the 2014 elections, but it requires candidates’ supporters to actually get out and vote.
* But, given the numbers this weekend, the path to the voting booth appears to be downhill for Republican candidates and uphill for Democrats.
* On the <a href = “<http://www.mullings.com/dr_10-24-14.htm>**” <**b> Secret Decoder Ring</b></a> page today: Links to the Wall Street Journal, MSNBC, and to the Politico look at the weekend’s polling.

Also a Mullfoto taken from my train window last weekend.

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