

# If Republicans Weren't a Dying Species, Would They Make Good Pets?

November 19, 2009

Barack Obama, Barack Obama, Barack Obama, Barack Obama, Barack Obama, Barack Obama!

Obama, Obama! Obama! Obama!

There are 306 precincts in the four Hawaii counties and Barack Obama won them all. In the last election, he got 75% of the total vote, the highest percentage of any of the 50 states.

There are 25 members of the State Senate, two are Republicans. Of the two, one is getting out of public office. By 2011 there may no Republicans left in the State Senate.

There are 51 members of the State House of Representatives, six are Republicans. Of the six, two are not running for re-election and three of the remaining four are vulnerable to attack. It is entirely conceivable that in 2011 there may well be one Republican left in the House.

Who's fault is that?

Not mine. I am, and always have been, a machine Democrat. I don't even dress myself up as a "Progressive" or call myself whatever is popular with whomever is popular.

And yet, I have given more money to Republican office holders and candidates in Hawaii and supported more Republicans for public office than have most people who call themselves Republican. Because I put myself and my money into the political game. It's my business and my avocation.

I recall once giving a talk about 25 years ago on the same general topic as this, and not so modestly opined then that one basic reason that the Democrats in Hawaii were so lopsidedly in control is that the political landscape was thick on the ground with people like me. At that time you could have pointed in any direction and found young, yet experienced, Democrats engaging in political organizing and operating campaigns. And that is still true. Metaphorically speaking, there are boxcars full of Democratically oriented political workers and thinkers and not too many Republicans like that.

In comparison, the Hawaii Republican Party was, is, in a word: anemic. And it has been more or less weak and ineffective for half a century. Yet it has also had opportunities to do better. It has one right now.

The last time that the Republicans made a move toward resurgence came in the late 1990s as a result of the worst economic decline that Hawaii had faced since statehood.

By 2000, just nine years ago, Republicans had 19 people in the House and 3 in the Senate and seven years ago in 2002, there were 15 Republicans in the House and 5 in the Senate: enough to cause trouble.

What happened?

First of all, I don't believe that the Republican Party would ever have gotten to the so-called high water marks of 2000 and 2002 if Linda Lingle had not been a moving force in the Party throughout the 1990s, culminating in her taking the Party Chairmanship from 1999 until 2002. She was a brilliant Party Chair and an excellent political organizer. She made the Republican Party viable. Linda is a genuine political star, and the Party was smart to hitch its wagon to her. She convinced the largely, old school, right wing Party to soften its outspoken right wing Christian voices, to accept moderation, to accept newer ideas, and she brought in thousands of new, young, local, members who saw the Democrats as the architects of a status quo that they did not particularly like.

At the time, the titular leader of the Democratic Party was Ben Cayetano. By early 1997 only 2% of the people thought that he was doing an excellent job as Governor, while over half, 54%, thought he was doing a poor to fair job, and a third thought he was adequate. His dour, combative, acerbic personality contrasted with her far friendlier, more outgoing, yet modest demeanor. He simply was not well liked, and she just seemed—well—nicer, friendlier, more collaborative. And she had something more, something most politicians dream about—she had charisma. She was so popular that people lined up to get her autograph. She represented something that Republicans in Hawaii have often talked about being but seldom were. She represented hope and change.

In 1998 the Republicans and Lingle were ready to try to prove their mettle, but she was narrowly defeated, in a tough campaign. She came up short by about 5,000 votes out of 412,520 cast. I thought she was going to win. But in the last week, the momentum totally changed for a simple reason—Lingle stopped campaigning. She pulled thousands of dollars of ads off the TV, and Jack Seigle, who was Ben's media master, about fell through the floor. The Cayetano campaign bought all the time that she relinquished. **Let me stop here and tell you a dirty little secret that us campaigners know: as many as 5% of the voters go to the polls not knowing who they are going to vote for until they actually do.** That's why every close election is a crap shoot. Until this day, I contend that she beat herself in 1998.

In 2002, after building the Republican Party apparatus to a point where it was richer, and stronger and just plain better than the Democratic Party apparatus, she beat Mazie Hirono by 54 to 46%, by over 17,000 votes. And when she took office she was, I contend, the most popular Governor that Hawaii has had to date. She was Barack Obama.

She was so hot, that when her reelection came up in 2006, not a single Hawaii Democrat wanted to face her. Eventually, Randy Iwase and Malama Solomon agreed to sacrifice themselves, but there was never any doubt about the outcome. On November 7<sup>th</sup>, Lingle/Aiona, beat Iwase/Solomon, two to one.

And that was that. Lingle, like I believe Obama is, has no political coattails. She was an anomaly. The Republican Party has sunk back to be what it was—a fringe Party that caters to ideologues.

In 2004, at the height of Lingleism, the Hawaii Republicans put up candidates in eight of the twelve Senate seats that were up for election, and won two. They put up 48 candidates, in the 51 House seats, something of a high water mark, and won 10.

In 2006, when Lingle was cleaning Iwase's clock, they put up seven candidates in 13 Senate races and won 2. And they fielded 46 candidates for House 51 seats and won seven. They were losing as Lingle was winning two to one. No coattails.

In 2008 they put up seven candidates in 12 Senate races and won none. And they fielded only 28 candidates for 51 House seats and won just 6. There are now just two elected Republicans in the Senate and six in the House.

There are no Neighbor Island Republican members in either House, and the only seemingly safe seat in either House belongs to Representative Cynthia Theilen in Lanikai/Kaneohe Bay/Kailua in Windward Oahu.

It is conceivable that after the 2010 elections, that the State Senate will have no Republicans at all and the House may be left with Cynthia Theilen.

And thus the title of my speech.....

- You can't win if you don't field candidates. In the last election alone, Republicans gave over 1/3 of all seats to incumbent Democrats.
- Individuals win seats, but it helps to have support. And Republicans do not support Republicans, nor do they reach out enough to independents.
- You have to have a message and be able to sell it. And Republicans have been without any coherent message.
- To win you have to have a strategy and execute it. And Republicans.....

98% of Americans, and I am sure the percentage holds true in Hawaii, do not support any election efforts with their own money. A majority of Hawaii residents don't bother to vote at all.

Government belongs to those who show up!

I leave you with this, I was listening to National Public Radio the other day. There was a program about the fall of communism twenty years ago in Czechoslovakia. They had former President Vaclav Havel and other democrats on, and they were bemoaning the fact that the communists are still an important political factor; that even one of the top torturers in one of their communist prisons is, today, a member of Parliament! "Can you believe that!" They were saying. And yes, I can. Because in a democracy, those who get in, do so because they get the most votes. If Republicans want to be a factor in Hawaii, they can be—if they do that which will get them the most votes.

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