



CHRISTOPHE VORLET FOR THE GLOBE

Shaking it up

State needs diversity in its congressional delegation

By Ann Murphy

FACE THE facts: In Congress, Massachusetts has been represented by the same party since 1996 — the Democratic Party. In looking at individual districts, the numbers are stark. In the eighth district, the home of Democratic icons such as John F. Kennedy and Thomas P. “Tip” O’Neill, Jr., the last Republican to represent it was Angier Goodwin in 1954. In the second district, the last GOP congressman was Charles Clason who served until 1949, and in the seventh district, Robert Maloney was the last Republican to serve in 1923. What is wrong with this picture and why does it matter?

The largest party affiliation in Massachusetts, as in many other states, is “unenrolled.” This group of independent voters without a party makes up 51.44 percent of all registered voters in the state and it’s growing. Independent voters, combined with Republican voters, make up 64 percent of the approximately 4.1 million voters in Massachusetts. It is these party-hopping, party-eschewing, party-bereft voters who hold the key this election season.

Incumbents and the Democrat establishment bemoan the fact that they may not be playing in the Democrat-tilted playing field next January, that Congress may go Republican. Horrors! The pork bus will no longer be doling out goodies to the Bay State. Will the world come to an end if there is a GOP majority in Congress? Massachusetts did just fine during the GOP majority rule from 1994-2006.

Since when is clout only as good as your party affiliation and whether your party is in power? Whatever happened to the ability to truly govern, to cross the aisle and work together, both Republicans and Democrats, for the good of their constituents and the good of the country?

The art of compromise is sadly lacking in Washington. Gone are the days when Democrats and Republicans can actually work together. There are no more Ronald Reagan-Tip O’Neill or Orrin Hatch-Fed Kennedy relationships where elected officials disagree on most of their politics, but are willing to come together for the good of the country

and find areas of compromise.

The anger directed at Washington is because the majority of voters perceives it as a place where nothing gets done, and the will of the people is ignored. This sentiment has less to do with party affiliation and has everything to do with whether our elected officials are out of touch or just out to lunch. We need legislative leaders who can cross over the aisle and be agnostic to their party to achieve success.

The so-called Scott Brown effect was not driven by the GOP or Tea Party. It was disaffected independents who felt Brown was one of them, and not one of the entrenched establishment career politicians. They not only energized the GOP, they also reminded other voters that their voice mattered, their vote counted, and that finally, someone in Washington was going there for the right reasons.

Indeed, Massachusetts voters might be a little less anxious about the seismic change about to happen in Washington if we had more party diversity in our congressional delegation.

We wouldn’t have to worry so much about our clout if our delegation had more Republicans.

The GOP may pick up one or two Massachusetts congressional seats in the fifth and tenth districts in November, and maybe more if voter anger at the status quo builds momentum to toss out the incumbents. Will the entrenched Democratic incumbents facing “token” GOP opposition be caught asleep at the switch? A RealClearPolitics average of polls on Congress shows that 71.3 percent of all voters disapprove of the way it is doing its job. A paltry 20.5 percent think otherwise.

Voters in Massachusetts and across the country are angry, and they have a right to be. They look at Capitol Hill as a place where insiders win, the public loses and the status quo reigns. Why shouldn’t we have new blood and fresh faces? On Election Day, voters will have their say and they will have the clout. That’s the genius of our democracy.

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