



Inside Report for May 14, 2010

The GOP could score big gains in 2010 elections

By [LANNY KELLER](#)

Advocate Opinion page staff

Published: May 14, 2010 - Page: 9C

When political analyst Charlie Cook delivered recently a fact-filled data dump about this fall's national elections, the array of "diagnostics" from polling pointed to a single conclusion: Democrats are in big trouble.

Big, big trouble.

Cook is a Shreveport native and publishes the Cook Political Report and writes for The National Journal and other outlets about politics. He spoke to the annual meeting of the Public Affairs Research Council.

Few elections qualify as waves — big changes that remake the political landscape. For about 40 years, he noted, Democrats controlled the Congress, until the wave of 1994. After that election, Republicans were in charge for 12 years.

"We are watching another wave that is out there," Cook said.

The serious losses in the Congress suffered by Republicans in 2006 and 2008 national elections — the latter electing Barack Obama as president — mean that Democrats could be expected to lose a significant number of seats in the House.

In House and Senate, the midterm election is a referendum on the president and the party in power, so losses for the president's party can be expected. Cook quoted an old maxim, but revised it a bit: "All politics is local, except when it's not."

Even incumbents who are personally popular in their districts are vulnerable during a wave election, Cook said. "It's not a popularity contest," he said.

When Cook counts seats in the 435-member House one by one, he said, the Democrats could be expected to lose about 30 seats, 10 or so short of turning over the House to the Republicans. But Cook is more pessimistic about the Democrats' prospects: "I think it's more likely on the will than the won't side" about Republicans gaining control.

Republicans are expected to gain but not enough to control the Senate, he said, where 59 of 100 senators are Democrats or independents voting with the Democrats. But because only a third of senators are elected every two years, in 2012 and 2014 Democrats must defend many more seats. “There is a Republican Senate in our future, but probably not in 2010,” Cook said.

Among the diagnostics that pollsters look at are questions about voters who describe themselves as very interested in the fall elections. Republican voters in just about every survey can be characterized as more interested, and thus more likely to vote; Cook noted that midterm election turnouts are about 30 percent lower than in presidential election years.

The economy doesn’t help the incumbents. “If you are the party in power in a recession, you are going to pay a price,” Cook said.

While Cook’s projection generally was bleak for the Democrats, he speculated that an improving economy might help a bit, or a bit more popularity for Obama could help. But Cook said the main difficulty facing Republicans — and here he used what he called “a technical term we have in politics” — is that primary voters would nominate “whack jobs.” The potential for Republicans in several states to nominate candidates so far to the right that they give Democrats a chance for upsets is a legitimate concern for party leaders.

He also noted that events — such as a terrorist attack or other national crisis — might rally support for the president and help Democrats in the midterm races. But Cook’s diagnostics generally were poor for the Democrats, and encouraging for the Republicans.