

Do You Hear What I Hear?

✖ Last week's election results were historic. John Boehner's teary-eyed victory speech was very appropriate because he had just observed a modern day miracle. Boehner lives in the world of political reality. He is not a wimp. He is rough and tumble, professional politician. Nonetheless, his heart was moved by the surprising change in the nation's political cycle. The 60 seat congressional swing in favor of the GOP, along with 17 state legislatures changing from Democratic to Republican, has definitely been a loud statement of displeasure by the American people. Just as surely as the nation voted to give President Barack Obama a chance to bring change in 2008, the midterm vote clearly repudiated both the priorities and tactics of the administration.

Yes, the vote was salted with impatience. Yes, the administration could have communicated a little better. Yet, truly great communication starts with empathy and listening. The greatest question in the post election season is, "Do Washington insiders of either party truly hear what the people are saying?" I see signs of both parties misreading the message that the electorate is sending. Unfortunately in this article I only have time to address the Democratic Party's foibles.

Basic human nature tends to push all of us to interpret our problems through “faithful” paradigms that have helped us in past seasons of life. It is a rare leader that can see major changes coming and proceed with a combination of boldness and restraint, which is necessary to seize unique new opportunities. It is safe to say that the key Democratic Party leaders have not yet adjusted their concepts to actually understand the current moment. For example, Harry Reid seemed to deny that his political career was on the line just a few weeks ago. The fact of the matter is that if a more savvy, national politician had been running against him; they would have knocked him out in the first round.

Similarly, Nancy Pelosi sees no problem in volunteering to lead her party again in Congress. Astute observers believe that she single handedly squandered the party’s opportunities these last two years with heavy handed, manipulative leadership. The scary thought to most moderate Democrats is that her tactics and strategies actually seem reasonable to her as she looks back. As a minority leader in congress she would undoubtedly dig an even bigger hole for the party in 2012.

Less subjective, but perhaps more troubling, are the comments of Hillary Clinton. She told New Zealand Television, “We have a historical pattern of this happening. The party of the president loses seats in the first mid-term election. In that

respect, this is not at all out of the ordinary," she said. In fact she went on to declare that a similar dynamic occurred to President Bill Clinton in 1992. The fact that her husband was skillful enough to come out of a midterm tailspin does not guarantee that President Obama can follow suit. Unlike Clinton he does not seem to have a crackerjack administrative team around him. Clinton seemed to delight in sparring with his opponents, while Obama often sounds wounded and hurt. Clinton mastered both the, "I feel your pain" speeches as well as the "mía culpa" apologies with unparalleled skill. President Obama, however, cannot produce a believable "I am sorry."

Although all three of these leaders (Reid, Pelosi, and Clinton) have publicly minimized their party's dramatic fall from grace, I am most concerned by the president's "deer in the headlights" demeanor and public declarations. He knows that a midterm adjustment is necessary, but he does not seem to have wrapped his head around his troubles yet. His tone seems contrived and strained. To liken this to everyday life, I would say he sounds like an inebriated driver who has just been pulled over by the police. The driver's first response often sounds like this, "I am sorry officer. Was I driving erratically?"

President Obama may be so far removed from identifying with Main Street that he has developed a political hearing problem.

What do I mean

by a hearing problem? Simply that he and his team may have already minimized

how disillusioned the American people have become with his presidency. Instead

of truly finding out the priorities of the people and leading the way toward

their goals, the administration seems to be preoccupied with assuring its place

in history. This high level of self-absorption prevents transformational,

servant leadership.

Gone are the days that a speech would settle the race question (at least temporarily). Gone, also, are the days when folks do not

care about the president's lack of experience. As the next few months go by,

more and more Americans will want their president and congress to solve

problems instead of blaming Bush and the GOP. Gone are the days that an

engaging smile and the repetition of a campaign mantra can make everyone feel

better, while transferring an almost tangible sense of hope.

The president's

"credibility chips" and "popularity vouchers" have all been used up. The administration

and the Democratic Party must now attempt to face reality.

The challenge for both parties the next two years will be re-establishing trust in their leadership. Since the trust that many voters

originally placed in President Obama was not based upon his character or his

skill, we were actually gambling with the future of the nation, assuming that

anyone would be better than another term of a George Bush-like figure. I

believe all voters are going to want to see problem solving skills manifest on

Pennsylvania Ave and at the Capitol. For this reason the progressive or

liberal coalition may be in trouble with at least four sub-cultural groups.

These groups are: the U.S. Jewish community, progressive evangelicals, African

Americans and Hispanics. These groups will vote with their feet (low voter turn

out) or they will change party affiliation.

The GOP, if it is wise, will reach out to all four of these groups. Let's pray that conservatives are listening to the voice of the people.

Our freedom may depend on it.