



Tea Party and Constitutional Caucuses on Capitol Hill

On Election night, NBC's David Gregory joked that the "elephant in the room" was ironically the Tea Party, and not the Republican Party. Exit polls showed that 4 out of 10 voters were Tea Party supporters, and of those Tea Party supporters, 8 out of 10 voters supported the Republican candidates. Given the powerful influence that the Tea Party movement has had in political and on the Republican Party as a whole, it seems reasonable to witness the creation of a Tea Party coalition on Capitol Hill.



Minnesota Republican Representative Michelle Bachmann, a Tea Party favorite, is leading the efforts to create a House caucus for the Tea Party movement. Additionally, Kentucky's Republican Senator-elect Rand Paul has asserted his desire to form a bicameral Tea Party caucus.

With the "Constitutional Conservative Caucus" she plans to form and lead, Bachmann hopes to institute a program that will teach the Constitution to those elected to office. While Bachmann would not be teaching the courses, she would help organize the sessions with constitutional scholars, experts, and judges. The classes, likely held in one of the conference rooms on the Capitol Hill complex, will be open to all congressional members, not just freshmen. Names tossed around for proposed teachers include Libertarian Judge Andrew Napolitano.

Bachmann emphasizes the importance of the constitutional caucus:

It will be a different caucus focused on defending constitutional conservative principles by holding regular classes with real experts. The Tea Party caucus will allow Americans from all over the United States to be able to connect with members of congress without any filter.

According to Fox News, "The developments signal that the Tea Party's congressional stewards are looking to expand the movement's reach as soon as possible, though it's unclear whether the contingent will complement or combat the Republican Party as a whole."

While the GOP Establishment has begun to use the same talking points as the Tea Party candidates — cutting spending, cutting government, and spurring economic growth — some have worked to articulate a line between Tea Party conservatives and the Republican Party, like Tea Party favorite Senator Jim DeMint. DeMint has called for the Tea Party-elected officials to wage a battle with the Republican establishment.

Similarly, Republican National Committee Chairman Michael Steele warned that "the establishment is going to have to deal" with the election of a new generation Tea Party figures:

What you saw, in my estimation ... was the Grand Old Party evolving into the great opportunity party, where we are now not only getting outside of our comfort zone but going out and touching people in a way in which our message is resonating. We've got to now govern and we've got to govern on some very difficult issues in a very difficult time, and the expectation bar set by the



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on November 4, 2010

people last night is very high.

DeMint suggests that the next congressional session could prove to be dramatic as the Republican Party will face internal struggles. "The next campaign begins today. Because you must now overcome determined party insiders if this nation is going to be spared from fiscal disaster," writes DeMint in a *Wall Street Journal* column.

He adds, "Tea party Republicans were elected to go to Washington and save the country — not be co-opted by the club. So put on your boxing gloves. The fight begins today."

According to Fox News, the struggle between the GOP establishment and the Tea Party favorites will be highlighted by Bachmann's bid to chair the House GOP Conference:

One of the first congressional battles between outsiders and establishment could come in Bachmann's expected run for House GOP Conference chairwoman. Rep. Mike Pence, R-Ind., announced that he would leave that post, and Rep. Steve King (R-Iowa) a close friend to Bachmann, said the firebrand congresswoman would run for the fourth-highest position in the House GOP hierarchy.

Eric Cantor, Republican Whip, has already endorsed Texas Republican Rep. Jeb Hensarling for that position.

And so it begins.

Rand Paul asserts that the formation of a Tea Party caucus will help to assure that Tea Party ideals will be maintained, even in a difficult political climate characterized by clashes with the GOP:

Americans don't understand why we have to balance our own family budget and Congress doesn't. It just doesn't make any sense to us. We have to do something to get our fiscal house in order.

In regard to a Tea Party coalition, Paul remarked, "I think there [are] a lot of potential members in the House and a few members in the Senate as well."

Such members likely include Tea Party-backed Marco Rubio in Florida, Pat Toomey in Pennsylvania, Mike Lee in Utah, and Ron Johnson in Wisconsin.

In the House of Representatives, nearly two dozen Tea Party candidates were victorious, including Jon Runyan in New Jersey and Kristi Noem in South Dakota.

Photo: Rep. Michele Bachmann, R-Minn., addresses the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Washington, Feb. 19, 2010.: AP

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