

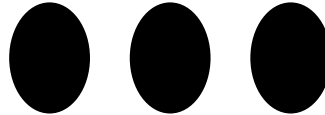


Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on February 12, 2010

Texas Tea Party Message to GOP: Ask Not for Whom the Bell Tolls

Proof of the independent spirit that quickens the Tea Party Movement's adherents can be found in the group's apparent influence in the Texas GOP Primary for Governor set for March 2.

Debra Medina is an avowed Tea Party advocate and gubernatorial candidate whose popularity is swelling according to a recent survey conducted by Public Policy Polling. A press release accompanying the North Carolina-based firm's 17-page report of its findings indicates that statewide support for Medina is accelerating and getting larger in the rearview mirrors of her Republican rivals.



One of these rivals, Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison, is an establishment icon and has served the Lone Star state in Washington since 1993. There is only a 4 percent gap (28 percent for Hutchison; 24 percent for Medina) separating Hutchison from Medina in this poll conducted from February 4-7 among 423 likely Republican primary voters.

With less than a month before Texas Republicans head to the polls, these numbers have to be shocking to the Hutchison campaign, whose war chest is overflowing with at least \$10 million for this race. The results are especially remarkable and fearsome to Hutchison given the senior Senator's experience and name-recognition status in a state where she has held one elective office or another since 1972.

In the current climate of dissatisfaction, it is little wonder that a 38-year political veteran and blue blood, particularly one saddled for just as many years with the label of "country club Republican," is being given a legitimate run for her money. It doesn't help that Hutchison is the belle of the ball when it comes to earmarks, and Americans struggling to make ends meet are fed up with legislators packing pork into every bill. To the point, 78 percent of Texans polled claimed that Austin was more reliable than Washington when it comes to addressing the problems plaguing their state.

The most telling of the figures released by Public Policy Polling concerns Medina's popularity with the right wing of the GOP. According to the report, Hutchison trails Medina 25 percent to 23 percent among Texans identifying themselves as conservative.

Medina's conservative bona fides are undeniable strong. She was the chair of the Wharton County GOP and coordinator for Texas Representative and right-wing favorite Ron Paul's Campaign for Liberty. While she hasn't raised even a tenth of Hutchison's impressive donations, she has gummed up the establishment's works to the point where she could force a run-off with either incumbent Governor Rick Perry (polling at about 39 percent support) or Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison.

If Medina pulls off such an upset then the reverberations will be felt in innumerable races around the



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country and will knock Republican candidates right off their comfy thrones. Typically, Republican incumbents can count on the “hold your nose” vote of conservatives forced to choose the lesser of two evils. If the Tea Party can consistently add genuinely conservative candidates to the ballot choices in primaries, however, then perhaps those of the GOP betting on the begrudging support of conservatives will wake up and realize that the problem is not one of party but one of principle.

There are indications that Tea Party activists are less concerned with the R or D next to a candidate’s name than with the candidate’s dedication to a retrenchment of a government that would make Leviathan blush with embarrassment over its claim to fame. After the result in last year’s election in New York’s 23rd Congressional District where a Democrat defeated Republican Dede Scozzafava owing primarily to money and time donated by Tea Party grass-roots volunteers on behalf of a Conservative Party nominee (Doug Hoffman), many Hoffman supporters said they preferred a wolf in wolf’s clothing to a RINO (Republican in Name Only).

That attitude must send a chill down the spine of establishment Republicans given to scoffing at the “nuts” and “conspiracy theory wackos” that they claim dominate the Tea Party movement and to discounting any threat such a group would pose. Furthermore, that hoary fraternity has grown accustomed to disregarding the right wing of it’s party, believing that when push comes to shove and in the anonymity of the voting booth, the conservatives and constitutionalists will pull the lever for the GOP.

Should Debra Medina or any other Tea Party upstarts successfully defeat any entrenched and experienced Republicans in high-profile campaigns, perhaps there will be a new 18th-century image added to the Tea Party’s patriotic palette, that of the Liberty Bell. And, the Republican establishment will learn not to ask for whom it is tolling, for it will be for them.

Photo of Debra Medina: AP Images



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