

## Politicos and journalists evaluate 2008

The Republican Party is in disarray, but it will regroup and recover. The Democrats face the challenge of governing from the middle when the temptation will be to satisfy pent-up demands of liberals.

Those were assessments offered by journalists and political insiders at “The Morning After,” a Nov. 5 forum hosted by the Department of Public Policy.

The forum will be held yearly on the day after elections, said Kenneth Dautrich, associate professor of DPP and moderator, who asked panelists for their assessment of the election just hours after the polls closed.

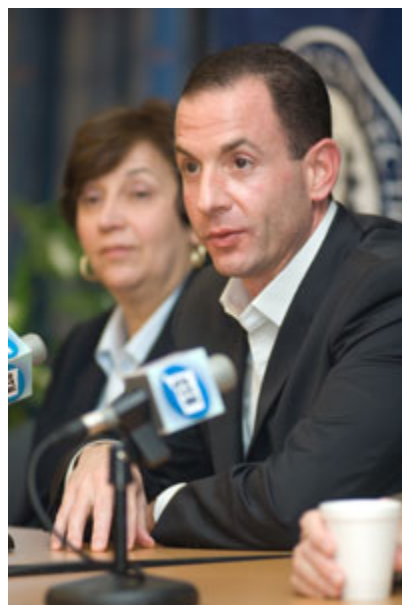
“We lost. We got smoked,” said Chris Healy, Connecticut Republican Party chair.

The GOP will earn its way back by organizing and talking to people about its principles, he said. In Connecticut, that means winning at the city and town hall level and developing coalitions that attract unaffiliated voters.



Ken Dautrich, moderator, with Nancy DiNardo and Roy Occhiogrosso

Photos by Daniel Buttrey



Nancy DiNardo and Roy Occhiogrosso

New England Republicans, who are typically socially moderate and fiscally conservative, are disconnected from the national party and will have a hard time reconnecting if it moves farther to the right and embrace Sarah Palin as a leader, said Mark Pazniokas, chief political writer for the *Hartford Courant* .

The upside for Republicans may be the difficulties that Democrats will face, panelists said.

“The Republican party got a wonderful gift yesterday,” said Kevin Rennie, a former Republican state legislator who now writes a column for the *Hartford Courant* .

The Democrats will no longer be able to unload on President Bush, he said. “This is going to be a very hard time to be president and to be in Congress,” he added.

“Where are the goods?” will be president-elect Barack Obama's

biggest challenge when he and a Congressional Democratic majority assume office and have to govern, said Healy.

Nancy DiNardo, chairwoman of the Connecticut Democratic Party, said Obama recognizes the difficulties but will attract and inspire people to be active in solving the problems the country faces.

“He excites people. Look at the voter turnout,” she said.

Healy credited the Democrats with learning from Ronald Reagan's success in inspiring young people with a message of hope and opportunity.

“They took our playbook and ramped it up and it became digital,” he said.

Panelists agreed that while vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin provided a boost to the Republican ticket at the Convention, the effect “slowly unspooled,” as Pazniokas said, when she did not attract voters beyond the Republican base.



Chris Healy



Mark Pazniokas

Roy Occhiogrosso, a DPP alumnus and a principal with Global Strategy Group, a political consulting company, predicted that Obama will concentrate on four areas: regulatory reform, tax reform, energy policy, and health care.

“I'm sure he'll be fine,” he said. “There's no way he could run the government any worse (than Bush).”

The Connecticut delegation in Congress is small but highly influential, the panelists agreed, citing U.S. Rep. John Larson's swift rise into leadership over ten years, enabling him to run for the Democratic caucus leadership in the new Congress. They also pointed to Senator Christopher Dodd's chairmanship of the Senate Banking Committee, now a critical post, and U.S. Rep. Rosa DeLauro's influential voice.

They disagreed over the role that Senator Joseph Lieberman will have in the new line-up.

Healy said Lieberman is in a “bad spot,” a kind of “no-man's land,” no longer needed to provide a Democratic majority.

But Occhiogrosso said that Lieberman and others could group into a filibuster phalanx.

“I don't buy the idea that he'll become irrelevant,” he said.



Kevin Rennie