

Changed Horizons

How the 2018 election may change the West's future.

By Dave Skinner

The midterm election results are in for 2018. As often happens, the party of the sitting president, Republican Donald J. Trump, lost 39, maybe 40 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives. The new balance of power is 235 Democrats and 199 Republicans, basically the biggest Democratic gain since the Nixon-Watergate-Vietnam midterm in 1974 when the Democrats gained 49 seats and a two-thirds House majority.

Of course, Republicans have had their own blowouts, gaining 54 seats in 1994 and 63 seats in 2010.

In the U.S. Senate, Republicans were able to “gain” two seats out of a potential six in what was seen as a “favorable” map, leaving the GOP with 53 seats and Democrats with 47, including two northeastern “independents” who usually vote with Democrats.

Aside from the parties, and Donald Trump, was 2018 a significant election for resource-producing westerners? In the short run, yes. In the longer term, scary yes.

On the Horizon

In general, the U.S. House of Representatives controls the agenda of the entire federal government, simply because “money bills” begin in the House and are moved on to the Senate for “advice and consent.”

The biggest immediate impact on the West in terms of policy—especially on public lands—depends on the incoming chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, Rep. Raul Grijalva (D-AZ), who will replace longtime chair Rob Bishop (R-UT). What is Grijalva’s political worldview?

In April 2017, Grijalva joined the Center for Biological Diversity (the great state of California later joined) as a co-plaintiff in a federal lawsuit demanding that the United States/Mexico border wall be subjected to the full environmental impact statement process before continuing construction—which would, of course, block construction for years at a minimum.

CBD/Grijalva et al. lost at the district level

in April 2018, but in August the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals took up the case. Finally, Rep. Grijalva sits on CBD’s “Climate Law Institute” advisory board in his spare time.

As for Natural Resources subcommittee

Most pundits have declared, in some form, that the 2018 election didn’t fit the old maxim that “all politics is local,” or even regional.

chairs, in one example, *The Hill* has reported that Rep. Don Beyer (D-VA) is “likely” to chair the Natural Resources oversight subcommittee that would be expected to “investigate” the federal land-management agencies (and their leaders, such as Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke).

Beyer, owner of a string of Volvo dealerships and enough of a Democratic donor to be appointed ambassador to Switzerland by



Rep. Raul Grijalva, D/AZ



Rep. Rob Bishop, R/UT

President Obama, is only in his third term. Endorsed all along by the League of Conservation Voters, Beyer opposes what he calls “Big Oil,” and calls gray wolves “furry friends” in a 2015 *YouTube* video.

Beyer most recently led the opposition to a lame-duck 2018 bill intended to legislatively delist wolves from Endangered Species Act control. His problem? Wolves occupy “just a fraction of their historic range.” While that bill passed 196 to 180, the lame-duck Senate had not acted to get the delisting bill to President Trump.

It’s pretty safe to assume that all the “west-

ern causes” regarding public lands law reform will probably grind to a halt: Endangered Species Act, National Environmental Policy Act, Wilderness Study Areas, Clean Water Act/Waters of the United States, Antiquities Act, and—certainly not last and not least—the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Democratic leadership will likely waste no time at all in passing to the House floor a “full funding, forever” permanent reauthorization package, which will almost certainly pass. Would passage through the Senate to the president’s desk be likely? Quite.

LWCF has always been popular with environmental groups and land trusts that work to flip “environmentally sensitive” lands from the private sector to public ownership, something that most pro-business budget hawks aren’t crazy about.

Unfortunately, in the past 15 years or so, corporate interests—namely Real Estate Investment Trusts wanting to liquidate marginally working forestlands—have joined Greens in lobbying for more LWCF funding. Why? Well, trying to sell marginal forests on the private market for a marginal price is dumb when LWCF enables the public to overpay in the name of “conservation.”

Beyond the Horizon

What about the long run? The pendulum could swing back for the House in 2020, if Democratic Party leadership overreaches as it did prior to the 1994 and 2010 midterms. However, a glance at the 2018 House election results’ map makes stark what the left-wing *Reformer* site called an emerging “sectionalism...between urban/-suburban/ exurban areas and rural areas.” *Politico* analysts Scott Bland and Elena Schneider put it slightly differently, saying that Trump had “undermined conventional wisdom,” with his presidency “bringing more rural voters into the GOP tent while driving away college-educated voters.”

Further, as *Reformer* sees things, “rural areas tend to be whiter, older, more male, and have had less exposure to ethnic diversity and

international exchange. This combined parochial, generational, and racial anxiety.”

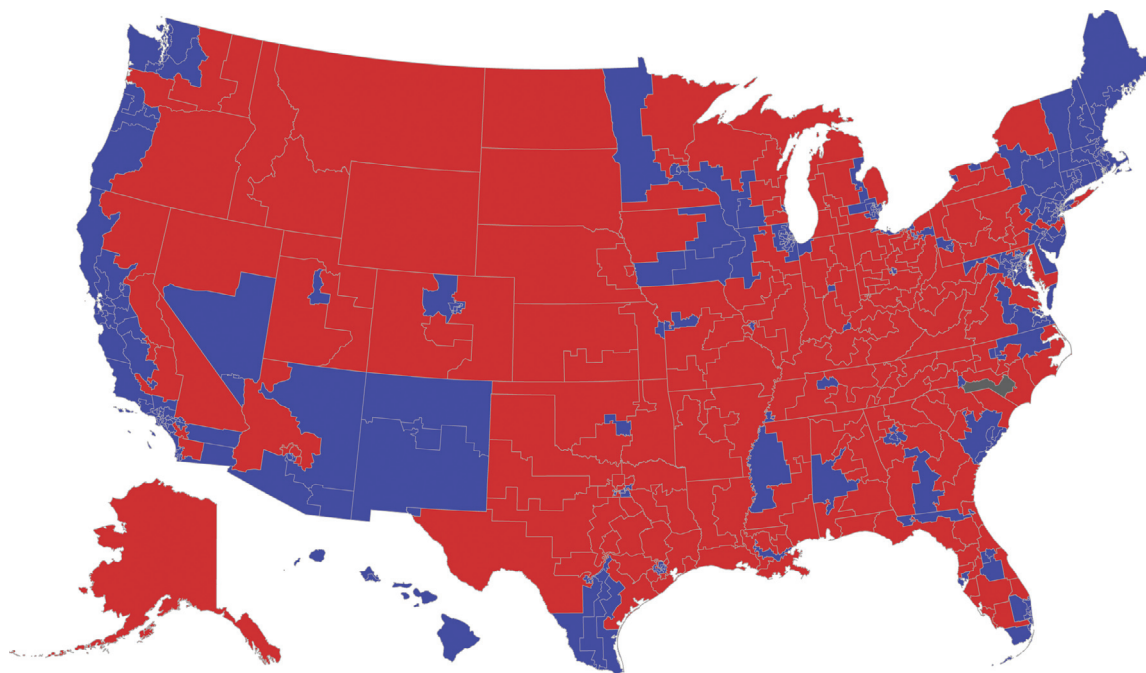
Then, after Thanksgiving, *Politico* published an interesting interactive web page that broke down the incoming freshman class, analyzing 60 new Democratic and 31 new Republican members of the U.S. House, who tended to be “younger, bluer, and more diverse than ever.”

Nevada

This growing national rural/urban split manifested itself directly in the West, with Nevada being the exemplar. While all House seats were “held” by the incumbent party, incumbent Republican Sen. Dean Heller lost. As *Outside Online*’s Elliott Woods explained, Heller had “applauded [Ryan] Zinke’s controversial review of national monuments last year and has proposed legislation to eliminate wilderness study areas.” Heller thereby “lost to Democrat Jacky Rosen, who stuck up for monuments and made public lands a central part of her campaign.”

There were other reasons Heller went down. *RealClearPolitics* analysts Michelle Price and Nicholas Riccardi gave Harry Reid due, deserved credit: “Reid started building the state party for the 2004 election, when Nevada was in a tug-of-war between its western libertarian roots and the Democratic leanings of recent transplants. The party had no permanent staff in nonelection years; now it has double digits.”

Price and Riccardi also noted that Nevada has “only about three million residents, so it’s easy for left-leaning groups to coordinate and have an impact. Most voters are concentrated in Clark County, which includes Las Vegas. It’s a state full of demographic groups that lean Democratic, with 29 percent of its population Latino and only 49 percent white.” Finally, *Politico*’s Bland and Schneider chimed in with the money angle: “Heller had \$35 million spent against him by outside groups, as opposed to \$20



The RealClearPolitics operation is a valuable, even-handed, data-driven resource for political observers, no matter which America they live in. This RCP map of congressional race results shows two combined voting trends: city/country and racial/ethnic “identity politics.” Salt Lake City, Denver and Las Vegas all stand alone, while in California the “blue wave” splashed from the Coast Range divide across the agricultural Central Valley to the Sierra Nevada ridge. Want details on your state? County results (findable at realclearpolitics.com) show that “solid” Montana isn’t. All Montana cities over 25,000 but one and all of Montana’s Indian reservations, voted Democratic.



Ryan Zinke, Sec./Interior



Sen. Harry Reid, D/NV



Rep. Don Beyer, D/VA



Sen. Dean Heller, R/NV

million for Democratic opponent Rep. Jacky Rosen”—whom Reid had recruited first to run for Congress.

New Mexico

Then there is the western state that is now solidly Democratic—New Mexico. Pro-pro-

ducer Congressman Steve Pearce (R) chose to run for governor against fellow U.S. House member Michelle Lujan Grisham (D), both hoping to replace Susanna Martinez (R).

Pearce’s open seat went Democratic, thanks to late results from the Albuquerque suburbs, while Lujan Grisham’s open district stayed Democratic as she won the governorship, thanks in part to what the *Albuquerque Journal* noted were “national left-leaning groups flexing their political muscle on her behalf.”

What about the U.S. Senate race? Mr. Woods from *Outside Online* again: “Martin Heinrich, a Democrat who has also defended national monuments and last year helped to open access to the Sabinoso Wilderness Area, easily defeated his Republican opponent, Mark Rich, who has called for Bureau of Land Management land to be transferred to the states and then privatized.”

Woods also writes for *The Guardian*, which in June 2017 threw away any pretense of objectivity by announcing a “news series” called “This Land Is Your Land.” Readers were told “America’s public lands are in danger” and then asked to “help us [a *British newspaper*!] fight the government sell-off” by funding

reporters (including Mr. Woods) to “aggressively report” a “new series to hold politicians and corporate interests accountable for their environmental policies.” The *Guardian* asked for \$50,000 and readers gave \$114,302. Such targeted funding might help explain the tone of Mr. Woods’ “reporting” to his mostly urban readership.

The Rest of the West

To varying degrees, the big-money, urban/rural split manifested in every western state.

In Utah, Salt Lake City’s seat in Congress shifted back to the Democratic side by 700 votes, while a younger, bluer Mitt Romney (former governor of Massachusetts) theoretically has kept Orrin Hatch’s senate seat in western Republican hands.

In Colorado, most urban House races (Denver and suburbs) showed stomping Democratic majorities over 60 percent, with rural districts (and military-conservative Colorado Springs) going GOP between 54 percent and 61 percent Republican. One eastern Denver suburban district flipped, while the governorship went to very young, very blue, very diverse, very wealthy Democrat Jared Polis, 52 percent to 44 percent. Polis’ election map shows the ski towns, and urban/suburban Front Range, solidly Democrat, with “non-ski” rural Colorado solid Republican.

What about Arizona, which sent Air Force Brigadier General and U.S. Sen. Barry Goldwater to Washington time and time again? And, yeah, John McCain also wore a flight suit, as had Republican candidate and combat Warthog driver Martha McSally. She was running against Kyrsten Sinema for the seat quit by never-Trumper Republican Jeff Flake.

Well, the lady whose most-famous clothing choice was a pink tutu won, despite a Green taking away enough votes to throw the election. There are wild rumors that Gov. Doug Ducey (R) could appoint McSally to take over from Jon Kyl in the late John



Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D/AZ

McCain’s Senate seat, but Arizona plainly chose young, blue and diverse—as *Politico* noted, Sinema is the “first openly bisexual person elected to the Senate.”

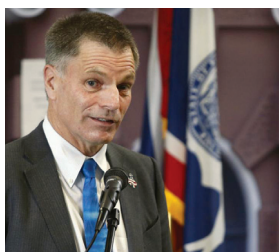
Even in Wyoming, where the “nationals” did nothing against a Republican landslide, it’s worth noting that new Republican Gov. Mark Gordon once chaired Sierra Club Wyoming. He even donated \$2,500 to the Democratic National Committee, and another \$2,000 to John Kerry for president in 2004. Yep.

Looking at a Changed Horizon

Most pundits have declared, in some form, that the 2018 election didn’t fit the old maxim that “all politics is local,” or even regional. National groups (and a few select billionaires) focusing primarily on the Beltway balance of



Rep. Martha McSally, R/AZ



Gov. Mark Gordon, R/WY

power dumped crazy-stupid amounts of money into every race possible, even in “cheap” states that would otherwise be ignored.

The majority of House seat flips came from very close races in suburban “swing” districts, including shared “suburban/rural” House districts that swing because of the city/country effect. In explaining why most of these close House races ended up being Democratic pickups, *RealClearPolitics* guru Sean Trende wrote: “The best explanation I have come up with is that money does matter at the margins, and in this cycle the Democrats’ enormous fund-raising advantage—as well as the late dose of money from [anti-gun, anti-soda billionaire] Michael Bloomberg in key races—really did make a difference in close races.”

So, while rural areas, nationwide as well as in the West, remained Republican, and cities nationwide stayed Democratic, many suburbs, even former “conservative bastion” Orange County, Calif., shifted to the Democrats.

Overall, because of national cash, western trends closely matched the national breakout, which in turn generated the strongest “city-versus-country” voting patterns ever seen. It wasn’t so long ago that metropolitan America had significant numbers of residents “fresh off the farm” or at least with living relations still “back home.” But today, only two percent of Americans, at most, are employed in agriculture, alongside the shrinking portion of Americans who work at “making stuff” out of the resources sent to cities from America’s countryside.

If the balance of power swings again in 2020, whatever new Republicans might be elected from these “re-swung” suburban districts won’t have much, if any, understanding of rural—much less western—issues. Who will help them understand? Hard to say. But it’s even harder to see how a shrinking “producer America” will ever again send enough of their kids to the cities to remind their neighbors (and political leaders) where stuff comes from. ■

Dave Skinner’s neighbors live just out of shotgun range. They are nice neighbors.

NOTE: In mid-December, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke resigned. Effective Jan. 2, 2019, his interim replacement is David Bernhardt. Arizona Gov. Ducey did appoint McSally to complete Sen. John McCain’s Senate term.

Meanwhile, In California

Current House Intelligence Committee chair Devin Nunes (R-CA) was targeted by both the political left and environmentalists in a noisy, \$20-million-plus battle. Nunes nevertheless won by 12 points despite what one news source called “national rage” from the left.

But while Nunes won his election, he will give up the chairmanship in January to Adam Schiff (D-CA), whom *The Hill* reports is “among Trump’s most outspoken critics and has indicated previously that he intends to restart the committee’s investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election.”

That’s not all Schiff may investigate. For example, global-warming group “350.org” called upon him to also start a “congressional investigation into ExxonMobil” for “misleading the public and wrecking the climate.”

So it’s no wonder that just days after the election, the *Fresno Bee* speculated that Nunes might not enjoy being “ranking member” of the committee minority under Chairman Schiff, therefore being open to replacing Ryan Zinke after the (falsely) “scandal-plagued” Interior secretary resigned. ■