

# The Other Primary Story

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Last Tuesday's primary results have generally led to celebration in progressive quarters because of the nominations of Tea Party sympathizers and other radicals such as Christine O'Donnell in Delaware and Carl Paladino in New York. As these candidates join other prominent Republican nominees such as Rand Paul in Kentucky and Sharron Angle in Nevada, there is a growing sense among some that the Republican primary outcomes are hurting their chances for victory in November. This is particularly relevant with regard to the senate seats in Delaware, Kentucky and Nevada where O'Donnell, Rand and Angle are all viewed as beatable candidates. The Paladino nomination while bringing a strange, frightening and off-beat man into the public spotlight has no real electoral relevance as the Democratic nominee for Governor of New York, Andrew Cuomo, would have been the heavy favorite against any Republican.

Democratic celebrations may be a little premature. While it is possible that all three of these candidates will lose, the campaign is far from over and the Democrats will face problems of their own. Currently, the [polling shows the Nevada race too close to call, Paul slightly ahead in the Kentucky race and O'Donnell trailing badly in Delaware](#). This all could change over the next six weeks or so, but a defeat of all these extremists is far from guaranteed.

Jon Stewart hosted a panel discussion on the [Daily Show on Wednesday discussing this question of potential Democratic pitfalls going into November](#). This is an important issue to think about because any Democrats who think winning any of these senate seats simply because the nominee seems like a wacky extremist are badly misreading the current political and media climate. The two major ways the Democrats could miss this opportunity, which were not directly addressed in Stewart's forum, are by assuming the voters all know how extreme the Republican Party candidates are in these races, and ignoring how some Democratic candidates, and thus the party more generally, will be portrayed by the Republicans.

For many people the frightening, bizarre and almost unhinged nature of the statements and positions held by Angle, Paul and O'Donnell, is axiomatic, but it would be an enormous mistake to think that most voters see it this way. While, for example, [O'Donnell's recent comments](#) that,

The conservative movement was told to curl up a fetal position and just stay there for the next eight years, thank you very much. Well, how things have changed. During those dark days when common sense patriotic Americans were looking for some silver lining, they stumbled upon the Constitution...I think it's a little like the chosen people of Israel and the Hebrew scriptures, who cycle through periods of blessing and suffering and then return to the divine principles in their darker days,

may be easy fodder for progressive ridicule, but it are appealing, and almost eloquent, to right wing ears, and not particularly offensive to those in the middle. The point here is that if Democratic strategists think that everybody already knows how extreme O'Donnell is, they will

be making a devastating and costly mistake. This argument will need to be made to the voters in a consistent and ongoing way as the election approaches. A very similar situation exists with regards to the candidacies of Paul and Angle as well.

Democrats might not be the only ones who have been pleased by who has been winning their opponent's primaries. On primary night in New York, Democrats in Northern Manhattan re-nominated their congressman for a 21st term. While Democrats may disagree over whether Rangel essentially did very little wrong and should stay to fight and clear his name or whether [as President Obama has suggested](#), Rangel should resign and preserve his dignity, it is almost certain that Republican strategists were not upset to see Rangel easily dispatch his five challengers.

Any ethics committee hearings involving Rangel or discussions of Democratic hubris and abuses of power will be bad for the Democrats and will almost certainly be exploited by the Republicans. Whether Rangel did anything wrong or not is really only tertiary to this as it is the process and spectacle which will not help the Democrats. Similarly, the reality that Republican abuses of power have been at least as substantial as those by the Democrats will do little to ameliorate Republican efforts to exploit the Rangel situation.

The capture of the Republican Party by extremists, Tea Partiers and the like is a short term opportunity for the Democrats and nothing more. It does not mean any guaranteed victories, but only that it may be a little easier for the Democrats to win if they do their work and do not get lulled into overconfidence with regards to these specific races.