

Tim Scott headed to the US Senate

Written by David A. Love

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South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley just announced her selection of Rep. Tim Scott, a black conservative Republican, to fill the Senate seat being vacated by Jim DeMint.

After the proper trouncing the Republican Party received in the 2012 election, Will Scott help a beleaguered and embattled Republican Party that wants to clean up its grumpy old white man image problem?

The evidence suggests Senator Scott will be useful to Republicans, but only up to a point.

After all, Scott is black, but he is a member of the Tea Party and holds the same extremist positions as his predecessor, who is headed to the Heritage Foundation. And while those positions are popular with the white hard right-wing base, they are turning off everyone else.

At first glance, we should not lose sight of the symbolism here. As Gov. Haley said, it is "a historic day." Tim Scott will become the first black senator from South Carolina, and the first black senator from the South since Blanche Bruce (R-Mississippi), a Reconstruction-era lawmaker who served from 1875 to 1881.

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Scott is only the seventh African-American senator, and the first black GOP senator since 1979, when Edward Brooke (R-Massachusetts) completed his second term in the Senate. Brooke was a liberal, pro-choice Republican who championed civil rights and affordable housing, and often challenged the leader of his party, President Richard Nixon.

In stark contrast to Brooke, Scott is a darling of the Tea Party, whose conservative political views are indistinguishable from DeMint, if not more extreme. His record is one of the most extreme in the Congress, earning a lifetime score of 100 percent from the NRA Political Victory Fund, 100 from the National Right to Life Committee, and 90 from the John Birch Society.

Scott introduced legislation to cut off food stamps to entire families if one family member strikes against an employer. He sponsored a bill to repeal the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare, receiving a consistent zero rating on health issues, disabilities and children's health.

But the soon-to-be senator seems to care about children if they are unborn, as he cosponsored legislation as a state representative to create a "monument on the statehouse grounds to remember all the aborted babies in" South Carolina. In addition, the congressman has voted to defund Planned Parenthood, ban federal funding of abortion, and restrict abortion after 20 weeks in Washington, DC.

On immigration, Scott sponsored legislation modeled after Arizona's anti-immigrant law, and supported legislation eliminating birthright citizenship to children born in the U.S. He also wants to "promote patriotic assimilation" by making English the official language and forcing new immigrants to learn the language.

Haley's task was to choose someone who can win the seat outright in the 2013 special election. In selecting Scott for the Senate seat, Gov. Haley said, "It is very important to me, as a minority female, that Congressman Scott earned this seat. He earned this seat for the person that he is. He earned this seat for the results he has shown."

And he has earned that seat for the value he brings to his party. Like his rabid, recently-defeated colleague Rep. Allen West (R-Florida), Scott will faithfully vouch for the worst policies imaginable, providing cover for the GOP on racially polarizing positions because of his

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skin color. Similarly, conservative women such as Sen. Kelly Ayotte (R-New Hampshire) put a friendly face on the war on women.

Republicans of color such as Scott, Haley, Gov. Bobby Jindal (R-Louisiana) and Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Florida) are popular among conservatives because of their ideas, not their racial or ethnic background. They don't speak to the issues of concern to constituents of color because those voters are not a part of the GOP base. Scott, who beat Strom Thurmond's son for the GOP nomination for the House seat, did not have to concern himself with the black vote because he ran in a district that is 73 percent white. Further, Rubio would have been Romney's running mate had he been able to deliver the Latino vote for Romney in Florida. Black voters are not fooled by a politician with a black face if that person does not speak to their issues in their language.

Ask Artur Davis, who lost the black vote in the Alabama Democratic gubernatorial primary to his white challenger Ron Sparks. Davis became the first black candidate to lose the black vote in a statewide election in Alabama, because he snubbed the black community and courted the white conservative vote instead. Subsequently, Davis proved the black folk right by becoming a Republican and supporting voter ID.

Besides, African-Americans are reminded of Clarence Thomas, whose Supreme Court nomination represented the most cynical form of affirmative action, and an outright assault on a rich legacy left by his predecessor Thurgood Marshall. Justice Thomas' humble roots in Pin Point, Georgia and his attitude of self-reliance made him a Republican favorite. Moreover, he became a tool in the dismantling of civil rights, and a disappointment to African-Americans. As President George W. Bush would say, "You can't get fooled again."

And this is why the Republican experiment of placing darker faces in high places is doomed to fail, even as it may score them some diversity points in the near term.

The Scott appointment, however historic, is pure window dressing, a facade of diversity, and more of the same old Tea Party tricks. Perhaps the face of the Republican Party is changing—or at least some faces—but their message of extremism and intolerance remains the same. Cosmetics are no substitute for a substantive policy shift. And with that strategy, the GOP shores up the base, yet yields no black voters, no white moderates and no women.

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