

Have Democrats Started a Circular Firing Squad?

Written by Rich Miller

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A few weeks ago, I ran into a fairly high-level Illinois Democrat at a party in Springfield. He said he'd taken my advice and was reading the [New York Times](#) ' ["Disunion" Civil War blog](#) . He also said he'd come to the conclusion that President Barack Obama should follow President Abraham Lincoln's lead by suspending habeas corpus and then arresting all Tea Party-affiliated Republican congressmen.

I couldn't believe what I was hearing, but he said he was dead serious.

I always thought this guy was a centrist, pragmatic sort. But he was obviously caught up in the national meltdown over the debt-ceiling fight. He was furious beyond comprehension. Actually, considering that Congress' job-approval rating is now rapidly approaching zero, his bone-chilling anger is probably comprehensible to a lot of people.

So I kinda get why some Democrats are all wiggled out over Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan's attendance at U.S. House Speaker John Boehner's recent fundraiser. Madigan, who is also the chair of the Democratic Party of Illinois, attended the fundraiser as a guest of Terry Duffy, who was hosting the event. Duffy is also chair of CME, a very big company that has threatened to move part of its operations out of Illinois because of the state's recent tax hike.

Anyway, a whole lot of Democrats I know are just furious about just about everything these days. They felt pushed around when George W. Bush was president, and they wanted President Obama to push back when he was elected. Instead, Obama has cut deals with

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Republicans and allowed himself to be bullied, at least in many Democratic eyes.

Many of the Republicans I know are consumed with anger as well. I saw a poll last week that showed 96 percent of Republican primary voters in a southern-Illinois region believe the state is on the wrong track. Considering that the poll had a margin of error of 4 percent, that wrong-track number could actually be 100 percent.

I guess I shouldn't be too surprised, especially after all the calamities that this state and this country have been through the past few years.

The congressional debt-ceiling fight seemed to bring everything to a head and became so vicious that at one point some pundit or another claimed that America was engaged in a "Cold Civil War." Partisans aren't shooting guns at each other, but their hatred and venom are more intense, and the divisions between them are far wider than at any time I can remember.

So attending a function for the benefit of the Republican House speaker who battled the Democratic president is considered almost an act of treason by angry Democrats.

Governor Pat Quinn was also apparently swept up in the national mania. Quinn can be a very partisan Democrat when he wants to be, and he has always been a staunch defender of Obama, no matter what.

Quinn let out a little bit of anger when he was asked about Madigan's attendance at that fundraiser last week. The governor whacked Madigan for his "support" of Boehner, which Quinn said Boehner did not deserve.

Quinn also chided Madigan for not attending a recent Obama event in a small town in Illinois, saying the party chair should support the Democratic president, even though this was a White House event, not an Obama campaign function.

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Madigan's spokesperson angrily retorted that Madigan didn't "support" Boehner because he didn't buy a fundraiser ticket and added that his boss interpreted the 2010 election results as a desire by the public to force both parties to work together.

Madigan's 2010 election analysis is actually shared by the president himself, yet hyper-partisans on both sides, including apparently Quinn, want no rapprochement of any sort.

For years, the Democrats in this state have made fun of the Republicans because the hardcore right wing and the "business class" set were always at each other's throats. One side was accused of being "too pure" and the other was accused of "selling out to the Democrats." The Republicans formed a permanent circular firing squad. As a result, they've been out of power for a very long time.

Quinn and some other Democrats apparently never learned that lesson.

Rich Miller also publishes Capitol Fax (a daily political newsletter) and CapitolFax.com.