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TUESDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2010

Tester faces liberal furor over DREAM Act vote

Jon Tester's vote Saturday against the DREAM Act has sparked bitter backlash from liberals that continues to play out on the web this week.

The blogosphere and twitterscape is roiling with accusations that Tester abandoned his progressive base by voting against the measure, [which would have created a path to citizenship for certain undocumented children who were brought at a young age to the United States by their parents.](#)

The DREAM Act was a favorite issue of many progressives, civil rights groups, and immigration advocates who saw it as a solid and achievable first step toward comprehensive immigration reform. Five Democrats, including both of Montana's Democratic senators, voted against it.

(You can read more about the DREAM Act and meet a Montanan whose hopes may have hinged on it's passing, [here](#) and [here](#).)

Max Baucus' "no" vote came as no surprise to Democrats, few of whom consider Baucus a progressive, but Tester has become a political punching bag for the left.

Byron York at the [Washington Examiner](#) first noted the "ugly breakup on the left" on Saturday when he reported on influential progressive blogger [Markos Moulitsas](#)' outrage over Tester's "no" vote on the DREAM Act:

Markos Moulitsas, the influential founder of the lefty website DailyKos, used to love Montana Democratic Sen. Jon Tester. Starting back in December 2004, when Moulitsas first [praised](#) Tester, then a farmer-turned-state-legislator, as a Democrat

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who "naturally speaks the language of rural America," the DailyKos has portrayed Tester as the cutting edge of a movement by which once deep-red western states would become swing states and then, perhaps, permanently blue.

In June 2006, Moulitsas was rhapsodic when Tester won the Democratic primary to challenge then-Sen. Conrad Burns. "What a great night," Moulitsas [wrote](#). "Not only did the best Democrat win, but so did Conrad Burns' worst nightmare. Say hello to the next Senator from the great state of Montana." Electing Tester and other favored progressives would create "a whole new ballgame in Washington DC," Moulitsas added. "Let's do everything we can to make it happen."

Moulitsas certainly did his part, promoting the Tester campaign -- "This is the future face of the Democratic Party," he [swooned](#) -- and contributing \$1,500 to Tester in October 2006. When Tester defeated Burns, part of a Democratic wave that took over the Senate and House that year, Moulitsas was ecstatic.

Now that's all a bitter memory. On Capitol Hill, Democrats have been using the lame-duck session to try to ram through some key unfinished parts of their agenda. Among them is the DREAM Act immigration bill, a favorite of Moulitsas'. On Friday, Jon Tester, once the darling of DailyKos, announced that he would vote against it.

Moulitsas' reaction was swift and furious. "Jon Tester to vote against DREAM," Moulitsas [tweeted](#) Friday night. "Good luck getting re-elected, a--hole." Moulitsas began re-tweeting negative comments about Tester -- one said, "Sen. Tester's active misrepresentation of DREAM act isn't just burning his bridges, it's going at them with a blowtorch." And then Moulitsas added his own final remark: "Anyone who votes to punish innocent kids is a de facto a--hole."

Moulitsas later [had this to say](#) on the [Daily Kos](#):

There are Democrats I expect to be assholes. I never thought Jon Tester would be among them.

Anybody who votes to punish innocent kids is an asshole. Plain and simple. And while I expect it from Democrats like Ben Nelson and C-Street denizen Mark Pryor, I honestly thought Jon Tester was different. I was wrong. I am now embarrassed that I worked so hard to help get him elected in 2006. I feel personally betrayed.

Not only will I do absolutely nothing to help his reelection bid, but I will take every opportunity I get to remind people that he is so morally bankrupt that he'll try to score political points off the backs of innocent kids who want to go to college or serve their country in the military.

To me, he is the Blanche Lincoln of 2012 -- the Democrat I will most be happy to see go down in defeat. And he will. Nothing

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guarantees a Republican victory more than trying to pretend to be one of them.

To which Matt Singer, founder of Left in the West, responded that [Tester was wrong on the DREAM Act, but Kos was wrong about Tester](#). Singer argues that progressives need to take the long view (please read Singer's entire post at the link above for the complete context) and not be too harsh on one vote by Tester. According to Singer:

- **Change Comes "Slow" Even When It is "Fast."** We're in a period of rapid change. The last two years have been among Congress's most productive. That said -- it feels absolutely glacial when experiencing it in the 24-hour news cycle. When we consider historic periods of "rapid change," we gloss over the entire 1960s as though it didn't take 10 years.
- **We've Had Some Huge Victories this Congress.** The repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell, the first comprehensive health care reform in history, ARRA, Lilly Ledbetter, etc., etc.
- **Montana is Montana.** There's an old joke about Missoula -- that it's nice and only 15 minutes from Montana. Missoula also stands out as the only historic Dem stronghold that held this legislative election. If you think that every Dem eyeing holding or winning statewide office isn't looking at an election where we lost House seats in 3 Reservation districts, Butte, and the heart of Helena, then you've misjudged how political actors behave.
- **Jon Tester is Jon Tester.** He's a great guy -- smart, genuine, honest, down-to-Earth. He's also not a Paul Wellstone, Barbara Boxer, or Sherrod Brown. He actually disagrees with them and me sometime. The only painful thing I see in the criticism of Jon is that he's entirely a calculating political machine. Jon's no naif, but he really gives a shit about this stuff.
- **We Didn't Do Our Job.** To be honest, I had read one news story in Montana about the DREAM Act (and seen virtually no tweets or Facebooks about it) prior to the vote. John Adams wrote a great piece about a UM student who would be affected. But here's the deal -- you can't fail to organize and build a campaign on an issue for something longer than a couple weeks if you genuinely want to move a U.S. Senate office. At the request of friends, I asked both Senators where they stood on this issue and got word early that they didn't see eye-to-eye with me. Springing vitriol after a vote is unfair -- especially to a friend.

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Singer also points out that “both of our Senators voted to repeal Don't Ask, Don't Tell and further noting (and emphasizing) that Rep. Rehberg opposed both DADT repeal and the DREAM Act.”

Helena immigration attorney and reform activist [Shahid Haque-Hausrath](#), took issue with Singer's argument in a lengthy response on [his blog](#):

Singer is mistaken that Montana's political environment has given Tester no incentive to rethink this stances. In Montana's 2009 legislative session, over 10 anti-immigrant bills were proposed. The cumulative effect of these bills would have been identical to Arizona's SB 1070. [I wrote about these bills extensively](#) as I worked with the Montana Human Rights Network and the ACLU to defeat them. All of these bills [were ultimately rejected](#) by the Montana legislature, with Democrats taking a party stance opposing these prejudiced and reactionary bills. The Montana Democrats' resounding show of disapproval for anti-immigrant legislation should have given Tester a reason to re-think his stances.

Then Kos [chimed in again](#) with some statements from Montanans who participated in a [survey](#) sponsored by a group called Progressive Change Campaign Committee, and adding at the end that those who “punish children for something they did not do” can “rot in hell”. One of those responses came from a Bozeman university professor named Petrus C Marten:

"I am nauseated by this basically racist stand. I am an immigrant myself. One of my children is adopted from Russia."

Tester's vote wasn't just noted by the “far left” of the Democratic party. GOP wunderkind and Public Service Commissioner-elect [Travis Kavulla](#) chimed in on the [Electric City Weblog](#), and the Montana Republican Party piled on with an e-mail blast today entitled “Tester's terrible, horrible, no good, very bad week,” in which they cited Kos' furious response to Tester's vote.

It's important to note that Tester's “no” vote on the DREAM Act isn't some late shift for Montana's junior Senator. As his staff has told me in recent days, “[Tester] has—and always had—firm beliefs about immigration policy.”

He voted against the DREAM Act three years ago, and said again in September, when the Senate was considering an amendment that would have included the DREAM Act in a defense spending bill, that he would vote against it then. So Montana progressives shouldn't be at all surprised by what happened on Saturday.

That doesn't take away from their fury this week. Time will tell if this vote will have an impact on Tester's reelection bid, but as one liberal activist I spoke with on Friday said, "I will never carry a clipboard for Jon Tester again."

If that attitude is pervasive among Montana liberals, that has to concern Tester's camp. After all, Tester narrowly defeated Conrad Burns in 2006 and he owes much of that narrow victory to the hard work of the liberal activists who are now so angry over his DREAM Act vote.

As I was writing this post, this amusing video appeared in my inbox:

UPDATE: Politico also [reported](#) on the liberal ire over Tester's vote. I think this statement illustrates why the backlash is so newsworthy:

"... the liberal netroots were a critical part of Tester's campaign machinery in 2006, helping him raise sufficient funds to upend party favorite John Morrison in the primary election.

ActBlue, which acts as a clearinghouse for Democratic fundraising, helped Tester haul in \$342,000 from more than 10,500 donors during his primary alone."

Also, Adam Green, co-founder of the [Progressive Change Campaign Committee](#), said the following in an e-mail regarding the survey the PCCC sent out:

"The people we surveyed are the ground troops Jon Tester will be depending on in 2012, including some very influential Democratic operatives in the state. Overwhelming, they were disgusted with his vote and considered it to be made out of fear -- and to have played into people's fears -- instead of being made out of principle. Tester was once known as a bold prairie populist who was willing to fight for the little guy, and if he wants to prevent the enthusiasm gap that crushed so many

Democrats in 2010, he needs to stop playing defense and start crusading for the popular progressive change he campaigned on in 2006."

Green added that the PCCC has [run ads in Montana before](#) and will be "pushing Tester to act boldly in 2011."

UPDATE: These posts are coming so fast and furious these days I can't keep track of them. I failed to mention above that [jhwylgirl at Missoula's 4and20 Blackbird's is also mad:](#)

"I've slept on this two nights, and I've failed to find a moral or a logical reason for Tester's vote, other than pandering for votes.

I guess I'm one of those idealistic ones who expects the people I vote for to do the right thing. Even when it's tough."

[Pogie at Helena's Intelligent Discontent is also disappointed:](#)

"I've had a couple of days to process my feelings of frustration about Senator Tester's disappointing vote on the DREAM Act, a sensible and fair piece of legislation that would not only have provided opportunity for a more realistic position on immigration and increased national security, but had the added benefit of being the moral choice. To demonize young people eager to serve in the military and attend college for the sake of a few votes is the kind of cynical realpolitik that Montana voters rejected in 2006."

[Rob Kailey at Left in the West says, "what the hell did you expect":](#)

"[Most of the Montana left disagrees with Tester](#) on this vote, me very much included, and yet we expect the man to break faith with what he said he believes/would do/has done. There is no politician alive today who us good voting folk will agree with 100% of the time. So, what can be expected?"

I'm sure I've missed a lot more out there. I'm also sure there are plenty of Montanans, and Democrats, who support Tester's vote. Please feel free to add to the discussion in the comments.

POSTED BY JOHN S. ADAMS AT 2:08 PM   SHARETHIS

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