



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on October 31, 2010

2010 Elections: Dividing the Spoils

Last-minute polls by Rasmussen and Cook are continuing to show big gains for Republicans on Tuesday. And jockeying for positions of leadership in the 112th Congress is now out in the open.

In his [“The Crystal Ball’s Final Calls”](#) for Rasmussen Reports, political commentator Larry Sabato raised raising the total [gain in the House] to +55 net R seats. In the Senate, Sabato estimates a net gain of 8 seats by the Republicans. Political analyst [Charlie Cook agrees](#): To be honest, I think the odds are higher that [House gains will be] over 60 than under 40. If he is wrong and Republicans fail to take control of the House, Cook said he’ll be sacking groceries.



Chairmanship for the House Republican Conference is already turning into a [free-for-all](#), according to Politico.com, now that Rep. Mike Pence (R-Ind.) [has suggested he might step down](#) in order to be free to run in the presidential election in 2012.

The House Republican Conference is responsible for electing House Republican leadership and approving GOP member committee assignments, as well as acting as the Republican message center to the media. At this point, Rep. Jeb Hensarling (R-Texas; [Freedom Index](#) rating: 90 percent) is the leading candidate. As the former chairman of the conservative Republican Study Committee, he has close ties to the current House Minority Whip Eric Cantor (R-Va., FI 85) and has publicly supported House Minority Leader John Boehner (R-Ohio, FI 89). But others are eyeing that position, including Cathy McMorris Rodgers, (R-Wash., FI 85) and Rep. Jason Chaffetz, (R-Utah, FI 93).

The Committee on Energy and Commerce, currently chaired by Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif., FI 8), has jurisdiction over national energy policy, consumer affairs, and interstate and foreign commerce, with numerous subcommittees on oversight, communications, health, and the environment. Joe Barton (R-TX, FI 83), Fred Upton (R-MI, FI 70) and Cliff Stearns (R-FL, FI 78) all are openly contesting for the coveted chairmanship position for this committee.

The National Republican Congressional Committee, currently chaired by Rep. Pete Sessions (R-Texas, FI 87), directs financial contributions to Republican candidates and organizations. Considered a fast track to higher positions, the committee’s chairman is facing an internecine squabble with Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif., FI 86).

On the Democratic side, House Minority Leader would fall to Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif., FI 0), if she wants it. As *Time* magazine [just reported](#), however, Pelosi might just retire rather than return to second-class citizenship. Not only would her retirement open up the minority seat in the House, it might just also open the floodgates of retirement for other Democrats who feel the same way, including Rep. George Miller (D-Calif., FI 13), Rep. Zoe Lofgren (D-Calif., FI 10), Rep. Louise Slaughter (D-N.Y., FI 5), and Rep.



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John Conyers (D-Mich., FI 13). Long-time Democrat grunt Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md., FI 3) would likely slide into Pelosi's vacancy, but has a potential challenger, Rep. John Larson (D-Conn., FI 10).

One of the noisiest and potentially nastiest challenges is shaping up over Senator Harry Reid's position as Senate Majority Leader. Described as "excruciatingly delicate, the position of Senator Charles Schumer (D-N.Y., FI 3) for Reid's spot is complicated by the fact that Reid hasn't lost the election yet, and Schumer is a close personal friend of Reid to whom he also owes a great deal politically. Reid [created a special post](#) for Schumer in 2006 as Democratic vice chairman, and gave him a seat on the Senate Finance Committee as well. As noted by one of Schumer's advisers, Phil Singer, Harry Reid has played a key role in helping Chuck Schumer become the senator he is today, and Chuck knows that better than anyone else.

In fact, Schumer just sent \$500,000 to support Reid's re-election efforts, along with \$20,000 to Senator Patrick Leahy in Vermont, \$50,000 to Senator Michael Bennet in Colorado, \$50,000 to help Senator Patty Murray in Washington, \$50,000 to Senator Russ Feingold in Wisconsin, and another \$50,000 to help Senator Barbara Mikulski in Maryland. All of these checks will make it easier for Schumer to ask for their help assuming that Reid fails to win on Tuesday. Further complicating Schumer's not-so-silent run for Reid's slot, however, is the effort by Senator Richard Durbin (D-Ill., FI 0), who also has his eye on Reid's seat. Durbin has traveled extensively during the election to support Democratic candidates in California, Delaware, Kentucky, Missouri, Pennsylvania, Washington, and Wisconsin. And just recently he too has supported Reid's faltering campaign with two trips to Nevada.

In an historical footnote, when Democratic Majority Leader Tom Daschle lost his re-election in 2006, Reid had already nailed down sufficient support within just hours of the election for his elevation to his present position as Majority Leader.

The Freedom Index (FI) [rates each congressman mentioned above](#) on their adherence to constitutional principles of limited government, fiscal responsibility, national sovereignty, and a traditional foreign policy of avoiding foreign entanglements. The FI ratings referenced above for various congressmen are the cumulative scores for the four semi-annual indexes (each covering 10 key votes) that were published for the current (111th) Congress. The average House score for the fourth (final) index for the 111th Congress was a dismal 40 percent, with only 13 of the 435 Representatives earning scores of 100. The average Senate score was an equally dispiriting 41, with 26 Senators earning ratings of 100. A careful review of the FI numbers of incoming representatives, however, provides some encouragement that those numbers for the 112th Congress will be measurably, perhaps significantly, higher, regardless of how the contests for each committee are settled.

As caustic political commentator H. L. Mencken used to say, "Every election is a sort of advance auction of stolen goods." How the spoils will ultimately be divided, therefore, remains to be seen.



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