



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on February 10, 2011

Is Webb Too Conservative for the Democrats?

Senator James Webb the conservative Democrat from Virginia who defeated incumbent moderate Republican Senator George Allen in 2006, has announced his retirement from the Senate. Retirement may not be the right word, given that Webb served just one term. But he is leaving elective politics nonetheless.



Webb won't run again, [he says](#), and plans to return to the private sector. Beyond that, he didn't offer much explanation for his decision.

His departure will leave the seat open for Allen, who lost the election to Webb because [he unwisely called](#) a Democrat spy [at a campaign event](#) a "macaca," [a racial term](#) in his mother's country, Tunisia. He spent the remainder of the campaign apologizing to no avail. It didn't much matter. Allen is a typical Republican conservative whose principal concern is the economy and money. Webb is a visceral, cultural conservative.

Webb's leaving also [doesn't help](#) the Democrats' chances in the Senate in 2012 beyond the obvious opening for Allen. Two other top Democrat Senators, [Joe Lieberman](#) (I-Conn.) and [Kent Conrad](#) (D-S.D.) will not run, which could turn the Senate over to the Republicans. If they retain the U.S. House in 2012, President Barack Obama, if he wins a second term, is in for an interesting four years.

Why He's Retiring

The reason Webb wants to leave, most likely, is that a man with his sense of honor could not abide swimming in the cesspool of Capitol Hill. A Naval Academy graduate and Marine Corps officer in Vietnam, [Webb received](#) the [Navy Cross](#) for bravery in action. He speaks his mind bluntly.

Examining Webb's [beliefs and writings](#) sheds some light on his decision.

Webb is, as [Andrew Ferguson wrote](#) in the *Weekly Standard* during his campaign, a "blood-and-soil conservative." Reprising a few lines from Webb's book, [Born Fighting: How the Scots-Irish Shaped America](#), Ferguson explains how conservative Webb really is:

The culture so dramatically symbolized by the Southern redneck [is] the greatest inhibitor of the plans of the activist Left and the cultural Marxists for a new kind of society altogether.

From the perspective of the activist Left, [rednecks] are the greatest obstacles to what might be called the collectivist taming of America, symbolized by the edicts of political correctness. And for the last fifty years the Left has been doing everything in its power to sue them, legislate against their interests, mock them in the media, isolate them as idiosyncratic, and publicly humiliate their



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traditions in order to make them, at best, irrelevant to America's future growth.

The people Webb refers to in that passage are Southern whites such as himself, and the "activist Left" is the coterie of crazies who have controlled the Democrat Party for the last 30 years: Hillary Clinton, John Kerry, etc.

Indeed, [Ferguson noted](#), the Democrats who sought Webb for a candidate because he rightly opposed the war in Iraq likely didn't know what they were getting. Webb is also pro-gun, for instance, a fact that left Ferguson's interlocutors at a campaign event for Webb in leftist Arlington, Va., struggling to explain their support.

This amusing exchange is an example:

She said she was a Quaker. I asked her whether she'd read any of Webb's war novels. "Are they violent?" she asked. "Maybe I should read one."

Among those Arlingtonians who do know more about Webb, enthusiasm is often muted. As chairman of the County Board a decade ago, Ellen Bozman helped bring about Arlington's continuing era of Democratic dominance. At the party she told me that many of her acquaintances had expressed reservations about her candidate.

"I have friends who say they'll vote for him, but reluctantly," she said. "His service as a Reagan administration official, that bothers some people. And they worry — about other things."

"Like affirmative action?" I said.

"There are concerns here and there," she said.

"And guns," I said. "He's incredibly pro-gun."

"There can be reasonable differences Democrats can have," she said. "I had a cousin who had guns. He hunted. Of course, that was in rural Illinois."

"And the Confederacy. He really likes the Confederacy. He named his son after Robert E. Lee."

"One friend tells me she just won't feel right voting for him," Mrs. Bozman said. "I say, He'll listen. He'll learn."

In short, the leftist Democrats who planned to vote for Webb thought they could "educate" him about how to vote because he is a "complex thinker," as another said. In fact, he is Southerner [proud of](#) his Confederate ancestors who likes guns and thinks a man man's merit, not melanin, is what counts.

Which brings up affirmative action. It is Webb's *bête noire*. He once called it "state-sponsored racism" and [recently penned](#) an article for the *Wall Street Journal* that flatly stated such programs are harmful to whites:

Government-enforced diversity policies have marginalized many white workers ... [and] now favor anyone who does not happen to be white....

Affirmative action was designed to recognize the uniquely difficult journey of African-Americans ... [b]ut the extrapolation of this logic to all "people of color" — especially since 1965, when new immigration laws dramatically altered the demographic makeup of the U.S. — moved affirmative action ... toward discrimination, this time against whites. It has also lessened the focus on assisting African-Americans....

Those who came to this country in recent decades from Asia, Latin America and Africa did not



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suffer discrimination from our government, and in fact have frequently been the beneficiaries of special government programs. The same cannot be said of many hard-working white Americans, including those whose roots in America go back more than 200 years....

Nondiscrimination laws should be applied equally among all citizens, including those who happen to be white.

That likely didn't sit well with the ruling elites in the Democrat Party.

Webb is also an economic populist who believes the middle-class is getting the shaft, and worries about the nation's manufacturing base being shipped overseas. He [has written](#) eloquently about overpaid corporate chieftains and underpaid workers, noting such statistics as the following:

Incestuous corporate boards regularly approve compensation packages for chief executives and others that are out of logic's range. As this newspaper has reported, the average CEO of a sizeable corporation makes more than \$10 million a year, while the minimum wage for workers amounts to about \$10,000 a year, and has not been raised in nearly a decade. When I graduated from college in the 1960s, the average CEO made 20 times what the average worker made. Today, that CEO makes 400 times as much.

In one case, Webb understates the case. The CEO of Wal Mart, Christopher Ferrara, reported in his book, [The Church And The Libertarian](#), earns 1,551 times what the average "sales associate" earns.

Webb sees something wrong with that. He's right, particularly given that Wal Mart wants to externalize its healthcare costs by putting its workers into government health-insurance programs.

Webb in the Party of Reid and Pelosi

Yet Webb's straight-to-the-bone conservatism didn't help him vote the right way on the floor of the Senate. To cite just one terrible instance, Webb recently [voted to repeal](#) the "don't ask don't tell" policy that prohibits open homosexuals from serving in the military. He [knows better](#), [given his](#) open and vehemently stated hostility to women serving in combat units, and likely held his nose doing it. [He voted against](#) an effort to repeal it in May because it would have been done without a thorough review.

On the other hand, [he recently voted](#) to repeal a provision of ObamaCare that required businesses to file a 1099 for every purchase of more than \$600. Though he is wrong on abortion and other social issues, Webb is, in a profound sense, the friend of the little guy. Indeed, if he is going to "educated," he's likely to be more educated in the Right direction, not the Left one.

Beyond that, Webb is conservative in another sense: his manifest and manly loyalty. Last week, [he offered](#) a [touching remembrance](#) of Ronald Reagan on [the centennial](#) of the 40th President's birth:

It was truly an inspiring time in my life to have worked for an individual who had the leadership qualities that Ronald Reagan demonstrated. He knew how to inspire our countrymen. He knew how to bring strong personalities together to work toward the good of the country and for its future. He knew how to make hard decisions. One of the great qualities that he had was that he was never afraid to take responsibility for the consequences of any of those decisions. That motivated everyone who served in his Administration....

Ronald Reagan campaigned based on our national greatness, on the intrinsic good of our society and on restoring our place at the top of the world community. I can vividly remember in the summer of 1980 when Ronald Reagan made a speech at the Veterans of Foreign Wars convention and just mentioned, as he was so wont to do with symbolic phrases, that Vietnam had been a



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noble cause. He had the media following him around the country mocking the comment, only five years after the fall of South Vietnam. But for those of us who had stepped forward and served in order to attempt to bring democracy to South Vietnam, that was a great moment of inspiration. ...

When Ronald Reagan left the White House, our military had been rebuilt, our people had regained their pride in our country and in their optimism for its future. The United States was again recognized as the leading nation in the world community. The failed governmental concept that had produced the Soviet Union was on the verge of imploding, not because of external attack but at the hands of its own citizens who could look to the West and see a better way of life.

To paraphrase an old saying, you never know when you're making history. You only know when you did. Ronald Reagan did make history, and I was proud to be a small part of it.

Webb ran as a Democrat because he opposed the war in Iraq, and he likely thought he could chart his own path in the party of Reid and Pelosi. He was wrong.

And that might be the real reason he will not run again.



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