



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on February 10, 2010

McCain May Get by With Help From His Friends

Even in John McCain's home state, the former Alaska governor he plucked from national obscurity to be his running mate in 2008 appears to be more popular with the Republican voters than McCain. Last November, a Rasmussen poll showed the Arizona Senator in a virtual tie with likely primary challenger J.D. Hayworth in this year's U.S. Senate race.



McCain, a senator who once favored term limits for members of Congress, is already campaigning, with town hall appearances and radio ads, to win his fifth consecutive six-year term in November. But first he will have to get by Hayworth and other challengers in the August primary.

Hayworth, who served in the U.S. House for 12 years and was until recently a radio talk show host, is an all but formally declared challenger. He is expected to announce his candidacy next week.

That November poll showed that Hayworth, who had used his radio show to attack McCain on immigration reform and the Senator's opposition to the Bush tax cuts among other issues, had pulled to within two points of the incumbent, being the choice 43 percent of likely Republican primary voters to 45 percent for McCain. The poll has a statistical margin of error of four percent. But a January 10 poll showed McCain moving to a substantial lead, ahead of Hayworth by 22 points, 53 to 31. Former Minuteman leader Chris Simcox drew four percent support, while three percent preferred some other candidate and eight percent were undecided. The surge for McCain followed news that 2008 Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin will be campaigning for him in his home state.

"Bringing in Palin is significant for a candidate who has always had a troubled relationship with the Republican base," said the Rasmussen Report. "Polling last fall found that 61% of Arizona Republicans said McCain was out of touch with the party base." Nearly as many of the state's Republicans, 59 percent, believe Palin "shares the values of most GOP voters throughout the nation," the report said. As a result, the Senate veteran who topped the party's national ticket just 15 months ago is now reaching for coattails from conservative figures of lesser rank. Along with Palin, newly elected Senator Scott Brown of Massachusetts is committed to campaigning for McCain and former Congressman Dick Armey of Texas, whose FreedomWorks organization has played a major role in the populist Tea Party movement, has announced his support for the Senator.

McCain, meanwhile, has been repositioning himself for a head-on collision with the more conservative Hayworth. A *New York Times* report on the Arizona race noted that: "Mr. McCain now sharply criticizes the bailout bill he voted for, pivoted from his earlier position that the Guantanamo Bay detention facility



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should be closed, offered only a muted response to the Supreme Court's decision undoing campaign finance laws and backed down from a statement that gays in the military would be O.K. by him if the military brass were on board." Indeed, when the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff recently echoed President Obama's recommendation to repeal the "Don't ask, don't tell policy" and let homosexuals serve in the armed forces openly, McCain was quick to voice his strong opposition.

The policy shifts, along with the help from his friends on the right, have apparently helped him grow in the esteem of those Rasmussen has identified as likely Republican primary voters. (Arizona has an open primary, so Democrats and independents may also vote in the GOP race). The January survey showed McCain enjoying at least a somewhat favorable rating by 74 percent of the likely voters, while 45 percent registered "Very Favorable" opinion of the Senator, up 10 points from last fall. Hayworth's favorable rating drooped nine points to 58 percent. Ironically, at a time when the Republican Party appears to be on a roll, with wins last November in the Virginia and New Jersey gubernatorial contests and in last month's special Senate election in Massachusetts, Rasmussen found 75 percent of Republican voters nationally say their congressional leaders are out of touch with the people.

Hayworth, a former sportscaster, was elected to the U.S. House in the Republican "tsunami" of 1994 and served six terms. His reputation was tarnished, however, by reports that he had received money and favors, including sports skyboxes, from lobbyist Jack Abramoff. He lost the seat to Democrat Harry Mitchell in 2006. He later became a provocative talk show host on right-leaning radio station KFYT in Phoenix. There, he went after McCain, whom he supported as a presidential candidate in 2000, on a number of issues, most notably the Senator's support for immigration reform that would include a "path to citizenship" for illegal residents. The issue plagued McCain in his 2008 presidential campaign, as opponents of the plan called it amnesty for the illegals and he eventually backed away from his stand, even to the point of saying he would vote against his own reform bill, a measure he co-sponsored with Sen. Edward M. Kennedy. Hayworth, apparently fearing an influx of Haitians, recently warned his listeners to "get ready for earthquake amnesty." Hayworth has also done his part to keep the "birther" movement alive, frequently devoting programs to the question of whether Barack Obama was born outside of the United States and is therefore ineligible to be President.

He resigned from the radio station after McCain filed a complaint with the Federal Election Commission, claiming that Hayworth was taking unfair political advantage of his spot on the licensed airwaves. But Hayworth is not alone as a right-of-center critic of McCain, who has frequently drawn fire for his support for campaign finance restrictions and opposition to a constitutional amendment to define marriage as between one man and one woman, as well as his support for immigration reform and his past opposition to the Bush tax cuts. In Arizona's presidential primary in 2008, McCain took less than half — 47.2 percent — of the vote in his home state. It was a clear win in a multi-candidate race, but less than impressive for a favorite son.

But McCain has enjoyed steady support among "moderate" Republicans, as well as independents and Democrats, a key consideration in an open primary. And he remains a potent fund-raiser, having thus far a reported \$5 million on hand for this year's race. His reputation as a war hero who suffered through five and a half years as a prisoner in North Vietnam doesn't hurt either. And even Hayworth speaks respectfully of the McCain's long tenure in the Senate.

"We all respect and admire and respect John for his service," he told the *Times*. "But he's been there too long and it's time for him to come home."

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