



Senate Races

Republicans must defend 23 of their 49 seats this year, while Democrats have only 12 of their current 49 seats at stake. (The Senate's two Independents, Lieberman of Connecticut and Sanders of Vermont, both caucus with and usually vote with the Democrats.) Three senior Republicans — John Warner of Virginia, Pete Domenici of New Mexico, and Wayne Allard of Colorado — are retiring, while the 12 Democrats are all seeking reelection. The Democrats appear positioned to solidify their congressional gains from two years ago when they captured majority control of both the House and Senate. Indeed, some of the Republicans' former strongholds look vulnerable.



Unlike the House races (see our profile in the last issue), where a number of “Ron Paul” Republicans are running viable campaigns, the only viable Republicans running for the Senate appear to be of the establishment variety. Nevertheless, there are still some interesting Senate races to watch, though neither the Republican nor Democrat contenders in those races are basing their platforms on the Constitution.

Alaska

Sen. Ted Stevens (R), David Cuddy (R), Mark Begich (D)

Way up north in Alaska, David Cuddy is trying to change the way voters look at elections. The 54-year-old real-estate developer and former bank president is the leading challenger in the August 26 primary to Republican Senator Ted Stevens, now in his 41st consecutive year as senator from Alaska, making him the longest-serving senator from any state in Republican Party history.

“He’s very good at bringing home taxpayers’ money to Alaska,” Cuddy concedes. So good in fact that the state’s largest airport is named after the senator, a rare honor for a politician still in office. Cuddy ran against Stevens in the Republican primary of 1996, spending a million to get 27 percent of the vote to Stevens’ 56 percent in a multi-candidate race. But Cuddy believes that with a national debt nearing \$10 trillion and deficits in the hundreds of billions each year, the issues he is raising have even greater urgency.

“Today the unfunded liability for Medicare is, by some estimates, 60 to 70 trillion dollars,” he said, while Congress continues to raid the Social Security and other “trust funds” to pay for unneeded programs and projects. It makes no sense, he said, to “tax widows and orphans in Oklahoma to send the money to Alaska so we can build some monument. What nobody understands is, there’s no free lunch. We keep borrowing and borrowing to pay for this and our kids are going to have to pay these things off.”



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Some of “these things” include appropriations like the famous \$223 million “bridge to nowhere,” connecting two small islands in southeastern Alaska, an earmark that Stevens put into the highway bill in 2005. Stevens, appointed to the Senate in 1968, was elected in a special election in 1970 and has been reelected six times.

But last year, both the FBI and the IRS raided the senator’s home in the ski resort community of Girdwood as part of an investigation into Stevens’ relationship with Bill Allen, the former head of VECO Corp., a field oil service company. Allen, who has pleaded guilty to bribing Alaska state legislators, has testified that he oversaw extensive renovations at the Stevens home and had VECO employees work on it.

The fact that he is the subject of an ongoing investigation may be one reason the latest Rasmussen poll shows Stevens trailing Anchorage Mayor Mark Begich, the likely Democratic candidate, 50-41 percent. But Cuddy said he has not been making an issue of the investigation in the primary campaign. He says that when he raised ethical issues about Stevens in the 1996 race, “I had people come up to me and tell me they’d vote for Ted Stevens if he were in prison.”

Cuddy may soon rethink that stance since Stevens was indicted for not reporting the “receipt of hundreds of thousands of dollars’ worth of things of value from a private corporation.”

Minnesota

Sen. Norm Coleman (R) vs. Al Franken (D)

Brooklyn-born Norm Coleman has covered a lot of ground, both politically and geographically, since attending the hippie Woodstock festival in 1969 and organizing a student strike at Hofstra University a year later. The junior senator from Minnesota was elected mayor of St. Paul as a Democrat in 1993, but changed parties in 1996 and was reelected as a Republican the following year. One year into his second term, he ran for governor and lost to former professional wrestler Jesse Ventura, the candidate of the Reform Party. In 2002, he was recruited by the Bush White House to enter the U.S. Senate race against Sen. Paul Wellstone, a liberal Democrat and an outspoken critic of the Iraq War.

The race appeared to be even when Wellstone died in a plane crash less than two weeks before the election. Had the Democrats merely left Wellstone’s name on the ballot, the deceased senator might have won with the help of a sympathy vote, as was the case in Missouri two years earlier, when Governor Mel Carnahan, similarly killed in a plane crash weeks before the election, defeated incumbent John Ashcroft in the U.S. Senate race. Instead, Minnesota Democrats resurrected former senator, vice president, and 1984 presidential nominee Walter Mondale, who ran with the apparent disadvantage of being still alive. Coleman won, aided perhaps by backlash against a highly partisan four-hour memorial service for Wellstone in which Vice President Dick Cheney and other Republicans were booed when they appeared.

Coleman appears to have fit in well with the Republican establishment, supporting the Bush administration on the Iraq War and other military issues, as well as on tax and trade policies. He has supported the Bush tax cuts and the granting of “fast track” trade authority that allows the president to negotiate trade deals that may not be amended by Congress. Coleman joined with the White House in promoting the creation of a prescription drug benefit to the Medicare program.

Coleman is also pro-life and supports the party’s “family values” agenda. He attributes his anti-abortion stand to the death in infancy of two of his four children from a genetic disorder called Zellweger syndrome. That, he has said, has led him to value every human life.



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His opponent is comedian and political satirist Al Franken of *Saturday Night Live* fame. Franken supports a wide range of liberal-left causes, including abortion “rights,” gun control, same-sex “marriage,” and more onerous environmental protections, along with a more progressive income tax. Coleman appears to be in another close race and one of Franken’s campaign promises, serious or not, may yet tempt some Republicans out of sorts with the current administration. The Democratic challenger has promised to push for a “quickie impeachment” of President Bush in the two weeks between the Senate’s swearing in and the end of the president’s term.

Mississippi

Roger Wicker (R) vs. Ronnie Musgrove (D)

Two years ago, red-state Mississippians voted to return Republican Trent “Thanks a” Lott to the U.S. Senate with only slightly less (63.6 percent) than his usual two-thirds share of the vote. Last year, Lott announced he was retiring to become a lobbyist. Roger Wicker, the seven-term House member from one of the state’s four congressional districts, was appointed to the Senate seat he is now defending against a strong challenge from former Governor David “Ronnie” Musgrove in this year’s special election.

Like the majority of his Republican colleagues, Wicker wants to make the Bush tax cuts permanent, while supporting much of the Bush spending spree. He has supported the No Child Left Behind Act and voted for the Bush proposal to create a prescription drug benefit as part of the Medicare program. His loyalty to the White House has its limits, however. This spring, Wicker and fellow Republican Thad Cochran of Mississippi voted to override the president’s veto of the pork-laden Farm, Nutrition and Bioenergy Act.

Wicker supported the invasion of Iraq and the “surge” of additional troops there, and the amendment to the FISA law that allows the government to monitor Americans’ international phone calls and e-mails without warrants.

Musgrove is known as a “fiscal-conservative Democrat,” though he argues that being part of the majority in Congress will enable him to leverage more dollars for Mississippi. “If the Congress is going to be controlled by the Democrats, then it makes sense to have someone on the side of the majority that can help bring assistance and aid to the Gulf Coast,” he said in an interview with WLOX-TV in Biloxi.

During his time as governor (1990-93), Musgrove signed a bill prohibiting homosexual or lesbian couples from adopting a child. He also requested that the display of the Ten Commandments that a federal court ordered removed from the Alabama Supreme Court be brought to the Mississippi State House for a week. He called the banning of the display a “tragedy.”

Wicker has a solid pro-life voting record, having received a rating of 100 percent from the National Right to Life Committee and a zero from the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League (NARAL). Musgrove signed a bill banning the use of public funds for abortion except when the life of the mother is at stake, in cases of rape or incest, or when the infant is about to be stillborn. He also signed a bill allowing the purchase of pro-life car tags from the state with the revenue donated to non-profit groups that counsel women against abortion.

A Rasmussen poll in July showed Wicker clinging to a one-point lead, 48-47, in a state that hasn’t elected a Democrat to the U.S. Senate since 1972. But trouble for the Republicans was seen earlier this year, when Democrat Travis Childers defeated Republican Greg Davis in a special election for Wicker’s former House seat.

**New Jersey***Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D) vs. Dick Zimmer (R)*

New Jersey Republicans, who haven't won a U.S. Senate race in 36 years, may have caught a glimpse of that ephemeral "light at the end of the tunnel" in mid-June when a Rasmussen poll showed Democratic Sen. Frank Lautenberg leading former Congressman Dick Zimmer only by a single percentage point. The 84-year-old incumbent had just triumphed in a hard-fought primary battle with U.S. Rep. Rob Anderson, who raised the question of whether the four-term senator was too old to serve. By the second week in July, however, Lautenberg had opened up a 13-percent lead over his Republican rival. But conventional wisdom has it that an incumbent polling less than 50 percent may be vulnerable.

Zimmer served in the U.S. House from 1991 through 1996, when he entered and lost in the U.S. Senate race against Robert Torricelli. It was the scandal-plagued Torricelli who quit his race for reelection six years later, opening the way for New Jersey Democrats to bring Lautenberg out of a short-lived retirement. Lautenberg did not seek reelection in 2000 after serving 18 years in the Senate. He defeated Doug Forrester in that 2002 race 54 percent to 44 percent.

Zimmer, 64, won the "Taxpayer Hero" designation from Citizens Against Government Waste during his time in Congress. He is perhaps best known for his sponsorship of "Megan's Law," an act requiring convicted sex offenders to register with authorities. The *Bergen (N.J.) Record* has summed up his record this way: "Zimmer's record in Congress includes opposing tax increases and discretionary programs such as the international space station while supporting some gun-control measures and abortion rights." He was one of only 15 Republicans in the House to vote to sustain President Clinton's veto of a ban on partial-birth abortion. He has a mixed record on gun-control legislation, having voted against the Brady Bill in 1991, but for a different version in 1993. He voted against the ban on semi-automatic "assault" rifles before voting for it as part of a major crime bill in 1994.

Lautenberg, meanwhile, has been an anathema to both pro-life and pro-gun activists. He has opposed the ban on partial-birth abortions, voted against a ban on anyone other than a parent taking a minor across state lines for an abortion, and against a requirement to notify parents of minors seeking out-of-state abortions. He has supported legislation to require that trigger locks be sold with firearms and successfully sponsored legislation to ban gun ownership by anyone convicted of domestic violence.

Lautenberg's response to the energy crisis is reflected in the plan he and fellow New Jersey Senator Robert Menendez announced to reintroduce the Consumer-first Energy Act of 2008, recently blocked in the Senate by a Republican filibuster. The bill would eliminate \$17 billion in tax deductions and create a 25 percent "windfall profits" tax on the top five oil and gas companies. It would also make "price gouging" a federal crime.

Louisiana*Sen. Mary Landrieu (D) vs. John Kennedy (R)*

The fortunes of the Republican Party in the deep South have fallen so far that in Louisiana the GOP actively sought out and persuaded Democratic State Treasurer John Kennedy to change parties and be the Republican standard-bearer in this year's U.S. Senate race against two-term Democratic Senator Mary Landrieu.

Kennedy was courted by former Bush political guru Karl Rove and was rewarded by a presidential visit earlier this year at a fundraiser that brought in \$500,000 for the Kennedy campaign. The challenger has



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struck familiar conservative themes, calling for an end to earmarks and advocating a line-item veto for the president. A Republican Congress passed a line-item veto during the Clinton presidency, but it was ruled an unconstitutional violation of the separation of powers by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Landrieu, who holds a slim lead over Kennedy in the polls, has been regarded as vulnerable by the Republicans since she first won the seat in 1996, beating out veteran state legislator Louis “Woody” Jenkins by a mere three-tenths of one percent. The closeness of the race, together with charges of voter fraud, sparked a Senate investigation that lasted 10 months, but ended with the Republican Senate deciding that Landrieu could keep the seat.

Oddly enough for a Democrat, she ran for election last time claiming to have voted with President Bush 74 percent of the time. As a freshman senator from a conservative Southern state, Landrieu frequently broke ranks with her fellow Democrats, supporting, among other things, the \$1.35 trillion Bush tax cut and a repeal of the estate tax, also known as the “death tax.” She also supported Republican initiatives to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to exploration and cosponsored a bill with Sen. Sam Brownback (R-Kan.) to ban all human cloning.

But Landrieu also voted against a proposed constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage and opposed federal vouchers for private school tuition for low-income families. She argued that schools accepting vouchers should be required to meet the same academic standards set for public schools in the president’s No Child Left Behind Act. A Roman Catholic, Landrieu has been at odds with the church hierarchy on a number of issues, including her “pro-choice” stand on abortion. During her campaign against Jenkins in ‘96, Philip Hannan, archbishop of New Orleans, stated publicly that if “a person actually believes in Catholic doctrine, then I don’t see how they can vote for Landrieu without a feeling of sin.”

With or without a “feeling of sin,” voters have twice elected Landrieu to the Senate. As of July 1, however, she held a rather precarious lead over Kennedy, 46 to 40 percent, according to a Southern Media & Opinion research poll.

New Hampshire

Sen. John Sununu (R) vs. Jeanne Shaheen (D)

“The name Sununu is to New Hampshire what Bush is to Texas,” according to the *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*. Well, not quite. The Bushes still lead in presidents, 2-0. But being the son of former Governor John H. Sununu, the chief of staff to the first President Bush, has not hurt the political career of Sen. John E. Sununu.

Sununu, an engineer with degrees from MIT and Harvard, made his political debut in 1996 when he ran for and won the U.S. House seat for New Hampshire’s First District. He was reelected twice before accepting the invitation of some Republican operatives, both in New Hampshire and Washington, to challenge incumbent Sen. Bob Smith in the 2002 Senate primary election. Smith, a hard-line conservative, had angered many of the party regulars by bolting from and vigorously denouncing the party during his short-lived independent campaign for president in 2000. He was also seen as vulnerable in the anticipated 2002 Senate campaign against Democrat Jeanne Shaheen, the state’s popular three-term governor.

Sununu defeated Smith by nine points in the 2002 GOP primary, leaving some of Smith’s followers bitter and angry. But Sununu proved himself a polished campaigner and effective debater as he went on to defeat Shaheen by four points in November.



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Democrats are confident, however, that the outcome will be different in this November's rematch. For one thing, the number of registered Democrats has risen to nearly match the Republicans in a state where independents now outnumber both. And the Democrats hope to tie Sununu, who campaigned with Bush in 2002, to an unpopular president and his policies.

Shaheen promises a "crackdown on oil company price-gouging and Wall Street speculation on oil," while blasting Sununu for taking campaign contributions from oil-company PACs. Sununu, meanwhile, criticizes Shaheen for opposing drilling offshore and in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to increase the supply of oil. He has countered her charge that he voted against nutrition programs for the poor by pointing out that the same bill contained \$40 billion in subsidies and price supports for corporate farms. "How high do food prices have to go before Jeanne Shaheen will take a stand against a pork-filled bill?" Sununu asked.

During her six years as the state's governor (1997-2002), Shaheen carved out a "moderate" image, successfully opposing a state income tax (New Hampshire doesn't have one), and vetoing a repeal of the death penalty, while expanding kindergarten and child health programs. One major difference between the two candidates is the one neither of them has raised during this year's campaign: Sununu is pro-life, while Shaheen has been an ardent champion of abortion "rights," having signed into law in her first term as governor a repeal of the state's anti-abortion statutes. She also favors federal funding for research on new lines of embryonic stem cells.

While most polls have shown Shaheen leading by 10 -12 points in the early going, a University of New Hampshire poll in late July showed the race in a statistical dead heat.

Jack Kenny is a free-lance writer living in New Hampshire.



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