

# REPUBLICAN MAIN STREET PARTNERSHIP



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## Overview

As campaigns swing into the final two weeks, many races in the House and Senate have begun to tighten. In addition to the Presidential contest, the stakes are high for the balance of power in Congress. Political experts are carefully watching a number of Senate races to see whether Democrats can win enough to get to 60 seats – a key number for control of the Senate agenda. In the House, major gains by Democrats would likely lessen the need for Speaker Pelosi to work with centrist Republicans or conservative Democrats.

According to Congressional Quarterly, Democrats remain on the verge of significant seat gains in both the Senate and House. But the extent of these gains is still unclear, as the Democrats have yet to close the deal on their many takeover attempts. In the Senate, Democrats would exit the elections with de facto control of at least 56 seats — a five-seat gain — if they were to win all five Republican-held seats in races currently rated as leaning slightly (Alaska, Colorado, New Hampshire) or leaning strongly (New Mexico, Virginia) toward Democratic takeover. In addition, there are races in Minnesota, Mississippi, North Carolina and Oregon for four GOP seats, in which Democratic takeover bids are rated no clear favorite or tossup. And three other states, Georgia, Kentucky and Maine, are staging highly competitive races for Republican seats that currently are rated as leans Republican.

If all went Democratic, the gain would be 12 seats. That, in turn, would be the biggest one-party net gain since 1980, when the Republicans also picked up a dozen to grab their first Senate majority in 26 years. Even a nine-seat gain would get the Democrats to their oft-stated goal of 60, the so-called filibuster-proof majority because it corresponds to the three-fifths vote needed to end delaying tactics and send legislation to a final vote on the Senate floor.

In the House, the scorecard suggests that sizable Democratic gains are more speculative. The House majority party currently holds 236 seats to the Republicans 199 seats. House races shift quickly, but political experts consider about 25 races as tossups. The national political environment continues to work in the Democrats' favor, enhancing their chances in this year's congressional contests. A flagging economy typically is a big political problem for the party holding the White House, and that appears reflected in the polls on the presidential race, which show Democrat Barack Obama with a growing lead over Republican John McCain.

Key Senate races in Minnesota, where first-term Republican **Sen. Norm Coleman** is trying to hold off Democrat Al Franken, and in Oregon, where two-term Republican **Sen.**

**Gordon Smith** is in a battle with Democratic state House Speaker Jeff Merkley, were both switched from leans republican to no clear favorite, by Congressional Quarterly.

### Connecticut

**Congressman Chris Shays** agreed to a series of at least six debates before election day. Shays received help in the form of an endorsement and an appearance at a fundraiser by New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who won election as a Republican but recently changed his affiliation to Independent.

### New Hampshire

New Hampshire's First Congressional District is one of the few where an incumbent Democrat is widely expected to face a close race. Rep. Carol Shea-Porter again is opposed by former **Rep. Jeb Bradley**, with polls showing the race a virtual dead heat. Congressional Quarterly recently changed their rating from leans democrat to no clear favorite, indicating momentum by Bradley.

Andrew Smith, director of the University of New Hampshire Survey Center, noted that Shea-Porter remains less well-known than her opponent, who represented the district from 2003 through 2006. Shea-Porter's incumbency "is kind of a wash in this election," Smith said. The demographics of the Republican-leaning, mainly conservative district are working against Shea-Porter. Though the area remains competitive, it is home to many GOP areas as well as blue-collar Democratic communities where Shea-Porter will need to make inroads.

"This is a tough trip for her no matter what," New Hampshire Democratic state Sen. Lou D'Allesandro told CQ Politics. D'Allesandro represents the Manchester area, which he believes will decide the 1st District outcome in November. Manchester is the most populous community in the 1st, and remains highly competitive. A Sept. 24 UNH poll showed Bradley leading Shea-Porter in the Manchester area 52 to 35 percent. That poll showed Bradley with a district-wide lead over Shea-Porter, 45 to 42 percent.

### New Jersey

Running in the open seat formerly held by Republican Rep. Mike Ferguson, **State Senator Leonard Lance**, was included in a list of a dozen "races to watch" by Roll Call columnist Stuart Rothenberg. Lance was described as a "well-regarded moderate," who "may be able to swim against a strong anti-GOP current."

### Minnesota

Most experts agree the three way Senate race has tightened up considerably. The Minnesota contest features idiosyncratic nominees in both major parties. Republican incumbent **Sen. Norm Coleman** is a former Democrat who in 2002 very narrowly defeated former Vice President Walter F. Mondale, who stepped in as a replacement after two-term Democratic Sen. Paul Wellstone died in a plane crash just days before the election. Democratic challenger Franken is a longtime liberal activist making his first bid for public office. Throw in an unusually strong third contender in Independence Party nominee Dean Barkley — briefly an

appointed senator following Wellstone's death in 2002 — and all the ingredients for an unpredictable race are in place.

In a recent Congressional Quarterly analysis, they believe Coleman's recent slip in polls stems from his vote in support of the controversial financial industry "bailout" legislation. A recent Rasmussen poll found that Franken led Coleman 43 percent to 37 percent while Barkley took 17 percent. But a recent poll by Minnesota Public Radio and the Humphrey Institute at University of Minnesota showed Franken leading Coleman 41 percent to 37 percent, while Barkley got 14 percent.

Third-party candidates often siphon anti-incumbent votes from challengers. But in this race, Barkley is gaining support from both parties because of the unpopularity of Coleman's vote on the bailout measure, said Lawrence Jacobs, director of the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance at the University of Minnesota. Jacobs said that Barkley's performance in polling also indicates voters from both parties are looking for alternatives. "It reflects both the high unfavorables for both Coleman and Franken and the defections of both independents and Democrats and Republicans from their headliners," he said.

## Oregon

Incumbent **Sen. Gordon Smith** not only faces a strong Democrat, but is running in a state where Democratic Presidential candidate Barack Obama has a double digit lead. "It's really a toss up right now," political scientist Robert Eisinger of Lewis & Clark College in Portland recently told Congressional Quarterly. Smith recognizes that the two Republicans who preceded him, [Bob] Packwood and [Mark] Hatfield, had records of bipartisanship. So it is wise of him to emphasize that point," Eisinger said.

In his campaign commercials, Smith touts his links to all three heavyweight Democratic senators - Barack Obama , John Kerry and Edward M. Kennedy. Smith has cultivated a moderate reputation in Congress, bucking his party on major issues, such as the war in Iraq. He announced his opposition to the war in December 2006 and was one of two Republicans who voted the following March for a bill that set a non-binding "goal" to remove most U.S. troops from Iraq by March 31, 2008.

He also has forged a working relationship with the state's Democratic senator, Ron Wyden , though Wyden has sought to distance himself from his GOP colleague in this election. Smith began airing an ad last week that features a past clip of Wyden speaking about his relationship with Smith. "Sen. Smith, my friend, my partner, always meets me half-way," Wyden states. The two senators' signatures are featured at the end of the commercial.

State demographics show Smith has a more difficult road ahead. Canter notes that swing areas outside of Portland once displayed a strong voter registration advantage for Republicans, but now many of those areas have experienced dramatic Democratic gains. Voter registration figures for the state, released last month, show Democrats with 43 percent to the Republican's 33 percent. The remaining 24 percent are registered as third party or unaffiliated voters.