

# REPUBLICAN MAIN STREET PARTNERSHIP



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## Minnesota Senate Update

At this writing, Norm Coleman continues his efforts to overturn Al Franken's 225 vote lead in the yet to be decided 2008 Minnesota Senate race. Coleman is making his case before a three judge panel, and is asking that they rule on approximately 4,000 absentee ballots that could be interpreted as votes for either candidate, or as invalid ballots. Minnesota state law provides that neither candidate may receive a certificate of election if any legal challenge is in progress.

Gov. Tim Pawlenty, a Republican, and Secretary of State Mark Ritchie, a Democrat, have declined to sign an election certificate because state law says none can be issued before the legal battle ends.

In a ruling issued in mid February, the judges indicated that they would count 23 absentee ballots that had previously been rejected. Reports indicate that these votes are expected to be for Franken. The 23 voters were among 61 who filed legal documents claiming their absentee ballots were wrongly rejected in the November 4 election and the Senate recount. After the election, Franken supporters contacted the voters and asked if they wanted to fight to have their votes counted. Some ballots had been rejected because of voter signature discrepancies, others because of administrative error.

Coleman's campaign applauded the decision, with Coleman attorney Ben Ginsberg saying, "While these were all Franken supporters, we take it nonetheless as a very good ruling consistent with the court's desire to enfranchise all wrongly rejected ballots." The three-judge panel has indicated it plans to open and count all legally cast absentee ballots that were wrongly rejected in the election.

Thus, the current Senate consists of only 99 Senators (56 Democrats, 41 Republicans, but with Independent Senators Sanders of Vermont and Lieberman of Connecticut caucusing with the Democrats.

Some political observers believe it could be months before either Coleman or Franken is declared the winner, and takes the final Senate seat in Washington, DC.

## **2010 Election Outlook**

One campaign season blends into the next, and speculation has begun concerning the prospects for Republican gains in 2010. In one encouraging sign one poll shows the Republican Party has narrowed the gap this week on the so called Generic Congressional Ballot. The latest Rasmussen Reports national telephone surveys found that the Democrats' lead is down to four percentage points--42% of voters said they would vote for their district's Democratic candidate while 38% said they would choose the Republicans. Just a week earlier, the Democrats enjoyed a seven-point lead.

The 38% who say they'd vote for a Republican is the GOP's highest level of support since early December. Over the past year, Democratic support has ranged from a low of 42% to a high of 50%. In that same time period, Republicans have been preferred by 34% to 41% of voters nationwide.

Recent legislative events show how important the votes of a few Senators can be. The next election cycle will likely again focus on the Senate, with Democrats trying to push past the 60 vote majority, and Republicans seeking to reverse the losses of 2008. Senate Republican strategists, see some advantages in 2010, with Democrats losing such strong candidates as Obama, Clinton, Biden and Salazar, thus having to defend those seats with new candidates.

On the Republican front, Senator Arlen Specter is likely to be a top Democratic target this cycle as he seeks his sixth term in office. The Republican raised \$611,000 between October and December and ended the year with \$5.8 million cash on hand.

No Democrat has announced a bid to take on Specter, though Rep. Patrick Murphy (D) has made his interest in the Senate seat known. Specter could also face a tough challenge in the GOP primary.

## **House and Senate Committee Assignments**

Republican Main Street Partnership House and Senate Members again occupy key positions on many important committees in Congress.

Senator Susan Collins again will hold the Ranking Senator position on the Homeland Security Committee and Senator John McCain will serve as the Ranking Senator on the Armed Services Committee. Senator Arlen Specter is the Ranking Senator on the Judiciary Committee and Senator Olympia Snowe is the Ranking Senator on the Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee.

In the House, Republican Main Street Members hold the top position on what are believed to be the three most important House Committees. Congressman Jerry Lewis continues as the Ranking Member on the Appropriations, while Congressman Dave Camp is the Ranking Member on the Ways and Means Committee. Congressman David Dreier is the Ranking Member on the Rules Committee.