



The Miller/Wenhold Political Report

Vol. 1 Issue 1

January 2008



Happy New Year's from Miller/Wenhold!

Looking back on 2007 in review, this past year has possibly been more tumultuous than any other in recent memory. From the power shift on Capitol Hill to television writers' strikes, our world has been an active one.

In January, the Democratic Party took control of Congress for the first time since January of 1995. With that changeover came the ascension of the first female Speaker of the House. Whether a Republican or Democrat, this day marked the dawn of a new era in American politics. The leadership of Speaker Nancy Pelosi has attempted to usher in change to Washington, DC. The Democrats passed legislation to raise the minimum wage and create a new energy policy. However, they failed to affect the course of the War in Iraq. Moreover, Attorney General Alberto Gonzalez resigned amidst a general shakeup at the Department of Justice stemming from the firings of eight U.S. attorneys.

Through all of these changes in Washington, DC, there was the steady humming of the presidential races. Both parties have wide-open primary battles with no clear frontrunner emerging by the close of 2007. Some candidates lead nationally but lag in early voting states. Other candidates are red hot in those January states, but are not registering in the nationwide polls. This all comes together to create an exciting and possibly contentious 2008 political calendar.

2008 is proving to be a pivotal year in American politics. Voters will cast ballots for the 44th President of the United States. Major candidates include: a woman, an African American, a Mormon, a Baptist preacher, and an actor. According to public opinion polls, Americans are concerned about the economy, healthcare, the War in Iraq, immigration, and terrorism. Presidential candidates and eventual nominees will have to answer to working America on how they would address our nation's issues.

Keep a lookout for the Miller/Wenhold Political Report throughout the coming year for updates, news, and information on politics – from Washington, DC to Washington State. It's all here!



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On The Hill



Last Day of Congress: To Be Continued

In the last days of the first session of the 110th Congress, the House of Representatives added Iraq War funding language to the **omnibus bill** saving it from a potential veto by President George W. Bush. On December 26, 2007, President Bush signed the omnibus bill into law; however, he took the opportunity to criticize Congress for inserting more earmarks than he wanted. This bill will help to fund the many agencies that assist in running the government.

The Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, **FISA**, was snagged and not passed by Congress. Various Members of Congress were upset at the bill's granting of immunity to the telecommunications industry. Presidential candidate and Connecticut Senator Chris Dodd (D) declared that he would pull out all the stops to ensure that the FISA bill did not pass as written. Congress will have to revisit the issue in the coming session.

Congress has failed to pass the nominations of a four person slate to fill the temporary positions created by recess appoints on the **Federal Election Commission** (FEC). Due to concerns raised by Senators John Kerry (D-MA), Russ Feingold (D-WI), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), and Barack Obama (D-IL), the nominees have not moved forward. The concerns are over a singular nominee – Hans von Spakovsky. The senators are concerned about von Spakovsky's tenure at the Department of Justice. This hold throws into flux the ability of the FEC to regulate the 2008 presidential election as well as issue advisory opinions. Congress will be revisiting these nominees come January.

On December 19, 2007, Congress passed a one-year reprieve of the **alternative minimum tax** (AMT) which will save many middle class Americans from paying higher taxes. The bill was contentious because Democrats promised to offset any tax changes with other changes to comply with their paygo (pay-as-you-go) rules. The Blue Dog Coalition, a group of conservative House Democrats, had attempted to hold the bill until a paygo solution could be reached.

Finally, the House passed a bill which will sustain funding for the **State Children's Health Insurance Program** (SCHIP) through March 2009. Without this bill, upwards of 20 states were at risk of draining their funds to insure the children of these low income families. SCHIP insurance recipients are families who are poor, but make too much money to qualify for Medicaid. Democrats had originally strived to expand SCHIP coverage, however fell short of that goal.

War in Iraq

The War in Iraq continues to be a major focal point for Congress. The Senate will be debating a \$50 million operations budget for Iraq and Afghanistan. Congressional Democrats have attached a non-binding objective of troop withdrawal by Dec. 15, 2008.

The Washington Post - <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/12/03/AR2007120300364.html>

Appropriations

Ten out of the eleven appropriations bills have yet to be passed out of Congress and sent to the President. President Bush has already threatened to veto some of the bills, if they pass, due to his belief that they spend too much money (\$22 billion more than the White House proposed).

The New York Times - <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/04/washington/04bush.html?ref=washington&pagewanted=print>



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On The Ground:



House Races

NH-01

In 2006, political neophyte Carol Shea-Porter shocked the political world by upsetting Rep. Jeb Bradley to win in the New Hampshire First District. Beating the Democratic Party's favored candidate in the primary, Shea-Porter relied on an active grassroots base and retail politics to punch her ticket to Washington. The 2008 race is shaping up to be a rematch between the two candidates. Shea-Porter is relying on the same support as the last go around and refusing the DCCC's Frontline contributions.

KS-02

Five-term incumbent Jim Ryun was defeated in 2006 by former pharmaceutical exec (and former Republican) Nancy Boyda. Boyda had run unsuccessfully against Ryun in 2004, but came up short. In 2008, look for Boyda to glean the do's from her 2006 victory and don'ts from her 2004 loss. Ryun will be attempting to regain the seat, but he will most likely be facing a primary challenge from State Treasurer Lynn Jenkins.

TX-22

Rep. Nick Lampson won the 22nd in 2006 with a hair more than 50% of the vote. The former Congressman from the Texas 9th Congressional District, Lampson lost his seat to now Rep. Ted Poe after redistricting. The Texas 22nd is the seat held by former Rep. Tom DeLay who withdrew from the race, leaving no Republican on the ballot. The 2008 race should prove to be a hotly contested one. Shelley Sekula Gibbs who won the special election to fill DeLay's shoes is running in the GOP primary for the right to take on Rep. Lampson.

CA-04

John Doolittle survived a primary challenge in 2006 by former Auburn mayor Mike Holmes and held on to defeat Democrat and former Lt. Col. Charlie Brown. The 2008 race will be close as Rep. Doolittle continues to fend off charges and investigations stemming from alleged ties to former lobbyist Jack Abramoff. Doolittle has said he will be running for reelection in 2008, but he will face primary challenges from Holmes and Eric England, a Air Force reservist. Whoever the eventual Republican nominee is, he will most likely be facing Brown for the general election.

Senate Races

Maine

Rep. Tom Allen, who has represented Maine's 1st Congressional District since 1996, is not seeking reelection in order to challenge Sen. Susan Collins. Collins has been Maine's junior senator since 1996. Collins is generally considered one of the more moderate Senate Republicans and is currently the Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs. Sen. Joe Lieberman (I-CT), the Chairman of the committee, has publicly stated that he will support Collins' reelection campaign. Currently, polls show Collins leading Allen, but as Election Day draws near, the race may very well tighten in the oft-politically volatile Maine.

Virginia

Retiring Republican Senator John Warner is vacating his seat in 2008, leaving an open race in a state which has tended blue over the last few Election Days. Former Governor Mark Warner has announced his candidacy for the seat. For the Republicans, former Gov. Jim Gilmore most likely will be running come November. A little less than a year from Election Day, it appears as though Warner has the advantage.



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On The Ground:

New Hampshire

The 2008 Senate race in this quirky New England state will be a flashback to 2002. Former Governor Jeanne Shaheen has decided to again challenge Sen. John Sununu. Shaheen lost to Sununu in 2002 in one of the more controversial races of that cycle. Accused of jamming the phones at Democratic headquarters, three Republican operatives were eventually found guilty of violating federal communications law. Shaheen lost that race by 4 percentage points. The upcoming race will prove to be an entertaining rematch for New Hampshire citizens and pundits alike. Recent polls have portrayed a tight race between the two political rivals.



Oregon

Republican Sen. Gordon Smith's seat is routinely considered one of the more vulnerable seats for the GOP. Three Democrats have indicated their intention to run: Speaker of the Oregon House Jeff Merkley, Steve Novick, and Candy Neville. The victor will take on Smith in a race that is sure to be a political hotspot.

On The Trail:

Iowa:

The Iowa caucus, to be held on January 3, 2008, will be the first test for the presidential candidates campaigning to move into 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. For the Democrats, there appears to be a three-way race for the lead between New York Sen. Hillary Clinton, Illinois Sen. Barack Obama, and former North Carolina Sen. John Edwards. The latest polls show that the three are in a statistical dead heat. Clinton, Obama, and Edwards are vying to convince caucus-goers that he or she is the most qualified to lead the nation and bring change to Washington.

On the Republican side, former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee has surged in recent weeks, and most polls have him in the lead over former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, on average by approximately 5 percentage points (www.realclearpolitics.com). Many polls also have McCain, Guiliani, and Thompson contending for the third, fourth, and fifth spot in the voters' minds.

New Hampshire:

The first in the nation primary, which is a source of pride for New Hampshire citizens and law in the state, will be held on January 8, 2008. Recently, it seemed that the race between Sens. Clinton and Obama was tightening up; however, more recent polling has pointed Mrs. Clinton widening her lead over Mr. Obama. New Hampshire voters will have a chance to digest the Iowa results before heading to the voting booths a week later. According to www.realclearpolitics.com, Clinton's average lead over Obama is about 7 percentage points.

On the GOP side, Arizona Sen. John McCain appears to be making a comeback of sorts and gaining on Gov. Romney. Romney, who was the chief executive of neighboring Massachusetts and has a summer house in the Granite State, has held a fairly commanding lead for a significant portion of the race thus far. The former Massachusetts governor still is maintaining a statistical lead over the Arizona senator.