



Can the GOP Win the Senate This November?

Political pundits were quick to discuss whether Republican David Jolly's victory in a March 12 special election in Florida was an early indicator of a GOP takeover of the Senate in the November elections. However, this single house election is less significant than results surfacing in recent national opinion polls, as well as historic trends suggesting that the party occupying the White House usually loses seats in Congress in the mid-term elections, especially during the president's second term.



A *Washington Post*/ABC News poll released on March 4 indicated that when registered voters were asked: "If an election for the U.S. Senate were being held in your state today, would you vote for (the Democratic candidate) or (the Republican candidate)?" a very slim plurality of overall respondents (46 percent to 45 percent) chose the Democratic candidate. More significantly, however, when the results were limited to states where there will be a Senate elections this year, the Republican candidate was chosen by 50 percent of those polled, with the generic Democrat receiving only 42 percent.

The results of this poll reflect the characteristics of our federal system, in which every state is represented equally in the Senate, an intentional (and non-amendable) provision in our Constitution designed to prevent the domination of our government by large population states.

Thirty-six Senate seats will be decided in 2014, 21 of which are currently held by a Democratic incumbent and 15 currently held by a Republican. Republicans need to pick up six seats in November to gain control of the Senate.

Among other questions asked by the *Washington Post*/ABC News poll, 38 percent said they would be less likely to vote for a congressional candidate who supported a "path to citizenship" (amnesty) for "undocumented" (illegal) immigrants, 30 percent would be more likely to vote for such a candidate, and 29 percent said it wouldn't make much difference. On a possible Hillary Clinton run for the White House, only 25 percent would definitely vote for Clinton, 41 percent would consider voting for her, and 32 percent definitely would *not* vote for her. If a congressional candidate supports ObamaCare, 34 percent would be more likely to vote for the candidate, 36 percent would be less likely, and 27 percent said it wouldn't make much difference.

A Reuters News article published on March 8, four days before the Florida special election, advanced



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on March 14, 2014

the viewpoint that, although the outcome was expected to be close, the number of Senate races in which Republicans are now competitive has increased, giving the GOP a good chance of regaining control of the upper house. Reuters noted that the results of recent polls indicates Republicans have big leads in three states — Montana, South Dakota, and West Virginia — all having longtime Democratic senators who have retired or will retire at the end of their current term.

“It’s moving a little in the Republican direction,” Reuters quoted Larry Sabato of the University of Virginia’s Center for Politics, whose Crystal Ball website rates the Senate as a toss-up. “Republicans will pick up Senate seats, probably three or four. The question is, will they get that wave in October that carries them to the six they need?”

Kyle Kondik, managing editor of Sabato’s Crystal Ball, said in an article posted on March 13th, 2014:

Nearly all the competitive seats this cycle are in places where Democrats are playing defense. That fact alone indicates the GOP is poised for a strong cycle, although we’re not ready to say they will in fact win the six seats they need to take outright control of the Senate, even though they have a path to six — or perhaps even several seats more than that. Democrats, meanwhile, would do quite well to hold the GOP to a net gain of three or four seats.

Reuters notes that in addition to winning the six extra seats, Republicans also need to defend two vulnerable seats they already have — those held by Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell in Kentucky and a seat in Georgia currently held by retiring Republican Saxby Chambliss. In that contest, Michelle Nunn, daughter of former Democratic senator Sam Nunn, will run against the winner of the Republican primary.

With President Obama’s approval ratings down to 43 percent in the polls, there are indications that he is concerned about his party losing control of the Senate, which would doom any hopes he still might have to pass any meaningful legislation. The White House essentially punted this week, when it extend the time insurers can offer health plans that do not meet ObamaCare’s requirements. This way, the president and his Democrat allies will not have to account for a new wave of policy cancellations during campaign season.

Obama is definitely worried about potential Democratic voter turnout in November. “Too often, when there’s not a presidential election we don’t think it’s sexy, we don’t think it’s interesting,” he said this week at a Democratic National Committee dinner in Boston. “Because the electorate has changed, we get walloped. It’s happened before and it could happen again if we do not fight on behalf of the things we care about.”

Speaking on MSNBC’s *Morning Joe* program on March 13, political commentator Chris Matthews — who once served on the staffs of Democratic Senators Frank Church and Ed Muskie — predicted tough going for Democrats in November: “It’s going to be very hard to hold the Senate — I think the Senate goes,” said Matthews. “I think we heard from the Ghost of Christmas Future this week [with David Jolly’s victory in Florida]; [Democrats are] going to lose the Senate.”

National Review Online’s Andrew Johnson noted that Matthews offered some campaign advice for Democrats if they want to improve their chances in November, suggesting that they frame voter-ID laws as attacks on minorities and assert that pro-life measures are attacks on “abortion rights.”

Although many will welcome the prospect of putting the Senate back into Republican control as an upcoming victory for “conservatives,” the two terms are not always simultaneous. For example, last year the Tea Party posted a list of Republican senators who, in their words, “voted for amnesty over



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border security and interior immigration law enforcement.” The list included Senators Kelly Ayotte, Lamar Alexander, Jeff Chiesa, Susan Collins, Bob Corker, Jeff Flake, Lindsey Graham, Orrin Hatch, Dean Heller, John Hoeven, Mark Kirk, John McCain, Lisa Murkowski, and even Tea Party favorite Marco Rubio.

On February 11, Fox News posted the names of Republican representatives who voted to raise the federal government’s debt ceiling increase. There were 28 of them, including Speaker of the House John Boehner, Majority Leader Eric Cantor, Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy, and Chief Deputy Whip Pete Roskam.

While there would be definite political advantages to having the Senate back in Republican hands, since having a divided government might slow down the process toward increasing the size of the federal government that has moved forward under both parties, it is important for conservatives to keep in mind that having a Republican majority is not a “cure-all” for all political ills.

Only an informed, active electorate can keep Congress honest, and committed to restoring the Constitution.

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