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Dixie's Competitive House and Senate Races

Dixie's Hot Congressional Districts

In any given election, only a fraction of the 435 US House seats on the ballot have a real prospect of changing hands from one party to the other. This year some 21 of the South's 162 congressional seats are more or less "in play," 12 of them currently held by Republicans, 9 by Democrats. Due to such factors as a strong tide against the party in power and the ability of probable Democratic nominee **Barack Obama** to bring out an unusually large turn-out among African Americans and young voters, Democrats stand the better chance of making gains this fall. This was demonstrated in the Democratic victories in this year's special elections in Louisiana 6 and Mississippi 1, both districts with strong Republican voting histories, suggesting that earlier assumptions about what constitutes a "safe Republican" seat need to be revised.

However, there is also the possibility that Obama will run very poorly in some Southern states, giving the GOP a boost in some congressional races. Here are thumb-nail descriptions of the districts that, at this point, are likely to be competitive in November.

Twelve GOP Seats Democrats Might Win

Alabama 2 (Dothan, etc.) - Open; US Rep. **Terry Everett** (R) retiring. In the GOP's July 15 runoff, a poll released by the campaign of state Rep. **Jay Love** on June 8 showed him with a 60% to 32% lead over state Sen. **Harri Anne Smith**. The survey was taken by McLaughlin and Associates. Meanwhile, the Democrats believe they have a strong nominee in Montgomery Mayor **Bobby Bright**.

Florida 13 (Sarasota, etc.) Freshman **Vern Buchanan** (R) is raking in the cash, but he slipped by with only 50.07% in 2006. Third-time candidate **Christine Jennings** (D) is handicapped by the entrance of **Jan Schneider**, Jennings' 2004 and '06 primary foe, as an independent.

Florida 21 (Miami-Dade, etc.) US Rep. **Lincoln Diaz-Balart** (R) is getting a spirited challenge from former mayor of Hialeah **Raul Martinez**. In the 1980s, Martinez was convicted of federal corruption charges, but won his case on appeal and subsequent trials ended in mistrials. But even some Republicans concede that the feisty Democrat will give Diaz-Balart a fight.



Florida 24 (Orlando, etc.) US Rep. **Tom Feeney** (R) has come under fire for his alleged ties to convicted former lobbyist **Jack Abramoff**. His Democratic opponent, former state Rep. **Suzanne Kosmas** (D), had more cash than Feeney at the end of the 1st Quarter.

Kentucky 2 (Bowling Green, etc.) - Open; US Rep. **Ron Lewis** (R) retiring. Look for a hard-fought campaign between state Sens. **Brett Guthrie** (R) and **David Boswell** (D), an experienced statewide campaigner.

Louisiana 4 (Shreveport, etc.) - Open; US Rep. **Jim McCrery** (R) retiring. There are competitive September 6 primaries in both parties and it could go either way in the fall.

North Carolina 3 (Greenville, etc.) A divisive primary hurt antiwar US Rep. **Walter Jones** (R), and Democrat **Craig Weber** has high name ID from his stint as a TV meteorologist; moreover, the Democratic Primary turnout here was high.

North Carolina 8 (Concord, etc.) US Rep. **Robin Hayes** (R) squeaked by with 50.2% in '06; challenger **Larry Kissell** (D), while still slow on fundraising, has a strong partisan wind at his back.

Texas 10 (Austin, etc.) US Rep. **Mike McCaul** (R), with 55% in '06, faces TV's "Texas Justice" **Larry Joe Doherty** (D). According to a June 2 survey taken by IVR Polls, which polled for a Democrat in 2006, McCaul had 52% to Doherty's 46%. Both will be well-financed.

Virginia 2 (Virginia Beach, etc.) Sophomore **Thelma Drake** (R) survived (51%) a strong challenge last time. Her '08 foe, ex-diplomat **Glenn Nye** (D), is raising respectable money. A poll taken for Nye in early May by Bennett, Petts & Normington showed Drake with 48%, Nye 32%, with 20% undecided.

Virginia 5 (Charlottesville, etc.) This one's a sleeper. US Rep. **Virgil Goode**'s (R) high-profile conservatism has hurt him with University of Virginia liberals; attorney **Tom Perriello** (D) has almost matched Goode in the money chase. Bush got 56% here in '04.

Virginia 11 (Fairfax County, etc.) - Open; US Rep. **Tom Davis** (R) retiring. In what promises to be one of the most competitive congressional contests in the nation, Fairfax County Commission Chairman **Gerry Connolly** (D) defeated former Congresswoman **Leslie Byrne** (D) for the Democratic nomination. In November, Connolly will face wealthy but unknown businessman **Keith Fimian** (R) in this suburban DC district where Bush edged Kerry by 50%-49%.

Nine Democratic Targets for the GOP

Alabama 5 (Huntsville, etc.) - Open; US Rep. **Bud Cramer** (D) retiring. State Sen. **Parker Griffith** (D), will face the winner of the July 15 GOP runoff, either **Wayne Parker** or **Cheryl Guthrie**. Bush got 54% here in '04.

Florida 16 (Hobe Sound, etc.) Freshman **Tim Mahoney** (D) won last time (50%) because disgraced ex-US Rep. **Mark Foley**'s (R) name was still on the ballot. Mahoney will face one of three GOPers in the August 26 primary, each of whom has some political heft.

Georgia 8 (Macon, etc.) US Rep. **Jim Marshall** (D) won with 51% last time; he faces potentially strong retired Air Force Major Gen. **Rick Goddard** (R) in this military base-laden district.

Kentucky 3 (Louisville) Freshman **John Yarmuth** (D) looks strong against US Rep. **Anne Northup**. SurveyUSA, in a June 6-8 poll, gave Yarmuth 57%, Northup 40%.



Louisiana 6 (Baton Rouge, etc.) The GOP's serious setback in the May special election may spur Republicans to unite behind a major effort to unseat just-elected freshman **Don Cazayoux** (D).

Mississippi 1 (Tupelo, etc.) After its humiliating loss (46%-54%) in the May special election, the GOP may try to defeat newly-minted freshman **Travis Childers** (D), but it won't be easy.

North Carolina 11 (Asheville, etc.) If the Appalachian Democrats turn to the GOP in reaction to Obama's candidacy, then Asheville City Councilman **Carl Mumpower** (R) might have a chance against freshman **Heath Shuler** (D), who, however, gets good marks -- and money -- for a first term.

Texas 22 (Sugar Land, etc.) **Tom DeLay's** (R) old district might return to its roots this fall, since first year incumbent **Nick Lampson** (D) won in 2006 against a write-in foe by a mere 52%. Lampson is facing ex-US Senate aide **Pete Olson**, a GOP-establishment favorite.

Texas 23 (San Antonio, etc.) Freshman **Ciro Rodriguez** (D) won his special election last year with 54%. If Obama runs poorly among Latino voters, the GOP's **Lyle Larson** could give Rodriguez a battle.

Many Dixie Senate Races Close

Although some incumbents are having an easy go of it, others are in surprisingly tough re-election battles. Here's a quick look at all 13 Dixie Senate races.

Alabama. Unlike some of his Dixie colleagues, US Sen. **Jeff Sessions** (R) is not facing a tough race. For starters, African-American state Sen. **Vivian Figures** (D) is not getting enough money to make an impact.

Arkansas. US Sen. **Mark Pryor** (D) doesn't even have a Republican opponent this year.

Georgia. Not all is doom-and-gloom for Dixie Republicans. In one recent poll US Sen. **Saxby Chambliss** (R-GA) led all five Democrats who are trying for the Democratic nomination by large margins -- from 19 points to 23 points. In his closest race, Chambliss had 58%, DeKalb County CEO **Vernon Jones** (D) 29%.

Kentucky. Senate Minority Leader **Mitch McConnell** was trailing millionaire **Bruce Lunsford** (D) by 49% to 44%, according to a Rasmussen Reports survey taken May 22, two days after Lunsford's victory in the Democratic Primary. Then a subsequent poll, taken for McConnell by Voter/Consumer Research, gave McConnell a 50%-39% lead.

Louisiana. US Sen. **Mary Landrieu** (D-LA) is in a close race with state Treasurer **John Kennedy** (R). According to a Rasmussen survey taken in late May, Landrieu leads Kennedy 47% to 44%, a weak lead for an incumbent. The poll represents a gain for Kennedy over a poll taken late in March/early April by Southern Media Opinion Research, which showed Landrieu leading 50% to 38%.

Mississippi. Given that recently appointed US Sen. **Roger Wicker's** (R-MS) former district has elected a Democrat to replace him in congress, Magnolia State Republicans could have a tough time keeping him in office for **Trent Lott's** four-year unexpired term. Two recent polls show differing, but close, results. It's 48% for former Gov. **Ronnie Musgrove** (D), 40% for Wicker, says a Hamilton Campaigns (D) poll for the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee; it's Wicker 46%, Musgrove 42%, says a Research 2000 survey for the left-of-center Daily Kos blog..... However, US Sen. **Thad Cochran** (R), running for re-election to a full term, is safe.



North Carolina. A Rasmussen poll released June 12 showed US Sen. **Elizabeth Dole** (R) with a 53% to 39% lead over challenger **Kay Hagan** (D), representing a gain for Dole over polls taken just after the Democratic Primary.

Oklahoma. Ten-year Senate veteran **James Inhofe** (R), 72, is a good re-election bet this year, but he does face a spirited challenge from state Sen. **Andrew Rice** (D), 34. Inhofe will be helped by the McCain-Obama battle. Rice is raising some money, but not enough. A Daily Kos poll taken June 9-11 gives Inhofe 53%, Rice 31%.

South Carolina. US Sen. **Lindsey Graham** (R) easily defeated a challenger to his right, former member of the Republican National Committee “**Buddy**” **Witherspoon**, by 66% to 34%. In November, Graham will face **Bob Conley** (D), an engineer, a former Republican, and a political neophyte who is conservative on illegal immigration, abortion and same-sex marriage, but is opposed to the war in Iraq. A recount confirmed that Conley won the Democratic Primary by 1,058 votes over more liberal **Michael Cone**, an attorney.

Tennessee. Former state Democratic chairman **Bob Tuke** is favored over 20-year Knox County Clerk **Mike Padgett** in the August 7 primary to choose an opponent for US Sen. **Lamar Alexander** (R). As of March 31, Tuke had \$217,000 on hand to Padgett’s \$77,000. Incidentally, Tuke is taking a page out of Alexander’s 1978 book, walking across the state meeting folks and getting publicity. Alexander is a heavy November favorite.

Texas. US Sen. **John Cornyn** (R-TX) now has a 52% to 35% lead over challenger **Rick Noriega** (D), according to the latest Rasmussen poll. In the same firm’s poll taken a month ago, Cornyn led by only 4 points, so the jump to a 17-point margin is a significant

boost for the GOPer. Meanwhile, the Obama campaign has launched a voter registration drive in the state’s four largest cities.

Virginia. Popular Democratic former Gov. **Mark Warner** (D) is already a heavy favorite to defeat the GOP’s former governor **Jim Gilmore** and claim the seat to be vacated by retiring US Sen. **John Warner** (R).

National GOP Expands Primaries Role

National GOP leaders in Congress will play a greater role in Republican Primary contests this year in an effort to assure the party has the strongest nominees in the General Election. The change was announced recently by House Minority Leader **John Boehner** (R-OH). While US Rep. **Tom Cole** (R-OK), chairman of National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC), the party’s lead committee for electing Republicans to congress, announced that his committee will continue to stay out of primary contests, NRCC spokesman **Ken Spain** told SPR that “the Leadership will get involved in helping those candidates, but that will not be a pre-primary endorsement by the NRCC.” So although the Republican Leadership, including the House Republican Conference and party leaders elected by Republican House members, will take sides in some primaries, the NRCC will continue its policy of remaining officially neutral in primaries.

Impact on Southern Races. Although the Republican Conference does not have the fundraising or campaign expertise on staff equivalent to the NRCC, the GOP Leadership in Congress does have considerable clout. One example of the Leadership’s involvement has been in Georgia’s 8th District (Macon, etc.), where Minority Leader Boehner headlined a fundraiser for retired Maj. Gen. **Rick Goddard** even though former US Rep. **Mac**



Collins (R), who received 49% in his 2006 race against incumbent Democrat **Jim Marshall**, had not yet ruled out running. But the NRCC, which helped recruit Goddard, did not endorse him prior to the filing deadline.

The Republican Leadership is also expected to get involved in the GOP primary in Louisiana 4 (Shreveport, etc.), where retiring US Rep. **Jim McCrery** (R) is supporting attorney **Jeff Thompson**, a former chamber of commerce president, over two other Republicans, and possibly discourage others may filing before the July 11 deadline.

Placing Blame for Recent GOP Losses. The change in the national Republican role in contested congressional primaries came about because of GOP concerns about two special elections for congress this year, in Louisiana 6 (Baton Rouge, etc.) and Mississippi 1 (Tupelo, etc.), as well as one in former Speaker **Dennis Hastert**'s district in Illinois. Former NRCC Chair **Tom Davis** told *The Hill* newspaper that bad Republican candidates contributed to those defeats and that "a little adult supervision would have helped."

Criticism of the Old NRCC Policy. The NRCC previously had a policy of choosing sides in primaries. Although the policy was supported by former NRCC chairmen Davis (R-VA) and **Tom Reynolds** (R-NY), it created controversy within the party and was reversed when Cole took over as chairman.

The NRCC's former policy of taking sides in primaries got a black eye in 2006 in several races, including one in Texas 17, where Iraq veteran **Van Taylor** had strong backing from the Washington committee, and as a result, much greater financial resources than **Tucker Anderson**, a former aide to US Rep. **Pete Sessions** (R-TX). Despite the imbalance in funding and national GOP support, many local

Republican activists and both the *Dallas Morning News* and the *Fort Worth Star Telegram* endorsed Anderson.

The NRCC backed Taylor in part because it wanted to have more military veterans on the ballot and because it deemed Taylor was a better fit for the district. Anderson argued, plausibly, that while he was a native of the district, Taylor had moved into the district to run for Congress. He contended that if Taylor were the nominee, this would be a major problem in the General Election campaign against vulnerable incumbent **Chet Edwards** (D-TX), who had won by a slim 51% in 2004.

Despite being outspent \$629,000 to \$66,000, Anderson lost the primary to Taylor by 46% to 54%, hardly underscoring the NRCC's contention that Taylor was the more electable candidate. Moreover, as Anderson predicted, the Democrats focused on Taylor's carpetbagger status and Edwards won by a much improved 58% to 40%. A good case can be made that had the NRCC stayed out of the primary, Anderson would have won both the primary and the General Election. As it is, this year Republicans are making only a token effort against Edwards: At the end of the 1st Quarter, GOP nominee **Rob Curnock** had \$2,766 on hand to Edwards' \$1,288,190.

Dixie's Mugwumps

With their mugs on one side of the fence and their wumps on the other, a number of Southern Democrats and Republicans are refusing to support their party's presidential nominee. Most of the Democratic mavericks are motivated by wanting to get re-elected in GOP-leaning districts. The Republicans' motives for staying clear of John McCain are mixed, including some that aren't clear. The list of Democratic non-endorsers was



published in Washington's *The Politico* newspaper and the Republicans in *The Hill*.

Democrats. US Rep. **Dan Boren** (OK) said last week that he will not endorse **Barack Obama**, citing his *National Journal* rating as the most liberal senator. In Florida, freshman US Rep. **Tim Mahoney** (D), in a tough re-election battle, announced that he will remain neutral through the national convention and does not plan to be active in the presidential race. His fellow Floridian, US Rep. **Allen Boyd** (D), has also declined to endorse Obama. Ditto for **Lincoln Davis** (D-TN), who has said either Obama or **Hillary Clinton** were "poison" in his district, and **Jim Marshall** (D-GA) who, according to a report in the *Washington Examiner*, won't say whether he believes Obama or McCain would make a better president. And Arkansas's **Marion Berry** told a reporter last week that with Obama as the nominee, his enthusiasm for his party's national ticket has been "drained to the bottom of the tank."

Republicans. US Sen. **Jeff Sessions** (AL), for no reason we know of, has not publicly endorsed McCain. Nor has US Rep. **Ron Paul** (TX), whose motives are likely multi-layered. **Walter Jones** (NC) is neutral because of his opposition to the war in Iraq. **Virgil Goode's** (VA) coolness might be related to Goode's stand against McCain's compromise illegal immigration bill. **Frank Wolf** (VA) is cut out of the same moderate cloth as McCain, but may fear Obama's strength in his Northern Virginia district. Non-supporter **Randy Forbes** (VA) is significantly more conservative than McCain. An aide to retiring US Rep. **Dave Weldon** (FL) told a Florida newspaper that her boss will vote for McCain, but "reserves his endorsements for conservatives." When **Ted Poe's** (TX) name

appeared on *The Hill's* non-endorser list, he "had a dialogue with the McCain campaign and offered Sen. McCain his full-support," Poe staffer **Deanne Thigpen** tells SPR.

Grits

? **Virginia's Rebel Webb.** US Sen. **Jim Webb** (D-VA), mentioned as a running mate for **Barack Obama**, might help or hurt the ticket with the latest revelation, on the front page of Washington's *Politico* newspaper. Webb, whose ancestors were officers in the Confederate army, is a staunch fan of the Southern side in the -- er -- War of Northern Aggression. He's written books, published articles and given speeches extolling the bravery of the Southern soldiers and criticizing "revisionist" historians who have attacked **Robert E. Lee**. Webb has noted that most Southerners did not own any slaves and were fighting for state sovereignty. Come to think of it, Obama and Webb, working opposite sides of the street, might do very well down South.

? **North Carolina Governor's Race Tight.** It's 47% for **Beverly Perdue** (D), the current lieutenant governor, to 46% for **Pat McCrory** (R), the mayor Charlotte, according to the latest Rasmussen poll of Tar Heel voters.

? **Cohen Ahead in Tennessee.** In Tennessee's 9th District (Memphis, etc.), freshman US Rep. **Steve Cohen** (D) faces a significant challenge from African-American labor lawyer **Nikki Tinker** in the August 7 primary. Tinker got a boost recently when Emily's List (Early Money Is Like Yeast), a group that funds Democratic women candidates, endorsed her. Tinker, who got 25% to Cohen's 31% in the 2006 primary, hopes that the absence of a large field of African-American contenders will enable her to defeat Cohen, who is white, in this 60% black district. Cohen released a poll, taken for him in late April by Lake Research Partners, showing him with 63% to Tinker's 11% and 5% for lesser known **Joe Towns Jr.**