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Dixie's Vulnerable House Seats

At least a year will probably have to pass before the 2010 political climate begins to develop, so speculation about Republican or Democratic gains are obviously imprecise. We do know a few things, however. First, it is usually -- not always, but usually -- the case that the out-of-power gains seats at the first mid-term election of a new president. We also know that freshmen members of the US House are at the most vulnerable point in their careers; they haven't had time to develop a record of service that identifies them in the voters' minds as public officials, rather than mere candidates. And third, we know when a member of congress is re-elected with 55% or less of the vote, he or she is likely to face a tougher challenge in the next election.

The first two factors suggest that Republicans are likely to have more opportunities to make congressional gains in the South next year. Not only will the new president be a Democrat, but eight of Dixie's Democratic US Representatives are freshmen, to five Republicans.

The third factor -- winning by 55% or less -- cuts both ways. Ten Southern Democratic members of Congress won their seats with 55% of the vote or less. But eight Dixie Republicans also garnered 55% or less.

The biggest factor in 2010 will be the record of the Obama Administration. If he is successful in putting the nation's economy on sounder footing, and if his foreign policy and defense initiatives aren't followed by one or more terrorist attacks in this country, then Democrats are likely to run well in the South's congressional elections, either gaining a few seats or holding their losses to a minimum.

If, on the other hand, the economy is still a mess, or if Obama's policies -- such as tax increases -- prove unpopular, or if the terrorists are perceived as gaining under the new administration, then the GOP is in a good position to make substantial US House gains.

Below are separate lists of Southern Democratic and Republican US House members who are potentially vulnerable next year, along with their tenure in office and their share of the vote in 2008.

Democrats

Alabama 2 (Dothan, etc.)
Freshman Bobby Bright (D) 50.3%

Alabama 5 (Huntsville, etc.)
Freshman Parker Griffith (D) 52%



Florida 8 (Orlando, etc.)
Freshman Alan Grayson (D) 52%

Florida 22 (Ft. Lauderdale, etc.)
Two-term Ron Klein (D) 55%

Florida 24 (Orlando, etc.)
Freshman Suzanne Kosmas (D) 57%

Mississippi 1 (Tupelo, etc.)
Two-term Travis Childers (D) 54%

North Carolina 8 (Concord, etc.)
Freshman Larry Kissell (D) 55%

Texas 17 (Waco, etc.)
Ten-term Chet Edwards (D) 53%

Virginia 2 (Virginia Beach, etc.)
Freshman Glenn Nye (D) 52%

Virginia 5 (Charlottesville, etc.)
Freshman Tom Perriello* (D) 50.01%

Virginia 11 (Northern Virginia)
Freshman Gerald Connolly (D) 53%

* Incumbent Virgil Goode (R) has requested a recount.

Republicans

Alabama 3 (Anniston, etc.)
Four-term Mike Rogers (R) 53%

Florida 15 (Space Coast, etc.)
Freshman Bill Posey (R) 53%

Florida 16 (West Palm Beach, etc.)
Freshman Tom Rooney (R) 60%

Florida 25 (Metropolitan Miami, etc.)
Four-term Mario Diaz-Balart (R) 53%

Kentucky 2 (Bowling Green, etc.)
Freshman Brett Guthrie (R) 53%

Louisiana 6 (Baton Rouge, etc.)
Freshman Bill Cassidy (R) 48%

South Carolina 2 (Lexington, etc.)
Four-term Joe Wilson (R) 54%

Texas 10 (Austin, etc.)
Three-term Michael McCaul (R) 54%

Texas 22 (Sugar Land, etc.)
Freshman Pete Olson (R) 52%

Louisiana: GOP Wins Two for Two

Louisiana voters, like those in Georgia's Senate runoff earlier in the week, confirmed their Republican roots on Saturday in two congressional victories. In the 2nd District, in a stunning upset, Vietnamese immigration lawyer **Anh "Joseph" Cao** (R) defeated African-American nine-term incumbent **William Jefferson** (D). And in the 4th District, physician **John Fleming** (R) appears to have won a cliffhanger over former District Attorney **Paul Carmouche** (D), for the seat of retiring US Rep. **Jim McCrery** (R).

2nd District (New Orleans, etc.). With all precincts reporting, Cao (pronounced "Gow") had 33,122 votes (50%) to Jefferson's 31,296 (47%). In a district that is 64% African-American and only 2.7% Asian, as well as about two-thirds registered Democrats, the results underscored the voters' reaction to Jefferson's ethical problems; the congressman will stand trial in early January on multiple federal bribery and corruption charges.

Cao, who becomes the first Vietnamese American in Congress, came to the United States from Saigon -- now Ho Chi Minh City - - when he was eight years old. He has an undergraduate degree in physics, a master's degree in philosophy and a law degree. His only previous political experience was as an independent candidate for the state House of



Representatives in which he came in fifth in a field of six.

Despite his slight political record, Cao, 41, had major muscle behind him, including Gov.

Bobby Jindal (R) and US Rep. **Steve Scalise** (R) from the 1st District (Metairie, etc.), as well as Democrat **Helena Moreno**, who lost the runoff to Jefferson on November 4.

While Cao made only passing references to Jefferson's legal problem in the campaign, the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* reported that the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) financed direct mail and automated phone calls that labeled Jefferson "crooked."

Jefferson's major problem appears to have been a major decline in the turn-out of black voters compared with November 4, when **Barack Obama** was on the ballot. However, there is also the possibility that with Obama's election, many African Americans feel a lessened need to support black candidates regardless of non-racial factors, much as Catholic voters began to leave the Democratic fold once **John F. Kennedy** broke the religious barrier to the White House.

4th District (Shreveport, etc.). With all precincts reporting, the complete but unofficial returns gave Fleming 44,497 votes (48.07%) to Carmouche's 44,141 (47.69%), a razor-thin 356-vote margin. Two minor candidates received 4.21%. Fleming declared victory, but Carmouche will request a recount.

Fleming, a physician and successful businessman (Subway shops, etc.), won a hotly contested primary and runoff over candidates with either deep pockets or high-powered support from McCrery and the NRCC. But the national GOP group swung quickly behind Fleming and made strong attacks on Carmouche's record as district attorney, citing

cases where criminals were set free after short sentences and continued to commit crimes; Carmouche attributed those to clerical, not prosecutorial, errors.

In addition, Fleming had extensive support from McCrery, and Jindal appeared personally in Shreveport to endorse Fleming and appeared in TV spots for him.

Carmouche, 65, has served as the district attorney for Caddo Parish (Shreveport) for the past 30 years. He mounted a well-financed campaign that included radio spots recorded by President-elect Obama. Nevertheless, Carmouche ran as a conservative on such issues as abortion. He also stressed the economy and bipartisanship.

African-American voters make up about one-third of the 4th District's electorate, but as in the 1st District, they appear to have turned out in smaller numbers than on November 4, compared to white voters.

Both elections were held in December because Hurricane Gustav forced state officials to postpone party primaries, which moved back the dates for runoffs and the General Election. Had the congressional elections been held on November 4, when African-American turnout - - spurred by Obama's candidacy -- was high, Democrats would have likely won both races.

US House Outlook

Alabama: Cooper for Congress?

If 6th District (Birmingham) US Rep. **Artur Davis** (D) runs for governor of Alabama in 2010, as expected, look for prominent Birmingham attorney **Patrick Cooper** (D) to make a major bid for Davis's congressional seat. Cooper ran for mayor of Birmingham in 2007 and finished second in a 10-candidate race, coming within 170 votes -- out of 52,111



cast -- of forcing a runoff. Davis and Cooper -- and Obama, for that matter -- are cut from the same cloth. Both are successful African Americans with strong ties to the city's business community. Davis graduated from Harvard, Cooper from Yale. Cooper's father, a two-star general, was ambassador to Jamaica.

Florida: Another Challenge to Klein?

The long, narrow and wealthy 22nd District (Boca Raton, etc.) produced an unexpectedly close result in this year's congressional election. African-American **Allen West**, a retired lieutenant colonel, who garnered 45% to freshman **Ron Klein**'s (D) 55%, has already expressed interest in a 2010 rematch. Klein was one of the US House's most successful fundraisers (\$3.9 million) to West's \$500,000. West, who resigned from the Army after US officials objected to his firing a pistol near an Iraqi prisoner's head to elicit information, is an outspoken and effective conservative who ran an under funded (\$500,00) campaign with a heavy grass-roots emphasis. Neither the national nor state GOP powers got behind West, but he came much closer to Klein than the experts thought possible. The close race, however, may entice other challengers to Klein, including House Majority Leader **Adam Hasner** (R), the Florida lower chamber's top fundraiser (\$1 million+) this year, who has already been mentioned in the media. Third-term Hasner, like Klein, is Jewish, which could benefit the Republicans in this district, which has a significant Jewish population.

South Carolina 1: Ketner vs. Who in 2010?

1st District (Charleston, etc.) voters are likely to see another lively congressional contest in 2010. Activist/ philanthropist **Linda Ketner** (D), who lost to four-term US Rep. **Henry Brown** (R) by a close 48% to 52%, has not announced but has said a re-run is possible and

she is forming what she describes on her website as "a loosely structured bipartisan groups of concerned citizens" to focus on improving life in the 1st District -- and which will keep her grass-roots volunteers involved before the next campaign. But amid rumors that 72-year old incumbent Brown might not seek re-election, there is also talk that **Katherine Jenerette**, 39, a US Army Reserve Officer and a Republican activist, might seek the GOP nomination. Jenerette ran against Brown in last year's primary, garnering 19% to Brown's 70% in a three-way contest. Observers describe her -- admirably -- as "Palinesque," a reminder of just how much of an icon the governor of Alaska has become.

South Carolina 2: Miller vs. Wilson Redux

Congressman **Joe Wilson** (R-SC), who has represented South Carolina's 2nd District (Lexington, etc.) for seven years, got a surprisingly tough challenge this year from retired Marine Corps officer, Iraq War veteran and small businessman **Rob Miller** (D), who held Wilson to a 54%-46% victory. While Miller hasn't said he will run again in 2010, his post-election letter to supporters suggests he might. "We do not view our results as a loss, but instead as a first step towards winning back the district. ... [O]ver the coming months, I will be in touch with as many of you as I can reach to discuss ways that we can start moving forward." Wilson, however, won't be taken by surprise. "I see this as an opportunity to learn about well-funded, self-financed campaigns and how to match that in the future," he told *The State* newspaper after his close race.

Virginia: Perriello Certified, But...

On November 24, Virginia's State Board of Elections certified that in the 5th District (Charlottesville, etc.), civil liberties lawyer



Tom Perriello (D) won the November 4 election, defeating six-term incumbent **Virgil Goode** (R) by 745 votes. The final vote was 158,712 (50.08%) for Perriello to 157,967 (49.85%) for Goode. Goode has requested a recount, which he is entitled to do under state law; the recount should be completed at some point in December. While Obama's strong race may have helped Perriello, McCain actually carried the district, 51% to 48%. If Perriello survives the recount, he will be one of three newly elected Democratic congressmen from Virginia and the state will shift from a US House delegation that was 8R-3D before the election to 6D-5R after the election.

Georgia: Chambliss Prevails

US Sen. **Saxby Chambliss** (R-GA) won re-election by an impressive 57.5% to 42.5% for former state Rep. **Jim Martin** (D) after he failed to receive a majority on November 4. A majority is required for election under Georgia law. Chambliss's victory was the result of a major get-out-the-vote effort, aided by major help from party big-wigs, including **John McCain** and **Sarah Palin**. (A good gauge of Palin's effectiveness could be seen on television in the broad grin on Gov. **Sonny Perdue**'s (R-GA) face as he stood behind her while she brought an Augusta crowd to raucous cheers.) Chambliss' victory had national importance in that it ensured that Democrats will not achieve a 60-vote filibuster-proof margin in the Senate.

Texas: Craddick Fights for Speakership

It is becoming a tradition in the Lone Star State for the House of Representatives to have a major battle on opening day over whether or not to re-elect Speaker **Tom Craddick** (R). Craddick, who has served in the chamber longer than any other Republican and is strongly supported by the business community

and most conservative legislators, holds a powerful office that can name committee chairs. He is disliked by most liberals and by moderate Republicans, who believe his enactment of a strict conservative agenda has been responsible for the steady decline in the Republican majority in the House in the last three elections, from 88-62 to 76-74.

So far, Craddick and nine other legislators have filed for the post, five Republicans and five Democrats. Even with a slim majority, Craddick is favored, but by no means a sure thing. The Republican representatives who filed for speaker are usually moderates. They believe Craddick has pressured moderate GOPers into voting for measures that hurt them in their own districts. But this year, in addition to moderates, conservative state Rep. **Burt Solomons** (R) also filed, indicating that even some on the party's right are dissatisfied with Craddick.

So far, while his opponents claim they have enough signed pledges to defeat him, no one has released the names of the signatories, the only sure sign of victory.

"Craddick probably has the most votes," says **Harvey Kronberg**, editor of the Austin-based *Quorum Report*, "maybe 30 to 35. But he probably can't get the balance of what he needs." Kronberg expects that between now and January 13, when the legislature convenes, the challengers will begin jockeying in hopes of coalescing behind a single challenger who could defeat Craddick.

Other observers cut Craddick more slack. **Will Lutz**, managing editor of *The Lone Star Report*, says that "if everything falls his way," Craddick could get as many as 79 or 80 votes. Lutz notes that Craddick's incumbency, combined with his support from the GOP's big donors, are considerable assets to the speaker.



Lutz estimates there are seven or eight Republicans who aren't likely to vote for Craddick. In addition, 63 Democrats have signed a petition pledging not to vote for Craddick, leaving 11 or 12 potential Democratic votes for the speaker.

If Craddick comes up short, the Republican who might possibly win the speaker's job is **James Keffer**, a somewhat conservative West Texan and a former chairman of the Ways and Means Committee. Keffer was once a Craddick ally, but the two fell out. Keffer has been campaigning actively for the post. The strongest Democrat is moderate **Allan Ritter**, who favors tort reform and is pro-business.

No one, however, sells Craddick short. "The presumption is with the incumbent," says Kronberg. "Craddick is fighting tooth and nail for every vote. He's been in the legislature since 1967 and knows how things work. And he's got big money and organization behind him," says Lutz. And another state house observer says, "No one would ever count [Craddick] out. He has nine lives."

Grits

? North Carolina: Women Rule. Not only did Tar Heel voters elect **Beverly Perdue** (D) the state's first woman governor, but they chose five other women to serve in executive positions, giving women a 6-to-4 majority on the Council of State. In addition to Perdue, the Council includes Treasurer **Janet Cowell** (D), Auditor **Beth Wood** (D), Secretary of State **Elaine Marshall** (D), Superintendent of Public Instruction **June Atkinson** (D) and Labor Commissioner **Cherie Berry** (R).

? Texas: GOP Has Problems. According to a mid-November poll by **David Hill** (R), the

Lone Star GOP isn't looking good as it prepares for key state elections in 2010. Only 31% said they were likely to vote for a Republican for governor or the legislature in the next election, to 45% who would vote for a Democrat. And just 32% said that Republican officeholders in Austin deserve re-election, to 54% who are open to voting for a Democrat. Pollster Hill told the *Dallas Morning News* that many voters viewed Republicans -- who hold all statewide offices in Texas as well as a majority in both legislative chambers -- as "arrogant, corrupt, angry and unwelcoming." Voters blamed **President Bush** for most of the Republicans' problems, but also believe that state GOP officials did not connect with Hispanics and younger voters.

? Tennessee: Bredeesen vs. Legislature? Gov. **Phil Bredeesen** (D), entering the last two years of his tenure at the helm of the Volunteer State, faces some unexpected obstacles in the legislature. Not only did Republicans increase their majority in the Senate to 19-14, but they gained a surprising four seats in the House, giving them a 50R-49D majority. Then House Democrats re-elected House Democratic Leader **Gary Odom** by one vote, over the governor's opposition. A Bredeesen spokeswoman said before the vote that the governor had "trust issues" with Odom, stemming from his opposition to Bredeesen's efforts to close a tax loophole last year. And the new speaker, to be elected in January, is likely to be a Republican -- state Rep. **Jason Mumpower** (R), 35, who, reports *The Tennessean*, is fond of quoting **Machiavelli's** *The Prince* and *The Art of War*, a 6th Century Chinese military treatise and a favorite of the GOP's late super-strategist **Lee Atwater**.