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Both Parties Gearing Up for 2010

President Obama is only in the second month of his presidency and November 2010 is still some 21 months away, but already Democratic and Republican committees are beginning their campaigns for next year's congressional elections. In this issue, SPR examines the strategies and targets of both parties.

Republicans Attack Waste, Democrats

"Last year **Travis Childers** promised us he would fight for fiscal responsibility..." says the radio ad that aired recently in Northeast Mississippi. "But now, just a year later, he voted for a wasteful pork barrel spending program that would cost taxpayers close to a trillion dollars." The radio spot adds that the stimulus bill Childers voted for included millions of dollars for prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, stop-smoking programs and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Sponsored by the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC), versions of the spot are being aired in 30 congressional districts across the country, nine of them in the South. Each ad is tailored to a Democratic congressman deemed by the NRCC to be potentially vulnerable in next year's elections.

The Southern Democrats targeted by the NRCC for this and other attacks include **John Barrow** (GA12), **Travis Childers** (MS1), **Chet Edwards** (TX17), **Bart Gordon** (TN6), **Alan Grayson** (FL8), **Larry Kissell** (NC8), **Suzanne Kosmas** (FL24), **Charlie Melancon** (LA3) and **Glenn Nye** (VA2).

Some are on the list because they are freshmen, who usually face their most serious challenge the first time they face the voters as an incumbent. Others made the list because they won by a narrow margin -- 55% or less is the usual cutoff -- last year, or because **John McCain** ran especially well in the district.

Dana Edelstein, a spokesperson for Childers, who voted for the stimulus package when it first passed the House and again on final passage, told SPR the ad "is misleading." Noting that the bottom line is about jobs, she added, "The country would probably be better off if those who ran this ad spent time working on an alternative plan rather than a radio ad. We need to do what's necessary to protect our country right now."

While **President Obama's** approval rating remains high -- more than 60% in a recent Gallup Poll -- an analysis of the Gallup survey



prepared for the NRCC by Public Opinion Strategies (R) noted that “just 52% of Americans” favored the stimulus plan. That number is lower in some districts, presumably including a number in the South where McCain out-pollled Obama last fall.

In addition to the radio spot focused on the Democrats’ vote for the Obama stimulus package, the GOP committee also sends out press releases on various other issues. The releases are worded differently for each targeted congressman, often quoting from the lawmaker’s 2008 campaign material. A release aimed at freshman Kissell (D-NC), for example, contrasts his campaign promise to reduce “congressional pork spending” with his pro-stimulus vote. Another NRCC release blasted Childers for his vote against an investigation into the role of government mortgage companies Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac in the current economic crisis.

On a different issue, NRCC releases are blasting targeted Democrats for voting against a motion to remove US Rep. **Charlie Rangel** (D-NY) as chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee until the investigation into his tax problems has been completed. Each release points out not only that the Democratic member voted against Rangel’s removal, but notes how much money he or she received from Rangel in campaign contributions in 2008. The releases note, for example, that US Reps. **Bobby Bright** (D-AL) received \$14,000 from Rangel, **Parker Griffith** (D-AL) \$7,000, Kissell (D-NC) \$23,000, **Jim Marshall** (D-GA) \$21,000 and Nye (D-VA) \$14,000; all of them voted against removing Rangel.

Whether a vote for the stimulus package will end up hurting potentially vulnerable Democrats remains to be seen. If the economy recovers before the 2010 election, it may be the GOP, not the pro-stimulus Democrats, who

will be scrambling for cover. But for now, the NRCC is gambling that softening up vulnerable Democrats on this and other issues will pay off in November 2010.

Democrats Back Stimulus, Hit GOPers

Hoping to killing two birds with one stone, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) is using **President Obama**’s economic recovery package as the key issue in its campaign to defeat vulnerable Republican members of the House in 2010. In a series of radio spots, press releases, e-mails (3 million) and robo-calls (100,000) aimed at targeted GOPers under the umbrella theme of “Putting Families First,” the DCCC is attacking freshman Republicans and other GOP members who are not secure in their congressional seats for their opposition to Obama’s stimulus bill. In the first phases of the program, the DCCC aired radio ads in 28 districts currently held by Republicans, supplemented by automated phone calls in the districts of seven GOP freshmen. In addition to trying to soften up Republicans who are likely to be Democratic targets next year, the DCCC program is giving significant support to the Obama Administration’s economic policies.

The messages are tailored to the targeted Republicans, and besides jobs, stress the tax cuts and support for investments, both popular concerns among the more conservative voters likely to be found in the swing districts. In a DCCC release, Chairman **Chris Van Hollen** (MD), accused Republicans of voting against “the largest tax cut in American history,” and noted that in addition to large job losses, “the stock market has plummeted, wiping out nearly \$7 trillion in stock market wealth and endangering thousands of investors’ nest eggs,” messages likely to resonate with middle and up-scale Republicans and independents. The phone calls are state-specific. “Did you



know Congressman **Tom Rooney** voted against economic recovery that would immediately create and save nearly 330,000 Florida jobs?" says the message used in Rooney's 16th District.

The stimulus package has been less popular in the South than nationally, but still gets majority approval in Dixie. A Gallup Poll taken February 10 found that 59% of respondents nationwide favored the package, to 33% who opposed it. In the South, the region where it was least popular, the package was favored by 57% and opposed by 38%. By race, 81% of blacks favored the package to 57% of whites who favored it.

The DCCC's program is a national one, running in 28 target districts, including eleven in the South. Southern Republican members of Congress whose districts are receiving attention from the "Putting Families First" program include **Bill Young** (FL10), **Adam Putnam** (FL12), **Tom Rooney** (FL16), **Lincoln Diaz-Balart** (FL21), **Mario Diaz-Balart** (FL25), **Brett Guthrie** (KY2), **Joseph Cao** (LA2), **John Fleming** (LA4), **Bill Cassidy** (LA6), **Henry Brown** (SC1), **Pete Sessions** (TX32), and **Eric Cantor** (VA7).

This early in the 2010 cycle, the targets for both parties are subject to change, with some to be added or dropped as circumstances warrant. While Minority Whip Cantor (R-VA) won easily (63%) in 2008, he is probably included in the list to -- er -- harass him, due to his position in the Republican leadership. Putnam (R-FL) is not running for re-election, but the DCCC probably wants to prepare the ground for the battle for an open-seat.

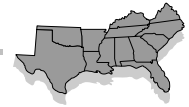
Virginia Governor's Race a Jump Ball

As one of only two governor's races in 2009 -- the other is in New Jersey -- the Virginia

election will be closely watched by political prognosticators. At stake is whether Virginia's trend toward the Democrats over the last eight years, capped by **Obama**'s carrying the state last November, will continue or be reversed.

For the GOP, state Attorney General **Bob McDonnell** has no competition for the gubernatorial nod, so the focus is on the highly competitive Democratic Primary. Three Democrats, each with powerful factors in his favor, are competing in the June 9 primary. Former Democratic national chairman **Terry McAuliffe** is a fundraiser sine qua non and is likely to have far and away the largest war chest. Former Del. **Brian Moran** is a 15-year veteran of the legislature, where he has made many friends and allies in the Democratic establishment. And state Sen. **Creigh Deeds** is well known to voters across the state after losing the attorney general's race in 2005 by only 360 votes out of some 2 million cast.

Each of the three Democrats has significant negatives as well as positives. McAuliffe, a resident of Northern Virginia whose political experience has been across the Potomac in Washington, is widely viewed as an outsider, a view that comes up over and over in conversations with savvy Virginia political observers. "Most people view McAuliffe as an interloper," says Tidewater attorney **Carter Phillips**, a longtime Democratic activist; "he's never done anything in Virginia Democratic politics at all." A Richmond observer makes the same point, noting that McAuliffe "has had his share of experience in the federal arena, and zero in state and local politics. He lives in Northern Virginia because it's close to Washington, site of his true passion." And **Larry Sabato**, director of the University of Virginia's Center for Politics, says "If McAuliffe had a background in Virginia government and politics, he would be a slam-



dunk, because he will outspend the other two by a mile.”

McAuliffe, however, is not ignoring the complaint. Like **Ronald Reagan** when he ran for governor of California in 1966, McAuliffe has been studying up on state and local issues, and has been traveling around the state meeting and greeting the folks the other two candidates have known for years. He’s also been up on radio and television, the first of the three contenders to do so.

Moran also has a bit of the outsider image, at least outside of Northern Virginia. He is considerably more liberal than most Virginians -- although he supports gun rights and is tough on crime. Moreover, he still has the Massachusetts accent that marks him as not a native Virginian. These negatives, however, would be more of a handicap in the General Election than in the primary. He also carries a burden -- as well as some advantages -- from being the brother of feisty, controversial Congressman **Jim Moran** (D-VA).

On the other hand, Brian Moran is picking up strong support from African Americans, a key element -- around 35% of the turnout -- in the Democratic Primary. Del. **Adam Ebbin** (D), a Moran supporter, notes that his candidate “has been going to black churches and meeting with black ministers in the Hampton Roads area for more than a year.” Moran also has a strong network of supporters in the party, created in part from traveling around the state as chairman of the House Democratic Caucus. He has especially significant support among Democratic public officials in Northern Virginia, where he will be competing with McAuliffe. Although more low-key than his brother, Brian Moran has not been shy about attacking McAuliffe, whom he views as his main competition: “Virginia needs a fighter, not a fundraiser” and “Will our party be

dominated by big money and those who raise it, or will we be the party of the people?”

Deeds, the only native Virginian in the race, suffers from having lost one race already to McDonnell, the Republican he would have to face in November. His base is in southwest Virginia and is mainly rural, somewhat limiting in a primary that will be decided largely in the cities and suburbs. He stresses good-government issues, including a much-publicized but failed effort to establish a bipartisan commission to draw congressional districts after the 2010 census. He advocates closing a loophole in the state’s gun control law and backs environmental programs.

Deeds’ other base is among his fellow state senators, including state Sen. **Henry Marsh** (D) of Richmond, one of the state’s most influential black political figures. (Ebbin notes that “all of the senators except the Alexandria senator are supporting Deeds and almost all of the House members are for Moran.”)

In the latest financial reports, through December 31, 2008, Deeds had the most money in the bank, with \$891,000. Moran had \$770,000 and McAuliffe \$718,000, but he’s certain to have plenty more when he needs it.

With three candidates in the race, which Democrat is likely to come out on top? “I think it’s a jump ball,” says Sabato. There is no runoff, so the candidate that wins a plurality wins the nomination. McAuliffe and Moran look like the top two right now. Deeds appears to be third, but no one counts him out.

Alabama: Davis’ Congressional Seat

The decision of US Rep. **Artur Davis** (D) to run for governor of Alabama in 2010 is inspiring a spate of contenders to run for the open seat. So far, only one candidate has announced, Birmingham attorney and civic



leader **Terri Sewell**. Two others, state Sen. **Bobby Singleton** and Jefferson County Commissioner **Sheila Smoot**, are putting together exploratory committees.

Sewell is part and parcel of the Obama generation of African-American politicians. She attended public schools in Selma, which is part of the district, and is still well known there. Sewell then went to Princeton at the same time **Michelle Obama** was there, and graduated with honors. She later attended Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar, then Harvard Law School with **Barack Obama**. She is still a friend and supporter of the Obamas. Since returning to Alabama, Sewell has been active in Birmingham's civic affairs; she has served on the board of such groups as the University of Alabama-Birmingham's Minority Health Initiative and the Alabama Council on Economic Education. Birmingham-based national political consultant **Richard Dickerson** notes that "Sewell's background gives her an advantage with white voters," who make up an important minority of the district. Sewell has already begun to assemble a team of experienced campaign consultants, including several former operatives of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee in Washington.

Singleton hails from Greensboro in the rural part of the district and could develop a significant base there. He is the owner of Black Belt Technologies and in the legislature has stressed economic development issues, which could be politically useful in the current recession. Belying his Baptist Church membership, he recently sponsored legislation that would legalize the sale of alcohol on Sunday in certain municipalities, which might help him in Birmingham.

Smoot, who has served two terms on the Jefferson County Commission and is a former

television news anchor, has the advantage of considerable name ID. On the other hand, as a member of the commission, she may have significant baggage. The indictment and conviction of more than one commissioner on federal corruption charges, as well as a continuing financial crisis -- the county is close to declaring bankruptcy -- due to the commission's inability to solve a major sewer system problem, combined with the 100-count public corruption indictment of Mayor **Larry Langford**, have given political incumbency in the city and county a bad reputation

Some other big names are also considering the race. State Rep. **Earl Hilliard Jr.**, son of the former five-term congressman that Davis unseated in 2002, is looking at the race. Hilliard would have positives and negatives from his father's legacy. On the plus side, his name is widely known in the district; the minus is that the elder Hilliard was highly controversial, especially for his views on the Middle East, views that helped defeat him. Aside from his Birmingham law practice, young Hilliard has been involved in film-making and has sponsored legislation that would offer incentives for companies to make movies in the state.

State Rep. **Rodger Smitherman**, recently elevated to president pro tem of the Alabama state senate, is also considering the race. Smitherman, who is from Birmingham, may decide, however, to stay put now that he has a more prominent role in the legislature.

State Rep. **Merika Coleman** and state Sen. **Linda Coleman** have also been mentioned as potential candidates, though neither has yet made any public move toward running.

Birmingham attorney **Patrick Cooper**, who garnered 29% in a 10-candidate race in the 2007 mayor race and forced Langford into a



runoff, had been mentioned as a congressional candidate, but he has decided to run for mayor again. Incumbent Langford is scheduled to stand trial on May 4 for what a federal prosecutor called “a classic pay-to-play scheme.” If Langford is convicted and removed from office, the election of a new mayor could come up in the next few months.

The 7th District is centered in Birmingham but includes much of the state’s rural Black Belt. It is solidly Democratic -- **John Kerry** carried the district 64% to 35% in 2004. The GOP has not contested the seat in the last two elections, and if it does so next year, it will most likely be a pro forma effort. The district is 62% black and 36% white. Thus, the candidates who have expressed interest so far are all Democrats and all African Americans. Consultant Dickerson says, “My gut tells me that the nominee will come out of Birmingham, which is the district’s population and financial base. But if five or six candidates run, a rural candidate could win.” However, Alabama still requires a runoff if no candidate in a primary fails to get 50% plus one of the votes, and a majority of the district’s voters are residents of Jefferson County, which includes Birmingham.

Grits

- **Virginia Bans Smoking.** Bans on smoking in restaurants and bars have been enacted in 23 states, but until Virginia enacted a ban in February, no Southern state prohibited smoking in public places. The measure, long advocated by Gov. **Tim Kaine** (D), was assured passage when House Speaker **William Howell**, a Republican, agreed to a compromise that would still allow smoking in private clubs and in ventilated rooms in restaurants and bars. Howell’s action did not go over well with GOP lawmakers; when the House of Delegates

passed the ban, 33 Republicans voted against it to 22 who supported it. Virginia remains one of the nation’s largest tobacco growing and cigarette manufacturing states.

- **Is North Carolina Next? Sir Walter Raleigh**, who founded this state and brought tobacco back to England and founded an industry that fueled the Tar Heel economy for centuries, would roll over in his grave. The North Carolina legislature may become the second Southern state to ban smoking in restaurants and bars. As the state’s economy and its population have diversified, tobacco’s influence is waning. A recent poll conducted by Public Policy Polling (D) found that 64% of respondents favored the smoking ban to 31% who oppose it. And the ban wins friends across party lines: 68% of Democrats and 62% of Republicans favor the ban.

- **The Bible Belt.** The Gallup Poll has confirmed what we already suspected, that the South is the nation’s Bible Belt. According to results of a survey of 350,000 interviews, published in the *Washington Post*, when asked if religion is an important part of their daily lives, the top eleven states were all in the South. The two Dixie stragglers -- both with lots of Yankees -- were Virginia and Florida, which ranked 16th and 23rd, respectively. What’s more, although the South’s blacks and whites disagree on politics, they have one big thing in common: Both races in Dixie are very religious. Here are the Southern states in order of religiosity, followed by the percentage who said religion is important in their daily lives: MS (85%); AL (82%); SC (80%); TN (79%); LA (78%); AR (78%); GA (76%); NC (76%); OK (75%); KY (74%); TX (74%); VA (68%); and FL (65%). Florida, the least religious state in Dixie, equaled the national average of 65%.