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Overview – U.S. Senate 2018 Elections

Next month's elections feature 26 Dem (two independents caucus with the Dems) and 9 GOP. The resignation of Thad Cochran (R-MS) in April set up a 35th Senate race and second special election this cycle. The GOP maintains a 51-49 edge, and can only afford a net loss of one state to retain its majority. Of the 26 Dem seats up, 10 are in states Trump won in 2016.

GOP: President Trump's approval ratings have stabilized in the low-40s this year, but the GOP is fighting a highly motivated Dem base and the historical trend of the party in the White House losing seats in Congress during the midterms. Of the three GOP incumbents retiring, two have clashed with Trump. Many popular would-be candidates in swing states decided against running, pushing several pickup opportunities out of reach. In addition, several races in reliably red states (e.g. TN, TX) have tightened as Election Day approaches.

Dems: The Dems maintain a high single-digit lead over the GOP in national polling, but are split on strategy. While moderates attempted to work with the President on issues of common interest (fewer this year than last), leftists have pursued "resistance" tactics. But these could harm centrist Dems in red states like Donnelly (IN), Heitkamp (ND), Manchin (WV), and McCaskill (MO). Dem base turnout and the level of GOP apathy will be crucial to determining control of Congress in 2019. Despite a historically favorable map for the GOP, the Dems have an outside chance to take the Senate.

Administration: Warm ties between the U.S. and Israel have continued into President Trump's second year in office, with positive actions by the White House and Congress. The U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem opened in May, ending a 23 year battle between the legislative and executive branches over enforcement of the 1995 Jerusalem Embassy Act. The U.S. ceased all funding to UNRWA, the Palestinian refugee agency which inflames anti-Israel sentiment in its schools and perpetuates the conflict by uniquely including actual refugees and all descendants as eligible. UN Amb. Nikki Haley withdrew the U.S. from the anti-Israel UN Human Rights Council this summer. The U.S. withdrew from the deeply flawed Iran deal and restored punishing economic sanctions. The threat of secondary sanctions convinced many foreign companies to reduce or eliminate operations in Iran. Iran's currency plummeted and the country has seen rounds of mass protests.

Congress: The Taylor Force Act, which passed, withholds PA funding until it ends "martyrs' payments" to families of terrorists, though it appears the PA has no intention of ending these payments soon. Both the House (H.R. 5141) and Senate (S. 2497) have passed annual 2018 foreign assistance bills for Israel with deep bipartisan majorities, crucial for Israel to maintain; the two houses are reconciling the differences in their bills. The Israel Anti-Boycott Act, which would prohibit U.S. participation in foreign-led boycotts against Israel, remains pending before Congress.

A comprehensive peace deal with the Palestinians is unlikely in the near future, though we have yet to see the White House's peace proposal. Weekly protests along the Gaza border, which had culminated in violent riots and attempted mass incursions into Israel in May, continue.

Congress must continue to play its vital role in shaping U.S. policy in the Middle East. It is therefore essential that reliable pro-Israel incumbents, especially those with seniority on key committees, are re-elected this year. This update lists all 35 Senate races in the cycle and current prospects. It indicates briefly where a candidate stands on our issues if he/she has a record in Congress. During our PAC's 37 years here on Capitol Hill, we have established close relationships with key legislators of both parties who share our view that a secure Israel is in the best interests of the United States. As always, we welcome your own insights and suggestions.

**Morrie Amitay
Alex Dubin, Editor
October 2018**

ARIZONA JEFF FLAKE (R)—RETIRING**CLOSE RACE, GOP SEAT**

The race for retiring Sen. Flake's seat is in a dead heat. Rep. Martha McSally (perfect record), the first female Air Force pilot to fly in combat, dispatched two far-right wingers in the GOP primary in August, ensuring a competitive race with Blue Dog Rep. Kyrsten Sinema (excellent record). In recent polls, Sinema maintained on average a 3 point advantage over McSally. This Grand Canyon State race, a must-win for Dems hoping for a Senate majority, is a toss-up going into the final month of the campaign.

CALIFORNIA DIANNE FEINSTEIN (D) 2012 Election, 63%.***Disappointing record—endorsed by J Street***

Feinstein, 85, was spurned by her own state party, as increasingly leftist CA Dems endorsed CA State Sen. Pres. pro tem. Kevin de León (CA has a top-two "jungle primary"). But she should easily defeat him next month and win a fifth term representing the Golden State.

CONNECTICUT CHRIS MURPHY (D) 2012 Election, 55%. Foreign Relations***Only fair record—endorsed by J Street***

Given his increasing national profile, Murphy should cruise to re-election in the Nutmeg State over GOP businessman Matthew Corey.

DELAWARE TOM CARPER (D) 2012 Election, 66%. Homeland Security***Fair record—endorsed by J Street***

Carper should easily secure a fourth term in November representing the First State over GOP county councilman Rob Arlett.

FLORIDA BILL NELSON (D) 2012 Election, 55%. Armed Services**CLOSE RACE, DEM SEAT*****Excellent record—save for the Iran deal***

Nelson, seeking his fourth term, is facing off against Gov. Rick Scott in a close race. The campaigns have spent a combined total of more than \$33 million, but Nelson and Scott have traded low single-digit polling leads over the past month. This race was nationalized after the Parkland shooting in Feb. cast Nelson and Scott into the spotlight, though national coverage of the FL Gov. contest between DeSantis and Gillum has eclipsed that of the Senate fight. This toss-up race will certainly be a referendum on Trump by the Sunshine State electorate, with a slight edge to the incumbent Nelson.

HAWAII MAZIE HIRONO (D) 2012 Election, 63%. Armed Services***Good record***

Hirono should easily win a second term in the Aloha State over retired systems engineer Ron Curtis.

INDIANA JOE DONNELLY (D) 2012 Election, 50%. Armed Services**CLOSE RACE, DEM SEAT*****Good record***

Donnelly's seat is among the most vulnerable—the Hoosier State voted for Trump by nearly 20 points in 2016. Businessman and former IN State Rep. Mike Braun defeated two House Republicans to face off against Donnelly in Nov. The few polls conducted during the last month have been inconclusive; both Braun and Donnelly have claimed small leads. The fate of this seat, one of the most enticing GOP pickup opportunities, will depend on the strength of a potential blue wave in a state trending red.

MAINE ANGUS KING (I) 2012 Election, 53%. Armed Services***Fair to good—endorsed by J Street***

GOP Gov. Paul LePage declined a bid for this seat, effectively ensuring that the independent King will cruise to a second term representing the Pine Tree State. ME State Sen. Eric Brakey, 30, is on the ballot for the GOP.

MARYLAND BEN CARDIN (D) 2012 Election, 55%. Foreign Relations***An outstanding and vocal supporter on all issues, including Iran***

Cardin, who served as Ranking Member of the Foreign Relations Committee until earlier this year, should secure a third term representing the Free State over Towson University Professor Tony Campbell. Cardin's re-election is a top priority.

MASSACHUSETTS ELIZABETH WARREN (D) 2012 Election, 54%. Armed Services***Fair to good record***

Warren should easily win a second term over GOP MA State Rep. Geoff Diehl as she prepares for a potential 2020 presidential bid.

MICHIGAN DEBBIE STABENOW (D) 2012 Election, 59%.***Very good record—save the Iran deal vote***

Stabenow, running for re-election in a 2016 Trump state, has pulled away from GOP businessman John James and should secure a fourth Senate term representing the Wolverine State. Several higher profile Republicans, including Rep. Fred Upton (very good record), declined bids for this seat as fears of a blue wave rose, all but ensuring Stabenow's victory in an initially plausible GOP pickup.

MINNESOTA AMY KLOBUCHAR (D) 2012 Election, 65%.***Excellent record—except for the Iran deal***

Klobuchar should easily defeat GOP State Rep. Jim Newberger and secure a third term, as the GOP will fail to capitalize on Trump's narrow 2 point loss to Clinton in 2016 in this blue state. Klobuchar's cool demeanor ("Minnesota nice") and reputation for pragmatism over ideology (in contrast to colleagues Booker and Harris) could conceivably make her a dark horse for 2020.

MINNESOTA (SPECIAL) TINA SMITH (D) Appointed January 2018***Perfect record so far—on just one vote!***

Dem Lt. Gov. Tina Smith was appointed to replace Sen. Al Franken and is running in a special election for the final two years of his term. High profile talent for the GOP, like former Sen. Norm Coleman (perfect record) and former Gov. Tim Pawlenty (unsuccessfully sought a third term as Gov.) declined to join this race. Smith will likely defeat MN State Sen. Karin Housley, but this unexpected addition to the 2018 cycle will be a much closer race than Klobuchar's.

MISSISSIPPI ROGER WICKER (R) 2012 Election, 57%. Armed Services

Good record

Wicker's re-election was all but secured once MS State Sen. Chris McDaniel decided to join the state's special election (see below). Wicker should defeat Dem MS House Minority Leader David Baria to win a second full term representing the Magnolia State.

MISSISSIPPI (SPECIAL) CINDY HYDE-SMITH (R) Appointed April 2018

Perfect record so far—on just one vote!

Hyde-Smith is seeking to fill the remainder of Sen. Thad Cochran's term after he resigned in April due to health. She likely won't gain a majority over former Dem Rep. Mike Espy (very good record) and MS State Sen. Chris McDaniel, but if polling holds, will almost certainly defeat Espy in a run-off on Nov. 27.

MISSOURI CLAIRE MCCASKILL (D) 2012 Election, 55%. Armed Services, Homeland Security, *Ranking Member*

Fair record—endorsed by J Street

CLOSE RACE, GOP SEAT

McCaskill is fighting for her political life against GOP MO Atty. Gen. Josh Hawley, 38. Hawley maintained a small average lead during the past month, but McCaskill has narrowed the gap. Ultimately, the "resistance" tactics used by Dems against Trump could spur increased GOP turnout, overcoming Dem enthusiasm in deep-red Missouri, and sink McCaskill in a state which voted for Trump by 19 points in 2016. The Show Me State is a crucial pickup opportunity for the GOP.

MONTANA JON TESTER (D) 2012 Election, 49%.

CLOSE RACE, DEM SEAT

Good record

Tester is vulnerable in deep-red Big Sky Country, but has maintained a small lead over MT State Auditor Matt Rosendale. This is another example of a Dem incumbent in a Trump state benefitting from the lack of big-name GOP talent, which tilts this would-be GOP pickup blue. Tester's deep Montana roots, both personal (growing up on a farm near Big Sandy) and political (MT State Senate service), make him particularly well-suited for this race.

NEBRASKA DEB FISCHER (R) 2012 Election, 58%. Armed Services

Excellent record

Fischer should easily defeat local councilwoman Jane Raybould to secure her second term representing the Cornhusker State.

NEVADA DEAN HELLER (R) 2012 Election, 46%.

CLOSE RACE, GOP SEAT

Good record

Heller's prospects declined this summer, losing ground to Rep. Jacky Rosen (excellent record) who has taken a small average polling lead. Rosen has consistently outraised Heller, the only Republican running in a 2016 Clinton state. Dem enthusiasm may ultimately sink Heller's bid for a second full term in the rapidly trending blue Silver State. Nevada is a must-win race for Dems seeking a majority.

NEW JERSEY BOB MENENDEZ (D) 2012 Election, 59%. Foreign Relations, *Ranking Member*

CLOSE RACE, DEM SEAT

Outstanding advocate on our issues with an excellent record

Menendez's race against GOP businessman Bob Hugin is surprisingly close, per a recent poll. Menendez, whose corruption case ended in a mistrial, should on paper beat Hugin; the deep-blue Garden State has not elected a GOP Senator since 1972. But if Hugin can capitalize on Menendez's negative publicity in the last month of the campaign (he's jammed NJ airwaves with attack ads), Hugin could slip by. Menendez, a consistent and reliable supporter on our issues, is one of our highest priorities for re-election.

NEW MEXICO MARTIN HEINRICH (D) 2012 Election, 51%. Armed Services

Only fair to good record—endorsed by J Street

Heinrich should be re-elected easily, but former Libertarian Gov. Gary Johnson, entering the race in Aug., could make things interesting.

NEW YORK KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND (D) 2012 Election, 72%.

Very good record of support, marred by backing the Iran deal

Gillibrand will easily defeat GOP private equity executive Chele Chiavacci Farley to win a second term as she turns towards 2020.

NORTH DAKOTA HEIDI HEITKAMP (D) 2012 Election, 50%. Homeland Security

CLOSE RACE, DEM SEAT

Usually supportive—endorsed by J Street

Heitkamp has a very difficult race. GOP hopes were resuscitated when Rep. Kevin Cramer (excellent record) reversed his initial decision not to run for this seat. Cramer, despite losing the fundraising battle, is pulling away from Heitkamp; after maintaining a consistent low single-digit lead, a recent poll in Sept. placed him at +10. Despite Heitkamp's positioning as a moderate willing to work with Trump on certain issues, this toss-up seat in the Peace Garden State is tilting increasingly red.

OHIO SHERROD BROWN (D) 2012 Election, 51%.

Fair to good record—endorsed by J Street

If there was any doubt that he might not win in a state that backed Trump in 2016 by 8 points, Brown is beating GOP Rep. Jim Renacci (good record) in fundraising and by double digits in the polls. The race was effectively over once OH State Treasurer Josh Mandel abruptly left the race in early Jan. Brown's populist Midwestern appeal will help him swing the Buckeye State back to blue in 2018.

PENNSYLVANIA BOB CASEY (D) 2012 Election, 54%.

Excellent record, aside from Iran deal

Pennsylvania went red in 2016 for the first time since 1988, but you wouldn't know it by looking at this race. Casey is facing off against fourth-term GOP Rep. Lou Barletta (excellent record), immigration hawk and vocally pro-Trump, and leads by double digits. Once a potential GOP pickup, this Keystone State race looks safely blue.

RHODE ISLAND SHELDON WHITEHOUSE (D) 2012 Election, 65%.

Good record—endorsed by J Street

Whitehouse should easily defeat former RI Supreme Court Justice Robert Flanders to win a third term representing the Ocean State.

TENNESSEE BOB CORKER (R)—RETIRING

CLOSE RACE, GOP SEAT

Tennessee has emerged as a battleground state. Rep. Marsha Blackburn (very good record) is fighting to save retiring Sen. Bob Corker's seat, facing off against former Dem. Gov. Phil Bredesen, who gave the Dem response to the State of the Union in 2017. Polling has been inconclusive; Bredesen and Blackburn have traded small leads. While this race is a toss-up, Bredesen's unique, old-style Dem moderate appeal, combined with a possible blue wave next month, could conceivably send him to Washington.

TEXAS TED CRUZ (R) 2012 Election, 57%. Armed Services

CLOSE RACE, GOP SEAT

Excellent record of support

Cruz is surprisingly in a competitive race against Rep. Beto O'Rourke (very poor record). O'Rourke's national star has risen and outside cash has poured into this race; he and Cruz are nearly tied in the fundraising battle. The national environment and enthusiasm for O'Rourke (inside and outside of Texas) should make it close, but it would be surprising if Cruz did not prevail. No Dem has been elected Senator since 1988 in the Lone Star State, which is still not purple. Cruz is an outstanding supporter of Israel and, given O'Rourke's terrible record (he was one of 8 to vote against 2014 emergency Iron Dome funding in a 395-8 vote), Cruz's re-election a high priority.

UTAH ORRIN HATCH (R)—RETIRING

Mitt Romney, 2012 GOP presidential nominee, should take over this seat from the retiring Sen. Hatch, the longest-serving GOP senator in history. Salt Lake City Councilwoman Jenny Wilson is representing the Dems on the ballot. Given his past statements, Romney should be supportive on our issues.

VERMONT BERNIE SANDERS (I) 2012 Election, 71%.

The worst Israel-related record in the Senate!

This far-left runner-up in the 2016 Dem presidential primary, at age 77, will win a third term, barring divine intervention. His opponent is GOP real estate agent Lawrence Zupan.

VIRGINIA TIM KAINE (D) 2012 Election, 53%. Foreign Relations, Armed Services

Only a fair record of support

Kaine holds a double-digit lead over polarizing Prince William County official and 2017 VA Gov. candidate Corey Stewart. Kaine's re-election to a second term is a solid bet as the Old Dominion's slow shift to blue appears to become permanent.

WASHINGTON MARIA CANTWELL (D) 2012 Election, 61%.

Very good record—but surprisingly endorsed by J Street

Cantwell will defeat former WA GOP Chair Susan Hutchinson to win a fourth term representing the Evergreen State.

WEST VIRGINIA JOE MANCHIN (D) 2012 Election, 61%.

CLOSE RACE, DEM SEAT

Outstanding record of support

On paper, Manchin should have the most difficult race for a Dem in the nation; his state voted for Trump in 2016 by 42 points. But he's a moderate, willing to work with Trump on issues of common concern (to the dismay of most in his party), and has deep political and personal roots to the Mountain State. Manchin is facing WV Atty. Gen. Patrick Morrisey and has maintained an average high single-digit lead. This seat remains a toss-up as we approach Election Day, but with a clear advantage towards Manchin. A staunch supporter of our issues, Manchin's re-election is one of the highest priorities in maintaining crucial bipartisan support in Congress.

WISCONSIN TAMMY BALDWIN (D) 2012 Election, 51%. Defense Approps

Very poor record—endorsed by J Street

Baldwin, who is facing off against State Sen. Leah Vukmir, maintains an average double-digit lead against her challenger. This race was once a conceivable GOP pickup, but higher profile Republicans declined to run. The Badger State went red in 2016 for the first time since 1984, but Wisconsin should revert to its traditional blue in 2018.

WYOMING JOHN BARRASSO (R) 2012 Election, 76%. Foreign Relations

Very good record

Barrasso won his last race with over three-quarters of the vote, and barring an act of God, should defeat Dem businessman Gary Trauner.

This newsletter is paid for and authorized by Washington Political Action Committee, Morris J. Amity, Treasurer