

U.S. SENATE CAMPAIGNS

September, 2012: Post-Conventions

This year there are 33 seats up for election. Democrats hold 21 of these, Republicans hold 10, and 2 are independents who caucus with the Democrats (Bernie Sanders in Vermont and Joe Lieberman in Connecticut; Lieberman is retiring).

The remaining seats divide as follows: 30 Democrats and 37 Republicans.

Therefore, Democrats need to win 21 seats to have a majority and Republicans need to win 14 to have a majority. (Of course, since the Vice President breaks any tie votes in the Senate, whichever party has the Vice President really needs one fewer seat to own the tie-breaker.)

Democrats have comfortable leads in 11 states and are favorites in 4 more, for a total of 45. These states are: California, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, and West Virginia.

Republicans have comfortable leads in 7 states and are favorites in 2 more, for a total of 46. These states are: Arizona, Mississippi, Nebraska, North Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

In Maine, independent Angus King is a very strong favorite to win and he will most likely caucus with the Democrats, bringing their total to equal the Republicans, at 46.

The 8 most competitive Senate races are as follows:

Connecticut: Chris Murphy (Dem) vs. Linda McMahon (Repub.)

Indiana: Joe Donnelly (D) vs. Richard Mourdock (R)

Massachusetts: Elizabeth Warren (D) vs. Scott Brown (R)

Missouri: Claire McCaskill (D) vs. Todd Akin (R)

Montana: Jon Tester (D) vs. Denny Rehberg (R)

Nevada: Shelley Berkley (D) vs. Dean Heller (R)

Ohio: Sherrod Brown (D) vs. Josh Mandel (R)

Virginia: Tim Kaine (D) vs. George Allen (R)

My personal opinion as of right now (mid-September) is that the Democrats will probably win Connecticut, Missouri, and Ohio, while the Republicans will probably win Montana and Nevada. If those are correct, the totals become Democrats 49, Republicans 48, with control of the Senate coming down to Indiana, Massachusetts, and Virginia. But these 8 (and even a few of the others) are quite volatile and things will certainly change between now and November 6.

Connecticut: Linda McMahon, wife of Wrestling mogul Vince McMahon, lost in the last Senate election, but is making a surprisingly strong showing this year, even leading by a slight margin in some polls. It would still be a big upset if she were to win in this usually reliably blue state.

Indiana: Democrats have a chance here because Mourdock is a Tea Partier who defeated long time Senator Richard Lugar in the primary. Indiana is tough for Democrats, but Mourdock may be too conservative even for this state.

Massachusetts: Scott Brown is the kind of Republican who no longer exists (or rarely so) anymore – a true moderate, in the mold of other Massachusetts Senators Henry Cabot Lodge and Ed Brooks. It is, at least in part, why he won this seat after Ted Kennedy died and may win again. But the argument that this seat may determine control of the Senate could resonate just enough for Warren to win.

Missouri: McKaskill is looking much better since Akin proved himself to be an ignorant moron with his comments about women and “legitimate rape.”

Montana: Romney will easily win this state, which usually, but not always, votes Republican. This should be very close.

Nevada: Being from Las Vegas, Berkley should be a very good candidate. However, there is currently a House ethics investigation happening, which the Heller campaign is emphasizing. Although I have not seen any polls since late August, Heller is ahead in the three latest ones.

Ohio: Latest polling is showing Democrat Sherrod Brown doing very well, with leads from 6% to 8%, even among Republican-leaning pollsters. Of the toss-up Senate elections, this may be the best for the Democrats.

Virginia: Former Governor Kaine vs. former Senator Allen. Very tough to call, just like the Presidential race. Last reliable poll I saw (from NBC/Wall Street Journal) had an exact tie.

House of Representatives

The Democrats must pick up 25 seats to gain a majority. This only becomes possible if the Romney campaign implodes. The Democrats will probably make things closer, but regaining the majority will be difficult.