

# Turning Blue

Can Democrats make the Senate filibuster proof?

By W. James Antle III

LAST YEAR, the Republicans barely lost control of the Senate. Come next November, the number of GOP senators might be knocked down to pre-1994 levels. If the prospect of Hillary Clinton in the White House doesn't frighten Republicans enough, they should entertain the new nightmare scenario: President Hillary and a filibuster-proof Democratic Senate.

Such a development would require a remarkable Democratic sweep, but it's not impossible. The 2008 Senate races were always going to be challenging for the Republicans. The GOP, already in the minority, must defend 22 seats to the Democrats' 12. Eight of the Republican incumbents are freshmen, including one interim appointee, while only one Democratic incumbent is in his first term. So far the Republicans have five retirements, the Democrats none. The open-seat gap between the two parties is the largest in 50 years.

Republicans must defend four seats in states that John Kerry won in 2004, and four in states where Democrats swept key races in 2006. Factor in Republican scandals—from Larry Craig's wide stance to the FBI's widening investigation of Ted Stevens—and candidate recruitment woes, and the Democratic field advantage begins to look quite formidable. Even the red states aren't always safe.

**Virginia:** No state better illustrates the GOP's precarious situation than the Old Dominion. Virginia, the only Southern state to support Gerald Ford over Jimmy Carter in 1976, hasn't voted for a

Democratic presidential candidate since going all the way with LBJ in 1964. State politics caught up with Virginians' presidential preferences during the 1990s. Yet the commonwealth is now trending Democratic, with the northern Virginia suburbs leading the way.

Early polls show Virginia surprisingly competitive in the 2008 presidential race. Democrats have won the last two gubernatorial elections, a U.S. Senate race in 2006, and control of the state senate. With the retirement of Republican Sen. John Warner, they are likely to pick up the other Senate seat. Popular Democratic former governor Mark Warner (no relation to the current senator) beats his Republican predecessor Jim Gilmore 53 percent to 37 percent in the latest Rasmussen poll. Northern Virginia Congressman Tom Davis, a moderate Republican, took a look at the race and passed.

Gilmore's national stock plummeted after a brief, disastrous bid for the GOP presidential nomination. Nothing in that bizarre episode inspires much confidence that he will be able to trump Warner's political talent and cross-partisan appeal. To lose this race, Warner would probably have to be filmed using an ethnic slur to describe a volunteer for his opponent's campaign. Fortunately, no Virginia politician would do something so foolish.

**New Hampshire:** Long the Republicans' last bastion in New England, in 2006 the Granite State bore a closer resemblance to neighboring Massachusetts. Democrats picked up both congressional seats, retained the governor-

ship, and won both houses of the state legislature for the first time since 1874. New Hampshire has voted Republican only once in the last four presidential elections. This stunning realignment creates a very challenging environment for Republican Sen. John Sununu's re-election bid.

Democratic former governor Jeanne Shaheen is seeking a rematch. Shaheen lost the 2002 Senate race to Sununu by three points. She probably would have won the seat if Sununu hadn't launched a successful primary challenge against GOP Sen. Bob Smith. Shaheen has good reason to hope for a different outcome this time around: an October University of New Hampshire poll showed her ahead by 16 points; SurveyUSA has her up by 11. Only Rasmussen has the race relatively close, with Shaheen leading by five points.

Sununu has occasionally shown independence from the Bush administration, such as when he became the first Republican senator to call for Atty. Gen. Alberto Gonzales's resignation, but perhaps not enough for the independents who are now a plurality of New Hampshire voters—his approval rating is dangerously below the 50-percent mark. The race will pit the Sununu family name against the Democratic brand.

**Colorado:** Another Republican retirement in a purple state has created a strong Democratic pickup opportunity. Sen. Wayne Allard limited himself to two terms and announced earlier this year that he would honor his pledge. While Colorado has traditionally voted Republican, like much of the interior West, it

has recently been trending Democratic. Allard eked out 51 percent in both 1996 and 2002. Democrats took Colorado's other Senate seat in 2004, while George W. Bush was narrowly carrying the state, and the governorship in 2006.

Republicans tried to recruit former governor Bill Owens, former attorney general John Suthers, and retired Denver Broncos quarterback John Elway to run for the seat, but they all declined. Former congressman Scott McInnis dropped out of the race in May. That leaves the GOP with former congressman Bob Schaffer, a solid conservative who lost the 2004 Senate primary to brewing magnate Pete Coors—who in turn lost the seat to the Democrats.

Congressman Mark Udall is the likely Democratic candidate. A November SurveyUSA poll shows the race fairly close, with Udall leading Schaffer 48 percent to 41 percent. But Udall leads among independents by a 5-to-3 margin, and he may receive a boost when the Democrats hold their 2008 national convention in Denver.

**New Mexico:** With longtime Republican Sen. Pete Domenici retiring, the GOP will be forced to defend another open seat in a Western state. Albuquerque Mayor Martin Chavez is the likeliest Democratic candidate. Two Republican House members, Reps. Heather Wilson and Steve Pearce, have announced they will seek their party's nomination.

Pearce is well regarded, but some analysts argue that he is too conservative to win statewide. The more moderate Wilson is seen as Domenici's protégé, but she won re-election to her House seat last year by just 0.4 percent of the vote. Depending on whom you ask, this demonstrates that Wilson is either polarizing or capable of winning tough elections. A poll commissioned by *Roll Call* showed Chavez narrowly beating both Republicans. Yet if Bill Richardson

dropped out of the Democratic presidential race and ran for the Senate instead, he would be the overwhelming favorite.

**Minnesota:** Remember when the state that gave us Hubert Humphrey, Eugene McCarthy, and Paul Wellstone—the only state that voted against Ronald Reagan in 1984—was supposed to be trending Republican? It seems like a distant memory. In 2006, then-Congressman Mark Kennedy, who was supposed to be one of the GOP's best chances to pick up a Senate seat, won just 38 percent of the vote—the worst showing for a Republican senatorial candidate in Minnesota since World War II. Minnesota's popular Republican Gov. Tim Pawlenty was re-elected by just 0.1 percent.

GOP Sen. Norm Coleman was one of his party's 2002 success stories. Narrowly trailing Senator Wellstone before his untimely death in plane crash, Coleman unexpectedly came back to beat former vice president Walter Mondale by three points. Now some polls show him only slightly ahead of comedian and liberal radio talk-show host Al Franken, the Democratic frontrunner. Franken aims to prove he's good enough and people like him, while Coleman can't believe he might lose to that guy.

A recent Rasmussen poll shows the race gets even tighter if the Democrats nominate their straight man, attorney Mike Ciresi, who Coleman beats 46 percent 43 percent. But in a state that elected Jesse Ventura governor, the funny man can't be counted out. Coleman, himself a former Democrat, has tried to triangulate on Iraq, opposing both the surge and congressional timetables for withdrawal.

**Oregon:** Incumbent Republican Sen. Gordon Smith is conservative on abortion, liberal on gay issues, and supports redeployment from Iraq. Oregon is Democratic, but frequently elects such unorthodox Republican senators. Polls

show him leading Democratic state Speaker Jeff Merkley by nearly 10 points, but consistently below 50 percent. Smith was first elected with just 49 percent of the vote in 1996.

**Maine:** No longer the bellwether state it once was in presidential elections, Maine will be decisive in determining whether the Democrats merely pad their majority slightly or dominate the Senate. Incumbent Sen. Susan Collins is the kind of moderate Republican Maine favors—fellow senator Olympia Snowe was re-elected with 74 percent in 2006. Collins's likely opponent is six-term Democratic Congressman Tom Allen.

A SurveyUSA poll showed Collins leading Allen 55 percent to 38 percent, suggesting this won't be an easy Democratic pickup (though keeping Collins while losing conservatives won't help GOP filibuster efforts much). Allen no doubt plans to challenge her on the war. He might get some unintentional assistance on this from liberal hawk Joe Lieberman, who has pledged to campaign for Collins. As Maine goes...

If the Democrats only win the races where they are now ahead, they will be one seat away from where they were before the 1994 elections. They need to win just two more for the 57 seats Democrats held when Bill Clinton took office. To get to 60, they will have to put states like Kentucky, Idaho, and Nebraska in play, a very tall order—and that's assuming there are no Republican pickups in red states like Louisiana, where Sen. Mary Landrieu is vulnerable, and South Dakota, where Sen. Tim Johnson's health has been poor.

If Republicans can avoid President Clinton and nearly 60 Democratic senators, they will feel like they've won a victory of sorts. ■

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# Smells Like Team Spirit

Even in a superstar age, high-school football is still about community.

By Steve Sailer

EACH YEAR ROUGHLY 1.2 million boys play and 100,000 men coach high-school football. It's one of those social phenomena that is so big that nobody thinks much about it. Yet prep football—by uneasily combining the norms of the middle of the last century, which seemed in the 1940s to be the Century of the Common Man, with our own Century of the Superstar, in which many watch but only a chosen few perform—offers a window into America's past and future.

The new age of elitist high-school football was epitomized by the nationally televised game played Sept. 15 between *USA Today's* #2-ranked squad, the well-drilled Dragons from exurban Southlake Carroll, winner of three straight Texas championships, and the star-packed #1-ranked Bulls of inner city Miami Northwestern, the 2006 Florida titleholders. Yet this type of made-for-television exhibition remains more the exception than the rule. At least compared to basketball, high-school football hasn't much changed culturally since Paul Brown was coaching the Massillon, Ohio Tigers to glory in the 1930s. For instance, a huge crowd of close to 20,000 fans showed up Nov. 2 for the 73rd meeting of Garfield and Roosevelt, two all-Latino high schools in East Los Angeles that seldom send players to college programs. This "East L.A. Classic" remains one of the countless local football rivalries that thrive despite the homogenizing dominance of the national media.

High-school football continues to be a repository of many of the authority-respecting and communal virtues of the WWII-winning Greatest Generation. On

the field, America's old struggle between nurture and nature—between the faith that winners can be molded out of the common folk versus the ever spreading suspicion that success is mostly in the genes and in private tutoring—can still battle it out on relatively equal terms.

Foreigners have long been astounded by the extravagant number of players on American football teams and by the expensive armor in which they are encased. Yet because only the most carefully rehearsed teamwork can prevent chaos on the gridiron, their numbers and anonymity have helped retard the growth of superstaritis.

Basketball, with its fewer and more recognizable players, can be dominated by one or two stars freelancing. Indeed, successful coaches increasingly emphasize recruiting genetic anomalies over training normal kids. USC basketball coach Tim Floyd recently promised full scholarships to two eighth graders!

Sacramento-area basketball coach Brian McCormick lamented his sport's decline:

Colleges hire the best recruiters, not coaches. High school players enhance their recruitment not by improving their skills, but by being more exposed. And, even youth coaches ignore skill development, focusing on attracting new players with better skills or athleticism. None of it makes sense, but it is consistent. From the top down and the bottom up, recruiting ruins American basketball, ruining the game year by year.

The overall quality of basketball appears to have suffered, especially on offense, a trend lowlighted by the ignominy of a team of top NBA players losing at the 2004 Olympics to Argentina, Lithuania, and Puerto Rico. In contrast, most prep football offensive records are no more than 15 years old, suggesting that teams are executing better than ever.

Even the scandals besetting high-school football can sometimes be redolent of an older America. Shedding light on what one coach was willing to do to win, an October report by a retired federal judge looked into the goings on at Hoover High School, winner of four straight Alabama crowns and the subject of the 2006-2007 MTV reality show "Two-a-Days." Located in an affluent, 88-percent white suburb of Birmingham, Hoover's football booster club raises \$300,000 annually.

The controversy began with a complaint by a math teacher, with the wonderful name of Forrest Quattlebaum, that the Algebra II grade of senior football hero Josh Chapman had been "rounded up" by an administrator so the 280-pounder would be eligible to play this season for the University of Alabama Crimson Tide. According to the report, Hoover head coach Rush Propst makes an official salary of \$93,000, takes in another \$15,000-27,000 running football summer camps on public-school property, earns \$3,500 from a local TV show, and receives a new pickup truck from a car dealer every 60,000 miles. It's enough to support "a not-so-secret second family."