

commentary

from other pens...

Battle for House begins to take shape

By Will Lester
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — The 2002 elections for the closely divided House of Representatives are shaping up as fiercely competitive and focused on a narrow range of districts and an unpredictable issues landscape. Democrats need to pick up six more seats overall to gain the majority, but political analysts say a smaller number of House seats than normal will be in contention because of a cautious approach the parties have taken this year to the redrawing of congressional districts.

“We’re starting with fewer races in play,” said nonpartisan political analyst Stu Rothenberg. “Redistricting has created more safe seats and fewer competitive districts.”

Rothenberg said he expects there will be 24 or more very competitive House seats by next October. Republicans expect 40, Democrats 50.

Republicans think they’ll have an edge in the House elections after redistricting, considering their usual advantage in money. Democrats have history on their side and have persuaded more of their members to run for re-election.

Of the current House members, the GOP has 14 not seeking re-election, some retiring and others opting to run for governor or senator; Democrats have lost seven.

Redistricting, the redrawing of political lines to account for population changes after the census, will continue through early summer.

“Neither side is getting a big bump,” said Amy Walters, who analyzes House races for the Cook Political Report. “Republicans should have a slight edge from one more seat to three or four more.”

Democrats already have begun targeting incumbent Republicans with their radio ads in three districts — John Shimkus in Illinois, Shelley Moore Capito in West Virginia and John Hostettler in Indiana. The ads say Republicans are too focused on tax cuts for big corporations and are doing too little for the unemployed.

Polling evidence on the economy is mixed. A CNN-USA Today-Gallup poll out Thursday showed the public prefers Republican economic plans to Democratic plans by 44 percent to 35 percent.

Jenny Backus, a spokeswoman for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, said polls tend to shift but have repeatedly shown voters trust Democrats more on the economy. Her Republican counterpart Steve Schmidt said Democrats are engaged in wishful thinking.

Democratic polling out this week suggested the public currently trusts the Republicans more on the economy, safeguarding the nation and fighting terrorism. The issue advantages could easily shift again by next October, though the economy is likely to remain dominant.

“Democrats are staying in the House because they’re excited about being part of a new Democratic majority,” Backus said.

Democrats say House Republican votes on issues such as airport security and the economic stimulus package, which Congress failed to enact this week, can be used against them in a campaign.

Schmidt, spokesman for the National Republican Congressional Committee, said Democrats have deceived themselves about any advantage they might have on issues such as the economy.

Democrats said they have raised almost \$34 million in 2001, a record for an off-election year. But they won’t say how much money they have on hand. Republicans expect to have their usual money advantage.

Democrats believe they have a historical advantage in the House race, because the party that holds the White House has lost seats in midterm elections in all but two elections in the last century.

“Democrats certainly can argue they have history on their side,” said political analyst Rothenberg. “But as the playing field gets narrower, Democrats will have to win a bigger proportion of the seats in play to take back the House.”

EDITOR’S NOTE — Will Lester covers politics and polling for The Associated Press in Washington.

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Patriotism, inflation and, ah, free trick

Shades of Richard Nixon. The Trade Promotion Authority passed by one vote. He passed most of his legislation by a one or two vote margin, too.

That’s how we got the Environmental Protection Agency. He needed money to pursue the Vietnam War and the eviros wanted to turn the farm belt into one great big buffalo wallow.

Well, that was then and this is now. I bet the same guys who say free trade, quicker than a Chinese agent gets out of jail, will say farm subsidies cost too much.

What does one have to do with the other? Everything! Another free tricks, I mean free trade, agreement means everyone will export their surpluses to good ole Uncle Sugar while we keep ours.

Now what do we do? Good question, why not export the farmers and keep our grain? To do otherwise would be isolationist.

The passage of Trade Promotion Authority means farm subsidies will cost even more. Even if the Village does cut payments to the guys who produce the grain. There will be money to the enviros...there will be more money for food stamps too.

In the last century we had child labor in factories that had no windows; now we have free food programs for single parents. All they have to do is to go to the nearest government office. We have no problem sending \$50 billion for the victims of the 9-11 attack and the village says we need an economic stimulus? Well, that’s something like billions for home land defense.

We even have money for those rich insurance



wayne gattshall
• wayne’s world

companies that write federal all risk crop insurance to farmers. All in the name of farm subsidies.

About the only thing fast trick will do is stimulate the Gross Domestic Product of China. These fancy guys say we need Trade Promotion Authority because the United States is being left out. That just isn’t so! These free trickers bring out the bogy man saying the U.S. is becoming isolationists.

Ya, Ya, ya. They say we are the only ones who don’t have a trade agreement. Wrong again! Since 1990 we have made 300 trade agreement, and only two were under fast track.

When you bring out the free trick map of the world you don’t see Asia at all.

It’s just like production controls for agriculture these so called trade agreements don’t work.

Whether it’s a multi-lateral trade agreement like General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs, or bi-lateral trade agreements like Permanent Normal Trading Relations with China, they all are trade distorting documents. China uses money from its Donald Duck imports to the U.S. to buy soybeans from South America and missiles from Russia.

How can it be free trade when any agreement has 3,000 pages of edicts. We will yin if you will yang. Well that doesn’t sound like free trade, Secretary

of State Henry Kissinger didn’t need one in 1972.

Oh, so that’s why that Brit, Christopher Hitchens, says he is a war criminal! So what they are talking about is not free trade.

Bureaucracies are to be more feared than marching armies. Some make the case exports make more jobs and higher wages. You know they’re right, farm exports would be better than another free-food-pentagon farm bill.

We might not need an economic stimulus bill either, it might give us a federal budget surplus too. About the only ones who’d benefit from another Market Promotion Authority would be farmers in Argentina and Brazil.

We need South America, Turkey and Azerbaijan in this war on terrorism. That would be better than the International Monetary Fund bailing them out. So you farmers should be patriotic. But then again we already have the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs, which is a multi-lateral agreement.

Just remember more trade agreements don’t mean more trade. These guys don’t know the difference between a computer mouse and a five-legged rat! Today the U.S. has 22 percent of the trade, with 5 percent of the people. Now that ought to tell you something.

We have virtually no tariffs and a tariffs is a form of taxation—perhaps the best way to get their attention is to slap tariffs on imports that come from companies which moved their factories to China. Now that really would be a tax cut for the people!

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Bogus credit card offers

Dear Attorney General Stovall:

I recently received a notice in the mail congratulating me, as I had been approved for a gold card with a \$10,000 line of credit. According to the solicitation, I just needed to return the application with a small processing fee, plus postage and handling. Because of my past credit history, I have had a terrible time trying to get credit cards or any extension of credit from most sources. Because I am wanting to refinance my house, I have been making slow progress towards getting my credit record cleared up; however, I have still been rejected for every credit card I have applied for. Because of this unfortunate track record, I am a little skeptical about a company that wants to offer me a \$10,000 line of credit. Attorney General Stovall, is this offer legitimate?

Dear Kansas Consumer:

My Consumer Protection Division has received many inquiries about companies engaging in the same - or very similar - types of practices as the one you have asked about. While my office is unable to say whether or not the offer is “legitimate,” we can provide some information to you.

In looking at the notice you received from the company, it appears that you have not been offered a \$10,000 extension of credit in the same way an extension might be offered to a consumer by a major credit card company. While a major credit card company such as Mastercard, Visa, Discover, or American Express lets a cardholder use their card as payment for purchase at any participating retail



carla j. stovall
• consumer corner

location, your “line of credit” through this particular company is extremely limited. Specifically, it is a \$10,000 line of credit redeemable only towards items offered by the company and only for the prices at which such items are offered. As you might imagine, the company’s catalogs are filled with a variety of products - with no guarantee of quality and, quite often, with substantially inflated prices.

In many cases, such companies offer consumers the opportunity to qualify for a major credit card, which might seem like an effective way to obtain a true extension of credit and a method of building good credit history. However, the qualification generally comes after the consumer has spent a specific amount on purchases from the company’s catalog.

Quite often the prices are so inflated beyond those charged for substantially similar items, readily obtainable from local merchants, that most consumers do not ever spend enough on purchases from the company to qualify for the major credit card.

The Kansas Consumer Protection Act (KCPA)

prohibits businesses from engaging in acts and practices in consumer transactions which are deceptive and/or unconscionable. While the solicitation you received might, at first glance, lead you to believe you are being offered an extension of credit by a major credit card company, the solicitations are usually phrased carefully so that they contain no actual misrepresentations or deceptive statements.

We would urge you and other Kansas consumers who are considering purchasing memberships into these “buying clubs” to read the solicitations carefully. If a major credit card is not specifically mentioned, it is probably not what is being offered. Also, be cautious of any solicitation requesting a payment for an “extension of credit.” The KCPA requires that the company comply with the Credit Services Organization Act, which includes registration with the Kansas Consumer Credit Commissioner, when a true extension of credit is being offered.

Attorney General Carla J. Stovall offers this public service to help you avoid becoming a victim of consumer fraud. Although some of the details have been changed, the cases appearing in this column are based on actual complaints. For further information or to file a complaint, please write Attorney General Carla J. Stovall, Consumer Protection Division, Kansas Judicial Center, Topeka, Kansas 66612, or call the toll-free Consumer Hotline, 1-800-432-2310. Leave your name, number and subject of your inquiry with the receptionist and your call will be returned promptly.

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