

= United States Senate Democratic primary election in Pennsylvania , 2010 =

The Democratic primary for the 2010 United States Senate election in Pennsylvania took place on May 18 , 2010 , when Congressman Joe Sestak defeated incumbent Arlen Specter , which led to the end of Specter 's five @-@ term Senatorial career . Just prior to the start of the primary campaign , after serving in the Senate as a Republican for 29 years , Specter had switched to the Democratic Party in anticipation of a difficult primary challenge by Pat Toomey ; Sestak was ultimately defeated by Toomey in the general election . Political observers and journalists described the race between Specter and Sestak as one of the bitterest and most watched of all the 2010 primary elections .

Although Sestak was initially urged to run by the Democratic establishment , Specter gained wide support from Democrats after he switched parties . Major political figures like President Barack Obama and Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell later tried to sway Sestak from continuing the race , fearing he would damage Specter 's chances in the general election . Former President Bill Clinton offered Sestak a position in the Obama administration if he withdrew his candidacy , an offer Republicans would later criticize . Sestak refused to drop out and criticized Specter 's party switch as an opportunistic move aimed solely at self @-@ preservation . Nevertheless , Sestak struggled to overcome problems stemming from low name recognition and Specter 's support from such individuals as Joe Biden and Harry Reid , and organizations like the AFL @-@ CIO and Pennsylvania Democratic Committee .

Specter led Sestak by more than 20 percentage points for most of the race , but this lead narrowed significantly in the final month of the campaign , when Sestak concentrated his funds and efforts on television commercials questioning Specter 's Democratic credentials . Specter grew more critical of Sestak as the race progressed , attacking his House attendance record , accusing him of failing to pay his staffers minimum wage and alleging he was demoted while serving in the U.S. Navy for creating a poor command climate . Political observers said Sestak 's commercials played a major part in his victory , and that a national swing in momentum toward Republicans and against incumbents ultimately harmed Specter 's chances .

= = Background = =

= = = Chris Matthews speculation = = =

Beginning in April 2008 , the media reported growing speculation that Chris Matthews , news commentator and host of MSNBC 's Hardball with Chris Matthews , might run in the 2010 Democratic primary for the United States Senate Pennsylvania seat then occupied by the Republican Arlen Specter . In an interview with The New York Times Magazine , Matthews said that he believed Specter had been in the Senate for too long , but that running for Senate would mean giving up a career he loved . Mark Leibovich , author of the article , wrote , " Matthews has been particularly obsessed with Pennsylvania of late , devoting hours on and off the air to the state 's upcoming Democratic primary , staying in close contact with the state 's party apparatus " . Speculation was further fueled by Matthews ' appearance on an April 14 episode of The Colbert Report . Host Stephen Colbert asked Matthews about the rumors and prodded him to make a public announcement , to which Matthews replied , " Did you ever want to be something your whole life ? ... When you grow up , some kids want to be a fireman . I want to be a Senator . But I have to deal with these things as they come . " Matthews declined to directly answer questions about his possible candidacy when pressed by the media , but did not deny the possibility .

The subject of Matthews ' possible candidacy was raised at an October dinner fundraiser for presidential candidate Barack Obama held by Robert Wolf , president of UBS 's investment bank . Discussing the dinner later , Matthews told The New York Times , " People have asked me about it . I 've never told anyone that I 'm running . " On November 28 , The Patriot @-@ News of Harrisburg reported that Matthews met that week with Pennsylvania Democratic Party Chairman T.J. Rooney

and Executive Director Mary Isenhour to discuss possibly running against Specter . Isenhour told the paper Matthews had not formed a campaign committee or begun raising money , and she did not believe he had yet come to a firm decision , adding , " He 's got a really good job with MSNBC . I think he 's going to put some thought into it before he jumps in . " The same day as that Patriot @-@ News report , the political blog FiveThirtyEight.com reported that Matthews had already met with potential campaign staff , something Matthews claimed was " absolutely not true " .

The increased speculation led some , like former spokesman for Hillary Rodham Clinton 's 2008 presidential campaign Phil Singer , to criticize Matthews for openly weighing a political campaign bid while working as a news broadcaster . Singer believed Matthews should resign or be suspended from the network until a decision was made . Speculation grew as Matthews spent much of 2008 attending meetings with Pennsylvania representatives and major Democratic fundraisers . Matthews discussed a possible campaign with Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell , and poll numbers for a theoretical race showed him only three percentage points behind Specter . However , the speculation came to an end on January 7 , 2009 , when Matthews told his Hardball staff he was not going to run for Senate . Such media outlets as The New York Times and The Washington Post suggested Matthews ' alleged consideration was a tactic to ensure a higher salary during negotiations with MSNBC to renew his contract , which was set to expire in June 2009 .

= = = Arlen Specter party switch = = =

As early as 2008 , the five @-@ term Republican Pennsylvania Senator Arlen Specter made clear his plans to seek re @-@ election . Specter had narrowly avoided a primary defeat against conservative challenger Pat Toomey during his 2004 Senate race , and he was expected to face an even greater challenge from Toomey in 2010 , particularly since the conservative faction of the Pennsylvania Republican Party had vowed to defeat Specter in the upcoming primary . Some high @-@ profile Democrats , including Vice President Joe Biden and Governor Rendell , began encouraging Specter to join the Democratic Party by publicly offering to help Specter raise money if he switched . A March 2009 Quinnipiac University Polling Institute poll found Specter trailing Toomey 41 percent to 27 percent among Republican primary voters , in large part due to voter angst over Specter 's support for the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 , which was supported by President Obama . Since the Pennsylvania primaries are closed , the poll noted that Specter could not be assisted by support from moderates or Democrats . Clay F. Richards , assistant director of the Quinnipiac University Polling Institute , said of the poll results , " Pennsylvania Republicans are so unhappy with Sen. Specter 's vote for President Barack Obama 's Stimulus Package and so @-@ called pork barrel spending that they are voting for a former Congressman they hardly know . "

The same month as the March poll , an article in The Hill quoted Specter as stating he was considering leaving the Republican party to run for re @-@ election as an Independent candidate . Specter later denied the validity of those claims , announcing on March 18 , " To eliminate any doubt , I am a Republican , and I am running for reelection in 2010 as a Republican on the Republican ticket . " However , on April 28 , 2009 , Specter announced he was leaving the Republican Party and becoming a Democrat because he disagreed with the increasingly conservative direction the Republican Party was heading in and found his personal philosophy was now better aligned with the Democrats . Although Specter said that he primarily based his decision on principle , he also admitted it was partially due to his poor chances at winning the Republican primary : " I have traveled the state and surveyed the sentiments of the Republican Party in Pennsylvania and public opinion polls , observed other public opinion polls and have found that the prospects for winning a Republican primary are bleak . "

Prior to switching parties , Specter was promised by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid that he would keep his seniority on the Senate if he joined the Democratic Party . The arrangement displeased some Senate Democrats , and , on May 3 , the Senate voted to strip him of his seniority despite Reid 's promise . This temporarily made Specter the most junior Democrat in the Senate and severely limited his influence as a legislator . Nevertheless , Specter 's decision was praised by

many major Democrats , including Reid and President Barack Obama , who promised to campaign for him . Republicans , however , criticized the decision , accusing Specter of betraying his principles and party to preserve his political career . Michael Steele , chairman of the Republican National Committee , said Specter " flipped the bird " to the party and that Specter made the decision based solely because he knew he would lose the election . Senator John Cornyn , chairman of the National Republican Senatorial Committee and a past supporter of Specter , said the decision " represents the height of political self @-@ preservation " . Specter defended his position by arguing the Republican Party had strayed too far from the vision of President Ronald Reagan , adding , " I am not prepared to have my 29 @-@ year record in the United States Senate decided by the Pennsylvania Republican primary electorate . "

= = = Joe Sestak declares candidacy = = =

Second @-@ term U.S Representative Joe Sestak , a former U.S. Navy admiral , began privately discussing the possibility of seeking the Democratic nomination with his family in December 2008 . Senator Bob Menendez , chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee , approached Sestak in April 2009 and asked him to run , but Sestak claimed he was not initially interested . Nevertheless , media speculation about Sestak 's possible campaign began as early as mid @-@ April 2009 , and intensified the day Specter changed political parties . While most Democrats embraced the long @-@ time Senator , Sestak issued a statement criticizing Specter 's decision , declaring it an opportunist move that should have been made in consultation with Pennsylvanians rather than the Senate Democratic leadership and the Washington political establishment . Menendez approached Sestak again , this time asking him not to run against Specter , but Sestak did not agree to back down . Later , when asked by Fox News , Sestak insisted he had not decided whether he would run for the office , but declined to immediately endorse Specter and said he had to " wait and see " . During a May 3 appearance on CNN 's State of the Union with John King , Sestak questioned whether Specter was really a genuine Democrat , adding , " I think Arlen has to tell us not that it was too hard to run against someone . ... What I need to know is , what is he running for ? "

Sestak insisted he would not make a final decision for several months . On May 4 , he met with Andy Stern , president of the Service Employees International Union , which fueled speculation that he was seeking labor support for a campaign . Meanwhile , Joe Torsella , the former president of the National Constitution Center , had planned on running for the Democratic nomination and initially announced Specter 's party change would not affect his decision to run . However , Torsella announced on May 14 he was dropping out of the race because Specter 's decision changed the political landscape , and he wanted to avoid a campaign that " would probably be negative , personal , and more about Senator Specter 's past than our common future " . It had been reported that Governor Rendell , for whom Torsella previously worked as an aide , pushed for Torsella to step aside so Specter could run unopposed , but Torsella 's staff denied those claims . Despite Torsella 's departure , Sestak continued to consider entering the race and began gaining support from the Democratic party 's more liberal factions like the Progressive Change Campaign Committee , which began a " Draft Sestak " campaign fund . Sestak became further encouraged to run after taking a tour of all 67 Pennsylvania counties to meet with party leaders and discuss such issues as jobs , the economy and health care . Sestak said that the leaders voiced serious concerns to him about the direction of the country and , although his lack of name recognition was a problem , Sestak said many of the people he encountered voiced support for him .

On May 27 , the website Talking Points Memo posted a handwritten letter by Sestak to candidates declaring his intent to run for Senate . Sestak did not dispute the authenticity of the letter , but told the press he wanted to discuss the matter with his family before making a formal decision . Sestak told media outlets he realized President Obama wished him not to run against Specter , but that he felt the choice should be with the voters of Pennsylvania rather than the president . Governor Rendell overtly tried to convince him not to run , believing it would damage Sestak 's own political future , plus cost the Democratic Party both Sestak 's House seat and possibly damage Specter 's

general election chances . Nevertheless , Sestak formally declared his candidacy for the Democratic nomination on August 4 , 2009 , in a speech before a Veterans of Foreign Wars hall in his native Delaware County . Shortly after the announcement , Toomey issued a statement welcoming Sestak to the race , describing him as " a consistent liberal who really believes in his values " , as compared to Specter , who he called " a career political opportunist who believes in nothing but his own re @-@ election " .

= = Candidates = =

Joe Sestak , U.S. Congressman

Arlen Specter , Incumbent U.S. Senator

Pennsylvania Rep. William C. Kortz and retired manufacturer Joseph Vodvarka also ran in the Democratic primary , but neither remained for the duration of the race . Kortz , who was little known outside the western Pennsylvania area , dropped out of the race on January 14 , 2010 after raising only \$ 20 @, @ 000 of the \$ 2 million he sought to raise for his campaign . Vodvarka , an Allegheny County man who had been mostly overlooked throughout the race , was formally removed from the ballot in mid @-@ April 2010 after it was revealed he failed to garner the minimum amount of signatures for a nominating petition .

= = Campaign = =

= = = Early months = = =

Both candidates started the campaign well @-@ funded . Sestak had more than \$ 3 million available from his House fund to use toward starting a Senate campaign , and raised an additional \$ 1 million by June 30 , 2009 , which brought his total to about \$ 4 @. @ 2 million . Sestak called it the largest campaign war @-@ chest of any Senate challenger . Specter , however , was ahead with \$ 6 @. @ 7 million in campaign funding as of March 31 . Sestak also faced challenges arising from his low name recognition and Specter 's support among high @-@ profile members of the Democratic establishment , like Obama and Biden . Specter spent the early months of his campaign trying to reestablish and strengthen his Democratic credentials , seeking union support and making speeches highlighting his support of positions supported by the party , such as the economic stimulus package , reforming health care , increasing the minimum wage , protecting abortion rights and supporting stem cell research . In a June 2009 speech to Pennsylvania Democratic Committee members in Pittsburgh , Specter said , " I 'm again a Democrat and I 'm pleased and proud to be a Democrat . " Commentators observed that Sestak 's involvement in the race would test Specter 's loyalty to the Democratic party and likely force him to make more liberal votes in the Senate .

Even before Sestak formally declared his candidacy on August 4 , 2009 , Specter and Sestak began exchanging criticisms about each other that were so heated , The New York Times writer Janie Lorber suggested " the contest will become one of the more vicious for next year 's midterm elections " . Sestak repeatedly said Specter was not a " real Democrat " and continued to assert Specter 's switch was based on self @-@ preservation rather than principles . Specter called Sestak a " flagrant hypocrite " for questioning Specter 's loyalty to the Democratic Party , citing the fact that Sestak himself was registered as an Independent until he became a Democrat in 2006 , just before he ran for Congress . Sestak claimed that was because he was serving in the military and wished to be nonpartisan , but Specter called that a " lame excuse for avoiding party affiliation ... undercut by his documented disinterest in the political process " , pointing out that records indicated Sestak voted in only 12 out of 35 elections from 1971 to 2005 . A day after Sestak formally entered the race , Specter described Sestak 's recent 67 @-@ county tour as a " taxpayer @-@ financed self @-@ promotion tour around the state " . Specter 's campaign also accused Sestak of neglecting his duties in the House and missing more than 100 votes in the last year , which Specter called the worst attendance record for any Pennsylvania Congressman . Sestak responded to the latter point that

most of the missed votes were procedural in nature , and were missed because of the statewide tour and because he visited his father , who was dying at the time . Sestak accused Specter of launching a " GOP negative style campaign " , which Specter denied .

= = = Toomey and Obama get involved = = =

Specter and Sestak participated in an August 14 panel discussion hosted by Netroots Nation , which included questions from online viewers consisting mainly of liberal and progressive bloggers and advocates . Media reports suggested Specter faced tougher questions from the crowd , with many questioning whether they could trust him based on his switching parties . Specter dismissed suggestions that his recent Democratic votes were politically motivated by the primary , and cited his support of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act and Children 's Health Insurance Reauthorization Act as proof of his Democratic credentials . Sestak argued a change in leadership was necessary and that his military background as a United States Navy admiral gave him the necessary experience . Sestak also pointed out that Specter worked with former Senator Bob Dole to defeat President Bill Clinton 's health care plan in 1993 . When some in the crowd brought up how Senator Chuck Grassley , a past ally of Specter 's , was arguing that Obama 's health care plan would lead to " death panels " , Specter said that Grassley was wrong and that he would call him about the matter . When some in the crowd chanted , " Call him now ! " , Specter took several audience members backstage and left a phone message for Grassley as they watched . Salon.com said based on the stunt , " Specter may have won the day , if not the battle " . However , a straw poll of 250 online activists attending the event showed Sestak was preferred to Specter by a vote of 46 percent to 10 percent .

Later , following an e @-@ mail exchange with the expected Republican challenger Toomey about health care , Sestak proposed an unorthodox joint town hall with Toomey about the issue , which was held September 2 at Muhlenberg College in Allentown . Specter was not invited to participate , and political pollster G. Terry Madonna of Franklin & Marshall College described it as an " informal pact " between Sestak and Toomey to weaken their joint rival , something the two men denied . Commentators suggested Toomey was willing to help Sestak at this stage of the race because he preferred Sestak as a general election opponent over Specter , who could possibly draw Republican and Independent voters from Toomey . Also in September , Obama appeared in a 30 @-@ second television ad for Specter , praising him for his support of the President 's economic recovery initiatives . A September poll by Franklin & Marshall College found Specter maintained a 37 percent to 11 percent lead over Sestak , but also that 54 percent of people felt a change was needed as opposed to 34 percent who felt Specter deserved a sixth term . That poll also found 73 percent felt they did not know enough about Sestak to form an opinion , which pollster Madonna said indicated the race would be focused more on Specter 's incumbency and record than about Sestak or Toomey .

On September 15 , Obama attended a Philadelphia fundraising dinner for Specter , an unusually public declaration of support so early in the primary season , when the President has the option of remaining neutral until the final outcome becomes clearer . Governor Rendell said that Obama and Biden felt obligated to strongly support Specter because they so strongly lobbied him to switch parties . Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter and radio personality Michael Smerconish also spoke on Specter 's behalf . Senate Majority Leader Reid took the unusual steps of scheduling no Senate votes that day so both Specter and Pennsylvania Senator Bob Casey , Jr. could attend the fundraiser . That move drew criticism from Republicans , as well as from Sestak , who felt Specter was skirting his Senate responsibilities , yet hypocritically criticizing Sestak at the same time for missing more than 100 votes in the U.S. House . The event was expected to raise about \$ 2 @. @ 5 million , which was to be split between Specter 's campaign and the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee . After the fundraiser , Obama and Specter traveled via Air Force One to Pittsburgh to address labor activists at the AFL @-@ CIO convention . There , Specter assured the audience he would support the Employee Free Choice Act , a proposed bill that would make union formation easier , which Specter had previously opposed as a Republican .

= = = Specter maintains lead = = =

As the primary entered into October , Specter continued to criticize Sestak on his record of missed votes in Congress . He claimed Sestak missed 122 in the past year , or nearly 17 percent of his total votes , whereas Specter missed four . In a letter , Specter told Sestak he should drop out of the campaign and start voting on a more consistent basis , or resign from the House " so he can cease to be a burden to the taxpayers " . Around the same time , Sestak launched a website called " The Real Specter " , which highlighted the right @-@ leaning votes Specter made and alliances he held during his 29 years as a Republican in the senate . Specter continued to maintain a significant lead against Sestak of 19 percentage points , according to a Quinnipiac University poll released that month . But Sestak pointed out that the gap was 32 points in July , and cited the poll as proof that he was gaining ground in the race . Also that month , new reports indicated Toomey was growing in popularity and , in one poll , was actually ahead of Specter , with 43 percent of respondents saying they would vote for him compared to 42 percent for Specter . This was attributed by some to the challenge presented by Sestak and the declining popularity of Obama , whose approval rating had dropped from 56 percent in July to 49 percent in October .

On October 14 , Specter reported he had raised \$ 1 @.@ 8 million during the previous three @-@ month period , bringing his total to about \$ 8 @.@ 7 million . The Senator said that he was aided in large part by his September 15 fundraiser hosted by Obama . In that same period , Sestak raised only \$ 758 @,@ 000 , about a quarter million dollars lower than the previous quarter , making his total allocation about \$ 4 @.@ 7 million . Sestak continued working hard to overcome his name recognition problem , seldom turning down interview requests and asking his staff to work six 12 @-@ hour days a week . As a result , Sestak saw a large amount of turnover in his staff , going through nearly half a dozen press secretaries and several chiefs of staff . Sestak called on Specter participate in six debates , one for each media market in Pennsylvania , but Specter only agreed to participate in one because that was the amount of debates he participated in as a Republican . On December 7 , Sestak was endorsed by Congressman Barney Frank , who said that he was impressed by Sestak 's leadership on economic and military issues , as well as his positions against the military 's " don 't ask , don 't tell " policy and the Defense of Marriage Act . The endorsement was important to Sestak because it was the first time a prominent member of Congress broke with the Democratic establishment to back him over Specter . Frank also said of Specter 's switching parties , " I have to say I don 't think it did our profession any good for someone to announce that he switched parties purely so he could survive . "

New polls in January indicated voter support was growing for Toomey , who now held a projected nine percentage point lead over Specter and an eight @-@ point lead over Sestak . Specter continued to lead against Sestak in the Democratic primary poll , this time by a 21 @-@ point margin . Some political scientists believed Toomey 's gain over Specter could be attributed to voter distrust of establishment candidates and growing dissatisfaction with the health care proposal pending in Congress . However , some Democratic leaders felt Sestak 's challenge to Specter was having a detrimental effect not only to Specter , but to the Democratic party in general and their prospects for ultimately winning the general election . This feeling was enhanced by the growing national support for the Republican party , and especially by the unexpected victory of the Tea Party @-@ backed Republican Scott Brown in a special election for a traditionally Democratic Massachusetts Senate seat . Specter acknowledged to The New York Times that the national political mood might work against him in the primary , but insisted he was not discouraged and expressed confidence in his ability to survive .

= = = Race grows more heated = = =

The primary continued to grow more heated in February 2010 . On February 5 , the two candidates held their first face @-@ to @-@ face debate , and used the 30 @-@ minute forum to strongly criticize each other , with Sestak continuing to associate Specter with failed Republican policies and

Specter arguing his opponent was more focused on criticizing him than debating policy . Sestak continued to attack Specter for switching parties , asking , " Is the best the Democrats can do someone who has been on the other side , with respect , for 50 years , and cast 2 @,@ 000 votes with President Bush ? " Likewise , Specter once again criticized Sestak 's missed votes in Congress , which he said would have been enough to earn Sestak a court @-@ martial for going AWOL in his former Naval career . Sestak also criticized Specter for voting in favor of the Iraq War , and Specter in turn condemned Sestak for supporting Obama 's proposed troop increase for the War in Afghanistan , which Specter opposed . The next day , the Pennsylvania Democratic Committee voted to endorse Specter over Sestak , with 77 percent of voters supporting the incumbent Senator , or 229 votes compared to Sestak 's 72 . Sestak criticized the committee for its decision , but also argued it solidified his own position as a political outsider independent from the mainstream Washington establishment . Media outlets said the vote indicated Specter had convinced most important figures in the state party that he was not simply a crossover politician .

Later in February , Specter accused Sestak of mistreating his employees and disobeying state and federal minimum wage laws by severely underpaying his House staff . Citing Federal Election Commission reports , Specter claimed ten of Sestak 's sixteen campaign staffers were making less than minimum wage and that they were so underpaid they were eligible for food stamps . He also noted that Sestak 's three highest @-@ paid staffers were members of his family , including his brother Richard Sestak , who worked as campaign manager . T.J. Rooney , a Specter supporter , wrote a letter to Sestak expressing concern about the potential violation of minimum wage laws , which read : " It is inconceivable to me that our standard bearer wouldn't be paying his workers the minimum wage " . Sestak responded by acknowledging his staff could make more money elsewhere , but said " they choose to work hard and make some sacrifices because they know how important it is to elect someone to the United States Senate who shares their principles " .

= = = Specter maintains momentum = = =

As the primary race entered into March , Specter appeared to be maintaining his momentum , with polls indicating he not only led Sestak by 24 percentage points , but had recaptured a projected lead against Toomey in the general election by a margin of 49 to 42 percent . Pollsters indicated Specter was still benefiting greatly from his strong name recognition , whereas Sestak and Toomey remained relatively little @-@ known . Peter Brown , assistant director of the Quinnipiac University Polling Institute , said , " There remains no evidence that his primary challenger , Congressman Joe Sestak , has made much progress as we get within three months of the May primary . " However , Time writer Karen Tumulty noted that while " thus far , Sestak has failed to meet expectations " , the poll also indicated some weaknesses for Specter . Namely , more than half of the surveyed Pennsylvanians did not feel he deserved another term , and among Democrats who knew the candidates well enough to form an opinion of both , Sestak led Specter 54 percent to 37 percent . On March 16 , Governor Rendell restated his past support of Specter and said of Sestak , " He has , in my mind , no chance to win . "

On March 30 , Specter won the backing of the AFL @-@ CIO , which was considered one of the most important endorsements in the primary race . It was one of several major labor endorsements Specter had received , including the state Service Employees International Union and the Pennsylvania State Education Association , which represented 200 @,@ 000 state teachers . Representatives from the AFL @-@ CIO cited Specter 's backing of President Obama 's stimulus package as a major factor in their decision . Sestak criticized the union federation 's decision , pointing out he had a 100 percent rating from the national AFL @-@ CIO while Specter had a 61 percent rating . He also attacked Specter for previously backing President George W. Bush 's economic policies and said , " Pennsylvania workers need a Senator they can count on to be there when they need him , not only when he needs them during an election . " The Philadelphia Inquirer writer Thomas Fitzgerald called the endorsement " a powerful affirmation of how smoothly Specter has managed his political transition to the Democratic Party since leaving the Republican Party less than a year ago " .

On April 11 , Sestak held a debate with Toomey in Philadelphia without Specter present , which media observers described as an explicit criticism of Specter for refusing to hold more than one debate with Sestak . During that debate , Sestak strongly attacked Toomey 's voting record in what The Morning Call reporter Colby Itkowitz described as " an obvious effort to show Democrats that he could hold his own in a general election matchup " . At the end of the debate , Toomey voiced respect for Sestak and described him as a more principled man than Specter , who he criticized for not participating in more debates . Later that month , when the Senate candidates publicly released their quarterly campaign finance reports on April 15 , it was revealed Toomey raised more in the first three months of 2010 than either Democratic candidate , adding \$ 2 @. @ 3 million to his total \$ 4 @. @ 1 million war chest compared to Specter adding \$ 1 @. @ 1 million to his total \$ 9 @. @ 1 million fund . Political analysts attributed this to the national swing in momentum toward Republicans , and said that it could indicate the Republicans would be victorious in many Senate races , including in Pennsylvania . Sestak raised \$ 442 @, @ 000 in the three @- @ month period , down from his previous quarter , which Specter 's campaign said proved Democratic donors had rejected his candidacy . Specter 's fundraising advantage was significant because it allowed him to start early in running political campaign commercials .

= = = Television advertisements = = =

Starting in April , both Specter and Sestak launched television advertisements that were particularly critical of each other . Sestak , who had been saving most of his roughly \$ 5 million campaign funds until the final month of the primary race , unveiled a 60 @- @ second spot that highlighted his Navy career and described the role his daughter 's experience as a brain cancer survivor played in his decision to enter politics . The commercial did not discuss Specter by name but made several implicit references to him , such as Sestak 's statements that " too many politicians are concerned about keeping their jobs instead of helping people " and " if we want real change in Washington , we can 't keep sending the same career politicians to represent us " . Specter launched several commercials , most focusing on his plans to promote job growth . One advertisement , however , focused entirely on attacking Sestak , highlighting not only his voting attendance record ? labeling him " No Show Joe " ? but also his Navy service . The commercial stated Sestak was " relieved of duty in the Navy for creating a poor command climate " , a reference to Sestak 's 2005 transfer from a senior Pentagon planning post to a lesser position , which effectively ended his naval career .

The Navy Times had previously reported the transfer resulted from Sestak forcing subordinates to work unreasonable hours , although Sestak himself disputed that accusation and attributed the transfer to the fact that the new top officer , Admiral Michael Mullen , simply wanted to appoint his own team . Sestak called on Specter to stop broadcasting the commercial , accusing the Senator of " Republican @- @ style " negative campaign tactics , which he compared to those used against Senator John Kerry by the Swift Vets and POWs for Truth during the 2004 presidential election . Sestak said in a statement , " It 's time to tell Arlen Specter : Democrats don 't ' swift boat ' . We 're better than that . " A group of veterans gathered in Philadelphia to echo Sestak 's call that the commercial should be removed , with retired U.S. Air Force Lieutenant General Robert E. Kelley announcing , " We 're all here because we 're enraged at the fact that someone , anyone , in the United States today would question someone who has 30 years of service . " Specter 's campaign replied they would not remove the commercial because it was accurate , and instead called on Sestak to remove his own advertisement , claiming it violated United States Department of Defense guidelines because it used military images , references and jargon without a disclaimer that it was not endorsed by the department .

= = = Sestak gains in closing weeks = = =

Sestak and Specter held their first and only televised debate on May 1 at Philadelphia 's Fox affiliate , during which the two candidates bitterly attacked each other 's character and honesty . The two began arguing even before the hour @- @ long debate formally began , when Sestak objected



to Specter 's use of notes and said that the rules did not allow them . The debate organizer ruled the notes were allowed . Specter criticized Sestak for campaign advertisements that accused the Senator of lying about Sestak 's record . Specter said , " Nobody has ever called me a liar , " and demanded an apology , to which Sestak did not respond . Specter also repeatedly asked Sestak to publicly release his military records , to which Sestak again refused to respond . Sestak accused Specter of using Republican @-@ style tactics in the vein of Karl Rove , former adviser to George W. Bush , and said Specter 's attacks were meant to mask his record of supporting Bush 's failed economic policies . Specter insisted the questions raised about Sestak 's naval record were legitimate because much of Sestak 's campaign was based on his military background , adding , " It goes to his ability to get things done , to get along with people . He 's all peaches and cream on television . " Specter criticized Sestak for supporting the troop build @-@ up in Afghanistan , while Sestak noted that Specter voted against a ban on assault weapons in the 1990s . The Philadelphia Inquirer noted the debate was " every bit as contentious as their Democratic Senate primary struggle has become in its closing days " .

With only two weeks remaining before the primary , a Quinnipiac University poll released May 4 showed Specter 's lead against Sestak had significantly narrowed , dropping from 53 @-@ 32 percent in the previous month to 47 @-@ 39 percent . A daily tracking poll by Muhlenberg College showed the race as even closer , with Specter supported by 46 percent of likely voters surveyed , and Sestak trailing only four points at 42 percent . The Quinnipiac poll indicated the strongest factor in these changes was that Sestak was gaining better name recognition due to his television commercials . According to the poll , 43 percent of respondents now had a favorable view of him , compared to only 33 percent in March . The day after the poll was released , Sestak unveiled a new television advertisement strongly critical of Specter , highlighting the incumbent Senator 's Republican history and showing images of him with George W. Bush and Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin . The commercial featured a clip of Specter saying , " My change in party will enable me to be reelected " and ended with a narrator saying , " Arlen Specter switched parties to save one job : his , not yours . " The same week the advertisement ran , T.J. Rooney said in an interview with Politico that a Sestak primary victory would be " cataclysmic " for the party in the general election , and warned Democratic voters , " If we want to keep this seat in Democratic hands , the only person capable of delivering that victory is Arlen Specter . "

Specter received several high @-@ profile endorsements during the final weeks leading up to the primary . Senator John Kerry , who had been an early supporter of Sestak 's 2006 House campaign , endorsed Specter in the Senate race , calling him " fighter and a friend , and I am proud to vouch for his character " . The Philadelphia Inquirer called Sestak " a worthy opponent " and said that his determination made the race especially competitive , but ultimately embraced Specter , whose overall career record the newspaper said was " a good choice for Democrats " . The Pittsburgh Post @-@ Gazette also endorsed Specter , focusing more on the fact that Specter stood the best chance of defeating Toomey in a general election challenge . The Pittsburgh Tribune @-@ Review , however , endorsed Sestak , calling him " incredibly intelligent , thoughtful and articular " while condemning Specter as a " self @-@ serving political ferret " for switching parties . Actor Michael J. Fox , who suffers from Parkinson 's disease , appeared in a television advertisement for Specter , praising the Senator for his long @-@ standing support of stem cell research . Fox said , " In the fight against disease , you can look back or move forward . Arlen Specter is moving forward . " President Obama sent e @-@ mail messages to his Organizing for America supporters encouraging them to vote for Specter , However , despite his long position of support for Specter , Obama did not fly to Pennsylvania to actively campaign for the Senator during the campaign 's final days .

As the campaign entered its final week , polls showed Specter and Sestak at a dead heat , with different surveys reporting contradictory findings over which candidate maintained a slight edge . A Quinnipiac University poll found Specter leading 44 @-@ 42 percent , with fourteen percent undecided , whereas a Franklin & Marshall poll found Sestak ahead 38 @-@ 36 percent , with about a quarter of voters undecided . In both cases , the lead fell within the survey 's margin of error . G. Terry Madonna , director of the Franklin & Marshall poll , said that Sestak improved because his television commercials were resonating with voters on three fronts : the arguments that Specter

switched parties for solely political reasons , that he consistently voted for Republican policies and that he had been in office too long .

= = Polling = =

= = Results = =

Sestak won the May 18 primary with 53 @. @ 8 percent of the vote , or 568 @, @ 563 of the votes cast , compared to 46 @. @ 2 percent and 487 @, @ 217 votes for Specter . The defeat led to the end of Specter 's nearly 30 @- @ year Senate career , the longest of any Pennsylvania Senator in history . Afterward , Sestak declared , " This is what democracy should look like : a win for the people over the establishment . It should come as no surprise to anyone that people want a change . " Specter conceded defeat and said , " It 's been a great privilege to serve the people of Pennsylvania . It 's been a great privilege to be in the United States Senate . " Commentators suggested Specter 's defeat signaled an electorate unsatisfied with the establishment in both major parties , and indicated that the backing of prominent politicians had little effect on voters during this political age . Sestak 's victory was seen as a minor embarrassment for Obama , who strongly and publicly advocated for Specter during the race . Several news outlets reflected that Sestak 's television advertisements condemning Specter as a hypocrite and opportunist were especially effective and may have been the primary factor in his victory . The Washington Post said the Pennsylvania race drew more attention than any other primary election in 2010 due to Specter 's longevity and his switch to the Democratic party .

Toomey went on to defeat Sestak in the general election , winning by a margin of 51 to 49 percent .

= = Clinton job offer to Sestak = =

During a February 2010 television interview , Sestak said that in July 2009 he was offered a job in President Obama 's administration if he dropped out of the race . During a February 18 taping of Larry Kane : Voice of Reason , a Philadelphia @- @ area local news show , host Larry Kane asked Sestak whether such an offer had been made , to which Sestak responded , " Yes " , without elaborating beyond that it was a high @- @ ranking assignment and that he did not plan to take it . In subsequent press inquiries , Sestak repeatedly stood by his original statement . When asked about the matter by The Washington Post , he said , " There has been some indirect means in which they were trying to offer things if I got out . " Likewise , during an appearance on the Fox News Channel , he said , " I was asked a direct question yesterday and I answered it honestly . There 's nothing more to go into . I 'm in this race now . " Over the next month , White House officials did not answer multiple press inquiries about whether Sestak 's claims were true . On March 16 , White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs said he had reviewed the matter and found conversations that had been held with Sestak were " not problematic . "

In March , Congressman Darrell Issa , the ranking Republican on the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform , sent a letter to White House Counsel Robert Bauer stating if Sestak 's claim was true , the Obama administration may have violated a federal statute that makes it illegal for a government employee to use his authority to interfere with a Senate election . Interest in the alleged job offer reignited after Sestak defeated Specter in the primary on May 18 . Seven Republicans from the Senate Judiciary Committee wrote to Attorney General Eric Holder seeking a review of the legal implications of the offer . Around this time , Sestak continued to maintain that a job offer was made , but he downplayed the importance of the incident and defended Obama 's integrity . On May 28 , the White House formally responded to the allegations and acknowledged White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel enlisted former President Bill Clinton to offer Sestak a seat on a presidential advisory board or another executive board if Sestak dropped his candidacy . If Sestak accepted , he would have been allowed to remain in the House while serving in the unpaid

position .

Bauer said that nobody in the administration itself directly discussed the offer with Sestak , and he does not believe there was anything improper , illegal or unethical about the conduct . Republicans in Congress disagreed , arguing the action contradicted claims Obama made during his presidential campaign about ethical conduct and transparency in government . Darrell Issa , in particular , felt it was an impeachable offense and referred to it as " Obama 's Watergate " . Nevertheless , the matter gradually became less of a focus during the primary election , where other topics like spending and the economy took the spotlight . With Issa poised to become chairman of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform following the Republican Party recapturing the house during the 2010 midterm elections , it was widely expected he would launch an official investigation into the job offer based on his prior critical comments about the matter . However , on November 5 , Issa announced he would not pursue an investigation . Some politicians and members of the media said that the job offer made to Sestak was neither illegal nor abhorrent , and that such deals are regularly made by politicians of all levels . Chris Cillizza of The Washington Post felt the matter only appeared to be a scandal because the White House badly mishandled the response , and Chicago Tribune writer John Kass wrote , " Offering a spot to an ambitious young politician to protect an old servile weakling isn 't new . Presidents do it , governors do it . Big @-@ city mayors really know how to do it . "