

# PERSPECTIVE



## After 2020 vote, one party likely to control presidency and Senate. But which one?

**By HAROLD MEYERSON**

**S**uppose Joe Biden is elected president in November, but the Senate stays Republican. Or, suppose he loses, but the Democrats manage to take the Senate anyway. If Americans vote the way they have in recent elections, both those eventualities are unlikely.

As the rift between the two parties, and that between their supporters, has grown to Grand Canyon dimensions, Americans have largely abandoned ticket-splitting.

In the 2016 presidential election, every state that elected a Republican senator voted for Donald Trump for president, while every state that elected a Democratic senator voted for Hillary Clinton. Since the nation inaugurated the popular election of senators in 1913, that had never happened.

Even in midterm elections, ticket-splitting — a pervasive feature of American voting throughout the 20th century — has gone into steep


decline. Of the 21 states that elected both governors and senators in 2018, only five elected one from each party. In the three states that elected Democratic senators and Republican governors, those governors — Massachusetts' Charlie Baker, Maryland's Larry Hogan, Vermont's Phil Scott — had each largely repudiated President Trump and ran (and in Baker's and Hogan's case, already governed) as centrists.

What does this portend when considering whether Democrats have any chance of flipping the Senate in 2020?

To oust Mitch McConnell from the post of majority leader, the Dems need to concentrate on states where Republican Senate seats are up for a vote and where Biden (or whoever becomes the Democratic nominee) has a good chance of winning.

That list certainly includes Colorado, where Republican Sen. Cory Gardner is widely regarded as the most endangered Republican incumbent.

Next on the list of targets are three



Republican senators from swing states: Arizona's Martha McSally, North Carolina's Thom Tillis and Maine's Susan Collins. McSally and Tillis are both in their first terms, and neither appears to have instilled fervent loyalty in their state's voters. Collins, of course, is a longtime favorite of Maine voters, having first won her seat in 1996, and may prove a more tenacious candidate.

Among the 12 currently Democratic-held seats on November's ballot, only one — that of Alabama's Doug Jones — is from a state that Trump carried in 2016, and is almost sure to carry again. Jones is in the Senate by virtue of a special election in which he had the great good fortune to have as his Republican opponent Roy Moore, the Bible-thumping friendship-cultivator of teenage girls.

As Jones cannot assume he'll be

that lucky this year (his Republican opponent will either be former Attorney General and Sen. Jeff Sessions or Auburn head football coach Tommy Tuberville), prudent Democrats should assume that they'll need to pick up four Senate seats to get to 50. Should Biden or another Democrat win the presidency, that would give them the narrowest of majorities, relying on the Democratic vice president to be the Senate's tie-breaking vote.

That that means for Democrats is they'll have to pour resources chiefly into the four states — Colorado, Arizona, North Carolina and Maine — where Republican senators are most endangered. Their likely nominees — former Gov. John Hickenlooper in Colorado, former astronaut Mark Kelly in Arizona, Maine House Speaker Sara Gideon and former state Sen. Cal Cunningham in North Carolina, who became the Democrats' nominee in the March 3 primary — stand either in their party's mainstream or a little to the right of it, much like Biden himself. If voters are persuaded to cast their ballots for Biden,

they will likely vote for these Senate candidates as well.

After those states, it's down to tougher prospects. In Montana, the popular Democratic Gov. Steve Bullock recently announced his candidacy against Republican Sen. Steve Daines. In Kansas, should Republicans nominate the far-right Kris Kobach, who lost to a Democrat in the 2018 gubernatorial election, the Democratic nominee would certainly have a shot. And if polls in October show a Biden blowout looming, Democrats might even be able to pick up seats in such currently improbable locales as Iowa and Texas.

That said, how states will vote in Senate races depends more heavily than ever on how they vote for president.

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## An issue of fairness Democrats should seize on in Senate races

**N**ever mind that it is the right thing to do. Or that the last thing politicians should be doing is coming up with ways to erode public confidence. Congress members for their own good should pass a proposed law that would end their ability to trade individual stocks while in office.

Senators and members of the House of Representatives, and often their top aides, know stuff the rest of us don't, or at least know it sooner. They get private briefings on national security threats, on economic data that can signal trouble ahead, and about foreign hot spots.

They need this to do their jobs, guide their policy decisions and act in the best interests of the people who elected them. But these reports can also indicate that they can make some big money by buying particular stocks or avoid big losses by dumping others.

Until 2012 there was nothing illegal about that. But there were calls for reform after the last market collapse in 2008 and 2009, and reports that many congresspeople weathered the subsequent Great Recession a whole lot better than the rest of us, based on investment decisions guided by the briefings they were receiving. President Barack Obama and the Democrats, then in control of both chambers, and with strong bipartisan support from the Republican minority, passed in 2012 the STOCK Act — Stop Trading on Congressio-



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nal Knowledge.

It prohibits lawmakers from “using nonpublic information derived from their official positions for personal benefit.” It also requires every member of Congress to publicly file and disclose any financial transaction of stocks, bonds, commodities futures, and other securities within 45 days. Unfortunately, in 2013 Congress passed an amendment that eliminated a requirement for the creation of a searchable, sortable database.

Disclosures must be filed, but only on paper, making access to and interpretation of the data significantly more difficult. Congress wanted to claim transparency, while making it difficult.

**Back in the news**

The STOCK Act is back in the news as the country confronts another market drop and an economic downturn, this time tied to the COVID-19 pandemic. And, again, some congresspeople may be benefitting from insider information.

As noted in our editorial earlier last week, Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., chair of the Sen-

ate Intelligence Committee, dumped stocks valued at up to \$1.7 million after attending multiple briefings in which he learned how serious a health and economic threat the virus posed, even though at the time both he and President Trump were offering assurances that threat could be managed.

Burr was not alone. Disclosure records show three other senators sold major holdings before the market collapse: James M. Inhofe, Republican of Oklahoma; Kelly Loeffler, a Georgia Republican; and Dianne Feinstein, Democrat of California, also a member of Intelligence. Yet none of their financial moves have the same direct connection to the crisis as Burr's wholesale stock dump.

Inhofe, for example, sold off Paypal and Apple stock, which didn't seem to be in the crosshairs of the shutdown tied to the pandemic, nor did the \$1.5 million to \$6 million in stock Feinstein and her husband sold in the cancer-focused California biotech company Allogene Therapeutics. Feinstein said the decision was made by her husband and had nothing to do with the crisis. In fact, the stock subsequently rose.

Loeffler is the wife of Jeffrey C. Sprecher, chairman of the New York Stock Exchange. Her filings, according to the New York Times, show 27 stock sales worth millions of dollars starting Jan. 24, beating the market downturn.

Loeffler, denying conten-

**SEE END PAGE B6**

## \$318,000 isn't too much to spend to protect the public

**By KENNETH W. RICHARDS JR.**

**S**ince 2010, I have informed the public of the safety issues concerning the North Stonington Road Bridge closure. Over the years both the towns of Stonington and Groton have included in their respective budget their cost-share to repair the bridge. However, until this year, Groton consistently cut the funding from their budget. Now, after supporting the project for the last nine years, Stonington has elected to cut funding while Groton has pledged to keep its funding intact.

The Old Mystic Fire District has gone on record many times regarding the public safety issues they face with the closure of the North Stonington Bridge. The Old Mystic Fire Department responded to 1,256 calls for service last year. The apparatus from our 21 North Stonington Road station in Stonington was dispatched 409 times to the Groton side of the fire district. With the bridge closed we must make a right-hand turn at the narrow intersection of Main Street and Route 27. This presents a major driving hazard for our personnel and equipment as well as the public.

In 2010, in order to cover our assets and protect the district legally, we installed a dash cam in the apparatus to record any problems faced while using this intersection. The footage was evidence enough that traversing this intersection in our fire apparatus is a safety hazard. There have been occasions when the driver has had to turn around because the apparatus would not fit through Main Street by the Post Office due to delivery trucks and/or cars and other vehicles that were parked on both sides of the street. This delayed our response by over 4 minutes, critical time in responding to a fire or other emergency.

While safely gaining access to the Groton side is a major concern, so is fire

suppression. While the bridge is closed, the nearest fire hydrant to the affected Groton side of the bridge is 360 feet away. The next fire hydrant is located at Main Street and Route 27. At a fire call, if we lay a five-inch supply line to the Groton side, the distance increases to 1,020 feet and requires the closures of Main Street, Route 27 and Shewville Road.

I respect the political and administrative leaders of both towns. I ask for that same respect in return for the wellbeing of our community. For 44 years I've dedicated my to public safety, 26 of them as fire chief. I consider myself to be an educated and well-qualified individual regarding this matter and I am disheartened by the lack of support.

Damaged by flooding, it will take a \$318,000 contribution from each town, with the total then matched by the state, to repair and reopen the bridge. Considering the warm winter we experienced this year, and the savings from the lack of snow-removal costs, I am certain that both towns, even under the fiscal restraints they are claiming, can find the funds necessary to complete a project that is eight years overdue.

Residents have spoken with a petition of over 120 signatures asking to repair the bridge. This is not about Republican versus Democrat. It's about what is right and wrong.

Public Safety must take priority in decision making. I encourage the community to respectfully contact your public leaders and demand the North Stonington Bridge be repaired and reopened.

**Kenneth W. Richards Jr. is the fire chief and fire marshal for the Old Mystic Fire Department.**