

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB NEWSMAKER LUNCHEON WITH REPRESENTATIVE THOMAS REYNOLDS (R-NY), CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIONAL REPUBLICAN CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE; AND REPRESENTATIVE CHRISTOPHER VAN HOLLEN (D-MD), REPRESENTATIVE OF THE DEMOCRATIC CONGRESSIONAL CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE

SUBJECT: MIDTERM ELECTIONS

LOCATION: NATIONAL PRESS CLUB, WASHINGTON, D.C.

TIME: 12:30 P.M. EDT

DATE: WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2006

(C) COPYRIGHT 2005, FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC., 1000 VERMONT AVE. NW; 5TH FLOOR; WASHINGTON, DC - 20005, USA. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. ANY REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION IS EXPRESSLY PROHIBITED.

UNAUTHORIZED REPRODUCTION, REDISTRIBUTION OR RETRANSMISSION CONSTITUTES A MISAPPROPRIATION UNDER APPLICABLE UNFAIR COMPETITION LAW, AND FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC. RESERVES THE RIGHT TO PURSUE ALL REMEDIES AVAILABLE TO IT IN RESPECT TO SUCH MISAPPROPRIATION.

FEDERAL NEWS SERVICE, INC. IS A PRIVATE FIRM AND IS NOT AFFILIATED WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. NO COPYRIGHT IS CLAIMED AS TO ANY PART OF THE ORIGINAL WORK PREPARED BY A UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT OFFICER OR EMPLOYEE AS PART OF THAT PERSON'S OFFICIAL DUTIES.

FOR INFORMATION ON SUBSCRIBING TO FNS, PLEASE CALL JACK GRAEME AT 202-347-1400.

MR. SALANT: Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press Club. I'm Jonathan Salant, a reporter for Bloomberg News and president of the Press Club.

I'd like to welcome club members and their guests in the audience today, as well as those of you watching on C-SPAN.

Please hold your applause during the speech so we have time for as many questions as possible.

For our broadcast audience, I would like to explain that if you hear applause, it is from the members of the general public and the guests of our speakers who are in the audience, not from the working press.

The video archive of today's luncheon is provided by ConnectLive and is available to members only through the Press Club's website at www.press.org. Press Club members may also get free transcripts of our luncheons at our website. Nonmembers may buy audio tapes, video tapes and transcripts by calling 1-888-343-1940. For more information about joining the Press Club, please call us at area code 202-662- 7511.

Before introducing our head table, I'd like to remind you of future speakers: October 23rd, John Hofmeister, the president of the Shell Oil Company; October 25th, Senator Elizabeth Dole and Senator Chuck Schumer, the chairs of the Republican and Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committees, to talk about the 2006 elections; on October 30th, Miles Brand, the president of the NCAA.

If you have any questions for our speaker, please write them on the cards provided at your table and pass them up to me. I will ask as many as time permits.

I'd now like to introduce our head table, and ask them to stand briefly when their names are called. Please hold your applause until all of the head table guests are introduced.

From your right, Bob Benenson, the political editor of CQPolitics.com; Laura Litvan, my colleague on the political desk at Bloomberg News; Kathy Kiely of USA Today; Bob Edwards, host of "The Bob Edwards Show" on XM Satellite Radio; Carl Forti, the communications director for the National Republican Congressional Committee; Gil Klein of Media General and a former president of the National Press Club; Representative Chris Van Hollen -- we'll have more on him later -- who's a representative of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee; Angela Greiling Keane, vice chair of the National Press Club's Speakers Committee and an associate editor of Traffic World Magazine; Congressman Tom Reynolds -- we'll have more on him later as well -- from the National Republican Congressional Committee; Jerry Zremski, vice president of the National Press Club, a reporter for The Buffalo News and the member of the Speakers Committee who organized today's luncheon.

And Jerry, thank you very much.

Karin Johanson, executive director of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee; Betsy Fischer, executive producer of NBC's "Meet the Press"; Mark Shields, a syndicated columnist for Creative Syndicate and a panelist on the "NewsHour with Jim Lehrer"; Clarence Page, a syndicated columnist for The Chicago Tribune; and Sylvia Smith of the Fort Wayne Journal Gazette, and secretary of the National Press Club. (Applause.)

Ever since the Republicans captured control of the House of Representatives in 1994, we have heard Democratic Party leaders tell us every two years that this would be the time that they win back the majority. This time, if polls are to be believed, they may be right.

A National Public Radio poll released earlier this week found voters in 48 competitive House districts favoring the Democratic candidate over the Republican by a margin of 51 to 40 percent. Still, House Republicans are hopeful of retaining the majority they first won in 1994.

Trying to keep the Republicans in control is the successor to the lawmaker who helped in that historic effort 12 years ago. Tom Reynolds of New York is the chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee, the same position his predecessor in Congress, Bill Paxon, held in 1994. Congressman Reynolds, the former Republican leader of the New York State Assembly, last visited us at our luncheon two years ago under much different circumstances. At that time, he said the Republicans would keep the House, and he was right. This time he has his own seat to worry about, in addition to the other 217 he needs to keep control.

His former chief of staff used to work for former Congressman Mark Foley, accused of having inappropriate contact with congressional pages. Congressman Reynolds has been accused of not doing more. He said he brought the matter to the attention of House Speaker Denny Hastert.

Still, Congressman Reynolds is a prolific fundraiser. He not only raised more than \$200,000 for President Bush's re-election campaign, but the Republican Congressional Committee continues to outpace its Democratic counterpart. His phone buddies include Governor George Pataki of New York and top Bush strategist Karl Rove, scheduled to come to Congressman Reynolds home county of Erie later this week.

"Tom is my type of guy," one lawmaker told The Buffalo News. "A lot of politics is about personal relationships and Tom is always working to build them." That lawmaker, by the way, was Congressman Reynolds's counterpart, Rahm Emanuel of Illinois. Rahm is chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. He is ill and cannot be here today, but we will hear instead from Representative Chris Van Hollen of Maryland.

Congressman Van Hollen knows how to defeat long-entrenched Republican incumbents. He did it himself, ousting Republican Connie Morella in 2002 from the seat in the Washington suburbs she had held for 16 years. A former congressional aide, he spent 12 years in the Maryland legislature before winning his House seat.

He's been campaigning across the country for Democratic challengers -- having recruited many of them himself, as the head of the DCCC's subcommittee. He is co-chair of the committee's red-to-blue program, seeking to help Democratic candidates running in Republican-held districts with their campaigns.

Congressman Van Hollen, as the pinch hitter, agreed to -- in fact, deferred to the first string on the Republican team, Congressman Reynolds, and gave Congressman Reynolds the choice of whether to bat first or bat second. Congressman Reynolds said he would bat second, so I'm going to turn it over to Congressman Van Hollen. And let's welcome him, and then Congressman Reynolds, to the National Press Club. (Applause.)

REP. VAN HOLLEN: Thank you, Jonathan.

It's wonderful to be here today. It's wonderful to have Jonathan as a constituent. And I hoped since he was a constituent, he was going to share with me in advance some of these questions, but he has not agreed to do so.

It's a privilege to be here to pinch hit for Rahm Emanuel. And in honor of the occasion I was trying to think of -- brush up on my four-letter words. I've been a lot more diverse vocabulary since I've been working with Rahm. (Laughter.)

But very seriously, I'm pleased to be here on his behalf. He's sorry he couldn't be here. Even from the place where he is sick, he has continued to work very hard in the cause of trying to take back the House for the Democrats. I'm very pleased to be joined here by Karin Johanson, who is the executive director of the DCCC, and we just have a terrific team there.

One of the dangers, of course, of representing a congressional district right near the Washington, D.C., the capital, is you get pressed into service on short notice like this. But that is not the only reason I'm here. I've also had the opportunity, as Jonathan said, to chair the committee we put together early on -- right after the last election -- to recruit candidates around the country. And I'm pleased now to co-chair what we call our red-to-blue effort, along with my colleague Debbie Wasserman Schultz, which is our organization that tries to make sure that the candidates we have out there have the resources they need, both in terms of funds, in terms of volunteer support -- to the extent we can give them -- in terms of information.

And I must say, as all of you know, when we first started this process right after the last election, and we were talking about the possibility of the Democrats being in a position to take control of the House, a lot of people thought we were absolutely crazy. How times have changed since then.

We got a good early start. We have lots of candidates. We got out there early, built their organizations and survived what we were worried about was going to be the Swift Boat summer. We emerged at the end of the summer with more competitive races than we had going into the summer. And that's for a variety of reasons, but one of the reasons is these candidates had an opportunity to put their organization together, build on the ground and define themselves before negative campaigns define them for them.

And as a result of that fact, along with some of the other factors I want to just mention briefly, we are in a position today where the field is actually growing, as we are just under three weeks out from the election -- growing in terms of the number of competitive races. Often in years past, as you know in these election cycles, you see at the end of the summer into September the number of competitive races narrowing. Here our challenge is to keep track in identifying all the new opportunities that are growing in terms of candidates and races that are competitive.

In fact, the only field that seems to be narrowing are the vulnerable Democratic incumbents, where we're confident that in many of these races where we thought we were going to have super-competitive races, the Republicans have decided not to invest a lot of money in those races and instead try and defend a lot of their embattled Republican incumbents elsewhere. And that is a major change from years past.

So what's going on out there -- what's going on out there in the country? I think all of you know that virtually every poll that we've seen for some time now shows that an overwhelming majority of Americans think this country is headed in the wrong direction. They are looking for a change.

They also understand more clearly than in elections past that the Republicans have a monopoly on power in Washington. They're the ones in charge. They've got the White House; they've got the Senate; they've got the House. So to the extent that people want to hold a group of individuals accountable and responsible for what they don't like about where this country is going, this election is their opportunity to do it. And they want to demonstrate a change and this is their opportunity to clean house and have that kind of change.

You also have a number of other factors. I think that what the Republican Party in past years has thought of as their sort of trump card, the national security issue and terrorism, has been very weakened from their perspective. Their credibility on this issue has sunk dramatically.

Americans look around and they see a couple things. They see that we have not completed the job against Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda in Afghanistan. They see that we took our eye off the ball there and went into Iraq. And they see that what we have in Iraq is a mess in chaos, and the result of many, many things, but including gross incompetence by the Bush administration. They see that things haven't really gotten a whole lot better.

We remember when the president was aboard the Aircraft Carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, and the banner "Mission Accomplished" read. That was April 2003. Vice President Cheney, more than a year ago, said the insurgency was in, quote, "its final throes." Then we had a Defense Department report that showed not only was the insurgency worse, but that was the lesser of our problems in Iraq -- that now we had an emerging civil war.

And so Americans have been able to contrast the happy talk from the Bush administration with the reality they see on the ground. And for awhile, the administration and Republican leadership in Congress tried to dismiss the negative press reports coming out of Iraq and saying, oh, the press only focuses on the bad news, not the good news.

But then we just recently had an NIE -- the National Intelligence Estimate. It showed a consensus of every one of the 16 intelligence agencies agreeing that in fact Iraq has fueled the terrorist movement around the world, that it has added new recruits to that effort, and people have concluded, in fact, Iraq has made us less, not more, safe. And in fact, the big winner in Iraq has in fact been the other member of the axis of evil, Iran.

And as for the third member of the axis of evil, I think the administration probably hoped they'd be able to change the subject with North Korea. But what happened in North Korea only further undermines the credibility and competence of this administration's national security policy. Because what we've seen in the last six years in Korea, resulting most recently with their test of a nuclear weapon, it seems to me shows a failure of policies there.

So throughout all this, you've had a Republican-led Congress that has refused to hold the Bush administration accountable both for their failures in Iraq and national security and for their failures on the domestic front. When they weren't just looking the other way with their sort of see-no-evil, hear-no-evil, they were just a rubber stamp. The administration would send something down; "Ask no questions" said the Congress. We don't -- you know what you're doing. And they were a rubber stamp for this administration -- failed to hold them accountable.

And what's the result? When you reward failure or you ignore failure, you're going to get more failure. You get more failure with respect to our policies in Iraq, and lack of progress on the many pressing issues here at home: the economy, and health care and education.

And so the American people say, we want a Congress that's going to provide a check rather than a blank check. They want someone who's going to balance this administration. And I think this is their opportunity to do that.

Secondly, they also see a Congress that not only won't hold the administration accountable, but cannot hold itself accountable for the misconduct of its members. And I think the evidence is very clear in this case, with respect to Congressman Foley, that the Republican leadership in Congress decided to put their political fortunes above the safety of the youngsters and the pages that were in their protection.

That is the only explanation for why the Democratic member of the page board, the group of members of Congress and others that's supposed to oversee the page program, wasn't informed. Why didn't they inform him? They were afraid that information would get out. They were afraid it would jeopardize the prospects of winning the Foley seat, and they were concerned that it would jeopardize their ability to hold onto power.

They put the desire to hold onto power in Congress above the interests of the individuals and youngsters in the page program. And the reason I think that was such a powerful event was it reinforced what other people were already thinking about this Congress -- it was that they were putting themselves before the public interest.

Look at the scandals: the Abramoff scandal. We now have recently reports that Curt Weldon, Congressman Weldon, is under investigation by the FBI. We have other reports cropping up of other people.

So there's a real sense around the country that what has been the people's House has become an auction house; that members, or the leadership and others, have decided to put their private, personal interests above the public interest.

And so I think this is an election where the American people have said, "Enough is enough" and they want to send a message. And that is why in these closing days, with less than three weeks to go before the election, you're seeing an expansion of competitive races, rather than the traditional narrowing of races.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

REP. REYNOLDS: Good afternoon.

And Jonathan, thank you for that kind introduction as we began today. It's great to see a Press Club president who hails from New York and has served in the Albany press corps.

I've been looking forward to the Press Club since we last did this in 2004. My sparring partner then was a gentleman from California, the late Bob Matsui. His successor, Rahm Emanuel, has been a worthy adversary throughout this cycle. I'm sorry to hear that Rahm is under the weather today, and I want to thank Chris Van Hollen for coming in his place.

I also want to thank the members of the House Republican Conference who twice elected me to serve in this post. Together we have stared down some serious challenges. And with our opponents ready and willing to exploit any issue for political gain, there has been little room for let up, and even less for error.

I'm sure that we'll get a lot of great questions to answer today, but one that is probably in the front of your minds: How is this thing going to turn out on election night?

Rahm Emanuel has answered that question by saying his job is to, quote, "affect races, not predict them." That is not a bad answer, certainly the kind of evasive response that you would expect from a Chicago Democrat -- (laughter) -- but I think it misses the point about how House races are decided.

The reality is, when it comes down to it, the two people who can tell you who's going to win and who's going to lose on election night are the two people who actually do affect these races. And they are the candidates on the ballot in each and every district. Because although House races are debated on cable news by national pundits, we are dealing with fierce contests fought by local personalities on local pocketbook issues. And 20 days from now, voters are going to go to their local polling places on Election Day with a choice to make, and they will either pull a lever for candidate A or candidate B -- not for the Democrat Congress or Republican Congress.

Of course, it is a Republican Congress we will have after these elections. And I want to walk through our strategy for making that happen on the House side. Let's begin with the fact from day one of this cycle we have had a stiff wind to our face. These six-year elections are the toughest for the party in power. Since the Civil War, the president's party has lost an average of 41 seats in the sixth year of that president's term.

We also knew from day one that Democrats, desperate after being out of power for over a decade, were going to try yet again to nationalize House elections, despite the fact that this approach has not worked for them in 2000, 2002 and 2004.

So because we never take our majority for granted, when we set out this cycle to execute our proven strategy of localizing races, we did so fully aware of what we were up against. You may be thinking that given the national environment, our strategy is not in a position to work this time around. But according to national polling -- numbers that you so often reference -- the old saying still rings true: Voters may hate Congress, but they like their congressman.

In fact, an ABC News and Washington Post survey released last week showed that 60 percent of registered voters -- registered voters -- approved of the job their representative is doing, nearly 30 points ahead of Congress as an institution.

To put that in further perspective, just 49 percent approved of their representatives at this point in 1994. Some might look at that as a trend of some sort, but I just think it goes back to what we have been doing successfully for several cycles now in a row -- keeping these races local by excelling at the nuts and bolts. And those nuts- and-bolts fundamentals are strong candidates, smart campaigns, and solid fundraising. Put it another way, they're my tried-and-true three "m"s: members, money, message.

The members of our conference are first-rate. They're battle- tested campaigners. They have always understood that we have wind in our face. They have raised the money that they need to have. And most importantly, they are in their districts connecting with their constituents and staying on the offense by (defining ?) their opponents. In addition to having outstanding incumbents, we were able to identify and recruit top-flight candidates to run as challengers. Make no mistake, we are on the offense.

For example, take a look at Georgia, where, as a result of a mid- decade redistricting, we have more Republican-friendly seats in Georgia 8th and 12th districts. We were able to get two former members, Mac Collins and Max Burns, to run there. I think we have a good shot at picking up those seats.

We have two pick-up opportunities in the Midwest. David McSweeney is taking on freshman Melissa Bean in Illinois -- historically a Republican district, the 8th district of Illinois. Also, I think we're doing very well with Jeff Lamberti in Iowa 3. Jeff is co-president of the Iowa Senate, and he's giving Leonard Boswell the toughest fight he's ever had. And Leonard has his share of tough fights. We like where we are in both of those races. McSweeney and Lamberti entered this month with double the cash on hand of their opponents.

This leads me right into my second "m," money. You may recall that we had to completely overhaul grassroots fundraising operations in 2003 to adapt to new campaign finance restrictions. This cycle we have hit full stride, posting some exceptional fundraising figures. In the month of September, the NRCC raised \$12 million from individuals and had \$39.2 million in the bank at month's end. This means that despite the uphill environment and two heavily contested special elections, the committee has \$13.5 million more in the bank than it did going into October of 2004.

In addition, our signature Battleground program has once again proven why there is no other like it among the campaign committees. The original goal was to raise \$17.5 million from our members, and we have been able to far surpass that, bringing in \$21.5 million to date from 201 House Republicans and three candidates, and we're still counting. These are resources that go directly into House races.

We are also fortunate to have the support of the Republican National Committee, led by my friend, Chairman Ken Mehlman. With his groundbreaking, 72-hour get out the vote program on the front lines in the weeks ahead, we are quite confident that we will get our voters to the polls on November 7th.

Because we are able to rely on the RNC's outstanding turnout operation, even more of our resources can be devoted to our third "m," message.

Of course, that message varies district by district, based on what local issues resonate. But the NRCC is in a full-court press where voter contact is concerned, running ads in 36 districts, looking to put Democrat challengers away. Much has been written about the fact that a considerable portion of the NRCC's spots are negative in tone, and I want to address that, because I think such an analysis oversimplifies the dynamic at play in a lot of House races around the country.

Right now we are seeing a clash of strategies. Republican incumbents are out there talking about pocketbook issues that resonate in their districts. I know that in western New York it's jobs creation and tax relief. In other places, it might be immigration or infrastructure. At the same time, however, you have a full slate of undistinguished Democrat challengers campaigning on national issues with cookie-cutter talking points scripted by Rahm Emanuel and his staff. It is crystal clear that the DCCC's chairman's goal is to run out the clock and avoid having B-list candidates engage on local issues, and the best way for us to overcome this is to draw a contrast and offer voters a true choice. And so through television, radio and mail, we are saying to the voter this is who the alternative on the ballot is. This is where he or she stands on the issues that matter in your community, and this is what he or she has done that is relevant to being qualified for federal office.

To demonstrate how our strategy plays out successfully, let's look at what many experts consider to be a bellwether race in Kentucky's 3rd District, which is based in Louisville. Our incumbent there is Ann Northrop, whose seat has been competitive since she was first elected in 1996. In fact, both Al Gore in 2000 and John Kerrey in 2004 won that district. But Ann has beaten back challenge after challenge, because she's a tough-as-nails campaigner who has doggedly fought for her constituents.

For instance, as a member of the Appropriations Committee, she's well known in her area for the first advocate for building of two new bridges over the Ohio River. As for her opponent, the first thing that comes to mind about him is the fact that he was Rahm Emanuel's fourth choice to run for the seat. He had two recruitment failures there in the span of a week, and his preferred candidate lost in the Kentucky primary. This week, Congresswoman Northrop reported having over \$1.5 million in the bank, resources that she is using to go directly to her constituents in order to draw a contrast between her record and that of her opponents.

One way Ann does this effectively is by using her opponent's own words against him, in the form of 15 years' worth of liberal columns for a local paper in which he proposed ideas ranging from doubling the payroll tax to legalizing marijuana. It's no wonder that The Cook Political Report's Amy Walter recently said that Ann was, quote, "in the driver's seat."

As for the bigger picture, the playing field is certainly fluid right now, with both parties combing across the country for new opportunities. But because we've been able to keep retirements low, there's not as many open-seat opportunities for Democrats to take advantage of. This

arrangement works in our favor, because I give any local incumbent the edge on any given election day.

Now, I say that from experience. I say that as a pol who got here the old-fashioned way, from the ground up, through the ranks of local party politics, in the offices of councilman, county legislator, state assemblyman and congressman. And in the 35 years that I've been involved in campaigns at all different levels, the manner in which they are waged has certainly changed, but the root from which they are won has not, and it is this: All politics is local. And I tell my members of the conference, my colleagues, all politics is local, for the same reason I told them that in 2004, for the same reason that Tip O'Neill said to his members 30 years ago, because if we do our civic duty and we serve our neighbors well, when the time comes to ask them for the vote, they know that request is coming from someone who has a record that is solid and whose word is good. That is how we're going to win these races, and that is how we are going to keep a Republican majority in the House of Representatives.

Thank you for coming today. I look forward to your questions. (Applause.)

MR. SALANT: We have a load of questions. I will invite both of you to answer each and every one of them. Let's begin -- this one was actually addressed to you, Congressman Reynolds, to start. How do you square your optimistic presentation with the poll numbers in districts across the country, including your own?

REP. REYNOLDS: Well, first of all, it was only a year ago my colleague Rahm Emanuel said there's going to be 100 seats that are competitive. Then it was 80 to 100, then it was 60 to 80. then it was kind of 55. Then if you look back in the history of the comments, he said, "As I've said all along, there's about 41 hotly contested seats across America." Ladies and gentlemen, there are three dozen to 40 seats that are the hottest-contested seats in the country, both sides are at them, both sides are watching them, both sides are making adjustments with each other and the conditions in those districts.

REP. VAN HOLLEN: Well, I think the reason you see an expanding number of races in play, you see the polling as it is, is that the people in all these districts are looking at what's happening in Washington and they're seeing that despite what their members of Congress are saying on the ground, and despite the fact that their members of Congress are having these election year conversions and saying all of a sudden they're independent-minded, they're looking at the records and finding that they're part of a team that has created all sorts of problems in Washington. And they understand that if you want to change the team, you've got to change the representative.

MR. SALANT: Do either of you think that an unexpected last-minute event like another hurricane or a terrorist attack will affect the outcome of the congressional races?

REP. VAN HOLLEN: Well, look, you can always have an unexpected, unanticipated event that can have an influence on elections, but I think the basic structure of this election is in place, barring some kind of unforeseen situation. In other words, I think that if you look at the polls and track them over a period of time now, you see people continue to be upset with the general direction of the country; they continue to have a strong disfavorable view of the president and the

conduct of the Bush administration. And it's based on a number of fundamental issues, including what's happening in Iraq -- you know, their impression of the lack of competence dating back to Katrina and before, and I think it's very difficult to change those fundamentals.

I do agree with Tom on one thing, that in the last three weeks here, it is essential that our candidates focus on sort of the fundamentals of elections -- getting out the vote, making sure they have the resources to remain competitive. And I think all our candidates are doing that. You know, it's easy to dismiss people's B- list candidates, but I can tell you, the reason these candidates are doing so well against entrenched incumbents is because they are terrific candidates and they've got a very strong message to carry.

REP. REYNOLDS: I go back to the ABC News-Washington Post poll of last week, where 60 percent of registered voters approve of their member of Congress. It kind of flies in the face of my colleague Mr. Van Hollen on what people may be thinking back home in their districts.

I want to also remind you that redistricting in 2002, there were more governors and more state legislatures that were Republican than we've seen in the 40 previous years. Many of you long-standing veterans covering redistricting would know that in 1982 in my state you drew the lines on a Mobil Oil map. In 1992 you went down to a mainframe computer on Park Avenue and you put in your request and they brought the stuff out. In 2002 you could have your own from about a 140-buck software package, and you could do your own redistricting maps in your living room or your office. We have now seen why I have said repeatedly three dozen seats will be the hotly contested races around the country, some by circumstances, some by candidates, some by what the district looks like. But as we look at the terrain, people now take in a tremendous amount of information in a day. You know that, as you have covered what's going on on world, national and local events, how much readership and other ways people absorb news.

So can there be some altering factor? Sure. Do we look at having strong candidates, a strong campaign organization, enough money to get the message out to minimize that? Absolutely.

MR. SALANT: Many states have changed their election procedures, especially the use of electronic voting, and of course this -- Congressman Van Hollen knows in his home state there was a lot of problems on primary day. Are you worried about the counting of votes and the tallying of votes in November?

REP. VAN HOLLEN: Well, one of the things I've learned in the House Administration Committee is how many states have so many different ways they vote, from still having an old-fashioned paper ballot box to the latest in computer technology. It is the prerogative of each state, and maybe each state allows each county to have its choice what happens with that.

The only thing I'm interested in having is a fair, honest election, however that state and locality determine that people will go to the polls.

We're even excited, I should bring up, in Texas 22, formerly held by Tom DeLay. We were watching an electorate down there that seems to understand that it is a write-in campaign, that they know how the candidate is, and there is one that gives us some optimism we could win a

write-in seat in Houston suburbs of Sugarland, Texas, and the four counties there. That is all on brand new computers that will be first used in the state of Texas, and those four counties -- or all four are on computer.

But I think the responsibility of the states and people working the voting elections is just to educate voters how to use the equipment.

REP. REYNOLDS: Let me just say, I mean, I -- my personal view is that we should have a paper trail of votes, even those that are cast by electronic machines. And many of us support legislation to do that. Some states have that. Some states don't.

What we need to do in this election is, where there are any questions about the process of voting, the integrity of the voting process, we just need to make sure that we have people on the ground who, as best we can, remain vigilant in monitoring.

Now we've tried to establish volunteer teams to do that in different places, and in many places we have people who are paid to do that. It's always a question of how you're going to use and husband your resources.

But I believe that you're going to get a good turnout in this election. I think every poll shows that the energy on the Democratic side, in terms of desire to get out there and go to vote, is clearly higher than on the Republican side, in terms of the get out the vote effort. And so I'm hoping they all get out to vote, and I think that the votes will be counted. The integrity of the process is an issue that we have to be worried about, and I think we need to address is both in individual states like Maryland and nationally. But in the meantime, we've just got to make sure that we're as vigilant as we can be.

MR. SALANT: With politicians often talking about changing the tone of debate in Washington, why are your two political committees spending so much money on negative advertising?

REP. VAN HOLLEN: All politics is local. It's going to be a choice between two candidates, as I made reference in my remarks -- Candidate A and Candidate B, either on the record or the views, or the view or the vision, so that people make a choice. Sometimes that defines what opponents or candidates or a record are. DCCC is particularly skilled at it. The NRCC seems to hold its own. (Laughter.)

REP. REYNOLDS: Let me just say, you're obviously seeing a mix of advertisements everywhere around the country, and I think one of the reasons our candidates are doing well is that they were able to get out with positive ads early on and define themselves, as I said, before the barrage of negative attacks came after them.

In terms of negative advertising -- look, obviously there's certain differences on issues that are fair game. People can go after people's records. People can go after issues and ask the voters to decide between different issues. Let me just give you an example. John Spratt's opponent came after John Spratt based on some immigration issues. It turned out that his opponent had hired illegal aliens to work for him. That is fair response, to point out that the person who's attacking

him on immigration in fact was somebody who had employed illegal aliens as part of their effort -- their business effort.

MR. SALANT: Democrats have run a campaign largely based against President Bush and his party. Congressman Van Hollen, if you win back the House, what do you consider -- what policies do you consider you'll win a mandate for?

REP. VAN HOLLEN: Well, there are two things that I think will change immediately. One is, you will have greater accountability, as I suggested early in my remarks. You will have a process where committees will actually do their job, bring witnesses before them, and ask them the tough questions in an open setting. And I think that in itself is important to restoring accountability and credibility of the institution.

In addition to that, Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid have laid out a specific agenda of six immediate steps they will take in the first 100 hours in the new Congress. It's called "Six for '06," and many of our candidates are talking about these issues out on the campaign stump. I'm going to run through them extremely quickly, because I think it is important, because part of the -- you know, what we hear from the Republican side is, you know, Democrats don't have an agenda for what they want to do.

We have a broad agenda, but among them are six specific steps that we think distinguish ourselves.

Number one, we're going to roll back the subsidies to the oil and gas industry that were passed during the last two energy bills and use those funds instead for alternative energy. We don't think there's any reason we should be using taxpayer dollars to subsidize the oil and gas industry when they're making record profits, and we need to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels and become more energy independent.

Number two, we want to raise the minimum wage. I think one of the things people see when they ask if the Congress is out of touch -- Congress has raised its own pay every year for nine straight years, and yet we haven't raised the minimum wage. Democrats have said, forget these congressional raises if we're not even going to increase the pay for people at the lowest end of the economic ladder from \$5.50 an hour to \$7.25 an hour -- to \$7.25 an hour. Even at that wage - - even with that wage you can still work all year-round and still be below the federal poverty level for a family of four.

Three, we're going to roll back -- we're going to roll back the cuts that were made to the higher education program. They cut \$13 billion out of the higher education program. We're going to reverse that. We think we should make it easier for students to go to college, not harder.

Fourth, we're going to implement the 9/11 commission recommendations. Some of those recommendations can be done immediately by the Congress. They're internal housekeeping measures, some of them. I think all of us would be upset if our children or grandchildren brought back a report card of Ds and Fs. Well, that's what the 9/11 commission gave to Congress and the administration with respect to implementing the recommendations that they made.

We are going to create a greater incentive for people to put away for their own personal retirement as a supplement to Social Security, not as a substitute for Social Security.

And finally, we think that it was outrageous that the Congress would pass a piece of legislation supported by the Bush administration with respect to the prescription drug bill that said the federal government cannot negotiate for price on behalf of the Medicare program. The Veterans Administration negotiates on behalf of price. HMOs collectively negotiate on behalf of price. It's outrageous the federal government should give essentially a gift to the prescription drug industry and give away its right to bargain for price.

So there's six specific actions Democrats will take in the first 100 hours if they become the majority in Congress, and it's those kind of issues that people are looking at when they're making their decisions at the ballot box.

REP. REYNOLDS: I want to congratulate Chris Van Hollen. I think that is the longest presentation I've heard from any Democrat member of Congress on what their plan and platform is for 2006.

But actually, we're in the 10th draft in the 10th month because, as they promised they're going to have all sorts of solutions, my colleague Rahm Emanuel finally wrote a Clinton centrist book on some of the things he was thinking about because they couldn't build consensus on it.

I've listened pretty carefully. I sit on the Ways and Means committee, as does Mr. Emanuel. I heard Charlie Rangel say the first thing he was thinking about is rolling back the Bush tax cuts of 2001 and 2003. That got a lot of people in upstate New York excited. Or that Ranking Member Conyers, one of the first agendas according to his website was the impeachment of President George W. Bush. That got people asking a few questions.

So when we look at choice, the first is going to be a choice in each and every district that has two candidates or more across America. The second will be the choice of who will be the majority party to lead the 110th Congress in the House of Representatives.

MR. SALANT: If the Democrats take control of one or both houses of Congress, how does that affect the policy in the with Iraq?

REP. VAN HOLLEN: First, I've got to respond to Tom's last comment.

It's been made categorically clear by the Democratic leaders in the House and the Senate that impeachment is off the table. No one's moving on impeachment. People understand that the American people want to move forward on issues. We've got a lot of problems to solve together as a nation, and we need to do that. We obviously need to hold people accountable for their actions in terms of hearings so that we can learn the lessons of the -- you know, the mistakes of the past so that we can move forward in the future.

As for the Charlie Rangel comment, that is -- he has said that that is absolutely not true. (Laughs.) He never made such a statement. In fact, one of the things the Democrats want to focus

on is trying to make sure that the AMT, the alternative minimum tax, does not continue to catch more people in its web, and we need to deal with that on an ongoing basis.

There is one area where Democrats may have talked about this issue, and that has to do with the estate tax. When we wanted to increase the minimum wage -- when we wanted to increase the minimum wage, the Republican position was, well, we'll only go along with raising the minimum wage if you agree to extend indefinitely a permanent -- a permanent -- elimination of the estate tax that would benefit disproportionately the very, very wealthiest people. And the Democrats said no. We're not going to succumb to that blackmail. Let's take this to the people. Let's take this to the election and go forward in that area.

With respect to the --

MR. SALANT: Iraq.

REP. VAN HOLLEN: Iraq. (Laughter.)

Let me say with respect to Iraq, this is obviously a critical issue.

Number one, it is, I think, a great mistake to underestimate the importance of hearings and oversight. One of the reasons I think we as a nation have gotten into such trouble in Iraq is that we have had a rubber-stamp Congress that has not asked the tough, tough questions. They have not compelled administration witnesses to come before the House and ask the questions in the light of day. I think we would have avoided a lot of mistakes if we'd done that.

Beyond that, I think the closest I would say -- there's a -- Senator Levin's amendment in the Senate, which was supported by a majority of Democrats and opposed by a majority of Republicans, I think probably represents the best consensus of the Democratic Party, which is we should begin to redeploy and draw down some of our troops, but he did not set a fixed deadline.

Now, I understand that there's a range of views within the Democratic Party. I think that's understandable. I think that's commendable. These are tough, tough issues. We don't have a whipped position on what your position should be on this particular issue. But I do believe that most of the creative thinking about how we're going to get out of Iraq has been on the Democratic side because "stay the course" is a slogan, not a strategy. I certainly think that the American people don't want more of the same.

And people like Senator Biden have come forward with constructive proposals. You may not agree with every element of it, but at least they're constructive ideas of how we can reach political reconciliation and deal with the situation in Iraq.

I don't hear any of that kind of creative thinking on the Republican side. We heard Senator Warner come back recently, say things didn't look good and we need to change plans. But in terms of specifics, it's Democratic members of Congress who have been out there thinking creatively. And I think that if the Democrats take back control of one or both houses of Congress, you're going to have a lot more creative thinking and hard questioning going on.

REP. REYNOLDS: I think Congressman Van Hollen has outlined that it wasn't a position in "Six for '06" by Ms. Pelosi or the Democratic caucus of what the position of Iraq was. Matter of fact, in the 10th draft of the 10th month I still haven't seen whatever the position is of the Democratic Party, particularly in the House, on the Iraq war.

I do say that many people, Republicans and Democrats, know you just plain can't cut and run in Iraq.

MR. SALANT: Why does there appear to be many more races in play -- Idaho; Gil Gutknecht in Minnesota, Katherine Harris in Florida, Mark Souder in Indiana?

REP. REYNOLDS: Want me to go first, sort of change --

REP. VAN HOLLEN: Sure, go ahead.

REP. REYNOLDS: Look, Indiana has been a challenge for Republicans. I think Mark Souder's doing very well. He comes from the Fort Wayne/South Bend area of that state. He is working hard, as is Chris Chocola and Mike Sodrel. We've never said they would be easy races. Both the president's numbers and the governor's numbers in that state, both Republicans, have kept the traditional swing state swinging.

When you look at Gil Gutknecht, he's a veteran that's been here a long time, and when you take an experienced legislator who's back home on the weekends and is getting his message out, I'll take that over a candidate up there any given day. A lot of activity in Minnesota. Have a U.S. Senate race, have a governor's race. He's going to do just fine.

What were the other states?

MR. SALANT: Idaho --

REP. REYNOLDS: Florida thirteen. Good race by both sides. It's about a 56 percent Bush seat, as I recall. I think you've seen over the last several weeks, for those of you who cover it or those of you who are interested in that seat, which is Sarasota and Manatee Counties, that Vern Buchanan, the Republican candidate, has moved very well into positioning for the general election. We like our chances there.

In Idaho, Bill Sali has won the primary and come in behind Butch Otter. Democrats tried to recruit a former member of Congress, one that I respected. That didn't happen. They've got a candidate out there in a seat that's 70 (percent)-plus Bush, and while they have bought time, I think the Republicans may keep a watchful eye to see what needs we have, if any, to make sure that comes in as a Republican seat. It is a tremendously strong performance seat.

Other one? That all?

REP. VAN HOLLEN: I would just say the fact that we're talking about those races here today shows what a surge you've seen in terms of support for our candidates in many, many races.

These are candidates that have been primarily on our emerging candidate lists, not the original red-to-blue lists, which consisted of over 40 competitive races. Now what you're seeing is these emerging candidates, people we had on that list, are now surging.

Now, Tom has talked about the fact that when you take these polls of how your own congressman is doing, people are supportive; they like their own congressman. Well, the reason that these races are now competitive -- we're not making these claims based on national generic polls. In each of these races that we've talked about, and many of these on the emerging lists, the reason they're competitive is because we've gone in there and looked and polls, one on one against the incumbents show that these candidates are indeed competitive. Their message is getting across, and you are seeing this surge.

So one of our challenges, as we head into these last weeks before the election, as I said, is to identify those candidates that can make it across the finish line, because I think one thing we would all agree is you don't want, at the end of the day, the day after the election, to wake up and say, you know, "Gee, if we'd only done a little bit more in this one race, we could have gotten somebody over the finish line." But the challenge, and it's a good challenge to have, is that so many more candidates, like some of the ones we've talked about just now, are in a position to get across the finish line, and we just need to give them the boost they need to do that.

MR. SALANT: There are three very contested races in Indiana. There are four formerly very safe Republican races in Florida that are also now being contested. How many of those seats do you expect that Republicans will hold, or how many do you think Democrats can pick up?

REP. REYNOLDS: Look, Indiana we've talked about. We've got a first-termer in Mike Sodrel, with a rematch with Baron Hill. We've got Mark Souder, who is an exceptionally strong retail candidate, with a guy that put up about 300,000 (dollars) to buy a little media, and it's been kind of a flurry talk on the Democratic side there.

We take a look at Connecticut, everybody told me that was gone. I think our candidates are working pretty strong up there. By no means are we conceding Philadelphia or Pennsylvania. No means are we conceding New York or Florida. Clay Shaw is a perfect example of a long-term incumbent in a tough seat. Most of you, if you look at Dade County, Fort Lauderdale, running up in Broward County up into Palm Beach, that's tough turf for a Republican. But you know what? It isn't whether he's a Republican or Democrat; it's Clay Shaw's represented us a long time. I don't care if he's a Republican or Democrat. It's Clay Shaw, I'm going to give him a vote. And yeah, they have a good candidate against Clay Shaw. I put my money on Clay Shaw, as he has been tested time and time again since he's come to Congress.

And so as we look at it, it gets back to my three "m"s: members, money, message. Never said it was going to be easy to hold the House. We also started with the highest amount of Republicans since 1946, as the 109th Congress began with 232 members. It's a 15-seat majority. We will work until the bell rings across every state on Tuesday, November 8th, to bring back this House majority, race by race, until it adds up to a House Republican majority.

REP. VAN HOLLEN: Well, you asked about Indiana, Florida, and some others. Look, in Indiana, the fact that you have Dr. Hayhurst, who is now in a competitive race against Souder, tells you a lot about what's going on. The other three races, of course, in Indiana have been on what we call our red-to-blue list from the beginning. We think our candidates there have a very, very good chance. The polling in those three races looks very, very good. Obviously, Election Day is the test, but they're in very good shape and I think -- and they know it.

In Florida, again, we have a number of terrific candidates. Ron Klein, who is our candidate against Clay Shaw, has been a member of the state senate. He was a leader in the state senate in Florida. He has been a prodigious fundraiser and has been out there on the issues. He's going to do well. Tom mentioned Florida thirteen, Christine Jennings, our candidate there, has been a really great campaigner, terrific candidate, fits the district very, very well, and has been ahead in the polls.

So in each of these races, again, as we head into the last three weeks, we have candidates that are in very good shape. They've just got to, you know, keep track, focused on the fundamentals, to get across the finish line. Obviously, we've got the Pennsylvania races. There are more races there now. We had four on our red-to-blue. We now have Jason Altmire in the Melissa Hart seat. That's another seat opening up, very competitive in Pennsylvania. We think the Connecticut races, we have some very good candidates and a very good shot. Those are all tight, tight races. As you look around the country, you obviously see an expanding number of tight races, and I think the fact that you see races like the Souder race, the Altmire race and other races coming on the radar screen now is a very good sign, obviously, for Democrats.

MR. SALANT: What impact s the Mark Foley scandal going to have on these congressional races, and does it get harder to hold the seat, considering his name and not the candidate is on the ballot? Likewise with Tom DeLay -- the real candidate is not on the ballot in that race either.

REP. REYNOLDS: Many times, whatever difficulty there is in a district, and I'm going to use some to look at -- Tom DeLay, whatever factors was, was in Texas twenty-two, not in other Texas districts, not in any other race in the country. Bob Ney's difficulties are an impact in Ohio eighteen, where it matters to maybe the district, but does not have impact in Ohio or other national races.

Foley -- right now, I believe that our candidate, former state senator Negron, is in a very good position to capture a very unusual seat in Florida sixteen. I wanted to share with you how that happens. Under Florida law, Mark Foley's name remains on the ballot, and so Negron, while he's the consensus candidate of the district and the Florida Republican Party, voters will go to the polls and have to vote for Mark Foley in order to achieve voting for Mr. Negron. I would also tell you that that seat's very well in play. Its very educated people have understood exactly what Florida law is, what the circumstances are, and the sophistication and strength of the Florida state Republican Party is a phenomenal resource, as we look at three weeks out. We are optimistic that seat is 54 (percent), 55 percent Bush. It is a good Republican seat, and one that, based on the circumstances of this campaign, leads us to a very good opportunity of seeing if we can't capture it, because it holds that Republican strength.

REP. VAN HOLLEN: Well look, we have a candidate in Florida, Tim Mahoney. He was already up and running, he already had his campaign put together. He's not an accidental candidate; he was a good candidate from the start in a district that has been tough for Democrats. The Foley scandal and what happened in that district, I think obviously puts him out in front, and I think he's going to do very, very well. They are going to try to hold on to that seat, but I think the Foley scandal is going to make it -- people are going to have a tough time bringing themselves to punch the vote for Mark Foley in that district, and I think that he's provided -- our candidate's provided a terrific alternative.

Nick Lampson, running of course in the DeLay seat, former member of Congress, got off to a very good head start, has consolidated his position. And Tom then mentioned the Bob Ney seat, where we have a good candidate.

I would just close this answer by saying look at the seats we're talking about -- Bob Ney, Tom DeLay, Mark Foley -- and you wonder why the American people are fed up, and you wonder why there is a very important national component to this election, if you want to hold people accountable.

MR. SALANT: Before we ask the last question, I'd like to offer both of you the official National Press Club coffee mug. (Laughter.)

REP. : Thank you.

MR. SALANT: Perfect for sipping a nice beverage while watching the election returns. (Scattered laughter.) And a certificate of appreciation. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

Our last question, on election night, the victory or defeat of which candidate will come as the biggest shock to those of us who follow congressional elections?

REP. REYNOLDS: Tell me the question again, I didn't hear it.

MR. SALANT: On election night, the victory or defeat of what House candidate will come as the biggest shock to those of us who cover congressional elections?

REP. REYNOLDS: Well, you're going to have to dig for your story. There's 435 opportunities for you to make a judgment and a call by morning when the results are in. (Laughter.)

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Aw, come on, Tom --

REP. VAN HOLLEN: I would just ask you to take a list of our emerging candidates, and I can assure you that you're going to have many surprises -- at least I'm hoping that Tom here is going to have lots of surprises off of that list. (Scattered laughter, applause.)

MR. SALANT: I'd like to thank everyone for coming today. I'd also like to thank National Press Club staff members Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson, Jo Anne Booze and Howard Rothman for

organizing today's lunch, and thanks to the Press Club library for its research. We're adjourned.
(Sounds gavel.)

####

END