

## **JIM JEFFORDS' JUMP**

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There are lots of cuts to this ship-jumping of Sen. Jim Jeffords', R-Vt., now I-Vt., ready to vote with (D) Senate Caucus, giving the Democrats control of the previously (R) Senate.

First: Be careful what you wish for. Democrats are delighted with what Jeffords hath wrought. But it conceivably robs them of their best issue for the 2002 Congressional elections. This was the first all-Republican government -- president, House, Senate, governors, Supreme Court -- since the dawn of time. If things did not go well in the nation, the Democrats had a gold-plated national issue: It was the fault of the Republicans. Note that St. Greenspan's latest view calls for continued sub-par economic growth. But now, rest assured that if the nation is in a ditch, the Republicans will claim that the Democratic Senate obstructed the Bush program, delayed his appointments, played partisan politics, destroyed new-found comity, and ate peas with their knives.

Second: This situation is not new. Up through at least the mid-1960s, both Houses of Congress were pretty well ruled by a coalition of Republicans and conservative Southern Democrats. Nominally, President Eisenhower had to work with a Democratic Congress, but easily came to terms with Democratic Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson, (then D-Texas), and Speaker Sam Rayburn, D-Texas. (That was a lot of Texas, huh?) Of course, a lot has changed. But a lot hasn't. President Bush's \$1.35 trillion tax cut got 62 votes in the Senate, even after the Jeffords jump was known. That means that 12 of the 50 Democrats voted with Bush on his signature issue, including 5 of 9 Southern

Democrats. We might end up watching a Democratic Senate pass a Bush agenda, which lends credibility to Bush's program.

Third: Did Jeffords act out of pure principle? He has traded an important committee chairmanship of the party that controls the presidency for an important committee chairmanship that doesn't. Like every President before him, George W. Bush is the goalie of American politics. His veto pen can stop most any piece of legislation in its tracks, including anything proposed by Jeffords' committee and enacted in the new Democratic Senate. On the other hand, as Republican Chairman of the same committee -- while taking some regular from the conservative leadership of the GOP -- what passed out of his committee room had a reasonable chance of becoming law. So it must have been an act of pure principle, right?

Fourth: Maybe. Perhaps it was an act of pure arrogance. Any one of the 100 Senators in the 50-50 Senate could have played the same game. Jeffords, from a pipsqueak state with a total population equal to less than that of Greater Toledo, opted to upset a national applecart that had been mandated only a few months ago in a national election.

Moreover, as it happens, Republicans in that election got some very bad breaks. Sen. Paul Coverdell, R-Ga., a relatively young man of 61 and a shoo-in for reelection, died suddenly, and a Democratic governor appointed a (barely) Democratic replacement, former Governor Zell Miller to serve as senator. In Missouri, Republican John Ashcroft was leading Democratic former Governor Mel Carnahan in the Missouri polls by 3-4 percentage points when Carnahan's plane crashed. Carnahan, then dead, won the election, with the understanding that his widow, Jean Carnahan, would be appointed to the seat

by a Democratic governor. She won on a sympathy vote. But can a senator, whose election was legally questionable, due to prior death, be "replaced"? The U.S. Senate could have refused to seat her; Sen. Ashcroft declined to contest the outcome. And so, we ended up with a 50-50 Senate. Moreover, Maria Cantwell beat Republican incumbent Slade Gorton by 2,229 votes in the state of Washington, out of a total of 2,461,379 -- in an election in which the television networks pretty well announced that Gore had won the election several hours before the Washington state polls closed. Some experts believe that the catastrophic network meddling depressed Republican turnout, costing Gorton his seat.

Fifth: Sen. Jeffords was also elected in 2000. He maintains he has been festering against Republican conservatism for 20 years. Has he read the truth-in-labeling notices?

Sixth: The idea that it would be a good thing if all the conservatives huddled in the Republican Party and all the liberals gathered in the Democratic Party is a bad idea. This crazy-quilt mixed system we have tends to moderate both parties, and moderation is a good feature in a successful society. Now there will be a holy war to get conservative Democrats to switch to Republican and vice versa. If it happens, and if it stinks, thank Jim Jeffords and his act of pure principle.

**Ben Wattenberg is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and is the moderator of PBS's "Think Tank."**

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