

# Democrats win control of Senate

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**NBC: Webb apparent victor in Va.; win solidifies Democratic power on Hill**

NBC, msnbc.com and news services  
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**WASHINGTON** — Democrats wrested control of the Senate from Republicans Wednesday with an upset victory in Virginia, giving the party complete domination of Capitol Hill for the first time since 1994, as NBC News reported that Democrat Jim Webb was the apparent winner.

Webb's apparent squeaker win over incumbent Sen. George Allen effectively gave Democrats their 51st seat in the Senate, an astonishing turnaround at the hands of voters unhappy with Republican scandal and unabated violence in Iraq. Allen was the sixth Republican incumbent senator defeated in Tuesday's elections.



Senator-elect Jim Webb, D-Va., addresses his supporters after watching election day

"The days of the do-nothing Congress are over," declared Democratic Sen. Harry Reid of Nevada, in line to become majority leader, adding that Americans spoke "clearly and decisively in favor of Democrats leading this country in a new direction."

The Senate had teetered at 50 Democrats and independents, 49 Republicans for most of Wednesday, with Virginia hanging in the balance. Webb's victory ended Republican hopes of eking out a 50-50 split, with Vice President Dick Cheney wielding tie-breaking authority.

The presumed Democratic majority counts on the support of two independent senators who have declared that they will caucus with the Democrats.

Earlier Wednesday, Democrats ousted Sen. Conrad Burns in Montana. Late victories padded their day-old majority in the House.

## Bush laments 'thumpin'

"It was a thumpin'," President Bush told reporters at a White House news conference after Americans sick of scandal and weary of war brought down the Republican House majority and pushed Democrats to toward their takeover of the Senate as well. "It's clear the Democrat Party had a good night."

Exultant Democrats won an early victory Wednesday when [embattled Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld resigned](#) over the troubled war in Iraq despite Bush's flat refusal to fire him.

Said newly re-elected Sen. Joseph Lieberman: "Thanks, Don, you've served the country, but really we need somebody new there."

Bush faced the reality of at least half of Congress in the opposition's hands for the final two years of his presidency.

The war in Iraq, scandals in Congress and declining support for Bush and Republicans on Capitol Hill defined the battle for House and Senate control, with the public embracing the Democrats' call for change to end a decade of one-party rule in Washington.

"This new Democratic majority has heard the voices of the American people," said Rep. Nancy Pelosi, the California Democrat all but certain to become [the nation's first female speaker](#), adding that Americans placed their trust in Democrats. "We will honor that trust. We will not disappoint."

In the House, [Speaker Dennis Hastert, R-Ill.](#), said he will not seek to be elected his party's House minority leader when Democrats take control in January.

For the GOP, it was an election that started out grim and only grew grimmer. First, voters brought down the Republican House majority after 12 years in power and gave Democrats a majority of governorships for the first time in just as long. Then Senate control, too, slipped away.

## Tester apparently prevails in Montana

Other political news of note

### Obama: Health care overhaul 'working the way it's supposed to'

Amid indications that the public has soured somewhat on his signature health care overhaul, President Barack Obama on Friday of the law already in place and on forthcoming advantages.

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[Newark mayor to announce bid Saturday](#)

After an overnight vote count in Montana, Democrat Jon Tester rode to victory over Burns, a three-term senator whose campaign was shadowed by a series of self-made missteps and his ties to Jack Abramoff, the disgraced lobbyist at the center of an influence-peddling investigation.

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“One hundred thousand miles and 15 hours later, here we did it,” said Tester, a flattop-wearing state senator and organic farmer who lost three fingers in a meat grinder.

Burns said he was not ready to concede, but projections showed him losing in a squeaker.

Tester’s race against Burns was delayed by equipment glitches, a heavy turnout and the narrowness of his lead — under 3,000 votes.

Burns, 71 and first elected in 1988 as a folksy, backslapping outsider, had been under siege because of his ties to Abramoff and because of his own gaffes — including an incident in which he cursed at firefighters.

A candidate in Montana can request a recount at his own expense if the margin is within half of a percent. If the margin is less than one-quarter of a percent, the state and counties pick up the tab.

#### **Allen adviser: Candidate waiting**

Earlier on Wednesday, Democrats had hoped to shape a 51-49 majority with a Virginia victory for Webb, a former Navy secretary under President Reagan, and support from two independents, Lieberman and Bernie Sanders of Vermont, both of whom have pledged to caucus with the Democrats.

An adviser to Allen, speaking on condition of anonymity because the candidate has not formally decided to end the campaign, said the senator wanted to wait until most canvassing was completed before announcing his decision, possibly as early as Thursday evening.

The adviser said that Allen was disinclined to request a recount if the final vote spread was similar to that of election night.

#### **Bush to Democrats: Let's do lunch**

After voters delivered a sharp rebuke of his leadership, Bush made conciliatory gestures toward top Democrats on Wednesday, pledging to work with them and [inviting them to lunch](#). Bush is scheduled to meet with the Democratic House leadership for lunch Thursday at noon, in the Oval Office.

Besides conflict over Iraq, Democrats promised new scrutiny of the Bush administration and a top-to-bottom cleaning of Congress, an institution that has been plagued by scandal and bitterness in recent years.

“We certainly have a mandate for making this place more honest, making it operate in a more civilized way,” Pelosi said Wednesday, on the morning after voters made all but certain she would become the House’s first “Madame Speaker” and hours after she and Bush pledged to work together.

#### **A pledge from Pelosi**

Setting a standard her party will be judged on in elections two years from now, Pelosi promised: “Democrats intend to lead the most honest, the most open and the most ethical Congress in history.”

Pelosi also pledged bipartisanship in a midday news conference.

“It’s not about the Democrats in Congress forcing the president’s hand,” she said. “The American people have spoken.”

Pelosi has already outlined a “First Hundred Hours” agenda. The plan includes promises to reform lobbying, enact the recommendations of the bipartisan 9/11 commission, raise the minimum wage to \$7.25 an hour, cut the interest rate on student loans in half, streamline Medicare’s prescription drug program and expand federal funding for stem cell research.

She said she wants to work with Bush on a “new direction” on Iraq.

#### **‘Full speed ahead’**

“Voters said let’s go full speed ahead — to the ballot box,” Rep. Rahm Emanuel, D-Ill., said on NBC’s [“Today”](#) show.

Without losing any seats of their own, Democrats captured 27 GOP-held seats and were leading for two more, assuring them of control 12 years after a Republican rout brought a new generation of conservatives into office.

Democrats also defeated six Republican incumbents in the Senate — Rick Santorum in Pennsylvania, Mike DeWine in Ohio, Jim Talent in Missouri, Lincoln Chafee in Rhode Island, Burns in Montana and Allen in Virginia — who covered the spectrum from conservative to moderate.

Indiana was particularly cruel to House Republicans. Reps. John Hostettler, Chris Chocola and Mike Sodrel all lost in a state where Republican Gov. Mitch Daniels' unpopularity compounded the dissatisfaction with Bush.

One of the biggest surprises of the night was Republican Rep. Jim Leach's defeat in Iowa after a career that spanned 30 years, losing to Dave Loebsack, a college professor making his first run for elective office. The two parties spent lavishly on television commercials in dozens of districts deemed competitive — but not that one.

### **Voter discontent**

Across the country, voters expressed exasperation with the criminal convictions, the investigations and the recent sexual e-mail scandal that befell Congress over the past two years.

In surveys conducted at polling places, three out of four voters said corruption and scandalous behavior in Congress made them more likely to vote Democratic.

Also in the surveys, about six in 10 voters disapproved of the Iraq war and only a third believed it had improved long-term security in the United States.

### **The toll of scandals**

Scandal took an undeniable toll on the Republicans. Democrat Zack Space won the race to succeed Bob Ney, who pleaded guilty to corruption this fall in the Abramoff scandal. Republican Rep. John Sweeney lost his seat in New York several days after reports that he had roughed up his wife — an allegation she denied.

Republicans also lost the seat that Rep. Mark Foley had held. He resigned on Sept. 29 after being confronted with sexually explicit computer messages he had written to teenage pages.

Rep. Don Sherwood lost despite apologizing to the voters for a long-term affair with a much younger woman; and Rep. Curt Weldon, also from Pennsylvania, was denied a new term after he became embroiled in a corruption investigation.

Surveys of voters suggested Democrats were winning the support of independents with almost 60 percent support, and middle-class voters were leaving Republicans behind.

About six in 10 voters said the nation is on the wrong track and disapproved of the way Bush is handling his job. Voters in all groups were more inclined to vote for Democratic candidates than for Republicans.

Over half of the voters registered dissatisfaction with the way Republican leaders in Congress dealt with Foley. They voted overwhelming Democratic in House races, by a margin of 3-to-1.

The surveys were taken by The Associated Press and the networks.

*The Associated Press and Reuters contributed to this report.*

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