House incumbents face déjà vu in November

BY KIMBERLY HEFLING
Associated Press Writer

NEW BRIGHTON, PA. | When it comes to choosing who represents them in Congress, many voters are experiencing déjà vu.

At least a dozen congressional races – in Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Washington, New York, Florida, Nevada and North Carolina – are rematches.

Melissa Hart, who once represented a western Pennsylvania district in steel country, is one of four former Republican House members seeking to win back a seat lost in 2006, when Democrats gained control of the House. On the Democratic side, six challengers who lost to the now-Republican incumbent two years ago are giving it another try.

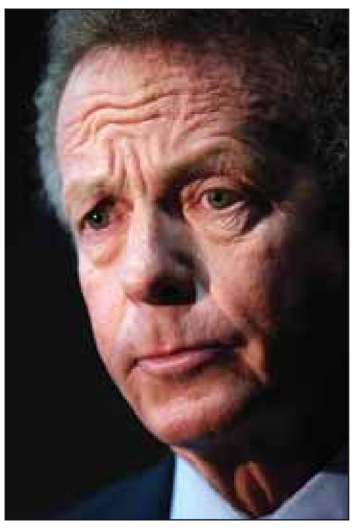
The Republican challengers in rematches hope 2006 was an anomaly and that voters now have buyer's remorse. The Democratic challengers, in turn, view it as a more favorable year for them because of discontent with the Bush administration and unhappiness with the economy.

Rematches are common; sometimes the second time is a charm.

Take Indiana's 9th District, in the south of the state. Democratic Rep. Baron Hill beat GOP challenger Mike Sodrel in 2002, lost to him in 2004, and then beat him in 2006. It's another rematch this year.

"There's a long history of candidates coming back to win after an initial defeat," said Jack Pitney, a professor of government at Claremont McKenna College.

The former GOP House members have the advantage of entering the race with an established fundraising network and base of support, as do those in office. But it could be a tougher fight for the Republican candidates this election.


KUHL


MASSA

National polls indicate that voters view the Democratic Party more favorably than the Republican, and Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama appears to be leading over GOP rival John McCain. Democrats are expected to maintain control of the House and Senate in the Nov. 4 election.

Republican Rep. Randy Kuhl, who is challenged a second time in his rural New York district by retired Navy commander Eric Massa, said he thinks it is an advantage that his party does not run the House.

"So what people are looking at is a do-nothing Congress that I have no responsibility for, and I can share the public's frustration," Kuhl said.

Massa said this year's campaign is more intense than the last one.

"One of the major differences we have this time, nationally, is an even bigger desire for a new direction. If it was a 7 on the Richter scale last time, it's a 10 this time. That's what's bringing those who traditionally call themselves Republicans over to vote for Barack Obama and Democrats," Massa said.

Hart, who was the first Republican woman elected to Congress from Pennsylvania, blames her loss to Democrat Jason Altmire on voters' unhappiness with the Iraq war, scandals on Capitol Hill and an unpopular incumbent GOP senator at the top of the ticket. In her three earlier races, she noted she had won the district with about 60 percent of the vote or more.

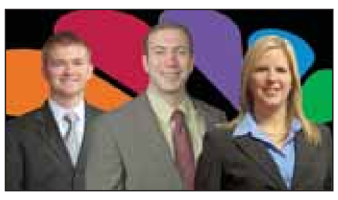
With more stability in Iraq, Hart said the climate has changed dramatically. "This year, I believe there's just more of an opportunity to talk about the issues," Hart said.

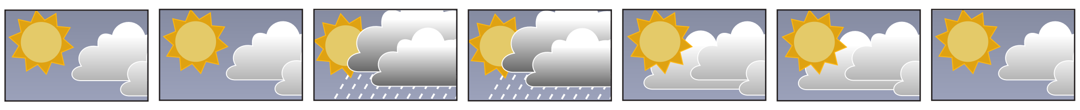
Her opponent, a former health care executive who as an underdog in his 2006 race pulled off a surprise upset, said he is more recognized this time.

"As a challenger, I talked a lot about what I felt the problems were in Washington and some ideas I had on how to fix them, and things we should be doing that we weren't doing," Altmire said. "And now I can go two years later to the same people and say, 'Well, here's what I told you I was going to do, and this is what I did.'"

SEVEN-DAY FORECAST

WETM 18 Storm Team
Meteorologist Nick Bannin
Meteorologist Joe Pasquarelli
Meteorologist Vanessa Richards

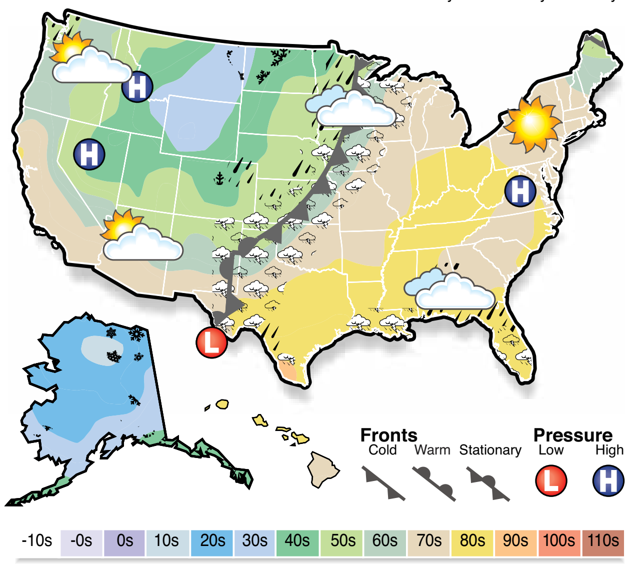




Today	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Mostly sunny, mild	Mostly sunny, inc. clouds and breezy later	P. sunny, early showers	Early showers, clearing later	Partly cloudy	Partly cloudy	Mostly sunny
High | 79	High | 76	High | 70	High | 63	High | 60	High | 58	High | 60
Low | 38	Low | 40	Low | 48	Low | 47	Low | 40	Low | 37	Low | 35

National forecast
Forecast highs for Monday, Oct. 13

Sunny Pt. Cloudy Cloudy



	YESTERDAY			TODAY			TOMORROW		
	Hi	Lo	Prc	Hi	Lo	Otlk	Hi	Lo	Otlk
Albany	70	41		73	46	PCldy	75	52	PCldy
Boston	65	50		67	53	Cldy	72	52	PCldy
Buffalo	76	50		78	51	Clr	74	58	PCldy
Chicago	84	57		82	60	PCldy	72	61	Cldy
Cincinnati	84	57		83	55	Clr	82	57	PCldy
Cleveland	82	50		79	52	Clr	78	55	Cldy
Columbus,Ohio	82	53		83	54	Clr	82	57	PCldy
Denver	43	37	.15	44	33	Cldy	53	30	PCldy
Detroit	79	50		80	52	PCldy	75	59	Cldy
Honolulu	87	77		m	m	mm	m	m	mm
Las Vegas	62	49		66	46	Clr	76	50	Clr
Los Angeles	73	53		83	52	Clr	87	57	Clr
New Orleans	82	72		83	72	PCldy	83	72	PCldy
New York City	70	53		78	54	PCldy	77	59	PCldy
Orlando	88	73		86	71	Cldy	86	70	PCldy
Philadelphia	75	52		80	54	Clr	79	54	Clr
Phoenix	72	53		79	48	Clr	85	53	Clr
Pittsburgh	81	45		80	47	Clr	79	53	PCldy
Portland,Ore.	62	44	.01	63	46	Cldy	62	46	PCldy
Providence	68	46		71	49	PCldy	73	51	PCldy
Reno	50	30		60	26	Clr	69	34	Clr
Richmond	77	51		81	50	Clr	86	52	Clr
Sacramento	71	46		81	42	Clr	81	46	Clr
St Louis	84	62		82	62	Cldy	75	62	Cldy
St Petersburg	m	m		86	75	Cldy	87	75	PCldy
Salt Lake City	40	33	.19	47	28	PCldy	58	32	Clr
San Antonio	85	70		87	73	PCldy	88	72	Cldy
San Diego	70	54		77	55	Clr	80	61	Clr
San Francisco	69	56		75	52	Clr	75	52	Clr
San Juan,P.R.	87	76	.55	85	77	Rain	86	77	Rain
Santa Fe	63	51		62	36	PCldy	60	36	PCldy
St Ste Marie	69	48		76	56	PCldy	60	53	PCldy
Seattle	58	45		58	49	Rain	58	47	PCldy
Shreveport	80	64		86	66	PCldy	84	66	PCldy
Sioux Falls	72	56	.06	50	42	Rain	57	35	Clr
Spokane	55	24		57	31	PCldy	57	37	PCldy
Syracuse	74	39		76	48	PCldy	76	52	PCldy

NEW YORK

Today will be mostly sunny with areas of valley fog in the morning and highs in the upper 70s.

Tonight will be mostly clear with lows in the upper 40s.

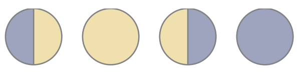
Tuesday will be partly sunny with highs in the mid-70s.

Tuesday night will be partly cloudy with lows in the upper 40s.

WEATHER HISTORY

In 1986, four tornadoes struck southeastern Virginia late in the night causing $3 million in damage.

MOON PHASES



First	Full	Last	New
NOV. 6	WEDNESDAY	OCT. 21	OCT. 28

SUNRISE | SUNSET

Sunrise today	7:19
Sunset today	6:29
Sunrise Tuesday	7:20
Sunset Tuesday	6:27

CREDIT
Continued from 1A

vogue," said Greg McBride, senior analyst at Bankrate.com. "This entire credit crunch is a wakeup call to anybody who was attempting to borrow their way to prosperity."

A prolonged period of tighter credit is ahead, experts say.

U.S. consumers will find it much harder to get a credit card, and to carry large balances. Late fees will rise and lines of credit will be reined in. After years of buying homes with interest-only loans, or loans that allowed people to borrow more than the value of the home, substantial payments and down-payments will be required. Interest rates are also likely to rise.

Lenders, far more wary of risk, have tightened the standards they use to judge potential borrowers. Regulators will be looking over their shoulders.

The changes cap three decades in which U.S. consumers – along with businesses and government – have run up ever-increasing debt. Americans became accustomed to financing purchases large and small with plentiful credit cards, easily approved loans for cars and the latest conveniences, and by siphoning the equity in their homes. Lenders did far more than just make credit plentiful. They aggressively marketed it as a necessity, a way for the smart consumer to leverage themselves into a better lifestyle.

The financial meltdown has made clear the role an increasingly global economy played in facilitating U.S. consumers' borrowing, with banks packaging and selling debt to investors, providing cash to people who once would have been considered too risky to get a loan.

The expansion of credit has, in many ways, been a good thing. It has allowed many more people to buy homes. At a time when household incomes have stagnated, borrowing has made it possible for many people to afford purchases and cover short-term expenses they might otherwise have had to delay or abandon.

But all that borrowing came at a heavy cost.

■ Americans are more reliant on debt than ever before.

The portion of disposable income that U.S. families devote to debt hit an all-time high in the second half of last year, topping 14 percent, figures from the Federal Reserve show. When other fixed obligations – like car lease payments and homeowner's insurance – are added in, about one of every five household dollars is now claimed by bills.

The credit card industry lobbied heavily in 2005 to tighten bankruptcy laws to make it more difficult for consumers to seek court protection and shed responsibility for paying off debt. But in a sign of just how much households have become dependent on borrowing, the average amount of credit card debt discharged in Chapter 7 bankruptcy filings has tripled – to $61,000 per person – from what it was before the law was passed.

"We are going to have to cut back," said Dean Baker of the Center for Economic and Policy Research, a Washington, D.C. thinktank. "We've really been living beyond our means."

■ Americans, borrowing to cover ordinary living expenses, have all but abandoned saving.

The U.S. personal saving rate dropped to well below 1 percent in late 2007 and early this year, according to figures from the federal Bureau of Economic Analysis. The figure has edged up in the last few months, but the actual savings rate may still be near zero, given that many people are covering living costs by using credit cards or money saved earlier, according to the BEA. The lack of savings is a sharp contrast with the decades after World War II. Americans routinely saved more than 10 percent of their income in the early 1970s.

Now, many families spend virtually all of their incomes covering living expenses, and even that is not enough.

"In the credit era, which is like living on steroids, you're not saving money, you're not breaking even. You're actually borrowing 20 to 30 percent," said Robert Manning, author of "Credit Card Nation: The Consequences of America's Addiction to Credit."

The new era of tighter credit will largely be a mandate, as consumers are forced to adjust to tougher rules and tighter limits. But consumers have also begun showing signs of a change in mind-set, putting off purchases, buying less expensive substitutes, going out to eat less, and rethinking their propensity to do so on credit.

Consumer borrowing fell for the first time in more than a decade in August, the Federal Reserve reported this week. The decline, at annual rate of 3.7 percent, reflected a sharp drop in the category of borrowing including auto loans and a smaller decline in the category including credit cards.

The tightening of credit will force American families to cut their spending, mindful of their current paychecks instead of borrowing against future ones, said Frank Badillo, senior economist with TNS Retail Forward, a consulting and market research firm in Columbus, Ohio.

"We're going to see some fundamental changes in consumer behavior," he said.

Badillo and others compare the psychology to the way people reacted after gasoline reached $4 a gallon last summer. Prices have eased considerably since then, but consumers seem to have decided that the good old days of very cheap gasoline are over. In response, people have moved to buying smaller, more efficient cars, and trying to reduce the miles they drive. Demand for homes in outlying suburbs has declined.

Like gasoline prices, the availability of credit should improve once the current crisis eases. But consumers are confronting what some see as a long-term change.

After years of living off one income and drawing on credit to fill the gap, Portland, Ore., legal assistant Susie Shepherd and her partner, Kaite Chase, are rethinking their finances. In the past few years, they regularly ran up debt to pay Chase's tuition and repeatedly refinanced their home, pulling out equity to pay bills and drawing on lines of credit to cover expenses.

But Shepherd was caught short this fall when her brother asked for help in paying moving expenses. She tried to draw on a credit card, but found her line of credit had been cut in half. The only way to help, the couple decided, was to sell some household items.

"We'd been living on credit for so many years," Shepherd said.

Borrowing against the future has always been part of the American story.

"How did those religious English people get to this country on the Mayflower? They came on what we would call the installment plan," said Lendol Calder, author of "Financing the American Dream: A Cultural History of Consumer Credit."

But the Great Depression chastened consumers. After World War II, and the explosive growth of the suburbs, consumption rose sharply. But the modern era of easy credit really began with the deregulation of the late 1970s.

In a 1978 Supreme Court decision, banks won the right to charge whatever interest rate their home state allowed and to do so across state lines. States repealed usury laws capping interest rates. Banks began pursuing consumers in ways they hadn't before.

When inflation soared in the early '80s, banks aggressively marketed credit cards to struggling consumers as a good deal. The interest rates were high, but not as high as inflation. In the recession of 1990-91, banks who saw their profits tightening seized on the margins available by lending more to consumers. When Congress eliminated income tax deductions for interest on credit cards, banks pushed home equity loans, encouraging people to take money out of their homes to pay off the credit cards.

As families took on debt, they were encouraged to follow a rule of thumb: It's OK as long as you don't devote more than 25 percent of income to borrowing costs.

Lenders, though, found a way around that. The 20-year home loan was repackaged as a 30-year loan and lenders stretched three-year car payment schedules to seven, masking the extent of the debt load.

Consumers "think they're doing fine by their parents' standards," Manning said. "But boy, have they fallen far behind."

The industry came up with subprime loans in the 1990s, then used them to encourage consumers with checkered credit history to buy homes. When very low interest rates early this decade sent home prices skyrocketing, and Wall Street demanded even more lending to feed a market for mortgage-backed securities, lenders went into overdrive. Consumers could buy with no money down and no documentation of income and were encouraged to borrow against the rising value of their homes.

Before the housing bubble popped, many consumers were pulling money out of their houses to pay for expenditures – from boats to big-screen TVs – well beyond ordinary living expenses.

Over the years, economists have tried to figure out when, if ever, consumers might finally reach their debt limit. But each time, Americans have proven far more resilient than pessimists imagined, financing their spending by borrowing.

CARBON
Continued from 1A

The sale of carbon credits will not affect the recent contract the county signed with Steuben Rural Electric Cooperative, Nichols said.

A contract with SREC to build an electrical generating plant using methane gas at the landfill was approved by the county Legislature Sept. 22. The contract is expected to bring the county an estimated $39 million during the next 10 years.

SYSTEM
Continued from 1A

The program would not require additional staff, and training would be through three online sessions, according to Alger's report.

Municipalities can sign up for community alerts, such as "boil water" notices.

Alger said county officials will set up procedures for all calls to ensure the system is dedicated only to emergencies.

Whether the towns should be charged for services is still up for debate.

Legislator Dan Farrand, R-Rathbone, has insisted municipalities pay to use the system.

But Committee Chairman Fran Gehl, D-Corning City, said Farrand's proposal is "too premature to be taken seriously at this point. Later? I don't know, we'll see."

Alger said the question may depend on whether the county's contract will provide enough time to cover town emergencies.

"I mean, I'd hate for somebody not to call because they can't afford it," he said. "That kind of does away with the idea of the service we're trying to provide."