

Quest to unseat Chambliss has begun

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Qualifying for local, state and federal elections began earlier this week. There are many contested races, but the Democrats' quest to unseat Sen. Saxby Chambliss and the GOP's attempt to runoff Rep. Jim Marshall have caught my eye.

Chambliss was elected in 2002 in a heated race against Max Cleland. Everyone remembers "the ad." Chambliss' campaign plastered images of Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein across every television in Georgia while questioning Cleland's commitment to securing the homeland.

Georgia Democrats have wanted to get even with Chambliss, and by the end of the week, as many as five Democrats could qualify for the opportunity to do just that. Former State Rep. Jim Martin, DeKalb County CEO Vernon Jones and consumer advocate Dale Cardwell have already qualified. Dr. Rand Knight and Josh Lanier, a former aide to the late Sen. Herman Talmadge, could also qualify by Friday.

It is not hard to put a finger on who the frontrunner is in this race. Both Jones and Cardwell immediately attacked Jim Martin, who announced his intention to run last month after being recruited by the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC). Jones, running as a conservative Democrat, told the Atlanta Journal-Constitution that Martin is too liberal to win and that, "Obviously, the Democratic Party loves to recruit losers."

In a press release on his site, Dale Cardwell called Martin a "convenient-crat," who only entered the race because of the allure of special interest PAC money, and essentially called Jones a closet Republican that voted for George W. Bush twice and says his "personal baggage would prevent him from beating Saxby Chambliss."

Martin is the establishment's candidate. He has the fundraising advantage. Within two weeks of announcing, he raised more than \$346,000. He also has the advantage of running statewide race before. He was the Democratic Party nominee for Lt. Governor in 2006. And more than anything else, Martin is a sigh of relief to Democrats skeptical of Jones and Cardwell. He will know what issues to throw out at Democratic primary voters to secure their support.

Rand Knight could be a problem in the primary for Martin. Both candidates will be going after the same voters, progressives and the anti-war crowd. Knight has picked up the endorsement of 2004 US Senate nominee Denise Majette and has some support from workers unions.

Chambliss has raised over \$4 million for his re-election and a recent poll by Rasmussen Reports shows Chambliss with over 50 percent of the vote against Cardwell, Jones or Martin. According to the same poll, Chambliss has an approval rating of greater than 57 percent.

The Democratic Party nominee, whoever it is, faces an uphill battle and it remains unclear that the DSCC is willing to commit any resources to Georgia when there are much more competitive races in other parts of the country.

The other race of interest is in Georgia's Eighth Congressional District. Who knows what the future holds for Rep. Jim Marshall. Republicans have his seat in their sites after a close race in 2006 when Marshall managed to beat Mac Collins by less than 1,800 votes.

It should not even be close on paper. President Bush carried the district in 2004. He traveled to Georgia and campaigned for Collins in 2006. Collins and the National Republican Campaign Committee ran ads portraying Marshall as weak on immigration and a liberal Democrat that would vote for Nancy Pelosi for Speaker of the House. None of it worked.

Marshall is popular in his district, but this is a competitive seat. The NRCC is putting retired USAF Major General Rick Goddard up against Marshall this year. His campaign thus far has been less than impressive. An example of Goddard's missteps was criticizing Marshall for being out of the country while Congress was debating the pork-laden farm bill last year. "Our current congressman was not there. He was overseas during the debate, and I think that's wrong," said Goddard. This left many pundits scratching their heads because Marshall was in Afghanistan visiting troops at the time.

In the end, it is very likely that both Chambliss and Marshall will keep their respective seats in Congress.