



## The Week Ahead: Sens. Specter, Lincoln face voters; Murtha seat up for grabs

By Emily Goodin and Erika Niedowski - 05/17/10 06:00 AM ET

Several more hearings into the Gulf of Mexico oil spill are on tap this week, with the focus shifting to the government's response.

Lawmakers will be watching the fate of Sens. Arlen Specter (D-Pa.) and Blanche Lincoln (D-Ark.) on Tuesday. Both face tough reelection chances and, with one senator and one House member already falling to anti-incumbent sentiment, this week's primaries will either calm members' nerves or raise the anxiety level.



Democrats pulled out of Saturday's Hawaii special House election but are in a fight for former Rep. John Murtha's (D-Pa.) seat. Republicans, meanwhile, are trying to break their special-election losing streak by taking the district.

Mexican President Felipe Calderón is in town this week. He's expected to protest Arizona's new immigration law when he meets with President Barack Obama. Calderon addresses Congress on Thursday.

And the Senate is expected to vote on final passage of financial regulatory reform. There are still several amendments on the table, so the final vote is expected near the later half of the week.

### Monday, May 17

-- Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) delivers the keynote at a Brookings Institution conference on the Senate filibuster. Senate historian emeritus Richard Baker joins a panel on the question: "Is the Senate functional?" The event runs from 8:30 a.m. to noon.

-- The Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee meets at 2:30 p.m. for a hearing on the oil spill. Janet Napolitano, the Homeland Security secretary, is expected to testify.

-- The Cato Institute premieres, at 5 p.m., the documentary “Overdose: A Film About the Next Financial Crisis.”

## **Tuesday, May 18**

-- The Senate Foreign Relations Committee opens hearings at 10 a.m. on the new START treaty, with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, Defense Secretary Robert Gates and Adm. Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, scheduled to testify.

-- Three Senate panels look into the Gulf spill. The Energy and Natural Resources Committee meets at 11 a.m. and the Environment and Public Works Committee meets at 2:30, with Interior Secretary Ken Salazar on the witness list at both. The Commerce, Science and Transportation panel convenes at 2:30 p.m.

-- It’s primary day in Pennsylvania and Arkansas, and Specter and Lincoln learn their fates as an anti-incumbent mood sweeps the nation.

Specter has held his seat since 1980, survived two bouts with Hodgkin’s disease and changed parties when he faced a tough Republican challenger. So not everyone is counting him out, but observers will note the irony if Specter loses in the Democratic primary, after he switched to avoid being defeated in the GOP contest. Polls show his race with Rep. Joe Sestak (D-Pa.) too close to call.

Both men have poured ads and money into the campaign in the days leading up to the election. Sestak is emphasizing the fact he’s the “real Democrat” (knocking Specter’s party-switch last year), while Specter has touted his national Democratic support, including an ad from Vice President Joe Biden. Polls close at 8 p.m. and, no matter the outcome, this is the race everyone will be talking about.

Lincoln is considered one of the country’s most endangered Democrats — and that was before Lt. Gov. Bill Halter (D) decided to challenge her in the primary. Polls have shown Lincoln leading by up to 10 points, but even if she gets a reprieve Tuesday, she’ll have to get past a strong Republican candidate in the general election. There is a primary on the GOP side, but Rep. John Boozman (R-Ark.) has around a 30-point lead and high name recognition. Plus, the national Republican Party is expected to pour significant resources into this race.

-- Pennsylvania voters also will decide on a replacement for the late Rep. Murtha. Murtha held this seat for almost 40 years and his former staffer, Mark Critz (D), has a slight lead in the polls. But Republican Tim Burns has poured money into the race, and with the district tilting slightly Republican, the GOP is hopeful it can break its special-election losing streak. Critz brought in the party big guns — former President Bill Clinton and popular Sen. Bob Casey Jr. (D-Pa.) — to campaign for him, while Burns brought in the new GOP superstar, Sen. Scott Brown (R-Mass.). Sarah Palin also has endorsed Burns.

-- A continuous primary in Kentucky ends Tuesday. Both sides were battling it out for retiring Sen. Jim Bunning’s (R-Ky.) seat.

-- On the Republican side, ophthalmologist Rand Paul, the son of Rep. Ron Paul (R-Texas), has pulled ahead in the polls. And several pundits see this election as a potential warning to Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), who endorsed Secretary of State Trey Grayson in the primary. Several members of the party establishment also have backed Grayson, while Paul has run as an outsider candidate. Paul has significant Tea Party support.

-- On the Democratic side, Lt. Gov. Daniel Mongiardo and Attorney General Jack Conway are in a virtual dead heat. Mongiardo was leading by 18 points two months ago, so Conway has made up a lot of ground.

-- Obama will visit the Youngstown, Ohio, area to discuss jobs and the economy.

### **Wednesday, May 19**

-- Another spill hearing convenes at 10 a.m., this one by the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

-- Tim Kaine, the Democratic National Committee chairman, addresses a National Press Club lunch at 12:30 p.m. □

-- The House Judiciary Committee holds a 2 p.m hearing on the use of racial profiling by law enforcement.

-- Former Secretary of State James Baker is due before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee at 2 p.m. for continued testimony on the nuclear arms reduction treaty with Russia.

-- The U.S. Capitol Historical Society honors the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee at a dinner, with Dr. Donald Ritchie, the Senate historian, delivering the keynote address. The invitation-only event takes place in the Dirksen Senate Office Building.

-- The White House hosts Calderon at a state dinner.

### **Thursday, May 20**

-- The Mexican president addresses a joint session of Congress at 11 a.m. One topic he will address is Arizona's crackdown on illegal immigrants. He called the state's new law "discriminatory" and "terribly backward" in an interview with Reuters last week.

-- The Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee holds a 10 a.m. hearing on the May 6 stock market plunge.

-- The House Energy and Commerce Committee looks at the Toyota recall at a 1 p.m. hearing.

### **Saturday, May 22**

-- Hawaii holds its special election for former Rep. Neil Abercrombie's (D-Hawaii) seat. The national Democratic Party pulled out of this race last week, virtually handing it to Republican Charles Djou. The election format worked against the Dems. The vote is by mail and it's winner-take-all. Democrats had two candidates in the race, and even though they tried to get state Sen. Colleen Hanabusa (D) to step aside for former Rep. Ed Case (D), Hanabusa refused to budge. Look for the party to try to reclaim this seat in November.

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