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New class of mavericks poised to storm 112th Congress

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In 2010, Obama euphoria dwindled and made way for the [Tea Party](#). From Alaska's Joe Miller to Delaware's Christine O'Donnell, upsets over establishment candidates have swept the nation. But there's another type of candidate that may gain Republican seats this election cycle: the mavericks.

In 2008, the term "maverick" was synonymous with then-presidential candidate John McCain. The Republican senator from Arizona was given the label because of his willingness to break from his party and reach across the aisle in order to achieve legislative ends. Throughout his career, McCain proved willing to seek out Democratic allies on issues such as immigration and campaign finance reform.

Both Tea Party and maverick candidates promise to buck the GOP establishment — in their own ways. Tea Party candidates vow to stand their ground when the Republican establishment is pushing policies that conflict with their conservative philosophical principles. Maverick GOP candidates say they will buck the GOP establishment by reaching across the aisle when they deem it necessary to build consensus on various pieces of legislation.

So who will take up the maverick mantle in the 112th Congress? All signs point to Senate candidates from California, North Dakota and Illinois, should they be voted in.

In California, Republican Carly Fiorina is challenging three-term Democratic Sen. Barbara Boxer. Campaigning as a small-government advocate in California would be tough for any Republican. But the former Hewlett-Packard chief executive and adviser to McCain's presidential campaign seems to be holding her own in the [polls](#) precisely because she's promised to be an independent thinker.

Fiorina was never more upfront about her independent streak than when her campaign released an ad earlier this month titled, "[Bickering](#)."

"When bickering ends, solutions begin," says Fiorina in the ad.

"No partisan games," she says. "I'll reach across the aisle, work with others, oppose my party if needed. Your agenda. Not mine."

The Boxer-Fiorina race has been neck-and-neck for months. The latest [Rasmussen poll](#) shows Boxer with a -point lead over Fiorina.

In North Dakota, Republican candidate and current Gov. John Hoeven's victory is all but assured. He, too, promises to buck the party line. The biggest indicator that he may just be a maverick is the fact that Hoeven wasn't even always a Republican. As recently as 1996, he was a [registered Democrat](#).

That same year, Hoeven wrote a letter, saying: "I have always been moderate in my political views, but now that I am considering elective office, I realize I must join a political party and stick to it. I have decided to join the Democratic-NPL Party because I believe that is the best fit for my views."

He went on to vehemently oppose the idea that he could even be a member of the GOP. "What people don't want is partisan politics as usual. The effort by overly partisan members of the [Republican Party](#) to cast me as one of their own is just that, partisan politics as usual."

Despite his past, Hoeven is now a registered Republican, although a [recent report](#) published by the free market-oriented Cato Institute ranked Hoeven near the bottom of their list of the most conservative governors in the U.S. He is running for the seat being vacated by Democratic Sen. Byron Dorgan.

Republican U.S. Senate candidate and current Rep. Mark Kirk of Illinois also promises to be somewhat of a maverick if elected — if a leaked 2009 campaign memo is any indication. [According to Politico](#), Kirk was worried about being the "next moderate victim" of the Tea Party enthusiasts.

To campaign manager Eric Elk, Kirk wrote, "I am concerned that we are meat on the table for the next moderate victim ... I canceled the health-care press due to the damage to the moderate label." He wrote about the need to communicate with "conservative elites" that he is the only [Republican candidate](#) that has a chance at winning Obama's old seat.

On the campaign trail, Kirk recently said, "The old Mark Kirk is still here. I am pro-choice. I am moderate." But Kirk has also been on the receiving end of some [harsh criticism](#) for taking the moderate label, most notably for his 2009 vote for the cap-and-trade bill in the House.

Like Fiorina, Kirk too is in a tight race; he's up against [Democratic](#) State Treasurer Alexi Giannoulias. [A Rasmussen poll](#) released Wednesday has Kirk in the lead — albeit a small one — with 46 percent support from likely voters. Giannoulias registers at 42 percent.

While North Dakota has recently been a Republican-leaning state, the other two candidates are running in states that tend to be more Democratic, which makes their job all the harder. Not only will they need the conservative base to turn out on [Election Day](#), they'll need to win the independent vote as well.