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Democrats worried about November

By Joseph Picard

Presidential Press Secretary Robert Gibbs is, by the nature of the job, a man eminently careful about the words that leave his mouth.

Therefore it was surprising to hear Gibbs this weekend on national television admit that the Democrats may lose control of the House of Representatives in this November's elections.

"There is no doubt that there's enough seats in play" in the House to make it possible for "Republicans to take control," Gibbs said.

"That was not a slip of the tongue," said Michael Tanner, senior fellow at the Cato Institute, a conservative think tank. "He was trying to fire up Democrats to come out and support their party. But saying something like that is risky."

Tanner said it is also possible that such words, because they sound defeatist, could discourage would-be Democratic voters from coming out to vote at all.

"That Gibbs made such a statement is a measure of how bad the Democrats are hurting," Tanner said. "They would not take such a risk if they were not worried."

The Democrats now hold 59 percent of House seats. They would have to lose 40 seats for the Republicans to gain control.

"Three months ago I would not have considered it possible for the Republicans to take control of the House," Tanner said. "Now, I'd say the Democrats will lose the House."

Democrats, naturally, do not agree.

"The DCCC and our members have been preparing since day one last year for what we knew historically would be a very challenging election cycle," said Ryan Rudominer, spokesman for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.

"As we learned in the Pennsylvania special election, candidates and campaigns matter and we know how to win in tough environments. This November, voters will have a clear choice between Democrats fighting for the middle class and Republicans trying to turn back the clock to the failed Bush agenda on behalf of big corporate special interests," Rudominer said.

Polls indicate that Republicans are gaining ground.

According to Rasmussen Reports, in a poll ending July 11, 44 percent of likely voters would vote for their district's Republican congressional candidate, while 38 percent would opt for his or her Democratic opponent.

Charlie Cook, renowned pollster for the Cook Report, pointed to a Wall Street Journal/CBS poll taken in June, where registered voters were asked, on a scale of 1 to 10, how interested they were in the November elections.

"One group was more interested in November than it was in 2008: those who had voted for Republican John McCain for president," Cook wrote. "And the groups that showed the largest decline in interest? Those who voted for Barack Obama --

liberals, African-Americans, self-described Democrats, moderates, those living in either the Northeast or West, and younger voters 18 to 34 years of age. "

"What's significant is how far the Republican Party has come back in just a year's time," said Doug Heye, spokesman for the Republican National Committee. "A year ago, they were saying the Republican Party was dead, or just a regional party. Since then we've had significant victories in Virginia, New Jersey and Massachusetts. It's a reflection on how unpopular Obama's policies are."

The White House, however, wants people to be aware of who, specifically, will be in control of the House if the Democrats lose their edge.

Gibbs said the notion of House Minority Leader John A. Boehner, R-OH, becoming Speaker and Rep. Joe L. Barton, R-TX, becoming chairman of the Energy and Commerce Committee should rally Democratic voters.

Boehner has compared the financial crisis to an ant, and Barton apologized to [BP](#) officials last month for the Obama administration's treatment of the company, Democrats said, calling the two out of touch with America.

Barton had accused the Obama administration of a "shakedown" in getting BP to set up an independently administered claims account for victims of the oil leak. Barton has since retracted the statement.