
Election Closeup: Nevada

A new breed of Democrats challenges Sen. Cannon in a battle for the West

by Freyda Greenberg and Susan Kokinda

When Congressman James Santini faces incumbent Sen. Howard Cannon in Nevada's Democratic primary on Sept. 14, there is more at stake than Santini's self-proclaimed effort to defeat the last of the "Class of '58," i.e., those 17 Senators elected in 1958, of whom only Cannon remains. The Nevada primary, as well as the Senate re-election bids of John Melcher (D-Mont.) and Quentin Burdick (D-N.D.) this year, focus around a challenge to established Democratic incumbents from a "new breed" of Western politician.

This "new breed" includes both Democratic and Republican challengers of varying ideological bents—ranging from "new right" Republican to "neo-liberal" Democrat. What makes them all part of the "new breed" is that they all share the same policy for the Western and Plains states, a policy formulated by Colorado's Aspen Institute.

Aspen's 'strategic minerals'

The western portion of the United States was once the heart of a strong lobby for advanced military and non-military research and development, nuclear energy development, water development, and high technology applications for the area's abundant natural resources. But today, it is being deliberately transformed into a haven for real estate speculation, resource speculation, and tourism. Using the slogan of "energy scarcity," the Aspen Institute, Institute chairman Robert O. Anderson, Anderson's Atlantic-Richfield Oil Co., and a grouping of major oil and mineral firms, many based in Texas, have embarked on a "strategic minerals" policy ostensibly designed to make the U.S. self-sufficient in energy and resources. In fact, the policy is designed to secure control of resources, and promote speculation in rather than development of them. Put simply, Robert O. Anderson and his friends in London, in particular, want the mineral wealth of the West to stay in the ground.

Toward this end, these same players have poured increasing amounts of capital into candidates like James Santini. Another player in the campaign is the National Conservative Political Action Committee (NCPAC) which has targeted Cannon and Melcher for defeat. While Santini, as well as Melcher's Republican opponent, Larry Williams, insist they are not affiliated with NCPAC, NCPAC director Terry Dolan

reports that he has caucused with Santini on the campaign. In any event, NCPAC continues to channel sizable sums of money into these states to shift favor toward the challengers.

In 1976, this crowd, including the predecessors of NCPAC, defeated the outspokenly pro-development Democratic incumbent from Utah, Frank Moss, replacing him with current Senator Orrin Hatch, to the loss of Utah and the U.S. Senate. They used the same tactics employed in today's races—i.e., they created rump scandals, spent lots of money, and obfuscated the policy issues critical for the region.

Energy and development

Now, Howard Cannon faces scandal mongering and bogus issues manufactured by Santini's backers, one of the most prominent being the fact that Cannon is 70 years old, and Santini is 45. Aspen would have voters believe that the Nevada Democratic primary involves a contest between a battle-weary Senator and a young, energetic Congressman.

While Howard Cannon has come far short of exposing and taking the needed measures to reverse the Aspen Institute's British colonial strategy for the West, he has posed a formidable obstacle to the scheme. Speaking on the floor of the Senate on Dec. 1, 1981, Cannon scored the speculative and non-productive ventures of especially the oil companies for contributing to the "inflation and the resulting high interest rates" that "threaten to destroy not only the traditional dreams and hopes of individual Americans and their families, but also our way of life, our economy, and our security and position in the world at large."

"It is not into new oil discoveries and new wells," Cannon told the Senate, "that the major oil companies are putting their money. It is into mergers and new acquisitions. Of the 204 such mergers and acquisitions by major oil companies since 1968, 116 of them were in non-energy fields." Cannon has also supported the efforts of Senator Melcher to remove Federal Reserve Board Chairman Paul A. Volcker to bring down interest rates.

Santini, consistent with his support for the energy industry's speculative ventures, is a leading proponent of inefficient energy sources such as tar sands and geo-thermal ener-

gy, as well as the standard environmentalist "soft" energies such as solar and wind power. While he voted for the Clinch River breeder reactor program, Santini has opposed measures for the disposal of nuclear waste and has made Cannon's refusal to oppose waste-disposal in Nevada a campaign issue.

On the crucial issue of water development, Cannon has voted almost consistently for water projects, including the Tennessee-Tombigbee River project that is essential to ensure water supplies to the south central regions of the United States. Santini, on the other hand, voted against Tenn-Tom in 1981 and voted to sustain Jimmy Carter's water-projects veto—both votes playing into the hands of the Aspen-connected interests who depend on resource scarcity for speculative gains.

Deregulation and labor

It has been around the question of labor and the regulation of the trucking industry, that Santini's backers have sought to most weaken Cannon. Cannon, in sharp contrast to many of his colleagues from that region, especially Senate Labor Committee chairman and right-to-work advocate Orrin Hatch, has voted consistently pro-labor. For this record, Cannon's detractors have repeatedly attempted to create scandals around the Senator's relationship to the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

Cannon, who had initially been a staunch opponent of the Carter-Kennedy 1980 deregulation of the trucking industry in 1980, which has so predictably gutted that industry, backed down from this stance after a concerted campaign which sought to cast aspersions on his union ties. While he was cowed into abandoning this critical vote, the next phase of

deregulation, which would eliminate the collective rate-making process, expected to occur in the next two years, is sure to meet with resistance from the Senator. If collective rate-making is eliminated, numerous firms that have survived deregulation to date would go out of business, making a bad situation much worse.

Of no small importance is the fact that senators allied to the British-Aspen policy hold positions in the Senate which are key to the pressure operations against Cannon. Orrin Hatch heads the Senate Labor Committee, which has repeatedly "exposed" the connection of the Teamsters to elected officials; and Sen. Malcolm Wallop (R-Wyo.) has led the Senate Ethics Committee witchhunts—the most recent resulting in the resignation of the only other surviving member of the "Class of '58"—the pro-labor, anti-Volcker Sen. Harrison Williams of New Jersey. As for Malcolm Wallop, who did much personally to remove Williams, it should be remembered that he is a member of the Royal House of Portsmouth and a cousin of the Queen of England.

Santini has smeared Cannon on the basis of old charges concerning his ties to the Teamsters and to "organized crime," charges of which the Senator was fully cleared in 1980. Santini, on the other hand, in addition to contributions from Texas and the oil companies, has received listed campaign contributions from the notorious Del Webb Hotels, Inc., which has been investigated for organized crime activity several times by Senate committees. Santini also has adopted the profile of being one of the Senate's most vociferous "Zionists," with a base of support among the Meyer Lansky types collectively called the "Las Vegas business community."

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