

As Jews reassess, Specter eyes bid

With a Republican landslide on both the state and national levels, the Jewish community began this week to assess: Where to from here?

Such issues as prayer in the public schools, vouchers for parochial-school tuition and threatened cuts in human services have taken center stage. Many Jewish communal leaders are speaking with a new urgency about ways to salvage the traditional liberal Jewish agenda.

Against this background comes U.S. Sen. Arlen Specter, who announced this week that he is officially exploring a bid for the White House.

Speaking at Independence Hall, the former Philadelphia district attorney laced into what he called the "fringe right" and appealed for fellow moderate Republicans to return to the values that have historically defined their party.

He also spoke of the importance of maintaining the separation of church and state. — Page 5



A JEW IN THE WHITE HOUSE? — Arlen Specter, R-Pa., is considering running for president.

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Specter eyes White House run

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President Specter?

If things go the way Pennsylvania's senior senator hopes, that is how he will be referred to as of Jan. 20, 1997.

Whether the nation is ready for its first Jewish president remains to be seen, but some local and national observers do not think a candidate's religion will be much of a factor in the upcoming balloting.

On Monday, Arlen Specter announced at a news conference in front of Independence Hall that he is exploring the possibility of "determining whether to become the Republican candidate for president of the United States."

The same day he also traveled to Iowa, the site of the first caucuses, and New Hampshire, which has the first presidential primary.

Attack on far right

Announcing his intentions at this point, Specter attacked what he called the "far-right fringe" within the Republican Party, led by Pat Robertson and Pat Buchanan — men who, Specter said, want to do away with the concept of the separation of church and state.

"That's so outlandish," said Specter, with dozens of supporters and onlookers assembled outside the building where the notion of that separation became law.

He noted that the pilgrims — and his own parents — came to these shores in search of religious freedom.

Specter warned that the "fringe" element he was singling out, which he said accounts for about 5 percent of the electorate, should not be referred to as the "Christian right" or the "religious right" since its members "do not articulate Christian values nor Judeo-Christian values."

Specter stressed that there is "a valued place in American life for people with deep moral convictions." But he said he was disturbed when, at the Texas state Republican convention in 1992, he saw a sign that read, "A vote for 'X' is a vote for God."

"That [sentiment] simply doesn't belong in American politics," the presidential hopeful said.

Specter said he was disturbed again when, at Iowa's Republican convention in June, he was booed when he mentioned the importance of maintaining the wall of separation between church



Pennsylvania's Arlen Specter is in the process of "determining whether to become the Republican candidate for president of the United States."

and state.

This latter incident is what sparked him to explore officially entering the race, Specter said Monday.

Specter said he is looking to garner support from "a majority of traditional Republicans" who subscribe to core Republican values.

These include: economic conservatism, less government, economic growth, lower taxes, civil rights and a strong role for America in the world.

Specter said he supports a woman's right to choose an abortion and believes that the death penalty is a deterrent to crime.

Of last week's elections giving his party control of both houses of Congress for the first time in decades, he said, "This is a unique opportunity for long-term control of the Congress and a victory in the White House."

Before representing Pennsylvania in Washington, Specter was a Democratic district attorney in Philadelphia. He gained national attention for his prosecutor-like questioning of witness Anita Hill in the 1991 Senate hearings to confirm Clarence Thomas for the Supreme Court.

If Specter makes a run for the presidency, he will not be the

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Specter embarks on a tour to test the waters for a run at presidency

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wing — which is becoming increasingly powerful at the state level so important to presidential primaries. And he wears the albatross of his prosecutor-like questioning of Anita Hill during Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas' 1991 confirmation hearings — which Specter yesterday acknowledged as a problem.

Traveling with his wife, City Councilwoman Joan Specter, he began his day at Independence Hall, within view of the Liberty Bell. After a chartered flight to New Hampshire, he was chauffeured to the statehouse in Concord — just steps from a reproduction of the Liberty Bell — for a second announcement. He then went on to Des Moines, where he will spend today and tomorrow meeting potential supporters and contributors throughout eastern Iowa.

The Liberty Bells provided apt if unplanned symbols for much of what Specter had to say in his initial stops.

Calling the separation of church and state "the fundamental American freedom," he said his moderate views of fiscal conservatism, social tolerance and a strong defense were more reflective of the true Republican philosophy.

Surrounded by family and about 200 supporters in Philadelphia, Specter said he would be "pushing hard the big tent, on broadening the party to include more women, more blue-collar Americans, more minorities."

Specter said he had been especially troubled by the intolerance and divisiveness of the 1992 Republican con-

vention in Houston, and he singled out Pat Buchanan and Pat Robertson as examples of extremists who he said undermined the party, contributing to George Bush's defeat.

"In politics, the power to divide is the power to destroy," he said. "I firmly believe it is critical to confront ... differences early rather than face a divisive convention and divided party, as we did in 1992."

As he has in previous speeches this year, Specter said that Buchanan and Robertson's followers, though vocal, were few, constituting only 5 percent of the GOP faithful. He refused to call them the "Christian right" or the "religious right" because, Specter said, "they do not stand for religious, Christian or Judeo-Christian values when they advocate intolerance and reject brotherhood and insist on either ruling or ruining."

He took pains, however, to say in Philadelphia that he did not consider soon-to-be Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole and likely future House Speaker Newt Gingrich "part of the 5 percent fringe."

Specter was booed in June at the Iowa State Republican Convention for his comments on the separation of church and state. Yesterday, he said he welcomed the participation of the "far-right 5 percent fringe" but urged other Republicans to "outwork and outvote them to prevent their dominance of our party."

It is those other Republicans that Specter must now reach, and, in New Hampshire at least, it appears he is having little success.

It is common practice for potential presidential candidates at announcements such as yesterday's to be surrounded by the local and state GOP leaders who have endorsed them. No New Hampshire Republicans joined Specter on the statehouse steps.

"He has two problems: The right hates him, and the left hates him," said Mike Hammond, a conservative Republican who came in second in a hard-fought primary for New Hampshire's Second Congressional District this year. "I'm not sure where his niche is."

Still, Specter's visit attracted the curious interest of a handful of local Republicans. Joel Maiola, chief of staff for former governor and now-Sen. Judd Gregg, said he had come by just to see whether any prominent state Republicans had joined Specter.

"His name recognition has got to be in single digits," he said. Still, Maiola said, being the first to announce meant increased attention to Specter for now.

While Specter said he wanted to spread his message of a traditional Republican campaign for lower taxes, less government regulation, fighting crime and a strong defense, he also is pushing hard for the GOP to remove its anti-abortion plank from the party platform.

That message could play well in New Hampshire, where flinty Yankee conservatism is fiscally oriented, and anti-abortion laws are frequently seen as unwanted government intrusion.

Given his abortion-rights stance, Specter may appeal to female voters. But a hindrance is that his national



Sen. Arlen Specter kicked off his effort yesterday outside Independence Hall. He said he would be working to broaden the GOP to include more women, blue-collar workers and minorities.

profile was first formed by his questioning of Anita Hill. His conduct during the Senate Judiciary hearings sparked Democrat Lynn Yeakel's candidacy against him in 1992, and political experts here say the hearings remain a problem for Specter.

Yesterday in Concord, there were no "Specter in '96" banners, but there was one "Remember Anita Hill" poster in the small crowd.

"I am pleased to see only one sign today," he said. "Those hearings were a learning experience for me. I had

not realized what a problem sexual harassment was for women today."

Specter is to return to New Hampshire on Thursday to continue to drum up support for the nation's first primary. Asked whether getting a late start was a problem, he said, "I think a fresh face may be the best face."

He promised to decide soon whether his visits into Iowa and New Hampshire — and into the soul of his party — would mean he would formally announce as a candidate. But he didn't leave much doubt.

"I'm not here for the scenery or the brisk air," Specter said in Concord. "I'm very, very serious."

Earlier in Philadelphia, accepting a cake frosted to look like the White House — gift of Allentown baker Elvin Newhart — Specter would not handicap his prospects or those of potential rivals. But if he ran, he said, he would need "table stakes of \$30 million as of Jan. 1, 1996."

Inquirer staff writer Peter Landry contributed to this article.