

Pressure From Women

By Helen Dewar
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ALTOONA, Pa.—From afar, Sen. Arlen Specter's struggle for political survival in the Pennsylvania Republican senatorial primary next month looks like a classic confrontation in long national fight over abortion politics.

At closer range, from the vantage point of this economically hard-pressed former rail center, the contest is that and much more, touching on everything from jobs and health care to a movie script, a racy novel, fights over Supreme Court nominations and voter frustration about politics-as-usual at all levels.

As such, the race—one of few serious intraparty challenges to senators this year—also is a test of Specter's well-honed survival skills as he attempts to dodge:

■ Fury from the right for his opposition in 1987 to Supreme Court nominee Robert H. Bork, rejected by the Senate but still a hero to many conservatives.

■ Anger from many women for his prosecutorial zeal in interrogating Anita F. Hill during Senate Judiciary Committee hearings last fall on the law professor's charges of sexual harassment against Clarence Thomas, subsequently confirmed as an associate justice of the Supreme Court.

■ Guffaws, whistles and whoops from movie theaters across Pennsylvania for the scorching ridicule accorded him by name in the movie "JFK" for his work as a Warren Commission lawyer in investigating the assassination of John F. Kennedy.

More fundamentally, the race will determine whether a large anti-abortion constituency can be used as launching pad for a broader conservative challenge to an otherwise well-entrenched incumbent, in this case one of the Senate's dwindling band of Republican moderates.

State Rep. Stephen F. Freind, 47, the sharp-tongued leader of the legislature's anti-abortion forces, has set out to show that the answer is yes with all the abrasive zeal that has characterized his 16 years of representing the Philadelphia suburbs in Harrisburg.

Only marginally less abrasive and just as intensely driven, Specter, 62, is relentlessly crisscrossing the

state and accumulating a formidable war chest to keep Freind at bay, constantly reminding voters how often he has visited their communities to "keep in touch" with local concerns and values.

Specter, a staunch supporter of abortion rights, warns Republicans at nearly every campaign stop that abortion is the "most divisive issue since slavery" and has no place in political campaigns. To deflect attacks from anti-abortionists and to project himself as a defender of the true Republican faith, he warns ominously that the issue poses a grave risk to President Bush's reelection and the survival of the party.

In the Senate, Specter can be both ardent partisan and stubborn maverick, depending largely on the direction of the wind from Pennsylvania. He often enrages colleagues with what they regard as an excess of often self-promoting tenacity, although they readily concede that he is one of the brightest and hardest-working members of the chamber, valued more for prosecutorial skills than bonhomie.

Recently, Specter infuriated Majority Leader George J. Mitchell (D-Maine) and set other senators' teeth on edge by suggesting at the last minute that the Senate cancel its Presidents' Day recess to get a head start on Bush's tax proposal.

By then, senators—including Specter, as Mitchell testily observed—had already made hard-to-break recess plans. But Specter wound up with the best of both worlds. He drew applause from crowds in Pennsylvania when, as he made recess rounds, he recounted how he tried to get the Senate to stay in Washington and do business.

Representing a Rust Belt state, Specter often broke ranks with the Reagan administration on social welfare, spending issues and some judicial appointments. Last year, he ranked fifth from the bottom among Republican senators in support of Bush's positions, ahead of Sens. James M. Jeffords (Vt.), Mark O. Hatfield (Ore.), John H. Chafee (R.I.) and William S. Cohen (Maine), according to Congressional Quarterly.

A Kansan by birth and a former Democrat who switched parties when he ran against his former boss, Specter got a fast political start by winning election as Philadelphia district attorney at age 35. But, after winning a second term as the city's prosecutor, he began a

four-election losing streak that would have sent most politicians into another line of work. Specter, however, bounced back in 1980 with a successful Senate bid and kept his seat in 1986, the year that Democrats knocked off enough Republicans in other states to reclaim Senate control.

Independent observers, such as political analyst David Buffington, publisher of the Pennsylvania Report, say Freind has not succeeded in branching beyond the antiabortion and far-right constituencies to threaten Specter seriously in the April 28 primary.

With voters tending to focus on pocketbook issues, "Specter can portray himself as the guy who gets things done, while Freind has yet to progress beyond the angry young man," Buffington said.

But observers say Freind could catch on, especially if he succeeds in his push to have Democratic abortion foes switch registration so they can vote for him and to spark interest among conservatives by portraying Specter as a "blazing tax-and-spend liberal Democrat thinly disguised in Republican clothing."

Through the farms and small towns of south-central Pennsylvania, where antiabortion sentiment is strong, Freind was greeted repeatedly during a recent two-day visit by Democrats who switched to vote for him and by conservatives who

agreed with his criticism of Specter. But even some of them expressed doubt that Freind could duplicate the feat well enough in other areas to defeat Specter.

Specter, for whom Freind worked when Specter was district attorney during the early 1970s, is taking his former colleague's challenge "very, very seriously," he told a reporter here during a 20-county swing.

Even in Pennsylvania, where the Freind-sponsored antiabortion law on appeal to the Supreme Court could become the vehicle for dismantling the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* abortion-rights decision, the anti-abortion vote alone is not enough to win a statewide election.

As a result, Specter is trying to portray Freind as a "single-issue candidate" in an attempt to confine Freind's appeal to voters preoccupied with abortion. Freind cries foul, insisting that opposition he has drawn from trial lawyers, teachers unions and the American Civil Liberties Union testifies to his achievements in pursuing insurance reform, anti-strike laws, tough-on-crime legislation and abortion curbs.

The single-issue charge "has about as much credibility as Specter's single-bullet theory," says Freind in a not-so-friendly reminder of Specter's role on the Warren Commission staff in developing the theory that a single and hardly dam-

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and the Right Tests



BY GERALD MARTINEAU—THE WASHINGTON POST

Sen. Arlen Specter during Judiciary Committee hearings on Clarence Thomas.

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Specter's Survival Skills

aged bullet caused multiple wounds to Kennedy and then-Texas governor John Connally.

But antiabortion voters provide a base—estimated at one-third or more in a Republican primary—from which a resourceful candidate with broader appeal can build a majority.

Only two years ago, Peg Liksik, a relatively unknown antiabortion candidate received 46 percent of the vote against state Auditor Barbara Hafer, the endorsed Republican gubernatorial candidate. Six years ago, a candidate who claimed to have been "told by God" to run won 26 percent of the primary vote against Specter.

In seeking to expand his base, Freind aims directly at voter frustration with government, Congress and politicians, especially Washington "insiders," charging that Specter is a charter member of the Senate "club," despite his less-than-clubby image in Washington.

"With Arlen Specter, you have the classic and consummate political opportunist who wakes up every morning and thinks what he can do to remain a member of that club on the Potomac that doesn't believe there's a country outside the Beltway," Freind told a business group here.

In an illustration of how he sometimes goes too far for his own political good, Freind said he would shun the "club" to the extent that Pennsylvanians might not get the "pork" available to members in good standing. He said this at a golf club just off "Bud Shuster Highway," a popular, well-traveled road named in honor of a local member of Congress who just happens to be the ranking Republican on the House transportation subcommittee.

Freind also had encountered problems with "God's Children," a 1987 novel that he wrote about political life in Harrisburg and that uses language not in the vocabulary of some of his more religious supporters. He wrote supporters saying the book was "in no way an endorsement of profane language but rather an admission that such language does exist, as do other regrettable aspects of society, such as abortion. . . ."

While Freind sees little if any political gain for himself from the drubbing of Specter in "JFK," he believes that the crossfire from conservatives and liberals over the Bork and Thomas nominations can

be used to question Specter's constancy and trustworthiness. "Liberals feel betrayed just like conservatives do," he said.

Specter acknowledged in an interview that he has "suffered some" among women from his aggressive grilling of Hill and his charge that she committed perjury in accusing Thomas of sexual harassment. But he contended that his "solid record of support for women's issues" is proving persuasive with most women.

Several political analysts have said that, while many women were angry with Specter, they are likely to be driven more by a desire to defeat Freind. "None of the people who would be upset about Anita Hill are going to vote for Steve Freind," Buffington said. Moreover, Specter's vigorous defense of Thomas has helped to assuage conservatives's bitterness about his opposition to Bork, they say. "It may have sealed his nomination," Buffington said.

But the possibility remains that Specter could be mauled sufficiently in the primary to weaken his position going into the general election.

Lt. Gov. Mark Singel, viewed as the most likely Democratic nominee, is not regarded as a particularly formidable challenger. But the upset victory of Sen. Harris Wofford over former attorney general Dick Thornburgh (R) in last fall's special senatorial election, coupled with Democratic gains that often accompany economic hard times, have buoyed Democratic hopes.

Against any anti-incumbent backlash that could help Freind and Democrats, Specter is relying on the fact that no Pennsylvania crossroads has gone unvisited—and no need, unintended—during his 12 years in the Senate.

With a glance at the running tally he always keeps within reach, he told the people of Altoona that he has visited their city 32 times and targeted it for seven town meetings. In all, he said proudly, he made 1,658 separate stops in the state, not including 376 trips to Philadelphia, his home.

His favorite line, however, is from a Thanksgiving Day column in a Pittsburgh newspaper that would have seemed odd in any year but this and for any senator but Specter. "We have something to be thankful for today," he recalled the column as saying. "Arlen Specter is not in town."