

The 1992 Campaign

Pennsylvania

Trouble Shadows Specter in Senate Race

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PHILADELPHIA, Feb. 20 — Last November, when for the first time in 30 years Pennsylvanians elected their first Democrat to the United States Senate, politicians across the country took note. Now, with the political landscape here still rumbling from Senator Harris Wofford's landslide victory over former Attorney General Dick Thornburgh, the state's Republican Senator, Arlen Specter, is running for re-election to a third term.

While Mr. Specter is way ahead of the pack of candidates jockeying for positions in the April 28 primaries here, political analysts say he is increasingly vulnerable because of the long recession, the voters' anti-incumbent mood and a ballot headed by a President whose re-election efforts are having serious problems.

Mr. Specter, a onetime Democrat with one of the most liberal voting records of any Republican in the Senate, has also alienated some of his supporters. Conservatives still criticize him for voting against Judge Robert H. Bork's nomination to the Supreme Court in 1987, and many women were outraged by his prosecutorial grilling of Professor Anita Hill in Judge Clarence Thomas's nomination hearings last October.

Ridiculed in 'J.F.K.'

Making matters worse for the Senator is that the election year opened with the star of a popular movie, "J.F.K.," calling him a liar and ridiculing him by name. So far more than 525,000 Pennsylvanians have seen Oliver Stone's

Rumblings from 'J.F.K.' and the Thomas hearing.

movie, in which the actor Kevin Costner, playing the role of Jim Garrison, the New Orleans District Attorney, refers to Mr. Specter as "an ambitious junior counselor" who perpetuated "one of the grossest lies ever forced on

the American people."

Mr. Specter, who served as an assistant counsel to the Warren Commission, called the movie "absurd" and said it "mangled the facts on the single-bullet theory" that he devised. Mr. Specter was the first to rule out a conspiracy by theorizing that one bullet killed President John F. Kennedy and wounded the Texas Governor, John B. Connally Jr. Many experts on the assassination say the theory strains credulity, but it has never been disproved.

The brief mention of Mr. Specter's name in the movie draws applause or shouts from detractors in theaters across the state. At some theater exits campaign workers for his opponent in the primary, Stephen F. Freind, hand out leaflets that try to raise more doubts about Mr. Specter's record.

Mr. Specter refuses to address what he calls his opponent's "scurrilous charges," and has joined other members of Congress in calling for the release of sealed documents relating to investigations of the assassination.

Some political analysts believe the 62-year-old Senator may be heading for trouble.

"Arlen Specter is perilously close to becoming the issue in this race, and being put irretrievably on the defensive," said Michael L. Young, a professor of politics and public affairs at Pennsylvania State University in Harrisburg. "And one of the most reliable axioms in modern politics is that if you become the issue in the race, the race is over and you lose."

So far, Mr. Specter dominates his potential opponents when it comes to name recognition, political support, campaign finances and organization.

In the Republican primary Mr. Specter, who recently won the party's nearly unanimous endorsement, faces Mr. Freind, an eight-term State Representative from a suburb of Philadelphia. Mr. Freind, 47, is best known as the main promoter of an anti-abortion law that is now being considered by the United States Supreme Court.

Three Democratic Contenders

The Democratic candidates are

Lieut. Gov. Mark S. Singel, who is running against the wishes of the Governor, Robert P. Casey; Robert Colville, a five-term District Attorney of Allegheny County, and Lynn Yeakel, a 51-year-old fund-raiser for women's organizations and who lives in a Philadelphia suburb. The Democratic Party has endorsed Mr. Singel.

If it is clear that Mr. Specter has political problems, it is unclear how deep they go.

"A lot of women are angry about Arlen Specter's performance during the Thomas hearings, but this isn't the time to indulge our anger because we need his leadership in the Senate on women's issues," said Elizabeth Hrenda-Roberts, executive director of Planned Parenthood, Pennsylvania Affiliates.

Mr. Freind has raised little money but says he has about 5,000 volunteers from the state's anti-abortion movement. Senator Specter and the three Democratic candidates support a woman's right to choose abortion.

Many conservatives are also angry at Mr. Specter who, according to the American Conservative Union, votes with conservatives only 34 percent of the time.

"His Bork vote weighs very heavily against him, but the way he conducted the Thomas hearings has relieved most of that stigma," said James O. Pickard, a Republican from Lancaster who is a leader of the party's conservative wing. "Arlen Specter also has strong positions on law enforcement, anti-gun control and economic development."

'A Lot of Red Flags'

Mr. Specter says he knows his campaign has some trouble spots. "I see a lot of red flags," he said in an interview. "But there are too many problems in this country for me to become the issue."

While the Senator did not officially begin his campaign until Feb. 10, in a sense he has been campaigning non-stop for the last 11 years. He often criss-crosses the state, visiting each of Pennsylvania's 67 counties every two years, and has held more than 400 "town meetings." He has also raised

more than \$5 million, and expects to spend more than \$7.5 by November.

Mr. Specter's tireless style of campaigning comes from a 25-year political career in which he lost as many races as he won. He was born in Wichita, Kan., graduated Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Pennsylvania, served in the Air Force and, at Yale Law School, was editor of the Yale Law Journal.

He worked as an assistant district attorney in Philadelphia and, at the age of 35, began his political career as District Attorney of Philadelphia. He ran unsuccessfully for mayor in 1967 before winning a second term as District Attorney in 1969.

He then skidded through a series of defeats, losing a third term as District Attorney in 1973, a senatorial primary in 1976 and a primary for the governorship in 1978. A year later his wife, Joan, won a seat on Philadelphia City Council, where she still serves. Mr. Specter narrowly won the 1980 election to the Senate and was re-elected by a comfortable margin in 1986. The Specters have two sons — Stephen, 31, a college teacher in California, and Shanin, 34, a lawyer in Philadelphia who is an adviser to his father's campaign.

David L. Buffington, who last fall was the first political analyst to predict that Mr. Wofford would defeat Mr. Thornburgh, a former Governor of Pennsylvania, said there would be no upset this year. "Democrats are divided, Specter will out-spend everybody, and he works and he works and he works," Mr. Buffington said.



Associated Press

Senator Arlen Specter, left, who is running for a third term in the U.S. Senate, faces an uphill battle with State Representative Stephen F. Freind, right, best known as the main promoter of an anti-

abortion law now being considered by the U.S. Supreme Court. Mr. Specter filed a nominating petition at the Elections Bureau in Harrisburg, Pa., on Tuesday, unaware of his opponent behind him.