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# Recession or not, Republicans have work cut out for them

By Nancy Reardon

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There's no better time to challenge an incumbent than during a fiscal crisis. But in Massachusetts, experts agree, it can be tough to succeed – especially if you're not a Democrat.

State Republicans are hoping 2010 will be their chance to win seats from the majority party. Several candidates are planning fundraisers and launching campaign Web sites.

But even in a state where half of voters aren't affiliated with either party, their top challenge is breaking voting habits.

“There's no question that in difficult economic times, the incumbents and incumbent party are often in trouble,” said Paul Watanabe, of Weymouth, a political analyst at the University of Massachusetts at Boston. “However, in Massachusetts the electorate has been highly resistant to making significant changes in the partisan makeup of the state Legislature.”

In the Bay State, he said, incumbents have been “particularly secure” compared with legislators in other states and in Congress.

Vincent Cogliano, chairman of the Plymouth County Republican Committee, also acknowledged the challenge.

“In Massachusetts, it's always difficult,” the former Pembroke selectman said. “The voters here tend to vote strictly on party lines, with little thought of what their vote really means.”

At the state level, South Shore Republicans are seeking House seats. It takes far more money to wage, and win, a state Senate campaign.

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## **THE CHALLENGE FOR CHALLENGERS**

**Half of  
Massachusetts  
voters are  
unenrolled,  
meaning they are  
not affiliated with  
either the  
Republican or  
Democratic  
parties. Still,  
Republicans have  
had a hard time  
winning spots in the  
Legislature – and  
no prominent  
names are being  
mentioned for  
potential open seats.  
A few Republicans  
have signaled that  
they'll challenge  
Democratic  
incumbents in the  
coming election  
cycle.**

In Plymouth County, two political newcomers – Geoff Diehl and Joseph Truschelli – are looking to unseat Reps. Allen McCarthy, D-Whitman, and Thomas Calter, D-Kingston, respectively.

In Norfolk County, Rep. James Murphy, a Weymouth Democrat, already has two Republican challengers: political newcomer Doug Ness and Michael Wilcox, chairman of the Braintree Business Council.

In a state where only about 13 percent of voters are registered as Republicans and 50 percent are unenrolled, candidates will be aggressively courting independents, Cogliano said.

“The independents in this state control the vote on both sides,” he said.

There’s been plenty of movement after U.S. Sen. Edward Kennedy’s death set off posturing for first that seat, then attorney general and, per the trickle-down effect, several House and Senate seats. Yet no Republican has emerged to take part in the Democrat-dominated game of musical chairs.

If Attorney General Martha Coakley is elected to the U.S. Senate on Jan. 19, Norfolk County District Attorney William Keating will run for her seat, he said.

That, in turn, will lead Rep. Joseph Driscoll, D-Braintree, and state Sen. Michael Morrissey, D-Quincy, to run for district attorney.

An open state Senate seat is an opportunity that the district hasn’t seen for more than 15 years, and all signs point to it being a hotly contested one. Those interested include Rep. A. Stephen Tobin, Quincy City Councilor John Keenan and Anne Mahoney of the Quincy School Committee.

Watanabe said that seat would be a large gamble for Republicans; he said they are more likely to score seats in the House.

Cogliano agrees, saying that anyone in the minority party is unlikely to run for that seat, especially if jumping in late.

“If you’re really considering a run for the seat, you probably should’ve been working on it for three months already,” he said.

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### **7th Plymouth District**

**Democratic Rep. Allen McCarthy, a Whitman resident who has held the seat since January 2007, is facing a challenge from Republican Geoff Diehl, a member of the Whitman Finance Committee.**

### **12th Plymouth District**

**First-term Rep. Thomas Calter of Kingston is being challenged by Republican Joseph Truschelli, an Iraq war veteran who now lives in Plymouth.**

### **4th Norfolk District**

**Rep. James Murphy, a Democrat and former Suffolk County district attorney, has held the seat since 2001. Republicans Doug Ness, a small business man and veteran, and Michael Wilcox, chairman of the Braintree Business Council, are challenging him for re-election.**