

Blue Dog Democrat Minnick is, well, a Democrat

- **June 2nd, 2010**
- (14) comments

Marty Trilhaase

Voters in Idaho's 1st Congressional District may assume they face a choice between a Republican and a Democratic incumbent who votes like one.

But do they?

High-profile votes against economic stimulus, federal health care reform and federal spending blur the line separating Blue Dog Democratic Rep. Walt Minnick from his Republican colleagues, U.S. Rep. Mike Simpson and Sens. Mike Crapo and Jim Risch. Because of that record, Minnick has won accolades from groups such as the Tea Party Express.

"Don't ask, don't tell" redefines that line.

Last week, Minnick joined 229 Democrats and just five Republicans who voted to repeal the 1993 law. Simpson voted against the change.

Since 1993, the law has been used to discharge 13,500 men and women from the armed services. It's an anachronistic law and Republican defense of it doesn't pass the laugh test. A tough vote in the Senate lies ahead. Should it prevail there, the law won't take effect until the Pentagon surveys service members and their families about the change. After that, the White House and the Defense Department must certify the plan won't diminish military effectiveness.

Nor is this vote the only time Minnick has stood apart. Elsewhere, he voted:

- For a Democratic plan to help people hold onto their homes by renegotiating mortgages and reducing interest payments.
- Against a Republican attempt to limit the Little Davis Bacon Act - which requires government to pay the prevailing wage - on local water pollution-control projects.
- No on a GOP study committee alternative budget to eliminate subsidized loans for graduate students, cut agriculture programs, slash funding for the National Community Service Act and cut federal pensions.
- To raise tobacco taxes and use the money to expand the State Children's Health Insurance Program. This meant more children of the working poor would qualify for Medicaid coverage. Simpson also voted for this measure.
- In favor of expanding federal hate crimes definitions to incorporate sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Against Michigan Democrat Bart Stupak's amendment. Part of the original federal health care reform package cleared by the House last year, this provision sought to block use of federal funds for most abortions.

- For the Lilly Ledbetter Act. This overturned a Supreme Court ruling that blocked people such as Ledbetter from challenging wage discrimination. Ledbetter had filed her claim more than 180 days after getting the first check. The new law says a worker now can sue 180 days after getting any discriminatory pay.

- For financial regulatory overhaul. The measure would create a new government watchdog over Wall Street.

A year ago, the conservative Club for Growth gave Minnick its highest marks for his refusal to seek earmarks. But last week, Club for Growth's scorecard rated Minnick a 53 percent score. Simpson came in at 72 percent. The conservative lobby looked at 20 votes; Minnick voted its way only eight times.

The American Conservative Union's ranking shows the same results. Last February, it scored Minnick's voting record at 44 percent. Of 25 items, Minnick voted the ACU's way 11 times.

Simpson scored 84 percent, Crapo 92 percent and Risch 96 percent.

Granted, these are high scores for a Democratic House member - only two Democrats scored higher with the Club For Growth. But most Republicans rate higher.

The irony is these issues, once a campaign thematic mainstay, don't seem to matter. If American Enterprise Institute President Arthur C. Brooks is any indication, we're not in "What's the Matter with Kansas?" anymore, when conservative campaigns waged a culture war on issues such as gay rights and abortion. "Those old battles have been eclipsed by a new struggle between two competing visions of the country's future," Brooks wrote recently. Now it's a fight between free enterprise and "European-style statism."

What a difference a Great Recession makes.- M.T.