

This is a printer friendly version of an article from GoUpstate.com

To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Back](#)

Article published Mar 11, 2007

S.C. congressmen find value in bipartisanship

Jessica Bernstein-Wax, Washington Correspondent

WASHINGTON -- Bob Inglis and Dan Lipinski are the kind of pair who could turn heads.

Not only have the two congressmen become fast friends despite marked differences in their districts and politics, but with their graying close-cropped hair and lanky figures they also look remarkably alike.

Inglis, R-S.C., and Lipinski, D-Ill., spend so much time together on the House floor that fellow lawmakers call them the "skinny caucus" and Washington political rags sometimes reverse their photographs in articles.

"People come up to us and say, 'What are y'all -- twins or something?'" Inglis said. "He's got short graying hair and somewhat receding, and I've got short graying hair... and a bald spot in the back."

"But that's because I'm seven years ahead of him," said Inglis, 47.

With Democrats controlling both houses of Congress for the first time in 12 years, Republicans are grappling with how to push through conservative laws that please their constituents. In some cases, reaching across the aisle to form strategic partnerships with Democrats may be their best bet.

And with their slim majority in the Senate, Democrats need Republican support to pass their own legislation.

One of the biggest ongoing challenges lawmakers face is how to remain effective on Capitol Hill, a process that usually involves compromising on issues, without alienating their core political base.

"There's always a trade-off between the platform by which you get on the train and the way you ride the train," said Blease Graham, a political science professor at the University of South Carolina.

"They can't be too inconsistent."

Since returning to Congress in 2005 after a six-year hiatus, Inglis has been more willing to work with Democrats and make trade-offs to get bills approved, Graham said.

"I think he has grown into more of a policy role as opposed simply to a partisan role," Graham added. "He was sort of the smartest kid on the block and not necessarily prone to negotiating -- over time, he

has grown into a policymaker."

Bipartisanship may be even more important in the Senate than in the House, thanks to procedural differences between the two chambers and the near-even number of Democrats and Republicans in the Senate. Democrats control 233 of 435 House seats, compared with 51 of 100 Senate seats.

"When it's 51-49... you have to have support across the aisle to get anything done at all," said David Rudd, who was chief of staff to former Sen. Ernest F. Hollings, D-S.C., and is now a partner at lobbying firm The Palmetto Group.

In the House, the majority party sets the amount of time legislation is debated and can force a vote. But a Senate measure that fails to garner 60 votes -- a three-fifths majority -- may face stalling tactics such as filibusters. The late Strom Thurmond holds the record for the longest filibuster for his 24 - hour-and-18-minute speech against the 1957 civil rights bill.

And because of the Senate's smaller size and lengthier terms, it is not unusual for senators to develop close friendships across party lines.

In South Carolina, Graham says that there has historically been a "division of labor" between the two senators. That remains the case today.

"Thurmond had the reputation of being the conservative and Hollings, while a conservative, did have a Democrat's heart for certain kinds of social problems," Graham said. "I think (Sen. Jim) DeMint and (Sen. Lindsey) Graham are continuing that tradition: DeMint is the housekeeper and Graham is the more adventurous of the two in terms of working across the aisle."

Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., has long had a reputation as a maverick who is willing to work with Democrats.

Sen. Jim DeMint is better known for towing the party line. But the Greenville Republican has demonstrated a new willingness to work across the aisle under the Democratic majority.

Last month, DeMint teamed up with Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., and a bipartisan group of senators, sending a letter to President Bush calling for "affordable, quality, private health coverage" for all Americans.

In January, Sens. Barack Obama, D-Ill., and John Kerry, D-Mass., broke with their party's leadership to oppose an attempt to kill a DeMint amendment strengthening earmark reform.

DeMint's measure, requiring all amendments that set aside money for specific projects be posted on the Internet 48 hours before a Senate vote, passed unanimously.

That Obama and Kerry voted to save the amendment "was a real positive signal that a number of the Democrats are willing to really look at the issue and not just vote party line," DeMint said in an interview.

"Whether you're in the majority or the minority, you're not going to pass major legislation without some bipartisan support," he said.

Danielle Vinson, a political science professor at Furman University, called DeMint's success at pushing through the earmark measure "pretty impressive."

"That was an area where he's been a little bit at odds with some of his own party, (who) weren't as serious about dealing with earmarks," Vinson said of the move to trim special interest spending. "He saw an opportunity: Democrats had campaigned on that issue."

She added that DeMint might have a bit more political wiggle room now that his party is in the minority. When a single party controls both Congress and the White House, you've got the burden of governing and "anything that doesn't get done it's going to be blamed on your party," Vinson said.

Sen. Graham, while still in the majority, was part of the so-called Gang of 14, a group of Republicans and Democrats who collaborated in the previous Congress to avert a partisan showdown over Bush's judicial nominations.

While Sen. Graham's participation in the bipartisan effort drew sharp criticism in South Carolina, it ultimately paid off by getting conservative judges confirmed, said Dave Woodard, a political science professor at Clemson University who managed Graham's 1994 and 1996 campaigns for the U.S. House.

"Had he been rigid and uncompromising, I think it's safe to say they might never have been confirmed," Woodard said.

Sen. Graham has said that Democrats and Republicans need to change how they relate to each other or risk seeing the rise of a third party.

"There's a vacuum in American politics, and all vacuums over time are filled," Sen. Graham said during a January speech.

• .