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Comeback candidates hear Capitol calling

By Kathy Kiely, USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — Pete McCloskey ran his last campaign 24 years ago. Now, as he spends 14-hour days traveling across four counties and three mountain ranges to woo voters in California's 11th District, the Republican former congressman admits he sometimes wonders what prompted him to launch another bid for a House seat.



Former House member Pete McCloskey works his Rumsey, Calif., farm. He says he's "mad as hell."

By David Martin Olson, Woodland Daily Democrat via AP

"The thought has crossed my mind that I was getting Alzheimer's or something that affected my thinking," McCloskey jokes. But the GOP maverick, who made headlines opposing the Vietnam War and Republican President Nixon, has no doubt about why he wants to return to Congress.

"I'm 78 years old and I'm mad as hell," says McCloskey, who left retirement "raising olives, oranges, horses and hay" to oppose Rep. Richard Pombo, a fellow Republican, in California's June 6 primary.

Former congressman Robert Shamansky, a 78-year-old Ohio Democrat, is also trying to return to the House he left 23 years ago. He's re-entering the fray because he got aggravated trying to enroll in the Medicare prescription-drug plan.

These septuagenarian comeback kids are part of an offbeat trend: former members of Congress who are trying to return to the House.

COMEBACK CANDIDATES

These former members of the House of Representatives are trying to get their old jobs back. Another ex-lawmaker, Democrat Ciro Rodriguez, was defeated by Rep. Henry Cuellar in Tuesday's Texas Democratic primary.

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Name, party, state	Previous service
Brian Bilbray, R-Calif.	1995-2001
Max Burns, R-Ga.	2003-2005
Mac Collins, R-Ga.	1993-2005
Baron Hill, D-Ind.	1999-2005
Nick Lampson, D-Texas	1997-2005
Ken Lucas, D-Ky.	1999-2005
Pete McCloskey, R-Calif.	1967-1983
Bob McEwen, R-Ohio	1981-1993
Tom Sawyer, D-Ohio	1987-2003
Robert Shamansky, D-Ohio	1981-1983

Sources: House clerk, House Democratic and Republican campaign committees

and Amy Walter of the *Cook Political Report*, say they don't know whether this year's crop of would-be returnees is a record. But their attempts to return are hardly unprecedented.

Today's Congress is a living contradiction of writer F. Scott Fitzgerald's famous axiom that "there are no second acts in American lives." Sen. Frank Lautenberg, D-N.J., and 10 current House members are serving again after having left Congress, then deciding they just couldn't stay away.

"This is one of the most rewarding things you can do," says Rep. Jay Inslee, D-Wash., who served one term in the early 1990s and then came back in 1999.

Rep. Dan Lungren, a California Republican who spent 10 years in the House from 1979-89 and returned last year, said he missed the "camaraderie" and intellectual stimulation. "You have people from different parts of the country coming together to talk about important issues," he says. "You'd have to be brain-dead not to be impressed."

The returnees say their time on the sidelines has made them better lawmakers. Rep. Bob Inglis, R-S.C., left in 1999 after failing to win election to the Senate. He says his defeat reminded him that a seat in Congress is a "temporary trust" — one he won back in 2004.

"Once you've had the experience of them asking for the beeper back, asking for the key to the (office) door and then giving you the nameplate off the door, you understand you can never have the experience of owning it," he says.

Former representative Baron Hill, an Indiana Democrat who is trying to regain the job he lost to Republican Mike Sodrel two years ago, agrees. "It's a humbling experience to go through a defeat," Hill says. "One of the things you do is go back to your constituents and say, 'What did I do wrong?'"

Several returnees represent their old constituencies, but not all. Lungren, originally from Southern California, was living in Sacramento when a House seat opened up and he decided to run. Rep. Jim Cooper, D-Tenn., moved across the state to Nashville at the behest of locals. "Nashville didn't want to be represented by a rookie," he says.



By Ric Feld, AP

McKinney speaks during the 38th Annual Martin Luther King Jr. Commemorative Service at the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Jan. 16. She won back the seat she lost in a Georgia primary in 2004.

when it was vacated by Denise Majette, who had beaten McKinney in a primary two years earlier. Indiana's Hill and Georgia Republicans Max Burns and Mac Collins are trying to reclaim the seats they lost or vacated two years ago.

Sometimes, it's a matter of revenge. One of the most closely watched comeback attempts is taking place in Texas, where Nick Lampson, a Democrat, has jumped into a district neighboring his old one to challenge Republican Tom DeLay. DeLay was chief architect of a redistricting plan that rearranged Lampson's district and several others held by Democrats into GOP strongholds.

As a result, in 2004 Lampson lost the House seat he had held for eight years. Lampson has raised more than \$1.5 million in his effort to defeat DeLay, who had to step down as House majority leader after being indicted for alleged violations of Texas campaign-finance laws. DeLay says he's done nothing wrong and is fighting the charges.

Old vs. new

Another attempted comeback with national implications is Bob McEwen's bid in Ohio. A Republican who served in Congress from 1981 to 1993, McEwen's comeback was foiled two years ago when Rep. Jean Schmidt, R-Ohio, narrowly beat him in the GOP primary. Since then, rookie Schmidt has made headlines for suggesting that Rep. John Murtha, D-Pa., a decorated Vietnam combat veteran, was espousing a "cut and run" philosophy by calling for a withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq.

Schmidt later apologized.

The two oldest would-be congressional returnees say they want to return to the House because they don't approve of what some of the newcomers have been doing. McCloskey is incensed that Pombo, 45, has been trying to roll back provisions of the Endangered Species Act, which McCloskey helped write. He calls Pombo an "embarrassment." Pombo argues that the law interferes with the rights of private property owners.

Shamansky, one of six Democrats vying in a May 2 primary to oppose Rep. Patrick Tiberi, R-Ohio, this fall, says he decided to get back into politics for one simple reason: "I became eligible for Medicare Part D," the new prescription-drug plan for seniors. He says the plan prevents the government from obtaining the best discounts on seniors' drugs by buying them in bulk. "You couldn't have a more anti-market provision," Shamansky says.

Getting back into campaign form isn't easy, Shamansky and McCloskey admit. But they say age has its advantages, especially when it comes to convincing voters about their motives for running. "I don't need a job," Shamansky says.

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