

Live, from Washington, DC...



Sen. Al Franken (D-MN)

The Senate already has among its members a Hall of Fame pitcher, a former veterinarian, a pro-basketball team owner, a farmer, and what some consider too many lawyers. Now it has a former comedian and talk show host.

After eight months of counting and recounting votes, the Minnesota Supreme Court has ruled that former *Saturday Night Live* writer and performer Al Franken was the winner of Minnesota's U.S. Senate race. Franken beat incumbent Republican Senator Norm Coleman by 312 votes.

Franken's election gives Senate Democrats a 60-seat majority. Unfortunately for Democrats, the 60 seats will rarely translate into the 60 votes needed to stop opposition filibusters and dictate Senate legislation. Senate Democrats will have, however, a larger proportion of seats on Senate committees. This will allow them to have more control of questions and witnesses at committee hearings and of the content of legislation committees send to the Senate floor. ■

—Kevin M. Wilson

Not So Fast, Mr. President

The President of the United States is often called the most powerful man in the world. That does not mean he always gets his way.

In President Obama's FY10 budget request to Congress, he asked for two increases that have raised concerns. The first was an increase in the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH)-wide investment in cancer research, doubling the cancer budget over the next eight years. The second was for increased funding for autism research. The cost for these areas alone totaled \$268 million, 60% of the \$443 million overall increase Obama requested for the NIH.

Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) and Representative David Obey (D-WI) both

expressed concern about such sizable allotments of funding for two specific areas of research. Obey was quoted as saying, "the result will be political chaos in an area that ought to be determined by science." Harkin is Chair of the Senate Labor, Health & Human Services, and Education Appropriations Subcommittee (LHHS Subcommittee). Obey is Chair of both the House LHHS Subcommittee and the full House Appropriations Committee.

With the influential Chairs of both the House and Senate funding subcommittees opposing the specific funding, its future passage is in serious doubt. ■

—Kevin M. Wilson

