

Session offers preview of '11 GOP

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ALBANY -- It won't be known until Tuesday whether a plan to save the bankrupt New York City Off [Track Betting](#) Corp. passes in the Senate. But it's a good wager that it may not be a purely party-line vote.

Several senators from outside New York City oppose the plan offered by Gov. [David Paterson](#)'s administration, which they feel shortchanges outlying OTB operations. But in the Capitol Region, Republican Sen. [Roy McDonald](#) of Saratoga said he would support almost any scheme to keep New York City OTB running, since it provides needed funding to the New York Racing Association, which operates the Saratoga Race Course.

"The signs are it's not the best of all deals, but I have a race track to protect," McDonald said Friday, just before Paterson announced that the operation, which had been scheduled to shut down Friday, would remain open at least until the Senate votes.

For both Republicans and [Democrats](#) the survival of New York City OTB -- perhaps the only legal bookmaking operation known to man that bleeds red ink -- hinges on sharply divergent regional interests.

Tuesday's vote may provide a preview of how Republicans next year will cope with newly emergent regional and personality differences. While Senate Republicans have long been known for their party discipline, that might not be the case come January when they are expected to start the 2011 session with a 32-vote majority after being out of power for two years.

During that time, Democrats were constantly stymied by rogue members who threatened to withhold their votes on key issues. Republicans maintained a solid 30-vote block on most issues, especially regarding spending.

But when Republicans take the helm in January, they will have entered a different era, in which battles over funding and resources are likely to be fiercer than ever.

The OTB plan proposed by the Paterson administration -- passed last week in the Assembly -- would have NYRA essentially take over the phone and internet betting operations of the troubled entity.

Other GOP senators who may end up supporting the plan include [Marty Golden](#) of Brooklyn and [Frank Padavan](#) of Queens, who have numerous unionized OTB employees in their districts.

Other possible flash points that GOP Senate Leader [Dean Skelos](#) may have to deal with include:

SUNY/CUNY empowerment: After seeing two western New York Democrats lose their jobs in November due to the perception that they didn't work hard enough to help the [State University](#) at Buffalo, the region's two freshmen Republicans, [Mark Grisanti](#) and [Pat Gallivan](#), will likely hold out for passage of something like the "UB2020" plan, which would let SUNY Buffalo raise tuition rates and embark on an ambitious expansion.

Transportation: Lawmakers last year approved a controversial employer tax to help the New York City-based [MTA](#). But upstate regions got no extra road and bridge money from that politically sensitive deal. Mindful of that, watch for upstate Republican senators to hold out this coming year for road and bridge money in exchange for their votes.

School aid: Battles among New York City, Long Island and other regions are timeless when it comes to education spending. But this year we'll have the relatively new situation of Republican-dominated Long Island senators competing with Grisanti and Gallivan, whose Buffalo city school district has a deficit of more than \$20 million.

Redistricting: All but one member of the incoming class of GOP senators signed former New York City Mayor [Ed Koch](#)'s pledge to support an independent, nonpartisan panel to redraw district lines. (Grisanti was the exception.) But now, Republicans will have to resist the urge to gerrymander the lines, or risk being called out by Koch. That could be hard for Republicans in comfortable districts.

Greg Ball: The Republican establishment didn't really want him, but he won a hard-fought Senate seat in the Hudson Valley. In the Assembly, he became known for outlandish statements and questionable behavior, including the alleged groping of an Albany barmaid. Ball has also taken hard-line stances on immigration and spending issues. Just as Senate Democrats such as [Ruben Diaz Sr.](#) or [Pedro Espada Jr.](#) held out on crucial votes for their pet projects, expect Ball to do the same on some hot-button issues.