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## Jewish Membership in Congress at All-Time High

By [Elizabeth Williamson](#)  
Washington Post Staff Writer  
Friday, January 12, 2007; Page A17

While Democrats celebrated the election of the House's first female speaker, another milestone passed more quietly: The 110th Congress includes more Jewish lawmakers than any other in history, and all but four are Democrats.

About 2 percent of Americans identify themselves as Jewish. But in Congress, the proportion of Jewish members is now four times that. Six new Jewish House members were sworn in last week, bringing the total to 30. In the Senate, the 13 Jewish members include freshmen [Benjamin L. Cardin](#) (D-Md.) and [Bernard Sanders](#) (I-Vt.), according to the National Jewish Democratic Council.

Other faith-related facts: This Congress includes its first Muslim member and, in Senate Majority Leader [Harry M. Reid](#) (Nev.), its highest-ranking Mormon ever. Catholics remain the largest single faith group in Congress, at about 30 percent -- slightly larger than their proportion of the U.S. population. Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians outnumber Jewish members, who outnumber Episcopalians.

In making its count, the NJDC, which bills itself as the national

... who identify themselves as Jewish. (So even if he had won, Virginia's [George Allen](#) wouldn't have made the cut.)

"This is a recent phenomenon," said NJDC Executive Director Ira Forman. "Fifty years ago, politics was not a Jewish profession. People would say arts and entertainment, law and medicine, retail and things like scrap metals, but they would never say politics."

Forman attributes this success to the rise of issue-based politics,

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which has begun to supplant patronage-based party machines in boosting candidates to national office.

What's more, the new Jewish Democrats hail from states hardly seen as Jewish strongholds, including Tennessee, Kentucky, New Hampshire and Wisconsin. The House has one Jewish Republican, Virginia's [Eric Cantor](#). In the Senate, Republicans [Norm Coleman](#) (Minn.) and [Arlen Specter](#) (Pa.) are Jewish.

"Jewish members used to come from Jewish districts," said L. Sandy Maisel, a professor of government and director of the Goldfarb Center at Colby College in Maine who is co-author with Forman of "Jews in American Politics." "Now they come from wherever they've caught the feelings of people on the issues of the day. . . . That's going to be a continuing trend."


The Republican Party has sunk millions into wooing the Jewish vote, but Jewish voters, traditionally Democratic, have moved ever further from the GOP in recent years. In the midterm elections, nearly 90 percent of Jewish voters voted Democratic, according to exit polls, one of the largest proportions in history.

Pollsters say the GOP failed to counter Jewish voters' opposition to Republican stands on issues such as reproductive rights, stem cell research and the Iraq war. And then there's the Republican Party platform in President Bush's home state of Texas, which has declared the United States to be a Christian nation.

Forman does not believe Jewish members will necessarily vote as a bloc. "They're not lock step," he said. "You have American Jews on both sides of many issues."

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