

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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President Obama's Visit to India Seeks to Deepen Economic Ties	1
President Obama on Tsunami in Indonesia	1
Midterm Senate Races Pose Tough Challenges for Incumbents	1
Virtual School Helps Students in U.S., South Asia, Worldwide	3

President Obama's Visit to India Seeks to Deepen Economic Ties

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama's November 6-9 visit to India will pay special attention to the deepening economic ties between the United States and India, and his interest in expanding the export of American goods and services and increasing U.S. business investment in the country.

Deputy National Security Advisor for International Economic Affairs Mike Froman told reporters at the White House October 27 that India represents "one of the most important emerging economic relationships for the United States, both multilaterally and bilaterally."

Froman said that the United States sees "a large potential market" in India, with its population of 1.2 billion and an economy that is expected to grow at 8 percent over the next several years. The Obama administration is working to ensure "there's a level playing field there, there's open markets there, and that our exports have an opportunity to penetrate that market and support jobs back here," Froman said.

The relationship is "a two-way street," he added. While the United States has quadrupled its goods exports to \$17 billion over the past seven years, and tripled its service exports to around \$10 billion a year, Indian companies are the second-fastest-growing group of investors in the United States, supporting 57,000 American jobs.

According to Deputy National Security Advisor for Strategic Communication Ben Rhodes, President Obama will arrive in Mumbai November 6 and will participate in the U.S.-India Business Council meeting by meeting with Indian entrepreneurs and U.S. business leaders to discuss business opportunities in India. Obama plans to deliver a speech to the meeting on the economic relationship, as well as "the enormous potential for both countries to expand growth and opportunity for our people through that relationship," Rhodes said.

He will also address the Indian Parliament in New Delhi November 8 to discuss bilateral cooperation on economic issues, as well as shared political and security interests, Rhodes said.

The president's three-day visit is "the longest single foreign visit of his presidency so far," Rhodes said, and having India serve as the first stop on his visit to Asia "underscores the significance and the potential of Indian-American partnership."

Obama will also stay at the Taj Hotel in Mumbai, one of the sites attacked by terrorists in November 2008, where he will make remarks and pay respects to the victims, Rhodes said.

His visit will also take him to the museum honoring Indian independence and spiritual leader Mahatma Gandhi in Mumbai, and to Gandhi's memorial in New Delhi. Rhodes also said that in Mumbai, the president will celebrate the Diwali holiday with Indian schoolchildren and speak with Indian university students in a town hall meeting.

The president's visit follows India's October 27 signing of the Convention on Supplementary Compensation for Nuclear Damage, which governs nuclear liability.

Speaking along with Rhodes and Froman, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs William Burns welcomed India's signing as "a very positive step toward ensuring that international standards apply and that U.S. companies are going to have a level playing field on which to compete."

President Obama on Tsunami in Indonesia

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
October 26, 2010

Statement by the President on the Tsunami in Indonesia

Michelle and I are deeply saddened by the loss of life, injuries, and damage that have occurred as a result of the recent earthquake and tsunami in West Sumatra. At the same time, I am heartened and encouraged by the remarkable resiliency of the Indonesian people and the commitment of their Government to rapidly assist the victims. As a friend of Indonesia, the United States stands ready to help in any way. Meanwhile, our thoughts and prayers are with the Indonesian people and all those affected by this tragedy.

Midterm Senate Races Pose Tough Challenges for Incumbents

By Bridget Hunter
Staff Writer

Washington — On Election Day, only 37 U.S. senators will be chosen, but those political contests are among the most contentious in the 2010 elections.

U.S. senators, who serve six-year terms, are divided into three groups for staggered elections. Approximately one-third of the seats are filled every two years.

The U.S. Constitution stipulates that each state, regardless

of population, is represented by two senators. Originally, senators were chosen by state legislatures, but in 1913 the 17th Amendment mandated senators be directly elected by the people.

Certain powers are reserved to the Senate, such as ratifying treaties negotiated by the executive branch and trying elected officials, including the president, if the House of Representatives has voted to impeach. Impeachment proceedings require a two-thirds vote of the Senate to remove an individual from office.

As with representatives, the Constitution fixes the qualifications a person must meet to be eligible to be a senator: "No Person shall be a Senator who shall not have attained to the Age of thirty Years, and been nine Years a Citizen of the United States, and who shall not, when elected, be an Inhabitant of that State for which he shall be chosen."

PARTIES BATTLE FOR CONTROL

In the 111th Congress, 59 seats are held by Democrats, two by Independents who usually vote with the Democrats, and 41 by Republicans.

Contests in the 2010 midterm elections include 12 Democrats and 11 Republicans seeking re-election and 14 "open" seats (no incumbent running) that currently are split evenly between Democrats and Republicans. Those open seats result from 11 retirements (six Democrats and five Republicans), losses in primary races by two incumbents (Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania and Bob Bennett of Utah) and the decision of Sam Brownback to run for governor of Kansas.

For nearly two years, Democrats have had nominal control of 61 votes, just more than the 60 votes need to end a filibuster — a parliamentary procedure that allows senators to continue a debate indefinitely and block voting on a bill or nomination. Filibusters have been used effectively throughout U.S. history, perhaps most famously by Southern senators seeking to block civil rights legislation in the 1960s.

In 1917, senators adopted a rule allowing debate to end, called "cloture," with a two-thirds majority vote, and in 1975 further reduced the votes needed for cloture to three-fifths (60). Even with 60 senators, a party cannot always prevent filibusters. Senators hold a wide range of political views, and not all party members will favor cloture on the same issues.

Polls suggest Democrats are unlikely to achieve a filibuster-resistant majority in the 112th Congress, which convenes in January 2011, but might well retain a narrow majority.

THE TEA PARTY FACTOR

The tea party movement, a small but vocal group of U.S. voters frustrated with government's large role in American life and U.S. economic policies, is an important factor in several Senate races.

In Nevada, current Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid faces a strong Republican challenge from tea party-supported Sharron Angle. In a series of acrimonious debates and television ads, Reid portrays Angle (endorsed by former vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin) as an inexperienced extremist, while Angle blames Reid for Nevada's high unemployment. An added complication is that Nevada is the only state in which voters can select "none of the above" when they cast their ballots.

In Delaware, the tea party might have hurt Republican chances. Thanks to a Palin endorsement and tea party backing, newcomer Christine O'Donnell defeated a longtime Delaware lawmaker to win the Republican nomination, but now may lose to Democrat Chris Coons a seat Republican Party officials earlier had been confident of winning.

The Senate race in Kentucky pits another tea party favorite, Republican Rand Paul, against Democrat Jack Conway in a close race. Further north, Wisconsin's Democratic incumbent, Russ Feingold, is in a tight contest with Republican businessman Ron Johnson. Feingold is seeking a fourth term in the Senate, while tea party-endorsed Johnson is new to politics.

In Florida, a three-way race pits Republican-turned-independent Charlie Crist, the state's governor, against Democrat Kendrick Meek, a former state police officer, and former state House Speaker Marco Rubio, the Republican nominee. Analysts credit Rubio's tea party backing with wresting the Republican nomination away from Crist.

RACES PIT CONSERVATIVE AGAINST CONSERVATIVE

In Arkansas, conservative Democrat Blanche Lincoln's vote for health care reform makes her a target in 2010. She survived a primary runoff election against the state's lieutenant governor, but now faces a tough re-election battle with Republican Representative John Boozman. Analysts say this Senate race is as much a referendum on Obama's policies as on Lincoln's performance as a senator.

The Louisiana Senate race also has candidates arguing about the president's policies, but the argument seems to center on who opposes Obama more, incumbent

Republican David Vitter or conservative Democrat Charlie Melancon. In the House of Representatives, Melancon voted against health care reform. Vitter, in an odd incident likely distasteful to many of his constituents, publicly apologized to those he had “let down” after his phone number was found in the records of a Washington escort service in 2007.

On November 3, Americans probably will know their new senators and which party will control the Senate for the next two years, but there are no guarantees.

Races sometimes are “too close to call” on Election Day, meaning no winner is projected because the number of votes separating the two candidates is too slim to accurately predict who will win once every vote is counted and the results certified by state authorities.

In 2008, two Senate races remained undecided the day after Election Day. Georgia’s Saxby Chambliss did not secure his seat until after a December runoff election, and the Minnesota contest dragged on for months. Not until June 30, 2009, after numerous recounts and legal challenges, did the Minnesota Supreme Court declare Democrat Al Franken the victor.

Virtual School Helps Students in U.S., South Asia, Worldwide

By Carrie Loewenthal Massey
Special Correspondent

New York — Many students have a subject in school that excites them while another subject leaves them bewildered. Whether they’re seeking deeper understanding or a new way of comprehending difficult material, the Khan Academy can shed new light on nearly any topic.

Salman Khan, based in California, created Khan Academy as an online classroom with a free database of video lessons on subjects ranging from basic arithmetic to algebra, calculus, finance, history, and many of the sciences, including organic chemistry. Khan plans to make videos that teach “everything,” making Khan Academy “the world’s first free, world-class virtual school where anyone can learn anything,” he writes on the academy’s website.

And soon, “everything” will become accessible to nearly everyone. In September, the Khan Academy received a \$2 million grant from Google to build the software needed to translate the site’s content into the world’s most-spoken languages.

“We have some leeway, but we are planning now to do Mandarin, Spanish, Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Russian, French, Portuguese, Arabic, Japanese and German,” Khan

said in an interview with *America.gov*.

“We’re going to do the first wave of translation over the next two years, and what we’re hoping is to really establish a process that makes it possible to go beyond those original languages,” he added.

Khan, who grew up in New Orleans with an Indian mother and Bengali father, looks forward to extending Khan Academy’s global reach with the translation project. He noted that the Hindi translations alone could reach as many as 400 million students, building on the site’s already prominent South Asian presence.

“By nature of where my family is from, Khan Academy has gotten quite popular in South Asia, especially Bangladesh,” Khan said. “The country is proud, but it’s very humbling for me. They’re proud that one of their own is out doing something helping other people.”

More than 10 percent of Khan Academy’s viewers come from India, Khan told the *Hindustan Times*.

“I happen to have the same name as an Indian movie star, so whether it’s deserved or not that gives me some flair,” he joked to *America.gov*.

Celebrity status aside, Khan is also making a name for his school in remote villages that do not have a regular electricity supply. Through a partnership with World Possible, a California-based nongovernmental organization (NGO) that works in part to bring computers and Internet access to poverty-stricken schools, Khan Academy supplies the educational content to some classrooms in Sierra Leone, Ethiopia and Ecuador.

“We hope over the next five to 10 years that ... other NGOs will keep working on the technology issues and we just need to hand the content to them and they figure out the best way to get it to students,” Khan said.

BUILDING A VIRTUAL SCHOOL

Khan has personally created the more than 1,800 videos available to students. Each module runs for 10 to 20 minutes, with Khan explaining in a conversational style the concept at hand while incorporating underlying principles and real-world connections that he thinks can help with students’ understanding.

“I teach the way I wish I was taught,” he writes on the website. “These videos are my expression of how the concepts should have been expressed in the first place, all while not compromising rigor or comprehensiveness.”

Khan began recording the video lessons after he saw how his teaching style helped his cousin. In 2004, when she

was struggling with her middle school math class, Khan began tutoring her remotely, eventually videotaping himself and posting the sessions on YouTube so she could access the help at her convenience. Her subsequent success in math, and her brothers' use of his other video tutorials, led Khan to post more and more videos to the Web. In September 2009, he quit his job as a hedge fund manager to run Khan Academy full time.

With plans to "keep making videos until the day I die," as he writes on his site, Khan wants to create simulation games to add to students' depth of understanding of the topics they watch and build a community of learners who use the site to interact and discuss the subject matter. He would like to see physical schools use Khan Academy as the basis for their curriculums.

"In the long term, we hope that we can be teaching people as [well] as anyone," Khan said. "We are redefining a good part of the educational experience."

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