

US Election Night Watchers' Guide

Liberal Democrat Voice / Joe Taylor

For those who haven't been following the US General Election as slavishly as I have, here is a handy cliff-notes guide to what to look for, when, and what it means.

So get some popcorn, stick some beer (or champagne?) in the fridge, and read on...

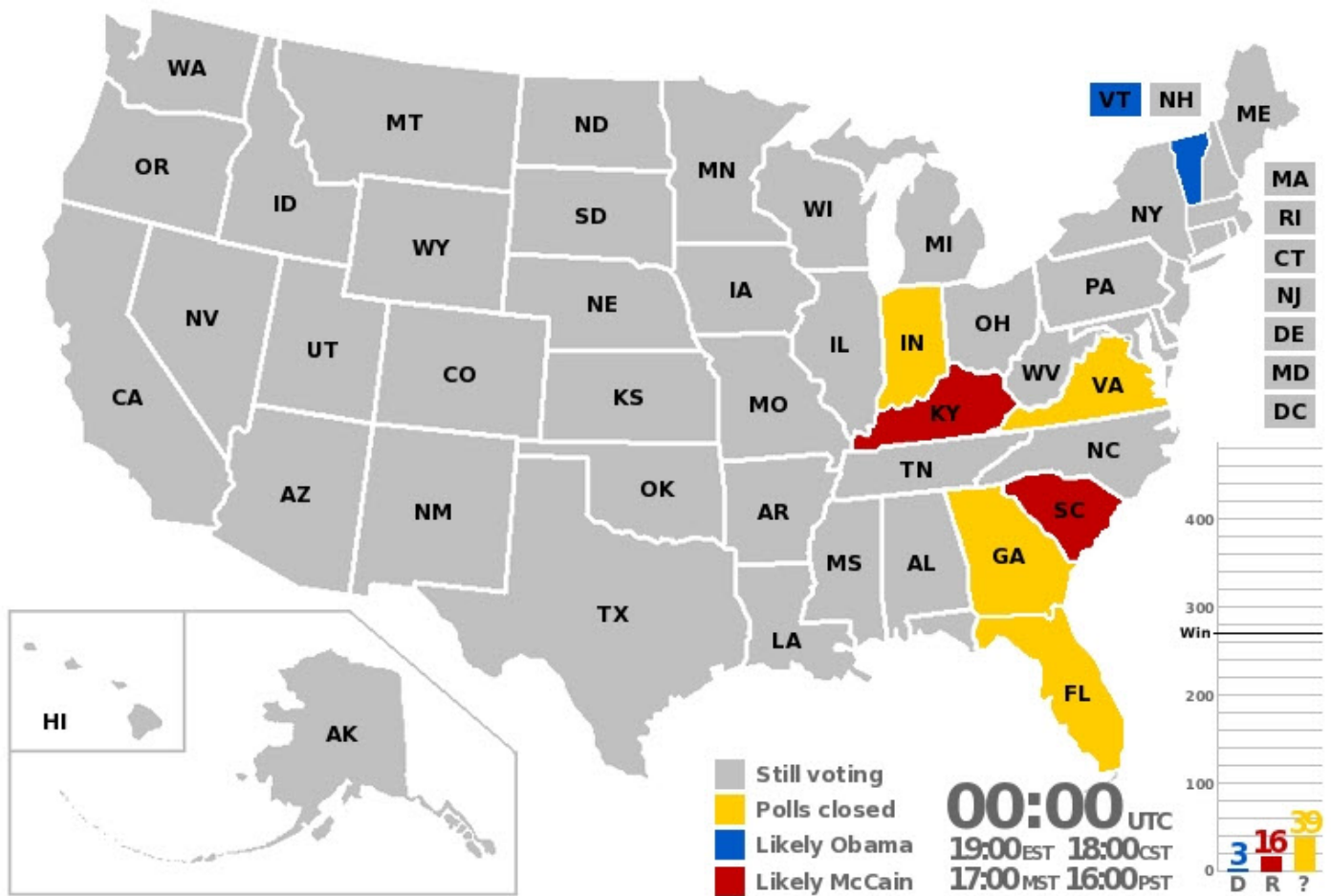
11.00pm (GMT)

First results from: **Indiana, Kentucky**

Normally these two traditionally red states are called shortly after 11pm, before the polls even close in the less populous Western parts of each state. The big news here this year is likely to be the Presidential contest in Indiana. No Democrat has won Indiana's 9 electoral votes since Lyndon Johnson in 1964, but this year Democrats are finally making a race of it. The Obama campaign has over 30 campaign offices open in the state while McCain has just one. This makes a close result difficult to interpret - is it down to the power of the ground game, or does it mean that Obama will romp home in more favourable states like neighbouring Ohio? Either way, if Obama wins here, he is well on his way to a Clinton-style blowout.

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Kentucky will go to McCain unless something unthinkable has happened between now and the election, but keep a close eye on the Senate race where Republican Senate leader Mitch McConnell has a surprisingly close fight against Democrat Bruce Lunsford. Democrats can smell blood in the water and unseating McConnell would be quite a prize. There's also a potential Democratic House gain to look out for in the open seat in Kentucky's second district.



12.00am (GMT)

First results from: **Florida**

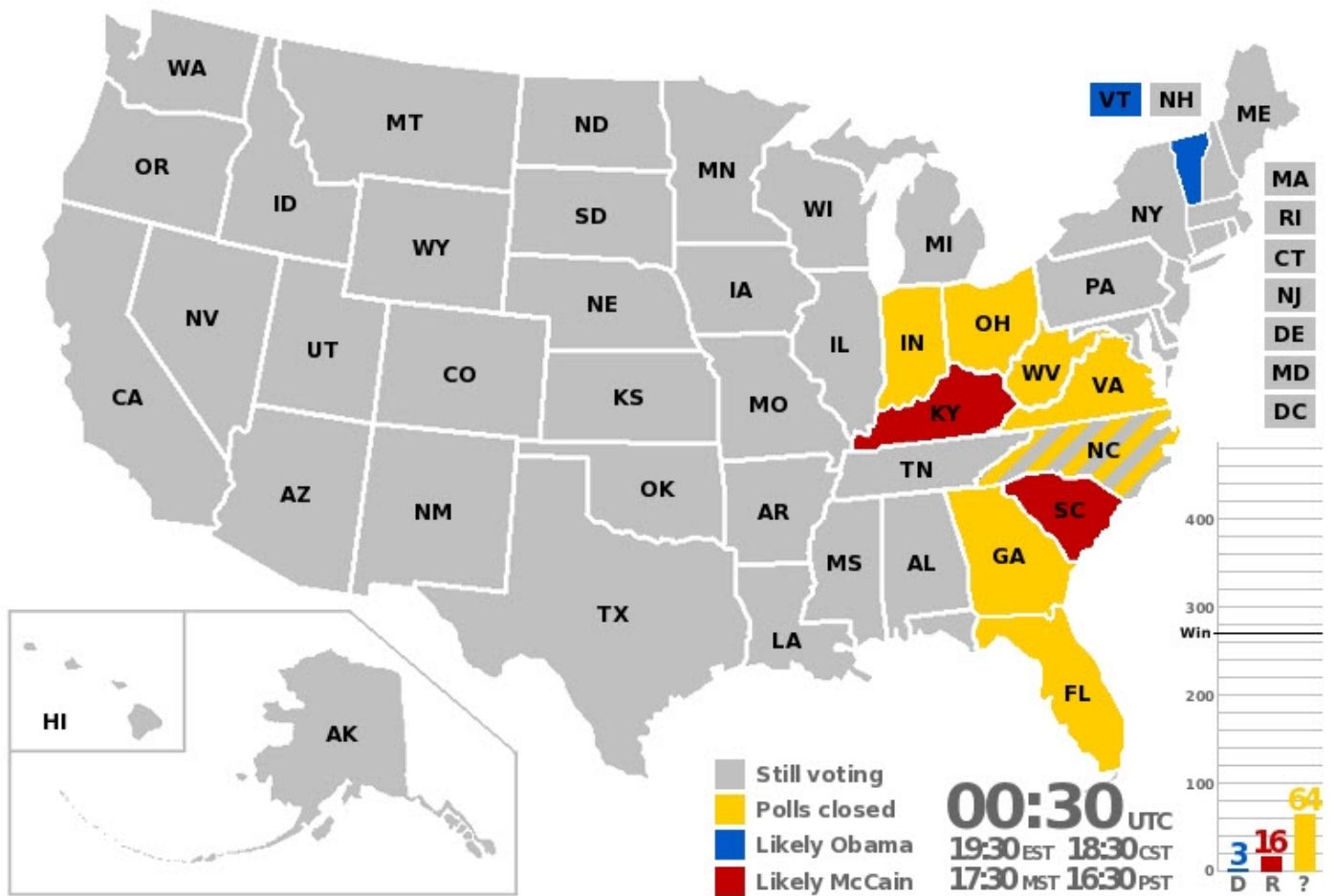
Polls close in 6 states: **Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, South Carolina, Vermont, Virginia**

Vermont will be called for Obama, South Carolina for McCain. The state to watch in this hour is undoubtedly Virginia. Like Indiana, Republicans scored wins here in each of the last ten presidential elections, but voter dissatisfaction and the growing DC suburbs in the north have made this state look increasingly purple. Democrat Jim Webb won a Senate seat here two years ago by the narrowest of margins: expect the networks to call an easy win for Democrat Mark Warner in this year's Senate race at 12 midnight. This will be the first of what could be many Democratic gains in the upper house. In the presidential contest, expect a tighter race.

Don't get too excited about any early exit polls from Florida: the traditionally Republican "pan-handle" in the West doesn't stop voting until 1am. Polls will be closed however in competitive House races in the 8th, 21st and 25th districts, in all of which Democrats hope to unseat a Republican incumbent.

Georgia could well be this year's dark horse. Strategists on both sides of the aisle were scratching their heads when the Obama campaign decided to invest in field operations there. Now tightening polls are making McCain, and Republican Senator Saxby Chambliss, sweat. Democrat Jim Martin is mounting a surprisingly strong effort to unseat Chambliss - and for a guy who won his seat by morphing triple-amputee war hero Max Cleland into Osama Bin Laden this would be just desserts.

Obama remains a long shot for Georgia's 15 electoral votes, but this will be an excellent test for the Obama ground machine. Watch black turnout in states like Georgia - if it hits 30% then McCain, and Chambliss, are in a lot of trouble.

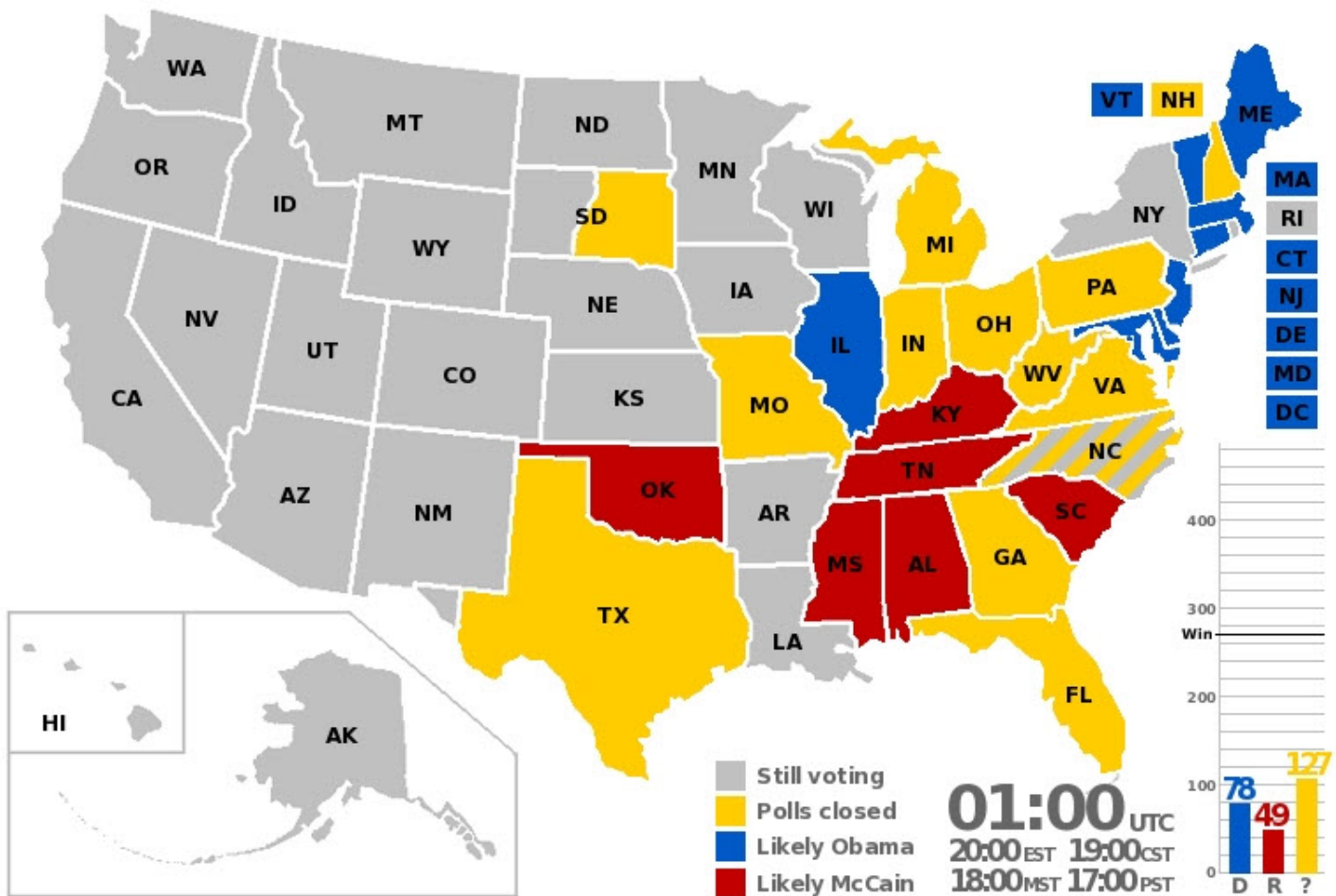


12.30am (GMT)

Polls close in 2 states: **Ohio, West Virginia**

All the attention will be on Ohio this half-hour, for one simple reason: no Republican has ever won the presidency without carrying Ohio. If the exit polls suggest an Obama lead, expect to see some glum expressions on Republican faces.

Despite West Virginia's working-class Democratic lean, Obama has struggled to compete there this year in common with other Appalachian states like Kentucky, Tennessee, and Arkansas. He scored a dreadful 25% in the primary contest against Hillary Clinton and hasn't really invested in the ground game. That said, polls have tightened there sufficiently to merit visits from Sarah Palin and Joe Biden. An early call for McCain would be good news for the Republican ticket at this point.



1.00am (GMT)

First results from: **Michigan, South Dakota, Texas**

Polls close in **15** states (plus DC): **Alabama, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee,** and the **District of Columbia**. Expect a flood of states to be called for one side or the other. Alabama, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Mississippi will go to McCain. Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Massachusetts, Maryland, Maine, New Jersey and the District of Columbia will go to Obama.

Pennsylvania went to Kerry by less than 150,000 votes in 2004, and McCain had high hopes of competing there. However, it looks a pretty long shot for the Republicans at the moment. If McCain can hold down his losses it might bode well for other states.

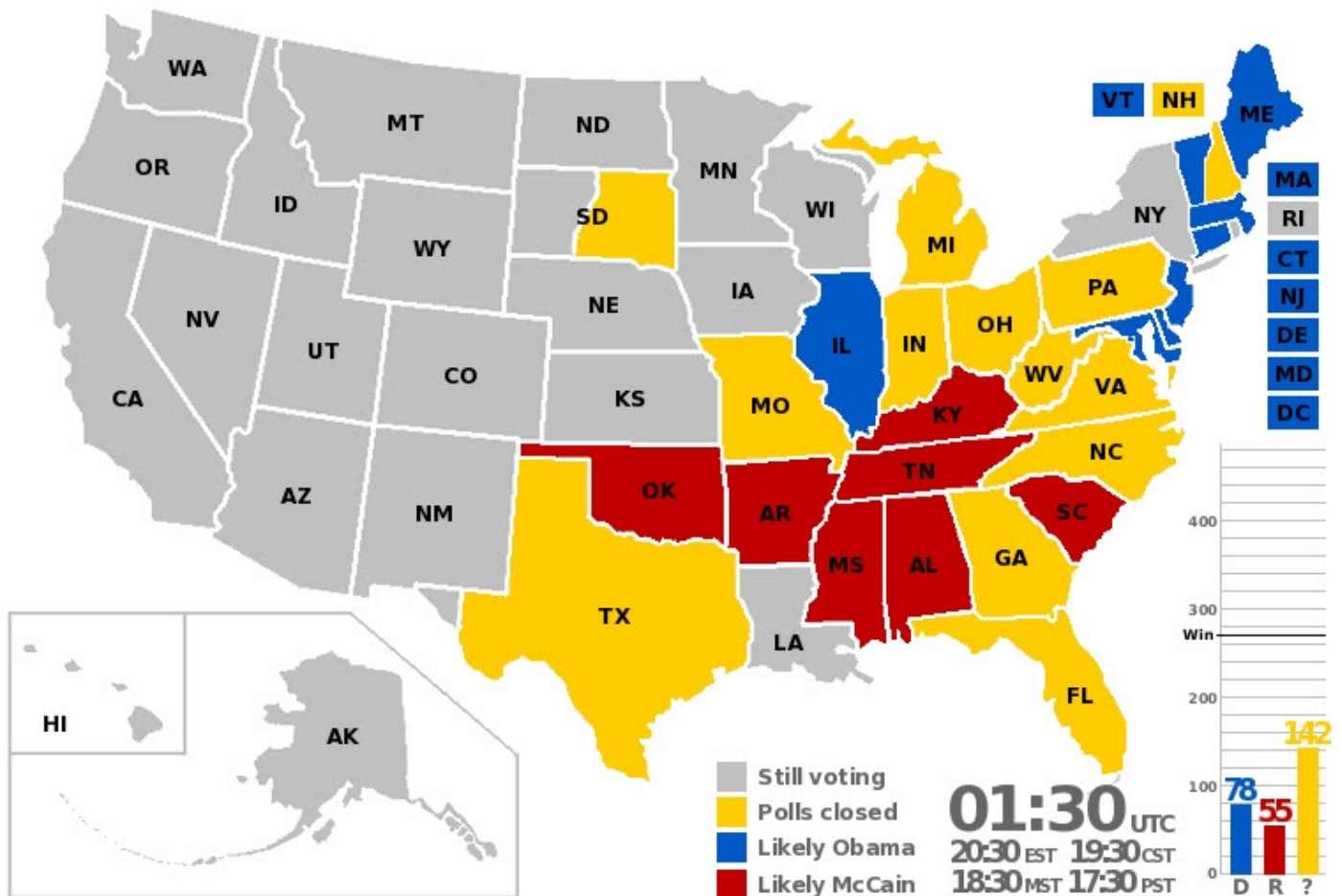
Missouri has correctly voted for the winner of each presidential contest since 1960, but this seems a likely enough year for that streak to end: Missouri has been running 3-5 points behind Obama's national numbers all year. The "Show-Me State" seems likely enough to vote for the Illinois senator, but it's unlikely to be the one that tips the balance.

Polls will be closed across Florida, and at this point the exit polls should give us a good idea of where this election is going. With 27 electoral votes, Florida is the biggest must-win for McCain in an election full of must-wins. Florida Democrats still bear the scars from 2000 and 2004 and they would love to lock this one up for Obama.

New Hampshire is the scene of a triple drama this year: Obama hopes to score a win in a state that went for Kerry over Bush by just 1%. And Democrat Jeanne Shaheen has high hopes of winning her Senate rematch against Republican John Sununu.

In the House, keep an eye on New Hampshire's first congressional district.

It's no exaggeration to say that Carol Shea-Porter wasn't supposed to win in 2006. Ignored by the Democratic establishment, down in the polls, and hopelessly out-raised by her Republican opponent, Shea-Porter scored a stunning win in the top-to-bottom Democratic takeover of the state. This year, ousted Congressman Jeb Bradley wants his seat back in what is surely one of the most competitive rematches in the country. This could well be a bellwether for the parties' prospects in the House, as well as an early indicator of how an Obama presence helps Democrats further down the ticket: Obama has invested big in the Granite State's ground operation.



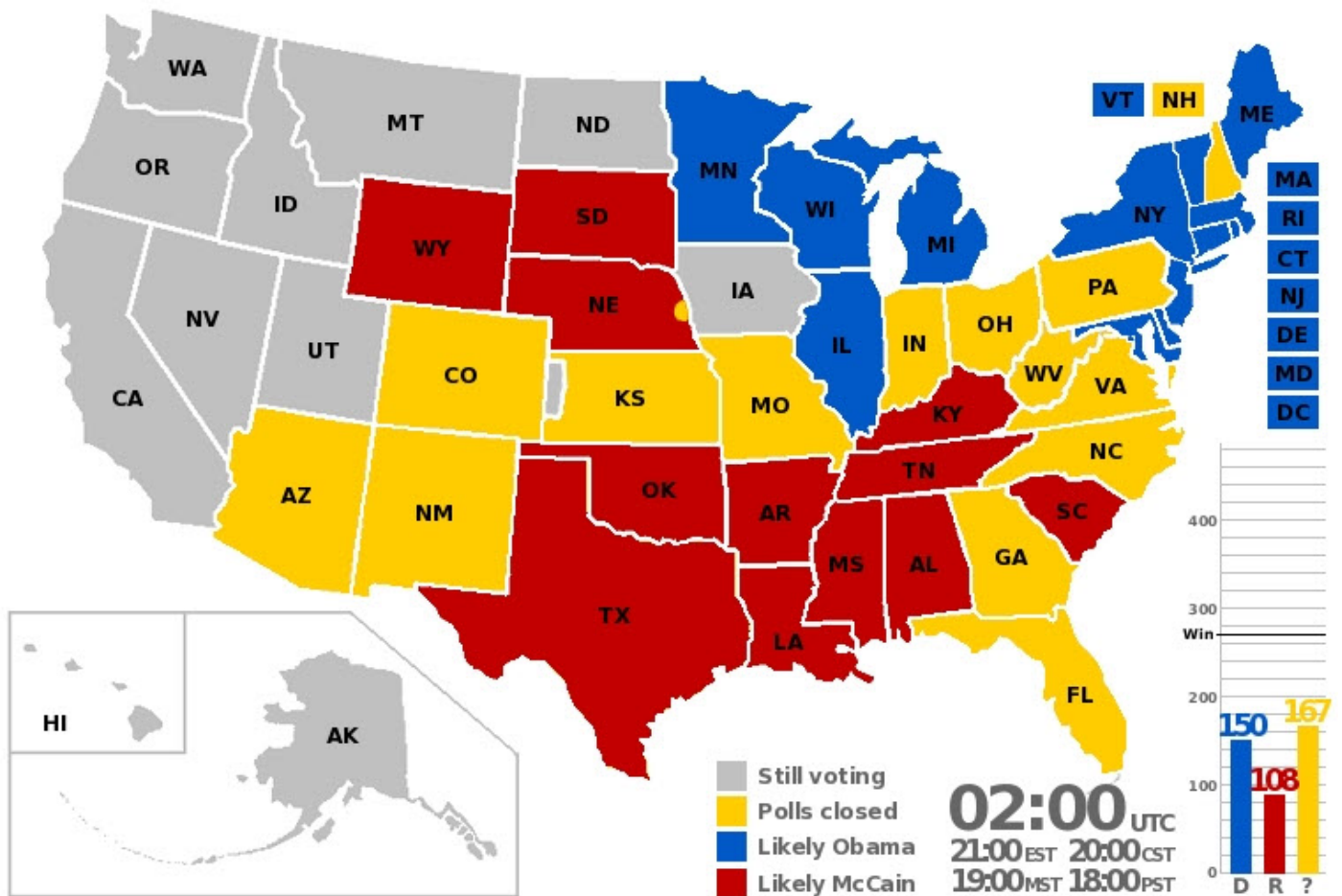
1.30am (GMT)

Polls close in 2 states: **Arkansas, North Carolina**

Arkansas has voted for Democrats before (Clinton, Kennedy, Carter and Johnson), but doesn't look especially likely to do so this year. Republicans will expect the Natural State to be called for McCain soon after polls close.

North Carolina shouldn't be competitive this year, but it is: some polls have shown Obama ahead in a state where George Bush crushed John Kerry by 56% to 44%. If this one goes blue, expect an Obama electoral college landslide.

North Carolina is another state where a strong Obama ground campaign could help Democrats win seats in the Senate. Senator Elizabeth "Liddy" Dole had the dubious pleasure of presiding over Republicans' embarrassing 6-seat loss in 2006 when she was chair of their Senate campaign. Now Democrat Kay Hagan could compound the misery by taking Dole's own Senate seat. Watch this one closely.



2.00am (GMT)

First results from: **Kansas**

Polls close in 13 states: **Arizona, Colorado, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Texas, Wisconsin, Wyoming**

Louisiana, South Dakota, Texas and Wyoming will be called for McCain at 2am precisely. So will Nebraska, but with a possible twist: it is one of two states (with Maine) to distribute some of its electoral votes by congressional district. In an unprecedented move, Obama has troops on the ground in Omaha in the hope of picking off one of the state's five electoral votes.

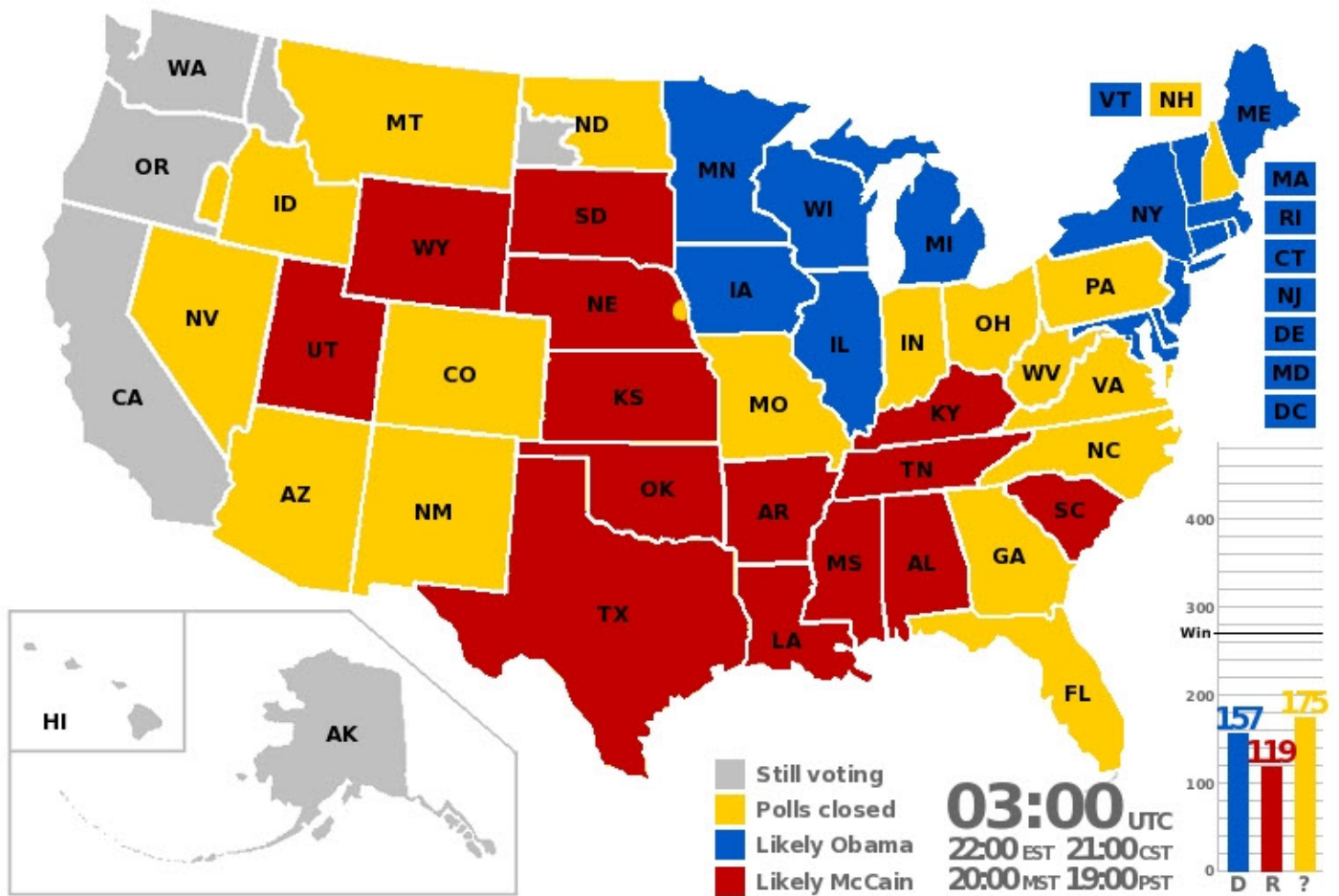
Michigan may well be called for Obama as polls close - or even before. McCain has publicly conceded the state, and voters don't like that. New York and Rhode Island will add another 35 electoral votes to Obama's column. Wisconsin and Minnesota should add to that total as they seem to have resisted McCain's attempts to pry them away.

Arizona should go to McCain, but some recent polling has shown the state shockingly close. If McCain loses his home state then he has certainly lost the election already - but Democrats would certainly like the bragging rights,

Colorado and New Mexico are the true battlegrounds and look to be favouring Obama at the moment. Democrats will hope to pick up Republican-held seats in both of these: Democrat Tom Udall is leading Steve Pearce in New Mexico and cousin Mark Udall is edging Bob Schaffer in Colorado.

Finally, comedian and former Air America host Al Franken is hoping to defeat Republican Senator Norm Coleman in Minnesota.

In the House, Democrat Gary Trauner is hoping to win Wyoming's sole congressional district. If Trauner wins it will be a body blow to Republicans in traditional red state. Just four years ago, George W. Bush won this state with a whopping 69% of the vote. Nonetheless, Trauner came within 1,100 votes of an upset win in 2006 and looks very competitive again this year. If Democrats pick up seats like this they are probably on their way to a big House majority.



3.00am (GMT)

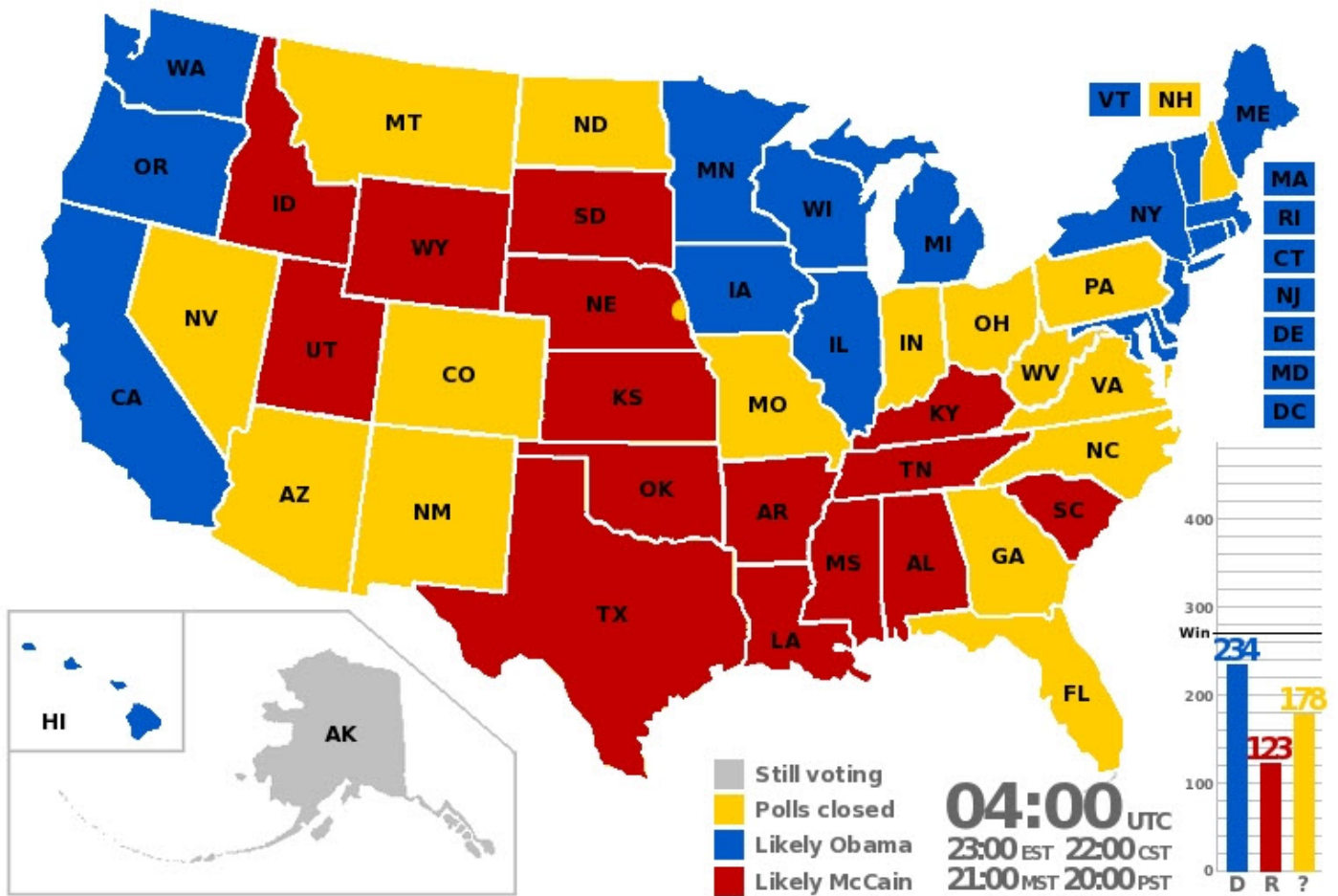
First results from: **Idaho, North Dakota, Oregon**

Polls close in **5** states: **Iowa, Kansas, Montana, Nevada, Utah**

Kansas and Utah will be called for McCain. Iowa looks set to go to Obama, despite voting for Bush in 2004 - Iowans liked Obama in the primary and don't seem to be able to get past McCain's opposition to bio-fuel subsidies.

McCain is the slight favourite in Montana (another state where Palin seems to have gone down well). Nevada is the closest thing we have to a toss-up this hour.

The US networks may be getting ready to call the presidential election as we head into the 4am hour.

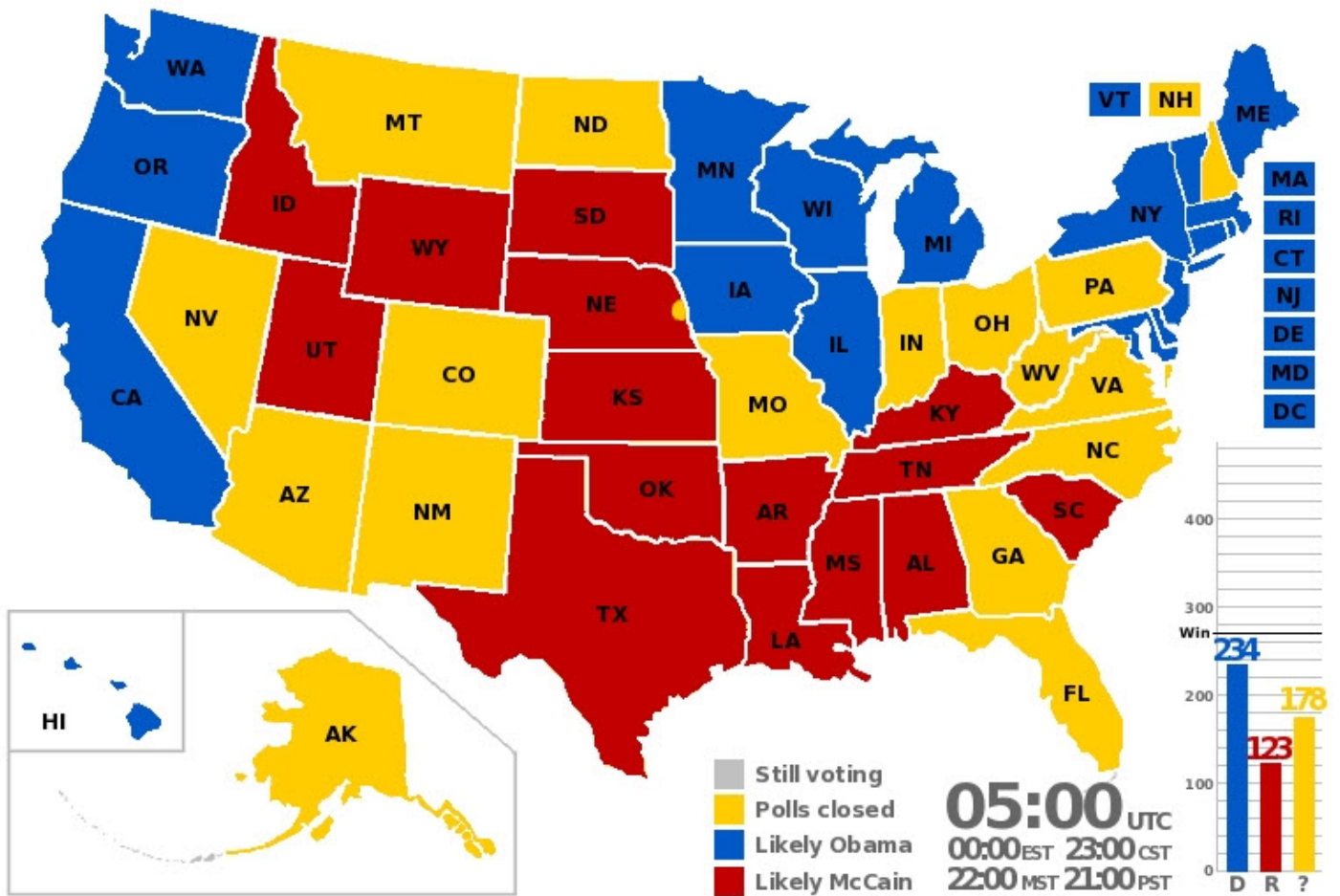


4.00am (GMT)

Polls close in 6 states: California, Hawaii, Idaho, North Dakota, Oregon, Washington

California, Oregon, Washington and Hawaii will all go to Obama, Idaho and North Dakota to McCain. If there is to be a surprise it will be in North Dakota - Obama had invested in the state but pulled out shortly after the Republican convention. But I wouldn't put money on it.

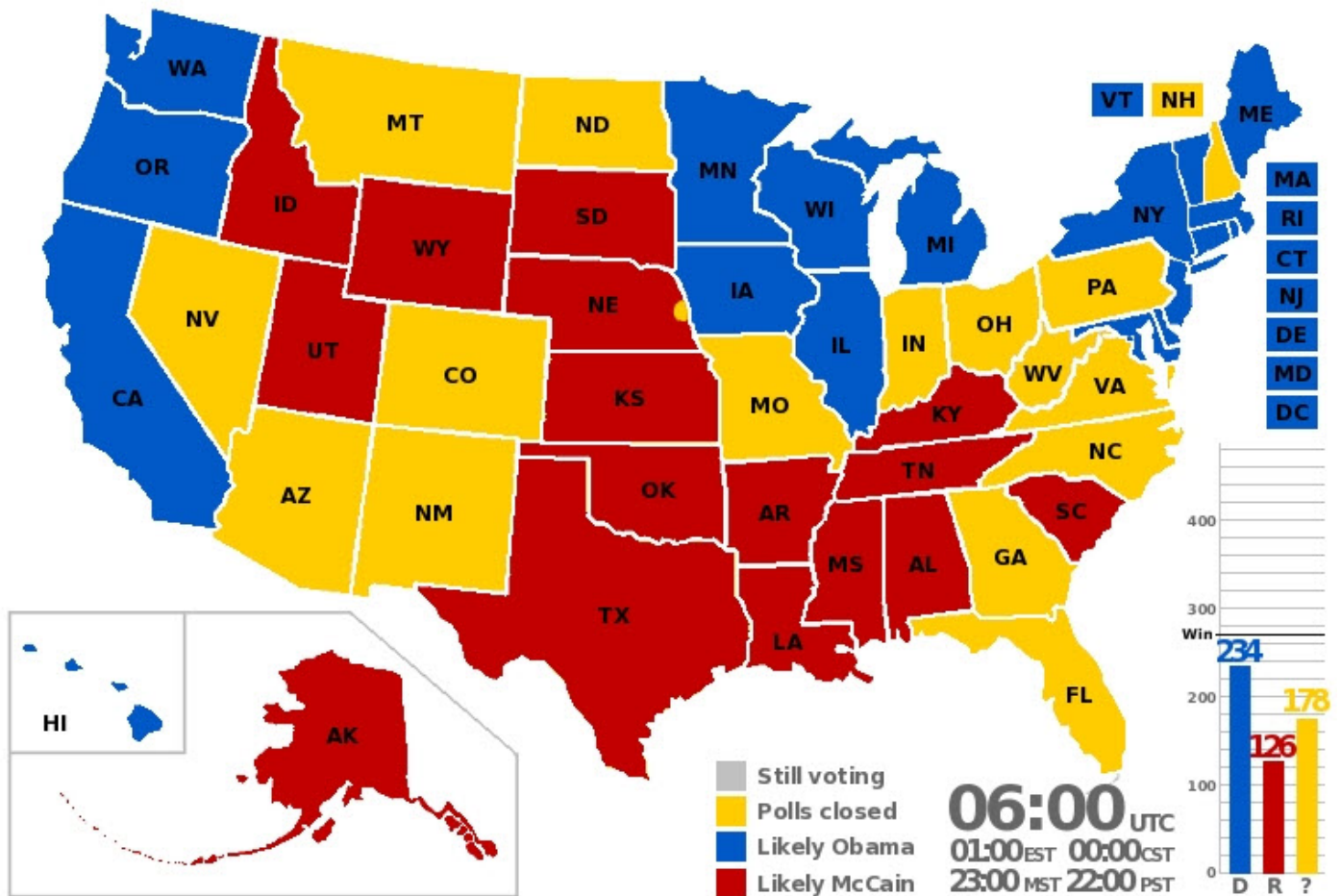
No big Senate races here, but there are some competitive contests in the House to watch out for



5.00am (GMT)

First results from: Alaska

Any hopes of Alaska being competitive in the Presidential election this year were ended by McCain's selection of home-state Governor Palin to be his running mate. The Aleutian and St Lawrence Islands don't stop voting for another hour, but don't expect the networks to wait for them before calling this state for McCain.



6.00am (GMT)

Polls close in 1 state: **Alaska**

One Senate race worth staying up for might be the Senate race in Alaska, especially if it makes the difference between Democrats gaining the coveted 60 seat supermajority or not.

Republican Senator Ted Stevens is infamous for the \$398 million "Bridge to Nowhere", often held up as a national example of wasteful pork barrel spending. In Alaska he has always been quite popular, until this year when he faces both a corruption indictment and popular Anchorage mayor Mark Begich.

Most analysts now agree that with Stevens' conviction for lying on official Senate paperwork (a felony) he is heading out the door this election.

Electoral College Votes per State

State	Electoral Votes	State	Electoral Votes
Alabama	9	Montana	3
Alaska	3	Nebraska	5**
Arizona	10	Nevada	5
Arkansas	6	New Hampshire	4
California	55	New Jersey	15
Colorado	9	New Mexico	5
Connecticut	7	New York	31
Delaware	3	North Carolina	15
Washington, D.C.*	3	North Dakota	3
Florida	27	Ohio	20
Georgia	15	Oklahoma	7
Hawaii	4	Oregon	7
Idaho	4	Pennsylvania	21
Illinois	21	Rhode Island	4
Indiana	11	South Carolina	8
Iowa	7	South Dakota	3
Kansas	6	Tennessee	11
Kentucky	8	Texas	34
Louisiana	9	Utah	5
Maine	4**	Vermont	3
Maryland	10	Virginia	13
Massachusetts	12	Washington	11
Michigan	17	West Virginia	5
Minnesota	10	Wisconsin	10
Mississippi	6	Wyoming	3
Missouri	11	Total electors	538

* Washington, D.C., although not a state, is granted three electoral votes by the Twenty-third Amendment to the United States Constitution.

** Maine and Nebraska electors distributed by way of the Congressional District Method.