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GOP Women Update -- Senate

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Here's an interesting bit of trivia, culled from data kept by the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers: no woman has won a GOP primary for an open US Senate seat since 2002 (Elizabeth Dole).

This streak will be tested this year, thanks to a whopping 11 open Senate seats -- five with departing Dems, six GOP.

The hopes appear to rest on two women; the other 9 races have just a couple of completely non-viable female in them on the Republican side.

Kelly Ayotte is one of those two, running for Judd Gregg's seat up in New Hampshire. She leads in the polls over Ovide Lamontagne and Bill Binnie. Conservatives don't like Ayotte and have been trying to rally around Lamontagne, but so far that doesn't seem to be catching fire. [Nate Silver at 538.com](#), in his new [Senate rankings](#), puts her likelihood of winning the primary at 65%, to 35% for Lamontagne -- but that must be based on polls prior to Binnie getting in the race. Close New Hampshire observers have been telling me that multi-gazillionaire Binnie is the real threat -- one GOP insider told me recently that he expects Binnie to win the primary.

The second is Linda McMahon, WWF exec running for Chris Dodd's seat in Connecticut. Silver gives her a 30% chance of winning that primary over Rob Simmons.

Fat lot of good it would do her, though: ever since Dodd opted out and Richard Blumenthal opted in on the D side, this has been chalked up as a sure blue victory.

Ayotte at least would be in a fair fight with Democrat Paul Hodes -- she is polling ahead of him now.

So Ayotte could make it to the Senate. There are two other good possibilities. One is Jane Norton in Colorado, who is the frontrunner in the GOP primary. If she wins that, she's in a toss-up race against appointed Senator Michael Bennet (assuming he makes it through the Dem primary).

The other is Sue Lowden, considered a slight frontrunner in a tough GOP primary field in Nevada. The winner goes against Senate President Harry Reid, who certainly appears to be doomed to defeat -- although not everyone counts him out yet.

There is only one other Republican woman with any realistic chance of winning a Senate seat this year: Carly Fiorina in California. She's getting pummeled in the GOP primary right now, and even if she recovers she would most likely be beaten by incumbent Barbara Boxer in the general.

So, that's three real possibilities -- I personally would put Norton at maybe 50% chance at best, with Ayotte and Lowden each a little less.

That's not bad, considering that right now the GOP has only four women Senators (out of 41 total). Three will remain: the two in Maine, who are not up for re-election, and Murkowski in Alaska, who is essentially running unchallenged. The fourth is Kay Bailey Hutchison, who promised to resign this year regardless of her success running for governor of Texas, but now that she's been humiliated in the primary many suspect she'll stick around the Senate. (Interestingly,

the race to replace her would likely have a couple of good female Republican candidates.)

It certainly seems possible that the GOP will get back up to its previous high of 5 female Senators, which would at least get them over the pathetic 10% mark. And if things roll right, it's possible they could do even better. On the other hand, it's not that unlikely that Ayotte, Lowden, and Norton all lose, Hutchison leaves, and they're down to just the three ladies from frozen, isolated, sparsely-populated tundras.