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## McCain likely to get Conservative line in N.Y.

*By Brian Tumulty  
Washington Bureau*

WASHINGTON -- John McCain is expected to have New York's Conservative Party line in the November presidential election, which could provide him with symbolic value nationally but not enough votes to win in a Democratic-leaning state where recent polls show Barack Obama with a comfortable lead.

New York Conservative Party Chairman Mike Long said Monday the expected September endorsement of McCain would be "a plus" for the Arizona senator among conservative voters around the country because New York is the only place with a statewide ballot line for the Conservative Party.

McCain has clear conservative credentials — leadership on the war on terrorism, support for tax cuts, advocacy for cutting federal spending and opposition to activist judges, Long said.

The party is waiting to see who McCain picks as his running mate, he said. "If he really picked the wrong vice president, it could put our endorsement in jeopardy."

Meanwhile, New York's Independence Party, which had serious discussions with New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg about a possible third-party presidential candidacy until Bloomberg opted out, is in discussions with representatives of McCain and Democrat Barack Obama about a November ballot line, party Vice Chairman Tom Connolly said.

"We are still up in the air," Connolly said. "The short answer is we haven't picked yet because Bloomberg quit on us."

The Independence Party endorsed Green Party candidate Ralph Nader in 2004.

Neither the Conservative Party nor the Independence Party ballot line is expected to make a difference in the presidential results in New York at this point because Obama leads McCain by about 14 percentage points, according to Maurice Carroll, director of the Quinnipiac University Polling Institute. "Color New York blue and throw away the crayons," he said.

The last time the Conservative Party mattered in a presidential election was in 1980, when the 256,000 votes Ronald Reagan received on that line provided him with his margin of victory in New York over President Carter. Reagan received 2.6 million votes on the Republican line to Carter's 2.7 million Democratic votes.

James Campbell, chairman of political science at the University of Buffalo, thinks the Conservative line still has symbolic value.

"It's meaningful because a lot of conservatives are skeptical of McCain," Campbell said. "I think having the support of the Conservative Party would help bring him back in the fold."

The line still matters to New York Republicans.

Four New York Republicans are battling for Conservative Party backing for the right to challenge Democratic incumbents in two congressional districts this fall.

Conservatives decided over the weekend to allow Sept. 9 primaries in the 20th Congressional District between Sandy Treadwell and Michael Rocque, who are trying to unseat Democratic Rep. Kirsten Gillibrand, and in the 22nd Congressional District between George Phillips and Bruce Layman, who are running against Democratic Rep. Maurice Hinchey.

The four Republicans also are running in GOP primaries. And another Republican, John Wallace, is running in the 20th District Republican primary.

The Independence Party decided against allowing a primary in the 20th Congressional District by endorsing Treadwell over Gillibrand.

"Both candidates showed top capability for the office," Connolly said, but he said Independence Party officials reacted negatively to interference in internal party deliberations by Democrats in the Buffalo area and in the Hudson Valley.

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