

SENATE TEA LEAVES

Gosh, you think this is why Sanctimonious Joe got all complimentary of Obama the other day?

Democratic leaders are discussing a major reshuffling of Senate committee chairmanships, according to multiple sources, and the proposed changes include ousting Sen. Joe Lieberman (I-Conn.) from his coveted chairmanship.

Lieberman, a former Democrat who supports Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) for president, is likely to lose his gavel on the Homeland Security Committee he has chaired since January 2007, say the sources who see him being replaced by Sen. Daniel Akaka (Hawaii), the committee's third-ranking Democrat.

The article is more interesting, though, for the changes it describes on other committees, assuming (touch win) Obama does pull this off on Tuesday.

In a change that I **think** is a marginal improvement over the weak leadership of Jello Jay Rockefeller, DiFi looks set to take over SSCI.

The shift also hinges on Sen. Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.) stepping down as chairman of the powerful Appropriations Committee, which aides say is included in the proposed changes. Sen. Daniel Inouye (D-Hawaii) would replace him. Byrd, who turns 91 in November, has been hospitalized three times this year and some have questioned if he is capable of leading the committee.

Other moves include Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-W.Va.) taking over the Senate Commerce Committee, Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) taking over the Senate Select Intelligence Committee and

Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) moving to the helm of the Senate Rules and Administration Committee.

There is no set plan to replace Biden, but one source cited Sen. Chris Dodd (D-Conn.) as a possibility.

However, another Democratic source said Dodd is likely to hold onto his chairmanship of the Senate Banking Committee and be available to replace Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) on the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, should Kennedy's health fail.

[snip]

Sen. Patty Murray (Wash.), who is currently the Democratic Conference Secretary but has only a subcommittee chairmanship, is likely to take over the Veterans' Affairs Committee, while Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) would likely stay chairman of the Judiciary Committee.

Leahy still wants the chairmanship of the Appropriations Committee, sources said, but also wants to be a key player in any Supreme Court nominations from an Obama presidency.

If Dodd does give up the Banking Committee, the responsibility is likely to fall to Sen. Jack Reed (D-R.I.) instead of the next-most senior Democrat, Tim Johnson of South Dakota, who suffered a stroke in December 2006 and returned to the Senate in September 2007.

As for SSCI, DiFi may not always agree with us, but she's got a lot more backbone than Jello Jay, and her position on Judiciary (which I presume she'll keep) gives her a more balanced view of what is legal.

I'm also fascinated by Schumer's pick-up of

Senate Rules Committee. I've been wondering when he would come and ask for something—having served as DSCC chair two successful elections in a row and lining up to do it again, Schumer's got a lot of bargaining power (and, with his hands on the purse strings of DSCC, power over those candidates he has helped get elected). So why's he want Rules?

The big issue, it looks like, is what happens with Dodd—does he stay at Banking to work through the crisis, or does he take over Biden's plum position at Foreign Relations?