FRYING PANS AND FIRES

We've all heard the expression "Out of the frying pan and into the fire," to go from bad to worse than bad. The question of the moment in America is: Will that be what voters do on November 7?

Congress's summer recess ended this week, with Congressistas, Senatorials, and their staffers flooding back into town. The mood on Capitol Hill is not upbeat.

The Pubbies know what a lousy job they've done, the Demmies terrified the voters will figure out they are a lousy alternative. That's why the electorate is in such a lousy mood: Let's see, frying pan or fire?

It's little solace to reflect that the American game is poker, and in poker you play the cards you're dealt. After a run of bad hands, you just want to walk away from the game to play another day. That's the difference between a game and life. You can't walk away from the latter.

An example of how demoralized conservative Republicans are in Congress was the shouting match that took place this morning during the GOP Caucus, a weekly meeting of all Republicans in Congress.

They were exploding in rage that the NRCC (National Republican Congressional Committee - to which they contribute) had blown 200 grand of their money supporting a pro-abortion, pro-amnesty candidate in the Arizona *primary* in an attempt to screw an anti-abortion, protect-the-borders conservative.

They were even madder that their leaders, Speaker Denny Hastert, Majority Leader John Boehner, and Majority Whip Ray Blount, all gave $5,000 each to Steve Huffman, the "centrist" candidate and are desperate to see a real conservative, Randy Graf, defeated in the primary next Tuesday (September 12).

The issue is not just ideological, its primal - their jobs and their majority are on the line. Member after member came back from summer recess with the words, *Protect the border!*, drilled into their brains by their constituents.

Over in the Senate, it's worse. The chief-of-staff of a major Republican Senator told me his boss is one of the very few not deer-in-the-headlights paralyzed into inaction over the threat of a Teddy Kennedy filibuster.

That's why the Senate has become the graveyard of decent legislation passed by the House.

There's a thin thread of hope that voters won't turn their government over to the Democrat Hate-America Left in November. The good news is that if a 110th Congress is in Republican control, the

leadership of the 109th will be tossed out on their "centrist" ears.

In the House, the hope centers on passing a straight shut-down-the-borders bill with no "comprehensive" add-ons and ramming it down the throat of GOP Senators who know if they don't vote for it, it's Minority City in January.

That and lowering gas prices they figure should put them over the top.

Every two-year election cycle, of course, puts all 435 Congressional seats up for grabs. The GOP has a 29 seat advantage, 231-202. Thus if the Dems net 15 more seats, they take over. (If it's a 1-2-3 seat razor-thin victory, though, you won't believe what the GOP will offer some Dems to cross over - and this is vice-versa.)

With almost all Congressional Districts computer-gerrymandered, the voters don't choose their representatives as much as the reps choose the voters. That's why House incumbents have a lifetime job. The only real contests are in the open races of which there are 30, 19 of which are gerrymandered GOP, 11 Dem.

For the Dems to win all their 11 plus 4 of the GOP, or some close approximation, is not a knock-over but it's certainly doable.

In the Senate, 33 of its 100 seats are up. The GOP advantage is 55-45, so the Dems need a net gain of 6. 4 seats are open and a number of others are wire-close. Handicapping them so far out - two months is a *very* long time in politics - is begging for error, but here goes.

Santorum in Pennsylvania, Connie Burns in Montana, Talent in Missouri: GOP keepers. Steele in Maryland: GOP gain.

Mark Kennedy in Minnesota: GOP gain.

Mike McGavick defeats Maria Cantwell in Washington: GOP gain.

Joe Lieberman defeats Ned Lamont as independent in Connecticut: Joe may caucus with the GOP.

Tom Kean defeats Bob Menendez in New Jersey: GOP gain.

Steve Laffey, a solid conservative defeats Lincoln Chafee in the Rhode Island primary and loses to the Dem in a solid Dem state: Dem gain.

Sherrod Brown defeats Mike DeWine in Ohio: Dem gain.

Michael Bouchard *might* defeat the Senate's dumbest Senator, Debbie Stabenow in Michigan: GOP maybe.

So far, it's hard to see how the Dems will pull it off. Dem Ford may defeat GOP Corker for Frist's seat in Tennessee. Santorum, Burns, and Talent could all lose. Most of these races will be close: 51-52 percenters.

The bottom line is that voters will most likely prefer the GOP frying pan to the Dem fire in the Senate, far more iffy in the House. But like Tipperary, it's a long way to November. It so happens I was in Tipperary a couple of weeks ago. At Tipperary's most famous pub, Nellie O'Brien's, it was my displeasure to have the worst Irish Coffee I've ever had in my life.

A lousy Irish Coffee in Ireland! It's almost as dispiriting (wow, that's a bad pun), as a lousy choice between frying pans and fires.

Just so you know what to avoid in Tipperary: