

Opinion: Ensign's days are likely numbered

By Jon Ralston, Las Vegas Sun

Suffering from the enervating ennui of postelection depression, I always find there is only one cure: Look ahead to the next one.

No, I don't mean the yawnfest to succeed Las Vegas Mayor Oscar Goodman – assuming he doesn't barricade himself in his office (lifetime supply of Bombay Sapphire therein) to stay longer. I refer to Campaign 2012, which officially began one week ago, with Republicans salivating to build on legislative gains here and everywhere, and Democrats trying to find a way to hold off the GOP without the vote magnet named Harry Reid on the ballot. And before the campaign matrix sorts itself out, we have to endure a bloodbath unlike any Sam Peckinpah could have imagined – and it always seems to move in slow motion! – known as Session '11, which could reshape the conventional wisdom I am about to dispense.

Rarely does a cycle approach with the number of cascading triggers as does the one that just began, with the first one at the top. Nevada's junior senator, John Ensign, may not know it, but he is a walking political corpse, soon to be indicted or willingly or forcibly retired.

His fate is inextricably linked to that of several other Nevada politicians, whose ambition or lack thereof could dramatically alter the levers of power in the state – or not.

I have to believe Ensign will soon become a target of the National Republican Senatorial Committee. Why? Because the GOP sees a path to taking the Senate in 2012 – two-thirds of the contested seats are held by Democrats – and they don't want to have to worry about defending their own. Ensign has a

disapproval rating approaching Harry Reid-like elevation and he will have neither the benefit of a Reid-like turnout machine or campaign team. Those who know him or have been with him before want nothing to do with him now. Even in Nevada, where the dead are resurrected and no depredation seems unforgivable, Ensign has no path to victory.

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