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## Jockeying Begins for Wicker's Seat on House Appropriations Committee

By Michael Teitelbaum, CQ Staff

Two days after Mississippi Republican Rep. Roger Wicker was appointed to replace GOP Sen. Trent Lott, the race for Wicker's seat on the House Appropriations Committee is already under way.

At least six contenders are vying for the slot — Joe Wilson and Henry E. Brown Jr. , both of South Carolina, Jo Bonner of Alabama, Michael R. Turner of Ohio, Tom Cole of Oklahoma and Dave Reichert of Washington. All have told GOP leaders of their interest.

In filling the vacancy, the Republican Steering Committee, which is dominated by GOP leaders, will have to weigh the merits of rewarding party loyalty against shoring up a vulnerable member in a competitive 2008 race. Only Reichert, the most moderate of the contenders, faces a tough re-election battle.

But use of choice committee seats to aid members in tight races did not work out so well in the last Congress, when Melissa A. Hart, R-Pa., and Chris Chocola, R-Ind., were put on the Ways and Means Committee. They promptly lost in 2006.

### The Contenders

Wilson, elected in 2001 in a special election to replace Floyd Spence, is a stalwart conservative. He speaks with a certain authority on defense issues as he and his family have been deeply involved in military affairs and he has been a strong voice of support for the war in Iraq.

His spokesman, Ryan Murphy, said an assignment to Appropriations would “be an opportunity to further serve his constituents.” Some of his funding priorities would be to increase defense spending and help out the four military installations in the district.

Wilson, Brown and Bonner all sought a seat on Appropriations in May, the last time a slot opened up. But Ken Calvert , R-Calif., won the chance to temporarily replace another California Republican, John T. Doolittle , who had stepped down from the committee after reports that the FBI searched his wife's home office in connection to the scandal involving convicted lobbyist Jack Abramoff.

Kevin Smith, communications director for House Minority Leader John A. Boehner , of Ohio said, “This process will begin when members return later this month, and I'd expect the Steering Committee to reconvene and fill the opening at the earliest practical opportunity.”

Brown has more seniority than Wilson and also was chairman of a state House committee that dealt with appropriations, tax and budget issues. Chris Berardini, Brown's chief of staff, noted that Wilson served on two committees in the state House with less relevance to appropriations: Judiciary and Education. He said that if Brown got on the committee, he would focus on transportation funding for Interstate 73 and beach replenishment.

Not since Republican Carroll A. Campbell Jr., (1979-87) was on the committee for one term (1981-83) has there been a South Carolina Republican on the panel.

Bonner is approaching the race from a different angle. He notes that two of his predecessors were on the committee, Alabama Republicans Jack Edwards and Sonny Callahan, and he worked for both — as a paid staffer for Callahan and an intern for Edwards.

Two current committee Republicans, Mark Steven Kirk and Ray LaHood, both from Illinois, also worked earlier for their predecessors who were appropriators — John Edward Porter and Robert H. Michel.

Since Bonner is a member of the ethics committee, he also would like to focus on making the appropriations process more transparent. "This appointment is an opportunity for leadership to make a statement to the American people that we deserve a second chance in the majority," he said.

Turner, a former two-term mayor of the city of Dayton, is a social conservative but has a lower party loyalty score than any of the announced contenders except Reichert. He splits with President Bush and most of his fellow Republicans on issues affecting workers. He was one of 82 Republicans to vote for a 2007 measure increasing the federal minimum wage by \$2.10 over two years, and was one of only 39 Republicans to vote for a Democratic amendment in 2004 to give workers who had exhausted their state unemployment an additional 13 weeks of benefits.

Reichert is a former King County sheriff who opposes abortion and has a mixed record when it comes to environmental issues. In 2007 he switched his position and voted to override President Bush's veto of legislation allowing federal funding for embryonic stem cell research, a decision he called "the most difficult I have encountered as a member of Congress."

In deciding to seek the Appropriations seat, his spokeswoman noted that "the Pacific Northwest is in need of another representative on the committee." Norm Dicks, D-Wash., and Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, are the only members from the region on the panel.

Cole, who has an eye on a career in leadership, can make his own claim to the seat. A party loyalist who in his first two terms established himself as a dependable and generous fundraiser for his fellow Republicans, he was elected as chairman of the National

Republican Congressional Committee for the current Congress — a difficult and possibly thankless challenge in the wake of the Democratic sweep of 2006.