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Familiar faces could define 2013 politics

By Salena Zito
Political Reporter

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Even without a presidential election, this could be a year of political change.

The 113th Congress, with 90 new members, began work on Thursday, and upheaval at the Capitol is likely to continue, especially with Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein's legislation to ban assault weapons.

President Obama's Jan. 21 inauguration starts his second term. If the Senate approves one of its own, Democrat John Kerry, as his choice for secretary of State, Massachusetts could hold a special election to replace Kerry. Two gubernatorial races, in New Jersey and Virginia, will attract attention.

Elsewhere, players to watch on the political scene are emerging. We highlight 13 for 2013:

HILLARY CLINTON

Though health scares sidelined her in recent weeks, people are wondering what the former first lady, U.S. senator from New York and outgoing secretary of State will do next. At 65, she remains one of the nation's most admired women in Gallup polling and is a favorite to become the Democratic Party's 2016 presidential nominee, although she has insisted she would not run. Her successful tenure as America's top diplomat stalled when the flu led to a fall, concussion and blood clot, delaying her testimony to Congress on the Sept. 11 terror attack in Libya that killed a U.S. ambassador and three others.

BILL CLINTON

No one in the history of modern politics has had a better do-over than the 42nd president. He can default to the angry, finger-pointing protagonist, but his speech at the 2012 Democratic National Convention showed he remains a masterful politician whose next move could be as important as that of his wife, Hillary. Some analysts believe his defiance and defensive attitude cost her the party's nomination to Obama in 2008. A calmer, gentler, vegan William Jefferson Clinton at 66 could help guide this American power couple back into the ultimate seat of power.

BOBBY JINDAL

The Louisiana governor boldly burst out of the gate after Obama's 2012 win, calling for an end to birth control politics and proposing that contraceptives become available over the counter. That brought a sigh of relief to many Republicans, as the GOP looks for a way to take touchy women's issues out of its platform. Jindal, 41,

chairs the Republican Governors Association, which will keep him in the national spotlight. Voters in his home state respect him for pushing through comprehensive ethics reform to end government corruption and his work to improve the state's weak bond rating and education system.

MARTIN O'MALLEY

The Maryland governor and chairman of the Democratic Governors Association gave a prime-time speech on the opening night of the party's convention and most Sundays appears on TV news shows in Washington, where people say it's the worst-kept secret that O'Malley, a musician who performs in D.C.-area bands, will run for higher office. He has made several trips for the party to Iowa and New Hampshire, key early primary states. Look for O'Malley, who turns 50 this month, to raise his national stature by proving his fundraising and candidate recruitment abilities, especially in states where Republicans won gubernatorial races in 2010.

NIKKI HALEY

The South Carolina Republican governor, who will celebrate her 41st birthday this month, made history twice in the past three years: as the first female governor in her state and by appointing Republican Rep. Tim Scott to replace outgoing Sen. Jim DeMint, making him the only black in the U.S. Senate. Haley, like Jindal, Scott, Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida and Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas, bucks the notion that the Republican Party lacks diversity in the South. Haley took on illegal immigration and voter ID in her first two years in office and fought a National Labor Relations Board lawsuit that sought to keep Boeing from opening a plant in the right-to-work state.

TIM SCOTT

The conservative congressman becomes the Senate's first black Republican since the 1978 defeat of Edward Brooke of Massachusetts. Scott, 47, grew up with a single mother who worked as a nurse's assistant to make ends meet. He owns an insurance brokerage in South Carolina and is a financial adviser. He ran on a platform of reducing government spending and taxes and can help the party espouse conservative values to minorities. If he wins the special election in 2014 for the final two years of DeMint's term, he would be the first black popularly elected to the Senate from a Southern state.

JIM DEMINT

The former senator from South Carolina and beacon for the Tea Party movement decided to take his gift for communication and knowledge of conservatism to the Heritage Foundation, a conservative, Washington-based policy group. DeMint, 61, who spent his private life in marketing and sales before running for Congress, told the Tribune-Review that he does not intend to politicize Heritage and will keep its respected scholarly programs intact. He wants to build conservatism from the ground up, which means influencing people by beginning at the local level.

NANCY PELOSI

There's a reason this former House speaker remains minority leader for Democrats: Though the party lost its majority in the chamber, she sees the potential to regain it, especially since Republican House Speaker John Boehner of Ohio was forced to make concessions in "fiscal cliff" negotiations. Few know how to twist arms for votes better than Pelosi, 72, of California, although many argue that arm-twisting on the stimulus package and health care law cost Democrats the majority in 2010. She told the Trib that among her proudest accomplishments were recruiting women and minorities to House seats.

THE TEA PARTY

Like other political movements that peaked and ebbed throughout American history, the Tea Party faces the challenge of remaking itself. Will its members affect primary races and deliver unpolished candidates who are unprepared for prime time, such as Richard Murdock in Indiana or Christine O'Donnell in Delaware? And with "compromise" considered a dirty word, will they cost Republicans control of the House with stubborn votes?

Most political movements last for two election cycles, and this one began to fade after huge wins in 2009 and 2010. It could regroup or morph as political will shifts.

PURPLE STRATEGIES

This bipartisan team of Washington strategists, including Republican Bruce Haynes, 45, and Democrat Steve McMahon, 52, proved in 2012 that political opposites can get along and be successful. It did what others could not: Poll accurately. Beginning with topsy-turvy Republican primaries, the data Purple Strategies collected through the November general election reflected voters' choices. As 2013 sets the stage for Obama's last midterm election, look for this firm's unbiased polling to provide insights on where the country is heading. Its members offer politicians savvy media strategies, making it integral to what's happening.

BURNS STRIDER

A Mississippi native, he's known around Washington as the man who can deliver the "God vote" for Democrats. Strider, 47, was instrumental in helping deliver control of the House and Senate to Democrats in 2006 by showing evangelical voters that Democrats care about their values. He worked tirelessly in 2008 for Hillary Clinton's failed presidential bid; when she lost, he established Eleison Group and then the nonprofit American Values Network. Watch for his influence in helping Democrats win back seats in the South and to leap to Clinton if she decides to run.

JOHN LAPP

If Democrats retake the House in 2014, it will be largely because of the work this partner at RalstonLapp does in 2013. His creative advertising aided Democratic victories for more than 20 years: from issue ads for the Democratic National Committee to more edgy work for Priorities USA, the SuperPAC supporting Obama's re-election. His firm won 80 percent of its campaigns in 2012, including sidelining five incumbent House Republicans. Lapp, 42, a former chief of staff to Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, has one motto — to win — and will continue to influence messaging, recruitment and candidate discipline.

BRAD TODD

A fifth-generation Tennessean, Todd's touch appeared to be everywhere for Republicans in 2010, and he helped steer wins by understanding politics at the local level. Todd, 42, and his team at OnMessage Inc., a Beltway-based media consulting firm, managed to keep Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker in office despite a recall election and to help the GOP hold its House majority in 2012, even gaining House seats from Pennsylvania, Arkansas, North Carolina and Kentucky. A former newspaper reporter, he'll be busy gearing up for Florida Gov. Rick Scott's re-election campaign and House midterms next year.

Burns Strider