

Stevens Indictment Puts Candidate Vickers in Spotlight

[By Rachel Kapochunas, CQ Staff](#)

In almost the blink of an eye, Alaskan [Vic Vickers'](#) political fortunes shifted from being a little-known Republican Senate candidate, with almost no chance of winning, to fielding phone calls from major media outlets around the country. It all happened in the wake of news that Republican Sen. [Ted Stevens had been indicted](#). Stevens, in office since December 1968, had been strongly favored to win his Aug. 26 Republican primary over lesser-known challengers, despite the ethical cloud that already hung over him. He was indicted Tuesday by a federal grand jury in Washington on seven felony counts of making false statements on his financial disclosure forms. In a statement Tuesday, Stevens said: "I am innocent of these charges and intend to prove that."

Immediately, Vickers, a lawyer and author, was in the national spotlight when it became clear he has a chance of winning the primary if Stevens resigns or posing a potentially strong challenge if the embattled lawmaker continues to run for re-election, which he has indicated he will do.

Vickers used that spotlight to his advantage Wednesday and held a press conference in front of Stevens' campaign office.

"I demanded that he resign today to stop the corruption," Vickers told CQ Politics following the event, adding, "he should have resigned yesterday."

He said the press conference was packed. "Every media outlet in town was there."

Vickers' campaign platform was centered on running against corruption and against Stevens even before the news broke. He was researching the oil and gas industry in Alaska for a book he is writing and said "the blatant corruption" tied to the industry "literally got me out of my writing chair" and prompted him to run for office. He filed for the Senate on the last day of the filing deadline.

He noted that he also takes issue with what he believes to be the senator's sense of entitlement. "He thinks he is the emperor of Alaska and he thinks he owns that office," Vickers said.

Vickers faces several hurdles in his quest. He is not well-known statewide. In addition, early polling before the indictment put one of his competitors, wealthy real estate developer David Cuddy, in second place in the Aug. 26 primary, but still far behind Stevens. Cuddy holds some statewide name recognition stemming from his unsuccessful 1996 campaign against the Senator.

But Vickers will raise his profile in the coming weeks. He had previously planned to begin running [television ads](#) Tuesday. He said he was able to alter one of the commercials at the last minute to add an image of a red "indicted" stamp.

Now, he says he'll run 5,000 television commercials and instructed his buyer to purchase spots on "every station" available. He said he is in the process of spending \$750,000 of his own money and has not solicited any campaign contributions.

He has pledged to refuse oil company and special interest money and as a critic of the oil industry, he expects them to push back against his campaign.

Nonetheless, like the majority of Alaskans, Vickers supports developing the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and says it can be done in an "environmentally safe" way.

This is Vickers' first run for office. He believes he's the "most qualified person in the race, including [Ted Stevens](#) ." Vickers has served in Florida as State Assistant Comptroller and chief of staff of the Department of Banking and Finance, represented environmental groups, victims of corporate fraud and financial institutions as a lawyer, is a businessman and an economic historian.

A total of seven Republicans will appear on the state's Republican ballot, including Stevens. The deadline to withdraw names from the ballot has passed, so even if Stevens resigns, voters will be able to cast ballots for him on primary day. National Republican Senatorial Committee Chairman Sen. [John Ensign](#) , who represents Nevada, declined to comment Wednesday on whether Stevens should get out of the race.

"There's an electoral process in place, and there's a legal process in place and we will let the process play out," Ensign said.

Ensign said he still considered Alaska to be a top-tier race, but he declined to comment on whether the NRSC would pare back the money it was going to spend on the race in light of Stevens' indictment.

If Vickers wins his longshot bid for the GOP nomination, his election battles will have just begun. The likely Democratic nominee, Anchorage Mayor Mark Begich, has been actively campaigning for the seat and has the strong support of state and national Democrats.

CQ Politics changed the rating for the race in the wake of the indictment news from Leans Republican to [Leans Democrat](#).

Kathleen Hunter contribute d to this story.

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