

EDITORIAL: Ensign in the money

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In a U.S. Senate brimming with partisan superstars and presidential candidates, Nevada Republican John Ensign holds a decidedly lower national profile. But that hasn't prevented his gradual ascent within the upper house of Congress.

Sen. Ensign, re-elected to a second six-year term last year, serves as chairman of the National Republican Senatorial Committee, a leadership position that puts him in charge of getting Republican candidates elected next year. And on Tuesday, Sen. Ensign was appointed to the Senate Finance Committee, as coveted an assignment as there is in Washington.

The Finance Committee oversees tax policy, which gives members the power to write legislation affecting every industry and worker in the country, as well as the recipients of Social Security and Medicare benefits. A seat on this panel is a tremendous honor and an enormous responsibility.

Sen. Ensign won the appointment over colleagues with more seniority, in part, because of his work with the senatorial committee. And Sen. Ensign was given that job, in part, because of his consistent voting record in support of spending restraint and fiscal conservatism. It was Sen. Ensign who insisted that illegal immigrants be denied Social Security benefits accrued under fraudulent documentation.

"It's important to recognize the efforts of people who do the heavy lifting around here on behalf of the whole team," said Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky.

To be sure, Sen. Ensign's voice will be limited by the fact that he's in the minority -- tax-and-spend Democrats will control Congress through next year. But that shouldn't prevent Sen. Ensign from using his seat to demand tax restraint and simplification and wholesale reforms for the country's insolvent entitlements.

Such advocacy would apply political pressure on Democrats who want to allow President Bush's income tax cuts to expire in 2011, then use that revenue to expand existing bureaucracies and create new social engineering schemes. And it might spur action to extend the existence of Social Security and Medicare beyond a couple of decades.

Sen. Ensign deserves congratulations for his latest promotion. Now he needs to make the most of it.