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Even as Alaska's Lisa Murkowski fretted all last week over whether to run as a write-in candidate for the job she lost in the Republican primary last month, the GOP leaders of the Senate tried to make that idea as punishing for her as they could in hopes she would decide to go away quietly.

She didn't, and instead unveiled a plan to seek a second full term without the party.

Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky had said publicly that it was time for Murkowski to "move on" after losing to Fairbanks lawyer Joe Miller, who was backed by tea party activists. McConnell later raised the ante, according to Miller, promising to deny Murkowski any seniority in the GOP caucus even if she asked to join after being re-elected to her second full term as a nominal independent.

Right now, she's got the top Republican seats on both the Energy and Natural Resources Committee and the Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee -- and so would in theory have the seniority to claim their gavels if the Senate turned Republican. She also has seats on the Indian Affairs and the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions panels.

Meanwhile, the chairman of the Senate GOP campaign operation, John Cornyn of Texas, said that if Murkowski stays in the race she will have to step down immediately from her position as vice chairwoman of the Republican conference. He then pledged hundreds of thousands of dollars to support Miller.

The promised punishments are a severe contrast to the way Senate Democratic leaders decided to ignore the apostasies of Joseph I. Lieberman -- first after he won as an independent in 2006 after losing the Connecticut Democratic primary, and then in 2008 when he worked to elect John McCain president. Despite grumbling on the left both times, Lieberman was allowed to keep his caucus seniority and then become chairman of the Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee.

This year, though, several Republicans have been turned out of office in primaries, and "the leadership fears the tea party base," says University of Virginia political scientist Larry J. Sabato. "They're riding a tiger. They don't want to end up inside."

Steven S. Smith, a political scientist at **Washington University in St. Louis**, said he doubts McConnell will follow through on his threat if Murkowski defeats Miller and Democrat Scott Adams on Nov. 2. "Winning tends to heal wounds," Smith said.

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