

McConnell would be too tough to replace

Sen. Mitch McConnell tells us that he believes "divided government is best," meaning splitting control of the legislative and executive branches between the Republicans and Democrats.

That's not to say the Kentucky Republican, the Senate minority leader, wouldn't like the GOP to come out on top of everything in this fall's elections. But McConnell is a political realist who sees the likelihood of the Democrats maintaining and probably expanding their majorities in the House and Senate. Working from the minority, he will have to have a bi-partisan approach if he wants to get things done.

"Leadership involves big egos and sharp elbows," he told the Enquirer Editorial Board. "We have a very ideologically diverse conference, but the way things happen is in the middle."

McConnell entered the Senate in 1984. In 2005 he became the longest serving senator from Kentucky in the state's history and in 2006 he became Senate Republican leader. He is not shy about using his position to benefit Kentucky, bringing home \$500 million in federal projects last year.

We often have decried the "earmarking" practice of legislators packing their favorite projects into federal spending bills. But McConnell is a master of the art and defends it as "a tussle over spending priorities between the administration and the legislature."

It's not that simple, of course. Earmarks warp the budgeting process to the whims of powerful members. The result is usually an increase in spending as members approve each other's piles of pork.

Still, it is beyond argument that McConnell's influence in this system has been good for Kentucky. The projects he brought into the state recently include \$5 million in earmarks for Northern Kentucky University. "Which part of that would you like rather seen go somewhere else?" he asked last month during a debate with his Democratic opponent, Bruce Lunsford.

McConnell's position as minority leader puts him in the middle of virtually every issue in Congress. That will be especially important in the coming term as Congress grapples with energy policy and the nation's crumbling highway infrastructure. Both issues are very close to Kentucky and Ohio

There is bipartisan support now for a varied energy policy that includes offshore drilling, and alternative fuels, including the development of clean coal. Kentucky and Ohio sit atop vast coal reserves and McConnell's position in Washington will benefit the region as those resources are developed.

Likewise, the Brent Spence Bridge across the Ohio River is a \$3.5 billion problem that will need strong federal support to fix - support McConnell will be in a position to provide.

Lunsford is a successful business man from Kenton County, who founded a multi-state health care company. He has the grit and intelligence to be a successful senator. He is correct that his experience in the health care industry could jump him to a position of prominence in a Democrat-controlled Senate. But he would still be a junior member from a small and relatively poor state. He might ably succeed McConnell, but it would be years before he could replace him.

For that reason we endorse McConnell for re-election to the U.S. Senate.

