

Fall 2011 Political Preview

October 2011

With Congress tied up with partisan posturing in advance of the 2012 presidential election, and with Republican candidates in particular jockeying for attention of the press and public, few statewide contests have much chance of gaining notice amid the fray.

But some interesting questions are being decided by voters this month and next, hence this short review.

GUBERNATORIAL CONTESTS

Only three states normally elect their constitutional officers in the odd-numbered years preceding a presidential election. Voters go to the polls in statewide general elections in Kentucky, Louisiana and Mississippi:

- In **Kentucky**, Democratic incumbent Steve Beshear seeks a second 4-year term in the face of a challenge from Republican state senate president David L. Williams.
- In **Louisiana**, incumbent Republican Bobby Jindal will square off on October 22 in an open nonpartisan primary ("jungle primary") against four Democrats, one Libertarian, and four independents. If no candidate wins more than half the vote, a runoff will be held in November. Jindal currently enjoys a comfortable lead over all nine challengers in polls and in fundraising.
- In **Mississippi**, incumbent Republican governor Haley Barbour is barred by term limits from seeking a third term. In Barbour's



Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal

stead, his lieutenant governor Phil Bryant will face Hattiesburg mayor Johnny DuPree. Mississippi is unusual in that if no candidate wins a majority of the votes in November, the contest will be decided in the Mississippi House of Representatives, which is currently controlled by the Democratic Party.

In addition, **West Virginia** voters choose a new governor in a special election on October 4. State Senate president Earl Ray Tomblin has been serving as acting governor since Gov. Joe Manchin won election to the U.S. Senate in 2010. Tomblin, a Democrat, faces Republican businessman Bill Maloney and six other candidates.

STATE LEGISLATIVE RACES

Four states hold general elections for the state legislature in November 2011.

- In **New Jersey**, Democrats currently control both chambers with a 24-16 edge in the Senate and a 45-32 margin in the House (with 3 vacancies). Republican governor Chris Christie, who has had a contentious relationship with legislative leaders, has launched a statewide ethics-based campaign in a bid to prevent his Democratic opponents from racking up veto-proof majorities. Candidates are competing in newly-drawn districts created by a nonpartisan Apportionment Commission.
- In **Louisiana**, Democrats will try to defend a 21-18 edge in the Senate, despite losing 5 members to term limits. In the House, Republicans will try to protect a 57-46-2 majority. Further roiling matters is redistricting, as Louisiana legislators will compete in districts already redrawn after the 2010 U.S. census.



New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie

- In **Mississippi**, a Republican Senate (27-24, with one vacancy) and Democratic House (69-53) cannot agree on new districts, so legislators are competing in the old ones; they may need to run again next year once new lines are drawn. (This last happened in 1992.) 16 incumbent Republicans and 10 Democrats reportedly face challengers in the Senate.

- The **Virginia** legislature is also split, with Democrats holding a 22-18 advantage in the Senate and Republicans up 58-39-2 in the House of Delegates (with 1 vacancy). But 16 Democratic senators face challenges this year, while only 3 Republicans have to work to hold onto their seats. A nonpartisan redistricting commission, appointed by the governor, redrew state legislative districts, but the General Assembly ignored its recommendations and substituted boundaries of its own that favored incumbents.

BALLOT QUESTIONS

Several states will be testing the mood of the electorate this year with controversial ballot questions.

Echoes of this year's labor standoff in Wisconsin will be ringing in **Ohio** where a referendum seeks to repeal legislation that limits collective bargaining for public employees. Voters will also weigh in on a proposed constitutional amendment that seeks to exempt Ohio residents from being required by federal law to purchase health insurance.

In **Maine**, where a newly Republican legislature and the feisty Tea Party-backed governor Paul LePage found common ground in the latter part of this year's legislative session, voters will be given a chance to overturn a bill that LePage signed ([LD 1376](#)) that eliminates Maine's tradition of same-day voter registration at polling places.

Maine voters will also be asked to endorse two gaming initiatives that would authorize a new resort casino in Lewiston and two "racinos" at or near harness racetracks.

(Under the latter measure, the slot machines could actually be situated as far as 25 miles from the track itself.) **New Jersey** voters will weigh in on a rare non-binding constitutional amendment that could lead to sports betting at casinos and racetracks, *but only if* a federal law banning such wagers is repealed or overturned.

As in Maine, **Mississippi** voters face a voting-rights question under [Initiative 27](#), which would require that voters present picture IDs at the polls. Two other ballot initiatives in Mississippi touch on conservative hot-button issues, both of which could affect gubernatorial and



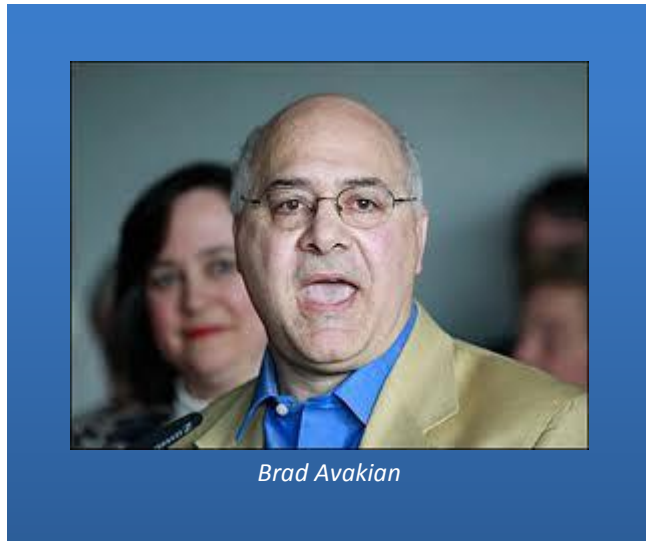
Maine Gov. Paul LePage

legislative races by influencing turnout. [Initiative 26](#) targets abortion by defining "human personhood" as beginning at the moment of fertilization, while [Initiative 31](#) seeks to enjoin state and local government from taking private property by eminent domain.

In the Northwest, **Washington** voters will find three initiative petitions on the ballot. Liquor wholesalers are behind another initiative asking voters to close a network of state-run liquor stores, while a union-backed measure would reimpose requirements for background checks and training for workers in nursing homes. Drivers incensed by the use of gas taxes and tolls to fund public transit have sponsored a measure that would prevent these revenues from being used for non-highway projects. If it passes, tolls could only be used to support the particular highway, bridge or tunnel where they were collected, and they could not vary by the time of day.

OREGON CONGRESSIONAL RACE

Congressional elections are held in even-numbered years, but November 8 will mark the special primary in Oregon's 1st District, where seven-term Rep. David Wu resigned in July.



Eight Democrats and five Republicans have filed to run for the open seat. Among them are Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian, state Sen. Suzanne Bonamici and state Rep. Brad Witt – all Democrats – and Portland businessman Rob Cornilles, a Republican who lost to Wu in 2010 by a 55%-43% margin.

Oregon elections are conducted by mail. Ballots will be mailed to voters beginning on October 21, and voters can cast their ballot from home. Ballots must be returned by 8 p.m. on Election Day.

The First District extend west from the city of Portland. Although the state's congressional districts are being redrawn as a result of the decennial U.S. Census, the election will be conducted using the existing (*i.e.*, old) district boundaries. The winners of the primary will face each other in a special election on January 31, 2012.

KEY MAYORAL CONTESTS

A variety of mayoral races around the country bear interest:

- For the first time in more than 90 years, **Portland, ME** voters get to elect their mayor directly. At last count, 15 names were on the nonpartisan ballot, including Nicholas Mavodones, an at-large city councilor who was elected to four terms as mayor by his fellow councilors. Also running as a write-in candidate is Erick Bennett, an aide to Gov. LePage who failed to submit enough nominating signatures.
- In Massachusetts, turnout in city elections tended to be low – 4.7% in Brockton, for example – as residents were distracted by the 2012 U.S. Senate race and the September collapse of their beloved Red Sox. **Springfield** city council president Jose Tosado faces an uphill battle against three-term mayor Domenic Sarno; nearby **Holyoke** expects a tighter race after political newcomer Alex Morse edged incumbent mayor Elaine Puta by one vote in September's nonpartisan preliminary contest. In **Fitchburg**, city councilor Joseph Solomito seems poised to unseat Lisa Wong, who made news four years ago when she was the first Asian female to be elected mayor in Massachusetts. Solomito decisively outpolled Wong in the preliminary election, capturing 60% of the vote and winning every precinct. In **Methuen**, local businessman Al DiNuccio narrowly edged at-large councilor Stephen Zanni in a four-way preliminary. Five candidates in **New Bedford**, including state representative Anthony Cabral, former federal prosecutor Jon Mitchell and councilor Linda Morad, are yet to be winnowed down to two in an Oct. 4 preliminary election. 33 other Massachusetts cities have mayoral contests scheduled, but most are uncontested.
- In **Philadelphia**, incumbent Michael Nutter is widely expected to win a second term. In **Baltimore**, interim mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake seems assured of winning her first full term as mayor, succeeding Sheila Dixon, who resigned in January 2010 as part of a plea deal after a conviction for "misappropriating" gift cards intended for the poor.



Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake

- Across the country, 16 candidates are competing in a "ranked choice" contest in **San Francisco**, including Edwin Lee, who in January was appointed by the city's Board of Supervisors to serve out Lieutenant Governor Gavin Newsom's unfinished term as mayor. Under the system adopted by voters in 2002, if no candidate earns a majority of first-choice votes, the lowest-ranked candidates are eliminated and their voters' second- and third-choice picks are reassigned to the remaining candidates; the process repeats until one candidate accrues 50% of the vote.



- In **Houston**, incumbent Annise Parker will face off against five challengers in seeking a second two-year term. Parker was a longtime city councilor in 2009 when she became the first openly gay candidate to be elected mayor of a major U.S. city.
- **Tucson** this year votes for the first time by mail ballot. Incumbent Republican mayor Bob Walkrup is stepping down in

this traditionally Democratic stronghold, so Democrat Jonathan Rothschild, a prominent local attorney, is considered the front-runner. Sole Republican city councilor Rick Grinnell had to resort to a write-in campaign to secure the Republican nomination. The Green Party is also fielding a candidate, Mary DeCamp.

- Elsewhere, **Raleigh** holds a three-way mayoral election on October 11; if no candidate wins a majority, a runoff will be held in November. In **Indianapolis** incumbent Greg Ballard faces Democratic and Libertarian opponents, while in **Columbus, OH** incumbent Democratic mayor Michael Coleman will defend his seat against Republican Earl Smith.