

Dems fighting to head off statewide sweep

by Jeremy Duda

Published: November 1st, 2010



(From upper left to lower right) Democratic candidates, Penny Kotterman, Andrei Cherny, Terry Goddard, Felecia Rottelini, Chris Deschene and Manuel Cruz.

Polling on Arizona's statewide races has consistently shown GOP candidates on top, and Republicans are optimistic that the anti-Democratic mood sweeping the state and the country will give them total control of state government.

Only a couple of relatively competitive races stand between Republicans and their first sweep of Arizona's six statewide offices since 1994, not including the Corporation Commission. Operatives on both sides of the aisle are eying the attorney general's race and possibly the treasurer's race as the Democrats' last hope of keeping the Republicans' entire statewide slate from winning on Nov. 2.

At the top of the ticket, Democratic gubernatorial nominee Terry Goddard has trailed by double digits in most polls. Two recent polls, one of which was commissioned by the Goddard campaign and another commissioned by the liberal

website Daily Kos, showed the attorney general down by just 8 or 9 points to Gov. Jan Brewer, though others have shown the governor with leads as high as 22 percentage points.

Most view attorney general candidate Felecia Rotellini as the Democrats' best chance of averting a sweep. On Oct. 20, an independent expenditure funded by the Democratic Attorneys General Association began a \$600,000 advertising campaign against GOP nominee Tom Horne, and an Oct. 12 Rocky Mountain Poll showed Rotellini trailing by just 4 points.

Privately, many Democrats worry that they'll be completely shut out of state government after the election. Publicly, some worry about the impact that will have in 2012, when President Barack Obama may not have much of a Democratic support base to lean on in Arizona, and in future state-level races.

Democratic consultant Mario Diaz said there is more at stake than just the Attorney General's Office, which has been the only statewide office held by Democrats since former Gov. Janet Napolitano's January 2009 resignation.

"There's an understanding that in four years from now, the Governor's Office will be open. Rotellini provides, currently, the best opportunity for a Democrat to win the Ninth Floor four years from now. I think this is one of the reasons why we've seen so much money in this race," said Diaz, of the firm Mario E. Diaz & Associates.

Andrei Cherny, the Democrats' candidate for treasurer, has also run a competitive race. The former state prosecutor raised \$616,000 and has run a vigorous television advertising campaign in the normally low-profile treasurer's race. Allegations of shoddy business practices and late property tax filings against his Republican opponent, former Cold Stone Creamery CEO Doug Ducey, gave him plenty of ammunition.

But Ducey still surpassed him in fundraising and has hit the airwaves hard as well.

"That one got a little nasty, which is fun to watch for a treasurer's race," said GOP consultant Chad Willems. "It could come down to both parties, both sides turning out their base."

If the downballot races do come down to voter turnout, Democrats' worst fears will likely be realized. Downballot races such as secretary of state, superintendent of public instruction and mine inspector generally get little attention from the media or the public, and are more reliant on larger voter registration trends.

Polls and surveys across the country show an "enthusiasm gap" that favors the GOP, and early voting returns in Arizona show Republicans turning in early ballots in significantly higher numbers than Democrats.

Of the 370,000 early ballots sent to registered Republicans in Maricopa County, 195,000 had been returned as of Oct. 27. Registered Democrats requested 275,000 early ballots and had returned 130,000, according to the Maricopa County Elections Department.

"I am admittedly a partisan cheerleader, but they're very high," Republican consultant Constantin Querard said of GOP's chances to sweep the statewide races. "Look at the early ballot numbers that are coming in. They're decidedly tilted toward the Republican voter."

Using polls to gauge the Democrats' chances is difficult because so little polling has been done on statewide races, said Fred Solop, a political science professor at Northern Arizona University. Most of the polling on Arizona's statewide races was commissioned by campaigns or partisan organizations or conducted using less reliable robocalls instead of live callers.

But an anti-Democrat mood that is expected to sweep Republicans to power in at least one chamber of Congress, as well as the widespread support for SB1070, Arizona's anti-illegal immigration law, clearly favors the GOP. Solop said there was little Democrats could have done to buoy their chances as a whole, though some individual candidates could have run better races.

"If you speak about specific races, maybe Terry Goddard could have started campaigning earlier," Solop said.

SB1070, the lawsuit filed against it by the U.S. Department of Justice and the boycotts it sparked against Arizona from some labor unions forced Democrats to defend unpopular positions and distance themselves from their party. Republicans unified behind the law and trumpeted a party-wide message that Democrats are soft on illegal immigration and are supported by unions that are boycotting Arizona, Solop said.

Some predicted that SB1070 would boost Hispanic turnout for Democratic candidates. But there are signs that the increased turnout won't materialize, such as a Pew Hispanic Center study from early October that predicted depressed Latino turnout.

Some Democrats hoped to benefit from increased Navajo turnout. The Navajo Nation election is on the same day as the general election, and Democratic secretary of state candidate Chris Deschene is the first Navajo to appear on a statewide ballot in Arizona.

Solop said increased Navajo turnout would help Democrats, but not as much as they need.

"That is a factor," he said. "But it's a very small proportion that we're talking about."

On Oct. 14, the Arizona Republican Party released a poll it commissioned that showed GOP candidates leading every statewide race. The press release included the subject line, "Clean sweep?"

Arizona Democratic Party spokeswoman Jennifer Johnson said she hopes that is not the case.

"I won't make any predictions for election night. All I can say is that we're working as hard as we can," she said.

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