



## Top of tickets expected to have impact on 2010 fight for Congressional seats

By Aaron Blake - 10/13/09 06:01 AM ET

Both parties expect the top of their 2010 ballots to have a major impact on Senate and House races across the country, even without a presidential race.

More than 20 open governors' seats are up for grabs in a busy midterm year, and more than a dozen Senate races are expected to be competitive. Races at the top of the tickets could push those down the ballot to victory or drag them to defeat.



In Nevada, Republicans worry their hopes of taking out Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) will be hampered by unpopular GOP Gov. Jim Gibbons.

New York Democrats are going through much the same thing with Gov. David Paterson (D), who could hinder their effort to retain several House districts the party has won over the last two elections.

While no one at the top of the ticket may have the impact President Barack Obama had for Democrats in 2008, top-ballot races in a midterm can have a pronounced effect, said Jim Campbell, a turnout expert at the University of Buffalo.

“It’s less than in a presidential race as far as we can determine, but still it’s significant,” Campbell said. “It works largely through turnout — having a popular candidate for high-level office will bring out more of that candidate’s partisans.”

The national environment helped Democrats win back Congress in 2006, but many of the party’s candidates benefited from help at the top of the ballot, too.

Only eight of 30 Democratic takeovers in the House came in states where the party lost the governor’s mansion, and only seven came in states where it lost a Senate race.

In 1994, when Republicans retook Congress in the first midterm of a new president, seven of the eight takeovers in the Senate came in states where they also won the governor's race. The only exception: an Independent governor winning in Maine.

Jennifer Duffy, a Senate and governor's-race analyst at The Cook Political Report, said it's about having as many strong candidates as possible in all races.

"A smart party like the Democrats in 2006 got as many credible candidates as possible so that, when the wave hit, they had surfers in the water to take advantage of it," Duffy said. "This is true up and down the ballot."

Sometimes a single candidate, or lack thereof, can ruin things for a party.

In Nevada, Republicans are still dealing with the prospect of the tremendously unpopular Gibbons running for reelection. With the primary field in flux, the race is up in the air and is weighing on other GOPers in the state, particularly those eyeing up Reid and Rep. Dina Titus (D).

Some Republicans make it crystal-clear they see Gibbons as a liability for those down the ballot.

"If Gov. Gibbons was the Republican nominee and you had a very strong Democratic nominee who happens to be Harry Reid's son, it can't help someone running as a Republican candidate," said Wall Street banker John Chachas, one of several Republicans challenging Harry Reid.



A similar situation is playing out in New York, where Paterson's approval rating rivals Gibbons's. Paterson has rebuffed White House suggestions that he step aside in 2010.

At a sit-down with reporters recently, Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC) Chairman Robert Menendez (N.J.) suggested having Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) on the ballot would help mitigate any damage caused by Paterson.

"Sen. Schumer, no matter who is on the top of that ticket, is going to drive Democrats to be supportive of that pick," Menendez said.

In Kansas, Democrats don't even have major candidates for governor or in Senate races that are expected to be steep uphill climbs.

That could be a problem for state Sen. Laura Kelly (D), who on Friday signed up to face freshman Rep. Lynn Jenkins (R) for a seat Democrats lost last cycle.

Kelly said she's confident she'll have some help up the ballot, but she's relying on herself.

"I think that issue will resolve itself shortly," Kelly said. "It's always nice to have good candidates on the ballot, but regardless, we will run the same sort of campaign."

Republicans think the down-ballot effect from the governor's race could pay dividends for them in states like Colorado, Iowa and Pennsylvania, in addition to Kansas. The party's recruits in Iowa and Pennsylvania are both polling double-digit leads, while Colorado Gov. Bill Ritter (D) has seen his numbers fall in recent months.

Republicans also feel that a competitive race against Sen. Blanche Lincoln (D-Ark.) could help them break through in one or two House districts held by conservative Democrats, and they think Reid could be a bigger weight on Nevada Democrats than Gibbons is on Republicans.

For their part, Democrats believe a pair of vulnerable House members in New Mexico could benefit from Lt. Gov. Diane Denish's (D) popularity in the governor's race, and that a pair of Alabama freshmen could gain from the black turnout created by Rep. Artur Davis's (D-Ala.) gubernatorial candidacy.

Both parties will keep a keen eye on Ohio, where each side feels it has strong candidates in races for both Senate and governor. However those races turn out will figure in several big House races.

Source:

<http://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/62701-top-of-the-ticket-expected-to-have-big-impact-on-2010-fight-for-house-and-senate>

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