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ERG's Pennsylvania Pre-election Assessment 2020

The Presidential election has seen both camps in and out of Pennsylvania regularly, as the Trump camp sees the state as one of a half-dozen critical states as keys to an electoral college victory, and former VP Biden's camp wants to win one or two of those six outright to forestall a lengthy battle in the courts. Strategies differ, with the Democrats focusing on early voting in those states, and Republicans looking at more traditional get out the vote programs. One national poll earlier this week suggested that 86% of Republicans plan to vote on Election Day. That means election night when you just count the results from the day's voting, Trump may well lead in Pennsylvania, but given the rules of mail-in voting and counting, a week later, Biden may well be the winner.

President Trump won Pennsylvania by just 44,000 votes in 2016, and Republicans have reduced their voter registration deficit by almost 250,000 voters in the last four years. Polls in Pennsylvania have been showing Biden with a 5-9 percent lead among registered voters and 4-6% among likely voters. One observation: compared to 2016, Biden's polling is slightly better than Clinton's; the continuing daily COVID-19 message is not helping Trump; the Biden team is much better organized than Clinton's was in 2016; and early voting has brought in four times as many Democratic and "other" votes than Republican votes in the last two weeks.

U.S. House of Representatives

Pennsylvania's 18 congressional seats are up for election, with the seats split 9-9 between the parties. Democrats hope to pick up one or even two seats in the House.

In Central Pennsylvania's 10th District, Congressman Scott Perry is being challenged by Democratic state Auditor General Eugene DePasquale where the race is considered a dead heat. The other potential pickup is the always competitive 1st District in Bucks County, where incumbent GOP Congressman Brian Fitzpatrick is being challenged by Christine Finello, an attorney and Borough Councilwoman. Democrats also hope to make inroads in northwestern PA where GOP Congressman Mike Kelly is being challenged by Kristy Gnibus, a schoolteacher, single mom and cancer survivor from Erie.

Republicans are looking to unseat Democrat Conor Lamb in southwestern Pennsylvania with challenger Sean Parnell, a retired Army officer, author and Afghan-vet.

PA Statewide Row Offices

Attorney General

Incumbent Democrat Josh Shapiro is running for re-election as the State's Attorney General. He is being challenged by Republican attorney Heather Heidelbaugh, a trial lawyer from Pittsburgh.

State Treasurer

Current state treasurer Joe Torsella, a Democrat, is running to keep his seat, and is opposed by Republican Stacy Garrity, a retired Colonel decorated in Iraq, and vice president of a global supplier of refractory powders.

State Auditor General

The Auditor General race has Democrat Nina Ahmad of Philadelphia, a small business owner and Deputy Mayor of Philadelphia running against Republican Timothy DeFoor, the Dauphin County Controller who has 25 years of experience as a special agent in law enforcement and auditing.

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GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Democrats are openly talking about taking control of either or both the state Senate and House of Representatives in 2020. Democrats would have to flip four of 25 Senate seats on the ballot, and nine of the 203 House seats. In 2018, Democrats picked up 5 seats in the Senate and 11 seats in the House in Gov. Wolf's landslide victory.

Reports show Governor Wolf's Political Committee has spent more than \$2.8 million on state House and Senate races this year, and just four Democratic campaign committees have spent more than \$16.9 million in 2020.

In their most recent update for state legislative elections, the Cook Political Report called the state House a "Toss Up" while keeping the Pennsylvania Senate at "Lean Republican." Control takes on additional importance because of the reapportionment after the 2020 census.

PA State Senate

Half of the state's upper chamber is on the ballot this year. Only two Senators are retiring, but their districts are considered "safe" politically for the parties in control. Democrats hope to pick up four Republican seats and hold on to their own, which would give them effective control at 25-24 with one Independent.

State Sens. John DiSanto (R-Dauphin) and Tom Killion (R-Delaware), who represent the 9th and 15th Districts, eked out victories by around 3 points in their most recent reelection bids and are squarely in the bullseye for Democrats. DiSanto faces Democrat George Scott, who came within four points of unseating Congressman Scott Perry in 2018. Killion is opposed by John Kane, business manager for the Plumbers Union.

State Sen. Dan Laughlin (R-Erie) won by about 7 points in 2016, and Democrats have put up Julie Slomski, Governor Wolf's northwest regional director against him, in what may be a close race as well. Democrats are also hoping to make inroads in Lancaster County against Sen. Scott Martin.

Democrats are heavily invested in protecting three of their own, Sens. Judy Schwank (D-Berks), Pam Iovino (D-Allegheny), and Jim Brewster (D-Allegheny). Trump carried both Brewster and Iovino's districts in 2016. Iovino's Republican challenger Devlin Robinson is a Marine combat veteran of three tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, who started his business, Veterans Medical Technology, when he returned from overseas.

State House of Representatives

All 203 seats in the state's House of Representatives are on the ballot, and much like in the Senate, Democrats are hoping to take control of the lower chamber. They need to flip at least nine seats on top of retaining their current 93 to gain a majority. Nearly a dozen state house races in 2018 were decided by less than 500 votes.

More than a third (74) of the districts have candidates without opposition on the ballot. Of the 129 districts with contested races, only about three dozen are really competitive. Nevertheless, both parties have targeted races in their efforts to control the two chambers in the next session, which could set the stage for a decade of political campaigns in the state. . In 2016, the GOP held 120 districts, and by 2018, that number was reduced to 109.

The Democratic Party has focused on no less than 35 districts outside of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh and Luzerne County, where neither party has an overwhelming majority of registered voters.

The GOP is looking to hold its seats in the suburbs and to flip Democratic seats largely in districts where President Trump won in 2016. Fifteen seats fit this category, with many in the Allegheny County area, but less than ten are considered realistic targets. And most of the Democratic members in these districts have consistently voted with the Republican caucus on policy issues throughout 2020, including votes to override the Governor through the summer and fall.