

Bellwether: Gubernatorial Finalists Picked

Virginia Election

Ever since President Donald Trump was inaugurated, Democrats have been desperate to win one of the several special elections to fill seats vacated by the president's cabinet members.

And they have, so far, failed miserably.

In Virginia, an election later this year will likely prove to be a true bellwether for the 2018 mid-term congressional elections. There, two big names in their respective parties will square off, just two hours south of our nation's capital, to decide whether the state will be red or blue.

Last November, the president won 96 of the state's 137 county equivalent jurisdictions, but former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton won its 13 electoral votes by a margin of 212,000 votes. Republicans control the Senate with a 21-19 majority and the House of Delegates with an even larger 66-34 majority. But Gov. Terry McAuliffe—a longtime friend and ally of Clinton—and Lt. Gov. Ralph Northam are Democrats.

McAuliffe is constitutionally barred from running for reelection, making this November's election a potential referendum on the GOP's unified federal government 100 miles away.

Tuesday evening, Northam won his party's primary election with 55.9 percent of the vote over former Rep. Tom Perriello. Both candidates accused the president and Republicans of being a "party of hate" both during the campaign and in their respective victory and concession speeches.

On the GOP side, former RNC Chairman Ed Gillespie won a much narrower victory in a more crowded field, taking the nomination with 43.7 percent of the vote over the president's Virginia campaign chairman, Corey Stewart, who received 42.5 percent of the vote, and State Sen. Frank Wagner. The final margin between Gillespie and Stewart was 4,300 votes.

The primary was seen by many observers as a rehash of the establishment versus the base fight that dominated the 2016 Republican presidential primary race. Gillespie, who is closely aligned to the Bush family, attempted to ignore Stewart who attacked him on a wide range of issues including immigration and abortion, much like former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush attempted to brush off the president in 2016, which nearly cost him the race.

Stewart's strength suggests Trump voters are still energized, despite media polls that suggest the president's approval rating is hovering around 30 percent in Virginia. {eoa}