



THE VIEW

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PREVIEW OF COMING ATTRACTIONS

BY

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Off on the far horizon the storm clouds are gathering, indicating that the drought of electoral politics will soon be coming to an end. Lest we needed any reminder of that, we witnessed a micro version of what is to come in the most recent “off, off year” elections. New Jersey, Virginia, and New York House District 23 provided the morsels of news to feed the election-hungry cable news beasts. The results might be best described as a definite ray of hope for Republicans only recently (2006) removed from being in charge and a wake-up call for Democrats who are just becoming reaccustomed to flexing their leadership muscles again. The morning after the November 3 elections signified to political junkies everywhere that the 2010 mid-term elections were now officially less than a year away. Between 2010 and the Presidential and Congressional Elections of 2012 Mississippi will hold its 2011 Statewide Elections.

In 2010, all 435 seats in the United States House of Representatives are up for election and counting special elections a total of 36 Senate seats will be filled. Expert national political observers at Congressional Quarterly Politics have labeled 99 House seats as being “competitive,” meaning that the outcomes of elections in these districts are not forgone conclusions as is the case in a majority of House districts. Of these, 67 are held by Democrats and 32 are held by Republicans. The November 3rd elections have the Republicans ecstatic that this may be an indication that the voting public may be heading toward a repudiation of the Democrats and the Obama administration. The current 257 to 178 Democratic advantage may be a steep hill to climb, but traditionally big gains have been made by the “out party” in elections where the White House is not being contested. Of the 36 Senate seats up for election, 18 are in Republican hands and 18 belong to the Democratic Party. Congressional Quarterly rates two Democratic seats as toss ups and seven Republican seats as toss ups. Once the New Year dawns virtually every piece of legislation will be affected by the anticipation of Election Day 2010. That is why there is a growing sense of desperation to get health care reform legislation out of the way before Christmas recess.

The 1st Congressional District of Mississippi is one of those districts that Congressional Quarterly lists as “in play” in the 2010 race. Democratic incumbent Travis Childers is a Congressional Blue Dog who was elected from a recently traditional Republican district that

was carried by Republican Presidential candidate John McCain in 2008 and George W. Bush before that. He is being opposed by stalwart Republican Alan Nunnelee of Tupelo who currently chairs the powerful Appropriations Committee in the Mississippi Senate. To hear many Republicans in the 1st District tell it, the race is between Senator Nunnelee and U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Congressman Childers knows the district well, which is something he clearly demonstrated in hammering through special elections and the general election to first gain and then hold his seat. He has to be concerned about the “friend of Pelosi” label and about fall off of the African-American and youth vote that was apparent in the recent Virginia gubernatorial elections. While Republican Nunnelee has the advantage of running in a district where there are plenty of folks accustomed to voting Republican, dangers for him lurk in the monumental task of crafting a State Budget in perilous economic times and perhaps differing with powerful Republican Governor Haley Barbour in the process.

There will be no time whatever for voters to catch their collective breaths following 2010 because the 2011 statewide elections in Mississippi will crank up the morning after. Open seats for Governor and other down ticket races are sure to draw large numbers of candidates from both parties. Perhaps the more intriguing questions surrounding this election have to do with legislative races. Legislative redistricting must take place in a very tight timeframe and in a highly partisan atmosphere prior to the 2011 races. If raw partisanship delays adoption of redistricting plans for the Mississippi House and Senate respectively, then the possibility looms for a repeat of the 1990 scenario in where elections had to be held in the old district one year and the new districts the next. If that were to happen, that could throw the second election into the same election day as the Presidential election with the Democratic incumbent President most likely heading the ticket.

Then there is the 2012 Presidential race itself, along with the next round of Congressional races. Prior to that time, big issues like health care reform, a couple or three wars, environmental legislation and a mountainous deficit must be dealt with. The momentum that accompanied President Obama into the White House last January was nowhere to be found on November 3, 2009. Polls say that despite public concern with the mounting issues facing the country, Obama remains personally popular. Does that mean that those of his passionate supporters among the young and minorities who helped to put him in office will wait until he is once again on the ballot to show up, or can they be rallied to his cause in 2010 and in races for the State Houses? Stay tuned for some of the best politics imaginable.



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