

Elections in the South

The Way Things Go Down on Tuesday November 2nd

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Global Research, November 01, 2010

1 November 2010

Region: [USA](#)
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Free Speech TV will be covering the elections Tuesday evening from Busboys and Poets restaurant in Washington, D.C. I'll be on the same channel earlier in the day via Al Jazeera, but the evening extravaganza at Busboys promises to be a lively affair with commentary from a variety of panels, as well as people who've just shown up to dine and to try their best to digest what's becoming of our democracy.

Norman Solomon and I will be discussing the fate of progressivism at around 12:30 a.m. ET on Wednesday for anyone who's still awake and sober, but at 8:40 pm ET Glen Ford and I will be considering the elections in Florida, South Carolina, and Virginia — and I hope North Carolina as well. This should prove an interesting discussion, as is any that Glen Ford is in, but for additional reasons as well.

The nice thing about vacationing in Florida, they say, is that it's so close to the United States. The nation will not necessarily go the way Florida goes on Tuesday, but the way things go down on Tuesday could determine how Florida is redistricted and governed, which could have an impact on future Congresses and future presidential elections. Florida has 25 congressional districts and is likely to gain two more in redistricting. Most of the 25 districts, like most districts around the country, are guaranteed for incumbents for life in large part through the power of creative gerrymandering. Two amendments that will be voted on in this election would, if passed, reduce gerrymandering in state legislative and congressional districts.

Also at stake on Tuesday is the governor's office. The incumbent, Charlie Crist, is running for the U.S. Senate, and the contest to replace him could be tight enough to require a recount, or rather a "recount" since most votes will be cast on machines that allow no meaningful recount or any means whatsoever of verifying an accurate tally. The contestants include a progressive Independent named Michael Arth, Republican Rick Stott, and Democrat Alex Sink. Stott is the former CEO of a healthcare (denial) corporation that just after he left paid the largest ever fine for Medicare fraud and pled guilty to a list of felonies, and also the founder of an astroturf group formed to lobby against health insurance reform. Sink is the former head of the Florida division of a mega-bank and the current Chief Financial Officer of the state of Florida. No matter which way the governor's race goes, the legislature will likely remain Republican-controlled.

In the U.S. Senate race in Florida, Republican George LeMieux is retiring and is considered likely to be replaced by super-rightwing Tea Party Republican Marco Rubio. However, there is the possibility that Rubio will lose to Independent Charlie Crist. Also running is Democrat Kendrick Meek, plus a Libertarian and a Constitution Party candidate. Crist supported the stimulus bill last year and would caucus with the Democrats in the Senate if he wins, which

would help prevent the Republicans from building on their 41-seat filibuster-rule-empowered majority. Former President Bill Clinton reportedly asked Meek to pull out in order to improve Crist's chances, but Meek stayed in.

Of Florida's 25 districts, 15 are now held by Republican House members. Of the six districts where the election contest is considered to be any sort of contest, four are currently held by Democrats. One of them is the Eighth district, where freshman Alan Grayson has often shown his colleagues how to stand up for the will of the people. Grayson has brought in more money and volunteer help for his campaign than any other candidate for Congress and enjoys national support among progressives. He urged Americans to lobby his colleagues against war funding. But this brave new post-Citizen's-United world of unlimited corporate electioneering has seen more funding pour into opposition to Grayson than any other candidate, and he is expected to lose a seat that was held by Republicans for decades prior to 2008. The Republican challenger, Daniel Webster, takes on Grayson and a Tea Partier and a Whig Party member and an Independent. Grayson calls Webster "Taliban Dan" for his opposition to women's rights, including his insistence that rape victims give birth to their babies. Webster also favors privatizing Social Security. Florida's second, 22nd, and 24th districts could also turn Republican. If they all do, Democrats could be in for a long night.

South Carolina's incumbent governor and Argentine adulterer Mark Sanford is out because of a term limit, having survived impeachment efforts. Democrat Vince Sheheen takes on Republican Nikki Haley and Green Morgan Bruce Reeves. Haley is of Indian ancestry and a Sikh. A state senator in South Carolina called both her and President Obama "ragheads," even though she wears no head covering and Obama changes his travel plans to avoid any nations that would require one. Haley claims to believe both Sikh and Methodist religious teachings. Various male politicians have claimed, probably falsely, to have slept with her. It would be interesting to see exit-polling and turn out numbers that might help gauge whether rightwingers fail to back Haley for racist reasons.

The state senate in South Carolina will likely stay Republican, and there are no House elections.

In the U.S. Senate race, Republican Senator Jim DeMint, who takes credit for blocking hundreds of bills passed by the U.S. House and allowed to rot, will likely defeat Democrat Alvin Greene. Greene came out of nowhere to "win" the Democratic primary on completely unverifiable voting machines, despite the protests of the man who "lost."

South Carolina has six congressional districts, four of them Republican. That could increase to five. In congressional primaries around the country this year, four incumbents out of 400 or so actually lost. One was Bob Inglis in South Carolina's Fourth. Inglis had badmouthed Glenn Beck and voted to reprimand Rep. Joe Wilson (R-SC) for shouting "You lie!" at Obama. Inglis also voted for TARP, aka the Bankster Bailout of 2008. He lost to "outsider" Trey Gowdy, but the seat will likely stay Republican. In the Fifth District, however, Democratic Congressman John Spratt may struggle against Republican Young Gun Mick Mulvaney and the piles of money backing him.

Potentially boosting rightwing turnout across South Carolina is an anti-labor rights amendment on the ballot that would prevent card-check organizing under the guise of "protecting the right to a secret election," a measure apparently created in response to the threat of Congress passing the Employee Free Choice Act, which the outgoing Congress will

have to live with never having even attempted.

My own state of Virginia has no gubernatorial or state legislative races or U.S. senate race. Of 11 districts, six are currently Republican. That could change to 8 or more for January. In my district, conservative war-backing, NRA-supported Democrat Tom Perriello won his first election in 2008 by less than one percentage point. Republican challenger Robert Hurt and Perriello have both dumped more money into the race than most television viewers can suffer without signs of physical illness. Perriello is President Obama's model of a loyal partisan Democrat, but that turns off people on the right, as well as those of us who care about the balance of powers and who oppose this war economy. Most polls predict Hurt winning, and tea partier Jeff Clark picking up very few votes.

In Virginia's Second District incumbent Democrat Glenn Nye should lose to Republican challenger Scott Rigell. In the Ninth, incumbent Democrat Rick Boucher could lose to Republican nominee and Majority Leader of the Virginia House of Delegates Morgan Griffith. In the 11th, incumbent Democrat Gerry Connolly faces a challenge from Keith Fimian who lost to him in 2008.

And over in the Seventh District, Republican Whip Eric Cantor is predicted to easily defeat progressive challenger Rick Waugh, despite refusing to debate him and despite police officers roughing up a Democrat who happened to be in a public restaurant where Cantor held a public event.

North Carolina is worth watching. GOP complaints of machines flipping votes have resulted this week in a court order to post warnings at polling places, as if being warned that there is no way to verify the vote counting will somehow improve the vote counting. The state legislature is up for grabs. Both houses are Democratic now and could switch, which could determine how redistricting is done.

In the U.S. Senate race we could see Democratic challenger Elaine Marshall unseat Republican Senator Richard Burr. No incumbent has been reelected to this seat since 1968. Libertarian Michael Beitler is also in the race.

In North Carolina, eight of the 13 districts belong to Democratic congress members, and that could climb to nine or drop to seven. In the Eighth District, Democratic incumbent Larry Kissell is being challenged by Republican nominee and retired TV sportscaster Harold Johnson. But in the Tenth, Republican incumbent Patrick McHenry survived a close primary in which he was outspent and is being challenged by political newcomer and Democratic nominee Jeffrey Dale Gregory.

Another race is of interest despite the outcome being almost certain. Democratic incumbent Mike McIntyre is expected to be reelected even in a right-leaning district, but the Republican nominee Ilario Pantano represents a certain extreme of Tea Partyism in that he shot two unarmed Iraqis at point-blank range and says he has no regrets. On the North Carolina ballot is a measure that would bar felons from serving as Sheriff in the state. It would not, however, apply the same standard to congress members.

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