

Analysis: Election lessons will shape '10 campaign

By LIZ SIDOTI
AP National Political Writer

WASHINGTON — What we learned from the off-year elections: The president's influence is limited, independents rule, incumbents beware, issues trump ideology and, once more, "It's the economy, stupid."

Also: Republicans can win — even if they lack a leader and their base is cracked. And this certainly isn't the Democratic-friendly political environment of 2006 and 2008 when the party captured control of Congress and the White House.

The first Election Day of Barack Obama's presidency was a big night for Republicans, who recaptured governorships in the swing state of Virginia and the Democratic stronghold of New Jersey. Democrats won two races for vacant congressional seats, including one in upstate New York that had been long held by Republicans and that exposed a GOP divide.

So, what did we learn about politics, people and their priorities from the handful of races on Tuesday? And how will those lessons shape the maneuvering of Republicans and Democrats ahead of 2010 midterms, when Obama's prestige will be put to the test across the country?

The results don't seem to bode well for Obama and his party heading into a high-stakes year as they look to advance an expensive domestic agenda while protecting the Democrats' grip on House, Senate and gubernatorial seats nationwide. They'll try to win over people in a country clouded by a job-killing recession, divided over war and, as Tuesday's results showed, fed up with the powers that be — no matter the political party.

Among the lessons learned:

Obama's political power is limited

"Yes, we can!" has turned into "Yes, we can — if we feel like it!"

The broad coalition — minorities, young people, first-time voters, Republican crossover and independents — that fueled Obama's victory was a 2008 phenomenon; it can't be counted on if the man himself is not on the ballot. Even though Obama personally implored his supporters to turn out in droves, voters rejected incumbent Democratic Gov. Jon Corzine in New Jersey and Democratic candidate R. Creigh Deeds in Virginia.

That could be a prob-

lem for Democratic lawmakers in swing states and conservative-to-moderate districts next fall because Obama won't be on the ballot to drive up turnout. Candidates carried into office in the Obama wave will be vulnerable in 2010 — with no lifeguard to help. And that could influence how those lawmakers vote in Congress in the meantime — perhaps threatening the president's priorities.

With Obama unable to guarantee their political survival, what's the incentive for them to back his legislative agenda?

Independents are kingmakers

Voters who don't claim a political party again proved their value by propelling Republicans to victory in Virginia and New Jersey one year after carrying Obama to the White House.

Independents are, well, truly independent — and, thus, are extraordinarily fickle.

Last year, hope and change tilted them toward Democrats. This year, anger and frustration tilted them to Republicans. They broke 2-1 for GOP victors Chris Christie in New Jersey and Bob McDonnell in Virginia.

Issues, from jobs to taxes to government spending, drive this center of the electorate, so candidates who talk about what independents care most about will win the middle and, thus, elections.

Democrats must figure out a way to bring independents back into their fold — or risk huge losses next fall.

Still, Republicans must be mindful of the volatile nature of public attitudes, for independents who have moved toward the GOP since last fall could just as easily move back to the Democrats by next November.

Incumbents, beware

This means you, Mr. President, as well as Democrats who control Congress and even Republicans in certain seats. If you're in office, voters are coming after you.

In the midst of recession, people vented their frustrations by ousting Democrats from power in New Jersey and Virginia. And Democrat Bill Owens won a House seat held for decades by Republicans in a special election in upstate New York.

Also, in New York City,

independent Mayor Michael Bloomberg barely won a third term against a little-known, poorly funded Democratic challenger. Voters generally approved of Bloomberg's job performance but resented his aggressive effort to get the city's term limits law lifted and his spending as much as \$100 million of his own money to stay in power.

Anger at both parties also manifested itself in third-party candidacies, including in New Jersey. Still, independent Chris Daggett faced traditional obstacles to becoming a serious threat: financial and organizational difficulties.

Issues, economy trump ideology

Voters have spoken: Issues like God, guns and gays take a back seat in a recession.

In Virginia, McDonnell proved that a socially conservative Republican can win in a Democratic-trending state if the focus is on pocketbook issues. Deeds went after McDonnell over conservative positions on so-called "values issues" but the Republican didn't take the bait. In New Jersey, Christie — a moderate Republican — found success by sticking to core local issues, taxes and jobs.

Both winners de-emphasized social issues in favor of solutions for problems people were facing in their own backyards, jobs, transportation and taxes among them.

Voters rewarded them; Both McDonnell and Christie were seen as running more positive campaigns.

In polling-place surveys, a jaw-dropping 85 percent in Virginia and 89 percent in New Jersey said they were worried

about the economy — even though there are signs of recovery. But jobs aren't yet returning, and trouble looms for Democrats if people still aren't feeling improvement next fall.

As the sign famously said in Bill Clinton's campaign war room in 1992, while there might be a temptation to focus on other issues, always remember, "It's the economy, stupid."

2006, 2008 are gone; GOP can win

The warm and fuzzy feelings voters had for Democrats in back-to-back national elections are history.

George W. Bush as a political punching bag doesn't work anymore; Democrats tried to use him against Christie and failed.

And now, after riding a wave of change to power, Democrats are the incumbents facing an electorate rich with anti-incumbent sentiment.

Of course, individual candidates matter, too, and in New Jersey and Virginia, Democrats ran candidates whom voters just didn't seem to like much.

Victories in both states have given Republicans a much-needed morale boost. And the wins proved that Republicans can find success if their candidates gravitate toward the middle and are responsive to the voters' mood. That approach allowed the GOP to successfully woo independents.

But the defeat in New York's 23rd Congressional District, after a nasty race in which the GOP-picked candidate dropped out under pressure from conservatives, served as yet another warning sign: The Republicans aren't out of the woods either.

Entertainment News

Palin book tour to start Nov. 18

NEW YORK (AP) — Sarah Palin's book tour is a gift for her base.

No stops are planned in Seattle, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Los Angeles and other major cities and book-buying communities that are standard for authors on the road, but where the voters tend to be Democrats.

Beyond a Nov. 16 television interview with Oprah Winfrey, nothing is scheduled for Chicago. New York will feature media appearances only. Instead, the itinerary for Palin, whose "Going Rogue" comes out Nov. 17, includes Noblesville, Ind.; Washington, Pa.; and Rochester, N.Y.

"She wants to be unconventional." She is unconventional," HarperCollins spokeswoman Tina Andreadis said Wednesday. "She feels like this is where her fans are and Harper feels this is where she'll sell the most books."

"Going Rogue" has an announced first printing of 1.5 million copies and has been at or near the top of Amazon.com's best-seller list for weeks.

On Wednesday, ABC News announced that Barbara Walters would interview Palin, to air in five parts over three ABC News broadcasts — "Good Morning America," "Nightline" and "20/20," starting the morning of publication day.

On her Facebook site, Palin says she's hoping to do interviews with others, including Rush Limbaugh and Fox News Channel personalities Bill O'Reilly, Sean Hannity, Glenn Beck and Greta Van Susteren.

Obama's half brother recalls abuse

GUANGZHOU, China (AP) — President Obama's half brother has broken his media silence to discuss his new novel — the semi-autobiographical story of an abusive parent patterned on their late father, the mostly absent figure Obama wrote about in his own memoir.

In his first interview, Mark Ndesandjo told The Associated Press that he wrote "Nairobi to Shenzhen" in part to raise awareness of domestic violence.

"My father beat my mother and my father beat me, and you don't do that," said Ndesandjo, whose mother, Ruth Nidesand, was Barack Obama Sr.'s third wife. "It's something which I think affected me for a long time, and it's something that I've just recently come to terms with."

Like his novel's main character, Ndesandjo had an American mother who is Jewish and who divorced his Kenyan father. The novel, which goes on sale Wednesday by the self-publishing company Aventine Press, is one of several books in the works by relatives of the president.

President Obama's parents separated two years after he was born in Hawaii in 1961. The senior Obama, a Kenyan exchange student, divorced the president's mother, Stanley Ann Dunham, in 1964 and had at least six other children in his native Kenya.

Ndesandjo, who said he attended Obama's inauguration as a family guest, declined to discuss his earliest memories of the president or describe their relationship over the years. However, he said he plans to meet his brother in Beijing when the president makes his first visit to China on Nov. 15-18.

Gay leaders blame TV ads, Obama for loss in Maine

By The Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Stunned and angry, national gay rights leaders Wednesday blamed scare-mongering ads — and President Obama's lack of engagement — for a bitter election setback in Maine that could alter the dynamics for both sides in the gay-marriage debate.

Conservatives, in contrast, celebrated Maine voters' rejection of a law that would have allowed gay couples to wed, depicting it as a warning shot that should deter politicians in other states from pushing for same-sex marriage.

"Every time the citizens have voted on marriage, they have always sided with natural marriage," said Mathew Staver, founder of Liberty Counsel, a Florida-based Christian legal group. "Maine dramatically illustrates

the will of the people, and politicians should wake up and listen."

Gay activists were frustrated that Obama, who insists he staunchly supports their overall civil rights agenda, didn't speak out forcefully in defense of Maine's marriage law before Tuesday's referendum. The law was repealed in a vote of 53 percent to 47 percent.

"President Obama missed an opportunity to state his position against these discriminatory attacks with the clarity and moral imperative that would have helped in this close fight," said Evan Wolfson of the national advocacy group Freedom to Marry. "The anti-gay forces are throwing millions of dollars into various unsubtle ads aimed at scaring people, so subtle statements from the White House are not enough."

YOU CAN WIN!



Check your mailbox for your Herald.

Convert your Ottawa Herald subscription to EZ-Pay or re-start a stalled subscription and you'll automatically be registered to win this Rubbermaid Classic 1 mailbox from Orscheln Farm & Home. Tough polymer double wall mailbox and post construction with rear door access for safer off-road accessibility. Will not rust or rot. Contest ends November 30, 2009.

ENTER TODAY!

We're giving away one per week!

The **Ottawa Herald**
Community News. Community Connections.

104 S. Cedar, Ottawa, KS • Open 8 a.m.-6 p.m. M-F
785-242-4700 (800-467-8383) • www.ottawaherald.com