

National focus on Virginia and New Jersey

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Two races with four very different candidates but both races will focus on candidates and issues that will be center stage in both the 2014 mid term elections as well as the 2016 Race to the White House. Let's start with the race in the Commonwealth of Virginia where Democratic gubernatorial candidate Terry McAuliffe, a former Democratic National Committee chairman, has maintained a lead over conservative Republican Ken Cuccinelli, a Tea Party favorite who gained national fame as the first state attorney general to litigate against Obamacare.

Barring a total disaster McAuliffe will become the governor of Virginia come Tuesday night. A final poll from Quinnipiac University, conducted over the past week and released Monday, shows McAuliffe leading Cuccinelli by 6 percentage points, 46 percent to 40 percent, with libertarian Paul Sarvis at 8 percent.

Meanwhile, New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, is expected to cruise to reelection in his race against Democratic state Sen. Barbara Buono. If current trends hold, Christie could be the first Republican statewide candidate to win more than 50 percent of the vote since 1988. His percentage could be the highest for any gubernatorial candidate since 1985, which was long before New Jersey turned blue.

So what will these races teach us about upcoming elections?

The McAuliffe win in Virginia will bring to light the importance of women's issues, something that we will see repeated in the 2014 mid term elections. Abortion and women's reproductive rights have become a dominating issue in the Virginia race. Planned Parenthood's political organizations have been highly active in the state since February with a campaign called "Keep Ken Out" that aims to educate voters, especially women, on the stances of Ken Cuccinelli II, the Republican candidate who opposes abortion in nearly all cases, even when a pregnancy is the result of rape or incest. Advantage goes to McAuliffe.

For Christie it is about the future and a possible run at the White House in 2016.

He and his advisers hope that the outcome will send a message to a divided Republican Party about how it can win in places where its presidential candidates have been losing.

In one way, Christie is taking a page from the playbook of former president George W. Bush, who used his 1998 gubernatorial reelection campaign in Texas to make himself the favorite for the Republican presidential nomination in 2000. Like Bush, Christie is trying to win by the biggest possible margin and show that, despite his conservative positions, he can attract support from constituencies long tied to the Democrats.

The bottom-line for tomorrow's gubernatorial elections in New Jersey and Virginia will highlight both strains of Republican conservatism, with Christie representing one approach and Virginia Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli II — a tea party favorite and underdog in his race against Democratic businessman and fundraiser Terry McAuliffe — representing the other.

A loss by a tea party favorite in a swing state and a victory by Christie in a Democratic stronghold would probably set the terms for the next phase of the debate within the Republican Party about the way forward. If Sen. Ted Cruz (Tex.) has become the symbol of the GOP's tea party wing, Christie is poised to become the anti-Cruz.

James Williams

Jim Williams is the Washington Bureau Chief, Digital Director as well as the Director of Special Projects for Genesis Communications. He is starting his third year as part of the team. This is Williams 40th year in the media business, and in that time he has served in a number of capacities. He is a seven time Emmy Award winning television producer, director, writer and executive. He has developed four regional sports networks, directed over 2,000 live sporting events including basketball, football, baseball hockey, soccer and even polo to name a few sports. Major events include three Olympic Games, two World Cups, two World Series, six NBA Playoffs, four Stanley Cup Playoffs, four NCAA Men's National Basketball Championship Tournaments (March Madness), two Super Bowl and over a dozen college bowl games. On the entertainment side Williams was involved with Berman Concerts and directed over 500 concerts for Showtime, Pay Per View and MTV Networks.

