

Split result in US off-year elections

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Off-year elections were held in two US states and numerous cities Tuesday, with the two big business parties splitting the two governorships at stake.

Republican Governor Chris Christie won reelection easily in New Jersey, defeating his Democratic opponent, State Senator Barbara Buono, by 60 percent to 38 percent. The national Democratic Party had effectively conceded the race months ago, and did not spend a dime on the New Jersey contest.

Dozens of local Democratic mayors endorsed Christie, particularly embracing his attacks on school teachers and other public employees. The state Democratic Party machine was mainly concerned with retaining control of the state legislature, which has collaborated closely with Christie's program of tax cuts for the wealthy and job and benefit cuts for state workers.

Preliminary reports indicated that voter turnout fell below the previous record low set in 2009, when Christie defeated incumbent Democrat Jon Corzine. Some 2.3 million voted in 2009, but it appeared that the total vote in 2013 would barely top the two million mark.

While the television networks hailed Christie's victory as a landslide that positioned him for a presidential race in 2016, exit polls of those who voted Tuesday showed Christie would lose New Jersey in a presidential election.

Far from being an endorsement of his right-wing program, Christie's victory was largely by default, because the Democrats agree with him. Significantly, the voters who reelected Christie also adopted an amendment to the state constitution raising the minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$8.25 an hour and indexing it to inflation going forward, insuring future increases. The amendment was vociferously opposed by corporate interests and the Christie administration.

In Virginia, Terry McAuliffe, former chairman of the

Democratic National Committee and a top fundraiser for Bill and Hillary Clinton, narrowly won the governor's race, defeating Republican Ken Cuccinelli, the state's attorney general. A Libertarian candidate received nearly 7 percent of the vote, taken largely from the Republicans, far more than Cuccinelli's margin of defeat.

Cucinnelli led in the reported vote until more than 80 percent of the ballots had been tabulated. McAuliffe first took the lead nearly three hours after the polls closed, when final returns from heavily Democratic areas in northern Virginia and Norfolk were reported. His eventual margin was 48 percent to 45 percent, with barely 50,000 votes separating the two candidates.

Despite the intensity of the campaigning and the vast sums expended—more than \$55 million for the two gubernatorial candidates alone—voter turnout was just over 2.1 million, compared to 2 million votes cast in the previous statewide election in 2009.

McAuliffe carried the Northern Virginia suburbs of Washington DC by a wide margin, as well as the Norfolk metropolitan area in the southeastern part of the state. He won the city of Richmond, the state capital, and its suburbs as well. Cucinnelli swept the rural agricultural and mining counties in the south and southwest of the state.

Democrat Ralph Northam easily defeated Republican E. W. Jackson, a fanatically right-wing Baptist preacher, in the race for lieutenant governor. Democratic and Republican candidates for attorney general, the other statewide office, were virtually deadlocked with 96 percent of the vote counted.

McAuliffe was an unpopular figure with no previous record in political office, a failed candidate who was defeated for the Democratic nomination for governor four years ago, and was linked to a series of corrupt and seedy business dealings. But the Democratic Party establishment cleared the field for his nomination and

mobilized considerable financial resources behind him.

Three factors accounted for McAuliffe's victory: he benefitted from the impact of the federal shutdown on government workers in Northern Virginia and Norfolk; there was widespread public hostility to the ultra-right positions of Cuccinelli on social issues, including abortion, contraception and discrimination against gays; and McAuliffe raised and spent nearly twice as much money, using his connections in national business and Democratic Party circles to rake in more than \$34 million.

Among the local government races, the most important was in New York City, where Bill de Blasio became the first Democrat to win the mayoralty in 20 years. His election follows 12 years of billionaire Republican turned independent Michael Bloomberg, and 8 years of former federal prosecutor Rudolph Giuliani.

De Blasio won the Democratic primary by running to the "left" of his main rivals, emphasizing the issue of economic inequality in a city that is home to more millionaires and more poor people than any other in America.

A former campaign manager for Hillary Clinton, with a long record in the Democratic Party and New York municipal government, de Blasio quickly made his peace with Wall Street after winning the Democratic nomination two months ago.

De Blasio actually outraised his Republican opponent, Joseph Lhota, a former deputy mayor, by 3-1, raking in \$10 million in contributions—a clear demonstration that the financial interests were not frightened by his "progressive" rhetoric.

Lhota, who served under Bloomberg, lacked the \$75 million that Bloomberg spent personally on his reelection campaign four years ago. He won only 27 percent of the vote, as de Blasio won in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx and among virtually all demographic groups, according to exit polls.

In Detroit, former hospital executive and Wayne County official Michael Duggan won the mayoralty over Wayne County Sheriff Bennie Napoleon. Both candidates were Democrats advocating right-wing austerity policies, including collaboration with the state-appointed emergency manager, Kevyn Orr.

Mayoral elections were also held in Boston, Atlanta, Minneapolis, Seattle, San Diego and dozens of other

cities. In most cases the Democratic Party was favored to win or the contests were nominally non-partisan, pitting rival Democrats against each other, as in Detroit.



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