

Tea Party candidates defeated in Republican primaries

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Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell routed an ultra-right Tea Party challenger in the Republican primary in Kentucky, one of a half dozen states where primary elections were held Tuesday. The six-term senator won 65 percent of the vote while his opponent, millionaire businessman Matt Bevin, won 35 percent.

Tea Party groups targeted McConnell, despite his consistently right-wing political record over many decades, because he was deemed insufficiently firm in opposing the Obama administration, particularly because of his role in brokering deals to end federal budget standoffs in 2011 and 2013.

But McConnell overwhelmed his opponent with a \$10 million barrage of television advertising, swamping the \$3.3 million raised by various Tea Party groups, the Senate Conservatives Fund, and from Bevin's personal wealth. McConnell also secured the endorsement of Kentucky's other Republican Senator, libertarian Rand Paul, and Paul's chief political operator served as his campaign manager.

McConnell will face Democrat Alison Lundergan Grimes, the Kentucky secretary of state and daughter of a former state party chairman, who has already raised \$8 million for her campaign and won her primary against token opposition.

The voter turnout was small, barely 350,000 each in the Democratic and Republican primaries, or less than 30 percent of those eligible, reflecting the lack of popular enthusiasm for either of the two big business parties. In 2012, by comparison, nearly two million people voted in the presidential election in Kentucky.

There was a similar result in Georgia, the other state where a Republican-held US Senate seat is closely contested. Five candidates split the vote in the Republican primary, with the two most heavily backed by business interests and the party establishment,

millionaire David Perdue and Congressman Jack Kingston, placing first and second.

They will face each other in a runoff election July 22.

Perdue and Kingston spent more than \$2 million apiece, the lion's share of the total of \$7 million in campaign spending by the five candidates. Turnout was even lower than in Kentucky, with only 18 percent of those eligible going to the polls.

Perdue is a corporate takeover specialist and former CEO of Dollar General, a chain of cut-price stores, as well as the cousin of two-term governor Sonny Perdue. Kingston was backed by the US Chamber of Commerce against two other sitting congressmen, Paul Broun and Phil Gingrey. Broun was notorious for having declared that evolution and the Big Bang theory were "lies straight from the pit of hell."

Republican Senator Saxby Chambliss is retiring, and the Democratic Party nominee for the vacant seat will be Michelle Nunn, daughter of former US Senator Sam Nunn, another well-financed scion of a prominent political family.

In Oregon, the establishment-backed candidate won the Republican primary for the Senate seat held by Democrat Jeff Merkley. Monica Wehby, a neurosurgeon who supports abortion rights, defeated a Tea Party-backed state representative, Jason Conger.

Wehby was far better financed, raising \$1.7 million, far more than Conger.

Two incumbent Republican congressmen targeted by the Tea Party also won renomination Tuesday: Mike Simpson in Idaho and Bill Shuster in Pennsylvania. The Idaho contest again showed the overpowering role of money in American bourgeois politics, as Simpson and his supporting groups poured \$2.4 million into the district. The Chamber of Commerce by itself spent more than Simpson's opponent, attorney Bryan Smith.

The decisive role of cash is not limited to the Republicans, of course. Furniture millionaire Tom Wolf won an easy victory for the Democratic nomination for governor of Pennsylvania Tuesday, defeating Congresswoman Allyson Schwartz and two other opponents by more than 40 percentage points. Wolf spent a staggering \$10 million to saturate the state's media with television ads promoting himself as a caring businessman who engaged in profit-sharing and served in the Peace Corps.

Tuesday was the busiest day for primaries in the lead-up to the November 4 general election. The main focus of the two big business parties and the corporate-controlled media has been the contest for US Senate seats, where the Republican Party needs to make a net gain of six seats to take control.

At least nine Democratic-held Senate seats are in danger—in Alaska, Arkansas, Colorado, Louisiana, Michigan, Montana, North Carolina, South Dakota, and West Virginia—while only the Georgia and Kentucky seats are considered at risk for the Republicans.

Given the dismal poll numbers for President Obama and the widespread disillusionment with his administration on the part of working-class, youth and minority voters who supported him in 2008 and 2012, the Democratic Party is expected to lose ground in the Senate and fall well short of gaining control of the House of Representatives, where the Republican Party has a 34-seat majority.

McConnell and other Senate Republican leaders have intervened in a series of primary contests this spring to block the nomination of ultra-right candidates whose views would be so provocative as to spark a popular backlash and cost the party seats—like Broun in Georgia, or the candidates in 2012, Todd Akin in Missouri and Richard Mourdock in Indiana, whose bizarre comments on rape and abortion contributed to their defeat.

The result has been the nomination of candidates whose views on major social and economic issues are just as right-wing as those of the Tea Party, but more skilled at disguising their opinions during the election campaign. House Speaker John Boehner summed this up, telling reporters cynically, “Sometimes there’s not that big a difference between what you all call tea party and your average conservative Republican.”

The Democrats have moved to the right in lockstep

with the Republicans. Both Grimes and Nunn, for example, have sought to distance themselves from anything that could be construed as liberalism or social reform, attacking the Obama administration from the right on fiscal policy.

The two parties combine their efforts to block any independent expression of the mass popular opposition to war, attacks on democratic rights and an economic slump now in its seventh year.



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