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Five things to watch in North Carolina's elections

By Gary D. Robertson

RALEIGH (AP) - North Carolina government has undergone a dramatic shift to the right. How voters feel about Republican control should shade Election Day results for the U.S. Senate and on down the ballot.

A state government dominated by Democrats for generations turned when the state House and Senate went Republican in 2010. Pat McCrory became the first GOP governor in two decades two years later.

Republicans have passed laws since 2013 reducing maximum unemployment benefits, spending tax dollars to send public school students to private schools, refusing Medicaid expansion and placing additional regulations on abortion. But lawmakers also say lowering tax rates and regulations and closing budget gaps helped accelerate the state's economic recovery.

Here are five things to watch in North Carolina's midterm elections:

WHO'S TO BLAME? The re-election of first-term Democratic Sen. Kay Hagan will hinge in part on whether voters are angrier with actions in Raleigh since Republican challenger Thom Tillis was elected House speaker in 2011 than those on Capitol Hill since Hagan went to Washington in 2009. Key to Tillis' chances are whether he can persuade registered independents in suburban Raleigh and Charlotte that public schools improved under his watch and that he can help clean up Washington's fiscal mess. Hagan has her own worries because of her vote for President Barack Obama's unpopular health care overhaul. She's banking on a self-portrait as a middle-of-the-road presence in Washington in a closely divided state politically. Their first televised debate occurs Sept. 3.

MONEY TALKS: With the Hagan-Tillis race considered crucial in determining whether Republicans retake the Senate from Democrats, expect an overload of Senate television ads. Outside groups already have spent nearly \$17 million in the campaign this year, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, and expect tens of millions more. The Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee announced it would spend \$9.1 million up to Election Day on ads attacking Tillis or praising Hagan. Tillis is likely to get more help from Karl Rove's American Crossroads and other groups bankrolled in part by conservative financiers Charles and David Koch. This third-party tidal wave should diminish the importance of the Hagan campaign's large fundraising advantage over Tillis through June.

CONGRESS: Republicans drew redistricting boundaries in 2011 that helped turn a 7-6 seat advantage for Democrats into a 9-4 Republican margin. Now the GOP is poised to gain another seat as Democratic Rep. Mike McIntyre decided not to seek re-election in the 7th District and Republican nominee David Rouzer is favored to win. Democrats are hopeful they can upset one incumbent and win a vacant seat. "American Idol" runner-up Clay Aiken won the Democratic nomination in the 2nd District currently represented by GOP Rep. Renee Ellmers. Former Baptist minister Mark Walker surprised many by winning the Republican runoff for the chance to succeed retiring 15-term Rep. Howard Coble in the 6th District. Democratic candidate Laura Fjeld has raised more money than Walker.

NEW RULES: The fall marks the first general election under rules approved in 2013 by the legislature that cut early voting time by a week, eliminated same-day registration during the early-voting period and prevented ballots from being counted if the voter went to the wrong precinct. Voters also are being told at the polls to prepare for a photo identification requirement in 2016. The provisions were carried out during the May primary, but a federal judge refused to block them from being used in November while lawsuits seeking to overturn them are pending. The state NAACP has been organizing voter registration efforts this year to counter what they argue are rules that will discourage black and Latino residents from voting. Republicans counter with data showing minority voter turnout was greater in the May primary compared to 2010.

OTHER RACES: All 170 seats at the legislature are up for re-election, but nearly half of the races have already been decided

because only one candidate is running in November. Republicans will be hard pressed to lose their strong majorities in either chamber. Voters also choose a chief justice of the state Supreme Court for the next eight years, while a whopping 19 candidates are seeking one seat on the intermediate Court of Appeals after a late retirement.



PR4ESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

Obama seeks to do no harm to Democrats in midterms

By Julie Pace

WASHINGTON (AP) - Hampered by low approval ratings and an unfriendly electoral map, President Barack Obama enters the fall campaign as a liability to some vulnerable Democrats and a target for Republicans trying to fire up conservatives and appeal to disillusioned independents.

Mindful of his precarious political position, Obama is charting a midterm election strategy intended to help where he can and, perhaps most importantly, do no harm to Democrats.

Thus far, that has meant embracing his status as the party's most prolific fundraiser. While Democrats have grumbled in past election cycles about Obama's level of commitment to the party's success, the president has been an aggressive fundraiser during the 2014 campaign, headlining 40 money events this year, with more to come this fall.

Obama is also expected to do targeted outreach as Election Day nears, using radio interviews, online appeals and other strategies to encourage young people and African-Americans to vote.

White House officials say Obama probably will campaign in October for individual candidates, namely those running for the House, as well as gubernatorial candidates in contested states such as Florida, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

Yet the president will be largely sidelined in nearly all of the races that will determine November's biggest prize: control of the Senate for the remainder of his presidency.

The most competitive Senate contests are in states where Obama has never been popular or has fallen out of favor with voters. Those states include Louisiana, Arkansas, Alaska, and North Carolina.

"We will go where we're most helpful and we will not go where we're not helpful," White House senior adviser Dan Pfeiffer said about Obama's Senate strategy.

With just two months to go until Election Day, Obama has yet to campaign alongside a Democrat at risk of losing in November. He planned to hold a July fundraiser with Colorado Sen. Mark Udall, but the embattled incumbent pulled out at the last minute, citing a need to stay in Washington for votes.

Of course, it's more than a conservative-leaning electoral map that has some Democrats trying to keep Obama at arm's length.

For much of the year, his approval rating among the American public has hovered in the low 40s, the lowest of his presidency. He also has been battered throughout the summer by a seemingly endless string of foreign policy crises.

A Gallup poll conducted in August put public support for Obama's handling of foreign affairs at 36 percent. His approval rating on the economy sits at 35 percent, reflecting the fact that many Americans are yet to feel the impact of higher economic growth and lower nationwide unemployment.

Republicans see Obama's difficult stretch as a boon for their electoral fortunes. They are using the prospect of neutralizing the president for his final two years in office as a way to motivate conservatives to show up in an election where turnout is expected to be low.

GOP leaders are casting incumbent Democrats as little more than a rubber stamp for what they claim is the president's failed agenda.

"After voting with him anywhere between 90 and 100 percent of the time, it's easy to see that a vote for a 2014 Democrat is a vote for another two years of Obama," said Reince Priebus, chairman of the Republican National Committee.

Republicans themselves are experiencing their own historically low approval ratings. But the GOP is all but certain to maintain control of the House. Republicans need to pick up just six seats in order to achieve a majority in the Senate for the first time in Obama's presidency.

That leaves Obama with the grim reality that even the most favorable outcome of the fall campaign will be a continuation of the divided Congress that has stymied nearly all of his second-term legislative goals.

White House officials appear resigned to the notion that few legislative victories await them even if Democrats hold the Senate. Instead, they are casting the fight to retain control of the chamber as crucial to staving off Republican challenges to current laws and ensuring that the president can get nominees confirmed.

During a fundraiser in August, Obama tried to motivate Democrats by hinting that "we're going to have Supreme Court appointments" during his final years in office.



Shemika Copele will be one of the performers at the Bull Durham Blues Festival this weekend. See story on page 9.

Library of Congress gets enigmatic Civil War photo

WASHINGTON (AP) - An enigmatic Civil War photo of a white man and a black slave, both in Confederate uniforms, has been donated to the Library of Congress five years after its appearance on "Antiques Roadshow" sparked speculation about its meaning.

Collector Tom Liljenquist of McLean, Virginia, donated the 1861 tintype after buying it from descendants of the white soldier earlier this month, The Washington Post reported in its Monday edition.

"It's an image that historians have debated because of the discussions of whether or not African-Americans voluntarily served in the Confederacy," Lonnie G. Bunch III, director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture said.

The picture shows Sgt. Andrew Martin Chandler of the 44th Mississippi Regiment seated beside Silas Chandler, one of 36 slaves owned by Andrew Chandler's mother.

The slave holds a shotgun and a knife, but there's no evidence he fought for the South, said Civil War photo historian Ronald Coddington, who researched the picture for his 2012 book, "African American Faces of the Civil War."

Silas Chandler called himself a soldier's servant on his successful application for a Mississippi state pension in 1916. Coddington said it is one of the most important photographs to come out of the conflict.

"There's not another image like it, in terms of having an identified soldier and identified servant, that you can track," he said.

In the picture, Silas Chandler is in his mid-20s, and Andrew Chandler is about 17, according to records.

It raises the question: Why does a slave appear to be in arms against the crusade that would gain him his freedom? Bunch said there is overwhelming sentiment that African-Americans who participated in the Confederacy were coerced.

"They were owned. They were enslaved," he said.

Helena Zinkham, head of the library's prints and photographs division, called it an extraordinary photograph.

"You look at those faces and you want to know more," she said.

Liljenquist, who has turned over 1,200 Civil War-era photographs to the library, said he bought the photograph from descendants of Andrew Chandler on Aug. 15 and immediately gave it to the library.

"I owned it for about 10 minutes," he said.

He declined to say how much it cost or identify the owner. Five years ago, on the "Antiques Roadshow" television program, the picture was said to be worth \$30,000 to \$40,000.