

GOP wins Kentucky governor’s race

Houston effort to add protections for gays fails

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY
Associated Press

Kentucky voters have elected just the second Republican in four decades to hold the governor’s office, in a race that hinged largely on President Barack Obama’s signature legislation, the Affordable Care Act.

The result represented a big win for the GOP as it continues to consolidate political power across the South. Democrats also came up short in Virginia, where they made a costly push to win a majority in one chamber of the state Legislature.

The governor’s race in Kentucky was the highest profile contest in Tuesday’s off-year elections. The only other gubernatorial campaign was in Mississippi, where Republican Gov. Phil Bryant easily won re-election.

Elsewhere, Houston voters defeated a closely watched ordinance that would have established nondiscrimination protections for gay and transgender people in the city, and Ohio voters rejected an initiative that sought to legalize the recreational and medicinal use of marijuana.

In Kentucky, Republican businessman Matt Bevin had waged a campaign to scale back the state’s Medicaid expansion that was made possible under the federal health care overhaul. Some 400,000 lower-income people who gained health coverage under the expansion could be affected.



Joe Ellis/The Clarion-Ledger
Avis Carpenter, right, listens as poll workers explain that her name is not on the precinct’s rolls as she arrives to vote on Election Day, Tuesday, in Jackson, Carpenter is accompanied by her children, Makhi, 8, center, and Mikyah, 7. Carpenter later filled out an affidavit ballot.

Bevin ran as an outsider, emphasizing his Christian faith along with his support for Kim Davis, the Rowan County clerk jailed for refusing to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples. His Democratic opponent, two-term Attorney General Jack Conway, embraced Obama’s health care reforms, saying hundreds of thousands of residents could lose access to taxpayer-funded insurance if Bevin won.

“The degree to which the national party is out of step with mainstream Kentuckians has created an environment where it’s extraordinarily difficult for a Democrat to win statewide,” said state Auditor Adam Edelen, who lost his re-election bid to a

little-known Republican state representative.

Around the country, several high-profile ballot initiatives tested voter preferences on school funding, marijuana, gay and lesbian rights and the sharing economy. Despite the relatively low number of races, the results could be an important bellwether of sentiment ahead of next year’s presidential elections.

In Virginia, a swing state, Democrats failed in an expensive bid to take control of the state Senate and empower Democratic Gov. Terry McAuliffe in negotiations with Republicans who control the state House. With the losses in Virginia and Kentucky, it

was a rough Election Day for Democrats.

“I don’t think you can point to one singular issue as to why these defeats happened tonight, but it’s an opportunity for Democrats to recalibrate and continue to develop a plan and a strategy to win in 2016,” said Tharon Johnson, who led Obama’s 2012 re-election effort in the South and helps oversee finances for the Democratic National Committee.

The governor’s race in Mississippi was overshadowed by a fight over a constitutional amendment that would allow people to sue the state to increase funding for public schools. Voters defeated the proposed amendment.

Critics say it would have taken budget decisions away from Mississippi lawmakers and given the courts too much power.

In Houston, the nation’s fourth-largest city, efforts to secure non-discrimination protections for gay and transgender people failed by a 2-to-1 margin. Now that same-sex marriage is legal, such laws have become a priority for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender groups. Opponents, including a coalition of conservative pastors, said the measure would have infringed on their religious beliefs.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott praised the voters who defeated the measure, saying they “showed values still matter.”

In the race for Houston’s next mayor, veteran state Rep. Sylvester Turner and Bill King, a former mayor of a Houston suburb, will meet in a Dec. 12 runoff. It was one of more than 300 mayoral races happening across the country. In Philadelphia, former longtime Councilman Jim

Kenney was elected mayor on a promise to fight poverty and push for universal pre-kindergarten education.

In Salt Lake City, former state lawmaker Jackie Biskupski had a narrow lead in her challenge to two-term incumbent Mayor Ralph Becker. But thousands of mail-in ballots that were dropped off at polling places Tuesday remain to be counted. If elected, Biskupski would be the city’s first openly gay mayor.

State judicial elections in recent years have become a focal point for political parties and interest groups seeking to influence the courts. Tuesday’s election to fill three open seats on the Pennsylvania Supreme Court was the latest judicial contest to attract heavy attention and spending.

Campaign contributors poured at least \$11.5 million into the race, which saw Democrats win all the seats.

San Francisco voters rejected a citizen-backed initiative to restrict the operations of Airbnb, the room-rental site, but approved a \$310 million bond package for affordable housing in the city.

In Washington state, voters overwhelmingly approved a measure to add state penalties for anyone who imports certain animal products for commercial purposes, such as elephant ivory or rhino horns

And Colorado voters decided to let the state keep \$66 million in tax revenue generated from the sale of recreational marijuana. An existing state law requires excess tax revenue to be returned to taxpayers, but on Tuesday voters agreed to make an exception with the marijuana revenue and direct it instead toward public education and drug-prevention programs.

Election: This is the fifth time voters had the option to renew levy

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The district will renew its local option tax, which has been in place since 2000, at a rate of 52 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value. Each year the tax will provide funds for the district, from \$1.22 million in 2016-17, up to \$1.4 million in 2020-21.

Overall, more than \$6.5 million would be raised through the local option tax. This estimate is based on current data available from the Clatsop County assessor. Seaside’s total school budget for 2015-16 was just over \$21 million.

The funds will support the district, which includes

Seaside High School, Broadway Middle School, Seaside Heights Elementary School and Gearhart Elementary School. The district also will include the Cannon Beach Academy when it opens in 2016.

According to the state’s Department of Revenue, most taxing districts are allowed to ask their patrons for temporary taxing authority above the permanent rate limitation. This authority is known as a “local option tax.” Local option taxes are limited to five years for operations and up to 10 years for capital construction purposes.

This is the fifth time voters had the option to renew

the levy. The last local option tax vote took place November 2010, with 55 percent of the voters approving the measure to continue to fund a reduction in classroom sizes and provide a wider range of programs for Seaside students. That vote brought an extra \$1.3 million per year on average to the district’s \$15 million general fund. It started at \$1,315,754 in 2011-12 and steadily increased to \$1,480,892 this year, 2015-16.

The local option levy is not related to building new school facilities at a different location.

Dougherty has indicated he plans to seek another bond measure in the next year or

so to build a new school site outside of the tsunami zone, which puts students at three of the district’s four schools at risk. A bond measure to do so was proposed in 2013 and failed.

In the event this local option levy did not pass, “it would have been really tough on everybody,” Phillips said.

“We would have had to make some major, major cuts,” he said, adding the extra money contributes about 5 or 6 percent to the district’s general fund, used for operations. “It allows us to move forward and to work with the Cannon Beach Academy people and to continue all the positive things the school district has

been able to do in the past.”

The district will be responsible to budget about \$250,000 for the Cannon Beach Academy when it begins serving kindergarten and first-grade students for the 2016-17 school year.

Tuesday night, Dougherty praised the support from the community.

“We had outstanding help from the Vote Yes for Kids campaign team,” he said. “Co-chairs (Lori Lum Toyooka) and Gail Dundas coordinated a campaign committee and numerous volunteers and businesses, who shared the need to renew the local option levy with our community. The campaign committee’s hard

work and dedication made the difference.”

“On behalf of our students, staff, and board of directors — thank you for your ongoing support of our students and their schools.”

Toyooka said she also was “absolutely thrilled about the overwhelming support of the community to help educate our kids and provide great teachers.” She was not involved in campaigning for the local option tax when it was up for vote in 2010, but she was impressed by the wide margin of success it had this election.

“I really do think the community does care about providing good education and programs,” she said.

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