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Authors:

[William \(Will\) Marshall](#)

[Swann](#)

[Joseph \(Joe\) Ward](#)

West Virginia Primary Election Leads to Surprising Results

West Virginia held its primary elections on June 9, 2020. The results will be unofficial until the canvas is completed Wednesday, June 17 by the Secretary of State. Compared to other states which held elections yesterday, West Virginia had a smooth election despite some concerns about how COVID-19 could impact turnout and election logistics.

Some results were expected, some results were unexpected, and some results were downright shocking. Ten incumbent Republican lawmakers lost to fellow Republicans. Senate President Mitch Carmichael lost to Amy Nichole Grady in what was the biggest upset of the night. Three of those losses were in the state Senate, with seven losses occurring in the House of Delegates. None of the 13 Democratic incumbents in the House and Senate were defeated. Given the results in the Republican primary, Democrats could gain seats in the State Senate during the general election. While a takeover is unlikely given the fact that they must defend several seats, a slimmer GOP majority could allow Democrats and centrist Republicans to block more conservative measures next session.

Governor's Race

As expected, West Virginia Governor Jim Justice cruised to a primary victory over former Commerce Secretary Woody Thrasher. Justice spent \$1,500,000 of his own money and Thrasher spent \$3,500,000 while only garnering 18 percent of the vote. Justice will face Kanawha County Commissioner Ben Salango. Salango defeated community activist Steven Smith by just a few percentage points. Smith is a progressive in the mold of Bernie Sanders that built a considerable grassroots network of like-minded voters and local candidates that could come into play at the organizational level in the general election if it survives the electoral loss of its head.

State Senate

As mentioned, the biggest news of the night came from the 4th Senatorial District race with Grady and Carmichael. Carmichael has been a member of the West Virginia Legislature since 2000 when he was elected to the House of Delegates. He was elected to the State Senate in 2012, serving as Majority Leader from 2015 to 2017 when he then became Senate President. He remains Senate President and Lieutenant Governor until his current term ends in January of 2021.

Grady is a public school teacher. Carmichael had drawn the ire of the teachers' unions the last several legislative sessions over issues like teacher pay and charter schools. Although Grady was endorsed by several labor groups, their support is unlikely to carry over into the general election because she supports charter schools and opposed the last statewide teachers' strike. The last time a sitting Senate President lost was in 1994. However, that was in the general election. It's incredibly unique to see a sitting Senate President lose in a primary election. Potential replacements for the Senate President include Senate Majority Leader Tom Takubo, Senate Judiciary Chairman Charlie Trump, or Senate Finance Chairman Craig Blair.

Elsewhere in the Senate, incumbent Republican Senator Sue Cline lost to David "Bugs" Stover, a labor-backed Republican. Former State Senator Robert Karnes bested fellow Republican incumbent John Pitsenbarger, who was appointed to fill the seat in 2019.

House of Delegates

The House of Delegates saw several Republican incumbents lose. Appointed GOP member Chuck Little lost to D. "Shannon" Kimes. N. Riley Keaton bested incumbent Martin "Rick" Atkinson in the GOP primary. Jonathan Adam Pinson led the ticket in the 13th District, which left incumbent Scott Cadle out of the mix in the two-member GOP primary race. Controversial GOP incumbent Delegate Eric Porterfield came in last in a three-member district which had five people running. George A. Miller, a political newcomer from Berkeley Springs, defeated incumbent and former GOP Majority Leader Daryl Cowles. Pharmacist and Republican Ken Reed ousted

incumbent Larry Kump.

Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia

West Virginia had a rare opportunity to elect three of the five members on its highest court. In Division 1, Chief Justice Tim Armstead held off a well-funded challenge from former Justice Richard Neely in a three-way race that included Marshall County Circuit Court Judge David Hummel. Former State Senator Bill Wooton narrowly defeated Kanawha County Circuit Court Judge Joana Tabit in Division 2 which had four candidates. Putnam County Prosecutor Kris Raynes came in third in that race. In Division 3, current Justice John Hutchison held on over Jackson County Circuit Court Judge Lora Dyer and Charleston lawyer Bill Schwartz.

Conclusion

Governor Justice will be the favorite to be re-elected Governor in November, but Salango will be able to mount a well-funded challenge. Chief Justice Armstead's State Supreme Court victory gives the court a conservative majority. The State Senate will go through substantial changes in leadership with the defeat of Senate President Carmichael. Assuming the Senate stays in Republican control, possible replacements for Carmichael include Senate Judiciary Chairman Charlie Trump or Senate Finance Chairman Craig Blair, both of whom hail from the increasingly populous and, in turn, politically influential Eastern Panhandle. The House of Delegates leadership team should look like what it is now pending any November surprises.

For more information, please contact [William Swann](#), [Joseph Ward](#), or any government relations professional with [CivicPoint](#).

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