

Final Week Before the Elections

Michael Sean Winters | Oct. 26, 2009 NCR Today

As we head into the final week before the off-year elections, be prepared to read a lot of nonsense. The governor's races in Virginia and New Jersey will tell us next to nothing about the national political winds for next year's midterm elections.

In Virginia, governors are limited to a single term. If you follow the logic of some populists, this should result in enlightened government as the incumbent does not have to consider his re-election prospects when making decisions. But, in fact, gridlock has afflicted Richmond because the GOP has maintained control of one or both houses of the legislature while two back-to-back Democrats have been in the governor's mansion.

Democrats are likely to lose in Virginia for a simple reason and it doesn't have anything to do with Barack Obama's policies, only his presidency. Americans like divided government. So, when George W. Bush became president in 2001, Democrat Mark Warner won the governor's race in Virginia. The two offices have next to nothing to do with each other, but Americans have come to believe that partisan competition is a good thing. They may bemoan government gridlock, but they vote for it in the hope of ensuring government moderation.

In New Jersey, the race has gotten closer, not least because there is a third party candidate. Whenever there is an incumbent, and this will be the third time Jon Corzine has stood before the New Jersey electorate in nine years, the election will always be more or less a referendum on his or her performance. Do the voters want more of the same or is it time for a change? New Jersey, with the rest of the country, is facing difficult economic times which argue for change, as does the Democrats' control in D.C. So, look for a close race.

If the GOP wins both races, look for Fox News to announce the end of the Obama era. If the Democrats win both races, look for MSNBC to decide that we are in the midst of a realignment. Neither will be true, at least not because of anything that happens next week.

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