

WUOT ELECTION 2016 BRIEFING BOOK

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2016

WHAT'S HAPPENING TODAY?

A general election for state legislative races, Congressional races and the presidential race. The governor's office is not up for election this year, nor are Tennessee's two U.S. Senate seats.

EAST TN CONGRESSIONAL RACES

- Stuart Starr (D) will challenge Rep. John Duncan (R) for U.S. House Dist. 2. It is very likely Duncan will hold on to the seat. See more on the Congressional races later in this guide.

EAST TN GENERAL ASSEMBLY RACES

- Sen. Becky Duncan Massey (R) is unopposed for her state Senate District 6 seat.
- Gloria Johnson (D) will challenge incumbent Eddie Smith (R) for State Rep. District 13 in the general election. Johnson is Smith's predecessor, having held the seat from 2012 to 2014. Johnson lost by about 200 votes in '14, so this will be a very interesting race to watch.
- Scott Hacker (D) will challenge incumbent Jason Zachary (R) for State Rep. District 14 in the general election.
- Pete Drew (I) will challenge Democrat Rick Staples for State Rep. District 15 in the general election. Incumbent Joe Armstrong (D) resigned from the seat in August, after being convicted on federal tax evasion charges. Staples was selected to run in Armstrong's stead. Rhonda Gallman is running a write-in campaign for the seat. She identifies as a Democrat.
- Bill Dunn (R) is unopposed for State Rep. District 16.

- Harry Brooks (R) is unopposed for State Rep. District 19.
- Heather Hensley (D) will challenge incumbent Roger Kane (R) for State Rep. District 89 in the general election.

ANDERSON COUNTY CHARTER COMMITTEE

Per *Oak Ridge Today*. The Charter Commission will be comprised of one person from each of the eight Anderson County Commission districts. It will be responsible for studying possible changes to the county government, and drafting a charter document. Once elected and sworn in, the Commission would have nine months to complete its work. The charter would then be placed in front of county voters to decide in a countywide referendum that would most likely appear on a ballot in 2018.

A charter document is sort of like a “mini-constitution,” a legal guide for county-level government. It can set the standards for terms in office, job descriptions of elected officials, and even which offices are elected and which are appointed. At present, only Knox and Shelby counties have charter documents.

KNOXVILLE REFERENDUM

Per the *KVS*: “Voters inside the city of Knoxville will have the opportunity to vote on four referendum questions.

“The first question would change the date of the city primary from the last Tuesday in September to the last Tuesday in August in odd-numbered years. The move is needed, officials say, to give the Knox County Election Commission time to certify the primary results in enough time to mail military and overseas ballots by the legal deadline.

“The other three questions are ‘housekeeping’ measures for the city retirement plans that among other things would put the pension plans in compliance with recent changes to state and federal law. According to the city, the changes would not result in higher taxpayer cost or additional retirement benefits.”

THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE

Hillary Clinton (D) vs. Donald Trump (R). Clinton won Tennessee's March presidential primary, 66 percent to Bernie Sanders' 32 percent. Trump won the GOP state primary with a plurality, tallying about 39 percent of votes cast.

The last time a third-party candidate garnered more than three percent of the popular vote in the general presidential election was 1996 (Ross Perot). The last time a third-party candidate won electoral votes was 1968 (George Wallace).

Electoral fun facts:

Whatever concerns Donald Trump may have about winning the necessary 270 electoral votes to claim the White House, he will not have to worry about Tennessee's eleven electoral votes. The Democratic vote has declined in Tennessee every election cycle since 1996, the last time a Democrat carried the state in a presidential election.

Since 1952, Tennessee's electoral votes have gone to a Democratic candidate only four times: 1964 (Lyndon Johnson), 1976 (Jimmy Carter), 1992 and 1996 (both Bill Clinton).

October polls from Vanderbilt University and Middle Tennessee State University show Trump's support at 44-48 percent. While not a majority, Trump's support outstrips that for Hillary Clinton (33-36 percent).

An October 4 MTSU poll found 16 percent of Tennessee's "likely" voters were undecided. A Vandy poll released the same day said 23 percent of "registered" voters were undecided. Third-party candidates Gary Johnson and Jill Stein polled in the single digits in the MTSU poll.

In short, it is unlikely that Donald Trump will lose Tennessee's electoral votes. One area of speculation is that his margin of victory will be smaller than that enjoyed by his predecessors in earlier election cycles.

WHITHER THE DOWNBALLOT RACES?

As mentioned above, Tennessee is a solidly red state. Republicans have made major gains in the General Assembly over the last six years, and current legislative district boundaries are drawn to keep them in power. Few legislative races are considered competitive, and many East Tennessee incumbents face no challenger, or only a token challenge.

National GOP leaders have worried that Trump's success or failure will have cascading effects to lower-level races, but it is unlikely any Tennessee Republican candidate will be hurt by Trump's performance.

The Tennessee Senate

5 Democrats

28 Republicans

33 seats total

The Tennessee House of Representatives

25 Democrats

72 Republicans

2 vacant (Jeremy Durham and Joe Armstrong)

99 seats total

Half of the state Senate's seats (16) are up for election this year. The whole House is up for election.

Tennessee's Congressional Delegation

7 House Republicans

2 House Democrats

2 Republican Senators

None of the state's eleven U.S. House races are considered battleground races, according to election-tracking website Ballotpedia.

District 8 Representative Stephen Fincher (R) decided not to seek re-election this year, but it is unlikely Democrats will win the seat. District 8 contains counties north of Memphis and west of Nashville.

East Tennesseans Phil Roe (TN-1), John Duncan (TN-2) and Chuck Fleischmann (TN-3) are locks to win re-election.

District 4 Congressman Scott DesJarlais (R) is always on the bubble, with predictions of imminent defeat. But he has survived every intra-party attempt to unseat him, as well as general elections. He is seeking his fourth term in office, and is considered a lock for re-election.

In the U.S. Senate, neither Lamar Alexander nor Bob Corker are up for election today.