

Issue Brief

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State Elections 2006: Gubernatorial Primaries Could Yield Some Surprises

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Introduction

Texas voters will kick off this year's state election campaigns when they go to the polls on March 7 to pick their party nominees for governor. It is the first of 36 gubernatorial primaries planned this year, with the final one taking place Sept. 23 when Hawaii voters pick their candidates.

This year, voters will see fewer "open" races than they did in 2004 when 20 of the 36 states chose new leaders. Only nine states – Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Iowa, Massachusetts, Nevada, New York and Ohio – have "open" contests brought about by retirements or governors being term-limited.

NAMIC's preliminary analysis of this year's political landscape in the states shows that:

- Strongly contested primaries are likely in Alabama, Alaska and Nebraska, where Republican incumbents face stiff opposition from some credible party opponents;
- Democrats, who now control 14 of the 36 governor's mansions, are viewed as having the edge at this point in Massachusetts and New York; and
- Republicans, meanwhile, have a better-than-even chance to pick up Iowa this fall, and depending on who wins in the primaries, the GOP should mount competitive races this fall in Illinois, Maine, Michigan, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

This *Issue Brief* is the first of two planned on the 2006 gubernatorial races. It examines each of the 36 primary races in alphabetical order and identifies which individuals have indicated their willingness to run for their state's top job. The second *Issue Brief* in mid-October will assess the final weeks of the campaigns and who are likely to be the winners on Nov. 7.

ALABAMA (Primary: June 6)

Republican Gov. Bob Riley faces stiff competition from Roy Moore in his party's primary. Moore is the state's former supreme court chief justice forced from office last year when he refused to remove a display of the Ten Commandments inside the Supreme Court building. The Democratic primary could prove just as interesting. Lt. Gov. Lucy Baxley could face former Gov. Don Siegelman, who narrowly lost to Riley in 2002 following a cash-for-appointment scandal within his administration. Siegelman is scheduled to go on trial before the primary for his alleged role in the scandal, and his future could be in doubt. Other Democratic candidates include Harry Lyon, an attorney and frequent candidate, and Nathan Mathis, a former state representative.

ALASKA (Aug. 22)

Republican Gov. Frank Murkowski has had his share of problems as governor during the past four years, and he could face opponents in the primary. So far, the only Republican to challenge him is Merica Hlatcu of Anchorage. On the Democratic side, state Rep. Eric Croft is running and possibly Bruce J. Lemke of Anchorage, who ran for governor in 2002. Other candidates may emerge before the June 1 filing deadline.

ARIZONA (Sept. 12)

Democratic Gov. Janet Napolitano should run unopposed in her party's primary as she seeks a second four-year term. So far, 11 Republicans have been mentioned as possible candidates, the most prominent being Jan Smith Florez, a former state appeals court judge; and Dan Goldwater, a GOP activist and the nephew of the late Sen. Barry Goldwater.

ARKANSAS (May 23; Runoff: June 13)

Republican Gov. Mike Huckabee is term-limited this year after two four-year terms. He is considered a potential presidential candidate in 2008. Huckabee's departure should set up a competitive race this fall between Republican Asa Hutchinson, a former congressman and Homeland Security Administration undersecretary, and either Democratic Attorney General Mike Beebe or Bill Halter, an economist and former Social Security Administration commissioner.

CALIFORNIA (June 6)

Republican Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger may have no competition in his party's primary, but he could face one of two solid Democratic challengers in the fall: state Treasurer Phil Angelides or state Controller Steve Westly. Edie Bukewihge, a publisher and frequent candidate, is also running as a Democrat.

COLORADO (Aug. 8)

Republican Gov. Bill Owen is term limited this year after two four-year terms. This should set up a competitive primary contest between Republicans Bob Beauprez, a congressman; and Marc Holtzman, the president of the University of Denver. Possible Democratic candidates include: John Hickenlooper, mayor of Denver; Gary Lindstrom, a state representative; Alice Madden, the House majority leader; and Bill Ritter, the former Denver district attorney. Ritter is considered the Democratic front-runner at this point in time.

CONNECTICUT (Aug. 8)

Republican Gov. Jodi Rell, who, as lieutenant governor, took over for Gov. John Rowland after he went to prison on corruption charges, is seeking her first election as governor. She will face Alexander Kanevsky, an artist, in the primary. Three individuals are seeking the Democratic nomination. They include John DeStefano, mayor of New Haven; Dan Malloy, the mayor of Stamford; and Kevin Miner, a college student.

FLORIDA (Sept. 5)

Republican Gov. Jeb Bush, younger brother of President George W. Bush, is finishing his second four-year term this year. His departure sets up an interesting primary race between two other Republican statewide officeholders: Attorney General Charles Crist and Chief Financial Officer Tom Gallagher, who has oversight of the Office of Insurance Regulation and was the state's former elected insurance commissioner. Other Republican candidates include Austin Brooks, Glenn Burkett, Bernie DeCastro, Richard Paul Dembinsky, Joseph Smith and Michael St. Jean. Seven individuals are seeking the Democratic nomination with the most likely winner being either Congressman Jim Davis or state Sen. Rod Smith. Other Democratic nominees include Glenn Burkett, Carol Castagnero, John Crotty, Roger Hoover, Phil Kennedy, and Monroe "The Art-Truck Guy" Lee.

GEORGIA (July 18; Aug. 8)

Republican Gov. Sonny Perdue will face Bill Byrne, a former Cobb County commissioner, in the primary before seeking a second four-year term in office. The Democratic primary will be between two statewide officeholders: Secretary of State Cathy Cox and Lt. Gov. Mark Taylor.

HAWAII (Sept. 23)

Republican Gov. Linda Lingle will likely run unopposed in her party's primary before seeking a second four-year term. Six individuals have expressed an interest in the Democratic nomination. They include: Kirk Caldwell, an attorney and state representative; Robin Campaniano, the state's former insurance commissioner; Mitch D'Olier, an attorney, developer and rancher; Randal Iwase, the state's Labor Relations Board chair; Harry Kim, mayor of Hawaii County; and Mike McCartney, a public television executive and former state senator.

IDAHO (May 23)

Republican Gov. Dick Kempthorne has announced his intention to retire at the end of the year and not seek a second four-year term. The Republican primary now becomes the key race this year in his largely Republican state with Don Adamson, a health-care executive, facing Congressman C.L. "Butch" Otter for their party's nomination. The Democratic candidate will likely be Jerry Brady, a newspaper publisher, who ran unsuccessfully against Kempthorne in 2002.

ILLINOIS (March 21)

Democratic Gov. Rod Blagojevich is seeking a second four-year term, but he will face Edwin Eisendrath, a former Chicago alderman, in the primary. Five individuals are seeking the Republican nomination. They include: Bill Brady, a state senator; Ron Gidwitz, a businessman and philanthropist; Andy Martin, a legal activist and frequent candidate; Jim Oberweis, a securities firm executive and former U.S. Senate candidate; and Judy Baar Topinka, the state's treasurer.

IOWA (June 6)

Democratic Gov. Tom Vilsack is retiring this year after two four-year terms. He is viewed by some political observers as a possible presidential candidate in 2008. Republicans sense an opportunity to win this "open" seat and have two primary candidates: Congressman Jim Nussle; and Bob Vander Plaats, a businessman and candidate in 2002. Six individuals may seek the Democratic nomination. They include: Mike Blouin, the state's former Economic Development director; Chet Culver, the secretary of state; Ed Fallon, a state representative and liberal activist; Patty Judge, the state's agricultural secretary; Sal Mohamed, a chemical engineer and former congressional candidate; and Vernon Weems, an anti-tax activist.

KANSAS (Aug. 1)

Democratic Gov. Kathleen Sebelius, the state's former insurance commissioner, should run unopposed in the primary as she seeks a second four-year term. Despite strong majorities in both the House and Senate, Gov. Sebelius' road to a second term appears relatively clear at this point. Six individuals may seek the Republican nomination. They include: Jim Barnett, a physician and state senator; Ken Canfield, executive director of the National Center for Fathering; Dennis Hawver, an attorney and frequent candidate; Robin Jennison, the former house speaker; Kris Kobach, the former mayor of Overland Park; and Richard "Rode" Rodewald, a retired automotive engineer and frequent candidate.

MAINE (June 13)

Democratic Gov. John Baldacci is expected to face two opponents in the primary: Robert Bizier, a carpenter; and Chris Miller, an Internet service provider. Baldacci is seeking a second four-year term. Republicans may have four primary candidates, including: Dave Emery, a former congressman; Peter Mills, an attorney and state senator; Marty Vachon, a former race-car driver; and Chandler Woodcock, an educator and state senator.

MARYLAND (Sept. 12)

Republican Gov. Bob Ehrlich is seeking a second four-year term. Two individuals are vying for the Democratic nomination. They are Montgomery County Executive Doug Duncan and Martin O'Malley, the mayor of Baltimore.

MASSACHUSETTS (Sept. 19)

Republican Gov. Mitt Romney's December announcement that he would not seek a second four-year term heightened speculation that he would be a presidential candidate in 2008. His high-profile Lt. Gov. Kerry Healy, whose personal wealth has already scared off viable challengers, became the immediate GOP front-runner upon Romney's announcement. Healey may face primary challenges from Gary Lee, a Norwood Selectman and Christy Mihos, a wealthy businessman. Bay State Democrats will choose between Deval Patrick, a former U.S. assistant attorney general and Attorney General Tom Reilly.

MICHIGAN (Aug. 8)

Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm is seeking her second four-year term this fall. Her Republican opponent will be Dick DeVos, the former president of Alticor, Inc., the parent company of the Amway Corporation.

MINNESOTA (Sept. 12)

Republican Gov. Tim Pawlenty is seeking a second four-year term and should run unopposed in his party's primary. Attorney General Mike Hatch leads the pack of Democratic candidates and is expected to win the nomination. Many believe Hatch will provide stiff competition to Gov. Pawlenty in November. The other Democratic candidates are: Kelly Doran, a real estate developer; Steve Kelley, a state senator; Becky Lourey, a state senator; and Ole Savior, an artist and frequent candidate.

NEBRASKA (May 9)

Republican Gov. Dave Heineman, who took over in January 2005 when former Gov. Mike Johanns resigned to become U.S. secretary of agriculture, will be challenged in the primary by three candidates. Heineman is considered by many to be the underdog to popular Congressman and former University of Nebraska football coach Tom Osborne, who is also seeking the nomination. Also vying for the Republican nomination are Dave Nabity, a financial consultant and former Young Republican state chair, and Tim Rinne, a peace activist. The Democratic candidate will be David Hahn, an attorney and publishing executive.

NEVADA (Aug. 15)

Republican Gov. Kenny Guinn is prohibited by law from seeking re-election in 2006, so this sets up an interesting "open" race in the country's fastest growing state. Three Republicans are vying to replace Guinn, including state Sen. Bob Beers; Congressman Jim Gibbons; and Lt. Gov. Lorraine Hunt. The three Democratic candidates include Leola McConnell, a liberal activist; Phil Satre, a gaming executive; and Dina Titus, the Senate minority leader.

NEW HAMPSHIRE (Sept. 12)

Democratic Gov. John Lynch likely will run unopposed in the primary as he seeks another two-year term. Six individuals are seen as possible Republican candidates, including Jim Coburn, a state representative; Tom Eaton, a state senator; Tony Giunta, the former mayor of Franklin; Sean Mahoney, a businessman and congressional candidate in 2002; John Stephen, the state's health commissioner; and Fran Wendelboe, a state representative.

NEW MEXICO (June 6)

Democratic Gov. Bill Richardson, who is often touted as a possible presidential candidate in 2008, is seeking a second, four-year term this year. His Republican opponent will be either George Bailey, Jr., a minister and teacher, or J.R. Damron, a physician and former medical school professor.

NEW YORK (Sept. 12)

Republican Gov. George Pataki is retiring after 12 years in office. Attorney General Eliot Spitzer, who was at the center of the broker fee disclosure issue last year, is viewed as the frontrunner, although he is expected to compete with Nassau County Executive Tom Suozzi for the Democratic nomination. Republican voters may get to choose from among five candidates. They include Randy Daniels, the former secretary of state; John Faso, the Assembly minority leader; Pat Manning, an assemblyman; Tom Ognibene, a former New York City councilman; and Bill Weld, a venture capitalist and former governor of Massachusetts.

OHIO (May 2)

Republican Gov. Bob Taft's leaves office this year under a cloud over an ethics scandal that has marred the final year of his eight years in office. As a result, Ohio is likely to become one of the most closely watched gubernatorial races this fall as both Democrats and Republicans look to move beyond the Taft era. Democratic Congressman Ted Strickland is his party's likely nominee. He already has chosen former Attorney General Lee Fisher as his running mate. Bryan Flannery, a former state representative, is the other Democratic candidate. The battle for the Republican nomination will come down to Secretary of State Ken Blackwell and Attorney General Jim Petro, although Larry Bays, a businessman, will also challenge for the nomination.

OKLAHOMA (July 25; Aug. 22)

Democratic Gov. Brad Henry will face Opio Toure, the House minority leader, in his party's primary. Henry is seeking a second four-year term. Three individuals are seeking the Republican nomination, including Congressman Ernest Istook; former state Energy Secretary Bob Sullivan Jr.; and state Sen. Jim Williamson.

OREGON (May 16)

Democratic Gov. Ted Kulongoski, the state's former insurance commissioner, will face Jim Hill, the state's former treasurer; and Pete Sorenson, an attorney and former state senator, in his party's primary. Kulongoski is seeking a second four-year term. Six individuals are interested in the Republican nomination. They include: Jason Atkinson, a state senator; David Beem, a developmentally disabled activist and frequent candidate; W. Ames Cutright, a retired businessman; Kevin Mannix, an attorney who ran against Kulongoski in 2002; Ron Saxton, an attorney and 2002 gubernatorial candidate; and Bill Spidal, a former police officer and frequent candidate.

PENNSYLVANIA (May 16)

Democratic Gov. Ed Rendell, the former mayor of Philadelphia, will run unopposed in his party's primary. He is seeking another four-year term. The Republican primary recently became more competitive when former National Football League great, Lynn Swann, announced his candidacy. He will be challenged by Jim Panyard, the retired Pennsylvania Manufacturer's Association president; and Bill Scranton III, the state's former lieutenant governor and 1986 candidate for governor.

RHODE ISLAND (Sept. 12)

Republican Gov. Don Carcieri is seeking a second four-year term. His likely Democratic opponent is the state's current lieutenant governor, Charlie Fogarty, who is also the former Senate President Pro Tempore.

SOUTH CAROLINA (June 13, June 27)

Republican Gov. Mark Sanford, who is seeking a second four-year term, will face Oscar Lovelace, a physician, in his party's primary. The Democratic contenders are likely to include former Congressman Ken Holland, state Sen. Tommy Moore, and Florence Mayor Frank Willis.

SOUTH DAKOTA (June 6)

Republican Gov. Mike Rounds, a former insurance agent, should run unopposed in the primary as he seeks a second four-year term. Gov. Rounds enjoys the second-highest job approval rating in the country at 70 percent. Two individuals are seeking the Democratic nomination, including Scott Heidepriem, an attorney and former Republican legislator and Dennis Wiese, president of the South Dakota Farmer's Union.

TENNESSEE (Aug. 3)

Democratic Gov. Phil Bredesen should run unopposed in his party's primary. He is seeking a second four-year term. His Republican challenger is likely to be either Mark Albertini, an attorney and building contractor, or Carl "Twofeathers" Whitaker, a Native American Indian Movement Chief and gubernatorial candidate in 2002.

TEXAS (March 7)

Republican Gov. Rick Perry faces three Republican opponents in his party's primary, but none is viewed as a serious challenger. They are Larry Kilgore, a Christian conservative activist and frequent candidate; Robert "Star" Locke, a rancher and building contractor; and Rhett Smith, a private security consultant. Three individuals are running for the Democratic nomination. They include: Chris Bell, an attorney and former congressman; Bob Gammage, also a former congressman and ex-state supreme court justice; and Rashad Jafer, a retail chain store manager. Six third-party candidates also are seeking election, the most notable among them is country music singer and author, Richard "Kinky" Friedman, who is running as an Independent.

VERMONT (Sept. 12)

Republican Gov. Jim Douglas is seeking another two-year term and should be unopposed in his party's primary. His Democratic opponent is likely to be Scudder Park, a former state senator and the state Democratic Party chairman.

WISCONSIN (Sept. 12)

Democratic Gov. Jim Doyle likely will run opposed in the primary as he seeks a second four-year term. His Republican opponent this fall will be either Congressman Mark Green or Milwaukee County Executive Scott Walker, who is also a former state assemblyman.

WYOMING (Aug. 22)

Democratic Gov. Dave Freudenthal is seeking a second four-year term and should run unopposed in his party's primary. His Republican challenger likely will be Ray Hunkins, an attorney and rancher who ran unsuccessfully against Freudenthal in 2002.

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Selected Annotated Bibliography

In addition to the NAMIC State Affairs Managers, a number of other sources were consulted in preparing this report. They include:

Campaign & Elections Magazine (www.campaignline.com). Ron Faucheux, the former editor and publisher of this subscription publication, used to feature his "Political Odds-maker" column where he predicted, with great accuracy, the outcome of both national and state elections. Faucheux recently left the publication to pursue a political career in his native Louisiana. The web site features access to some free content.

The Cook Political Report (www.cookpolitical.com). Founded in 1984, this subscription publication is an independent, non-partisan newsletter that analyzes both national and state elections and campaigns. Only a small portion of the web site is public.

The Council of State Governments (www.stateline.org). This web site often publishes non-partisan analyzes of state election campaigns.

Ron Gunzburger (www.politics1.com). This web site, which was founded in 1997, is published as a non-partisan public service to promote fully informed decision-making by the American electorate. Gunzburger is a Florida-based attorney.

Larry J. Sabato's Crystal Ball (www.centerforpolitics.org). This web site is run by Prof. Larry J. Sabato, director of the Center for Politics at the University of Virginia. Prof. Sabato describes his site as "a free public service meant to appeal to political junkies and interested voters alike."