GOP Gubernatorial Gains Back Union Reforms, Tax Cuts

3 Comments

By JED GRAHAM, INVESTOR'S BUSINESS DAILY
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Ariel Judah and her mother Shari Judah, right, of Silver Spring, Md., cheer for early election results during a campaign party for Maryland... View Enlarged Image

For Republican governors and would-be governors, the 2014 election map looked downright hostile — the reverse of the inviting terrain enjoyed by GOP Senate hopefuls.

Facing eight contests in states won twice by President Obama, experts expected the GOP to lose one or two governor's mansions.

That makes Tuesday's victories all the more impressive. The GOP message of low taxes sold just about everywhere, with Republicans claiming the solidly blue states of Maryland and Massachusetts, and expanding their foothold — instead of losing ground — in the Midwest.

To many political observers on left and right, no single election on Tuesday was more important than Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker's bid for a second term.

Union Reform Message

Known for curbing public-sector bargaining rights and banning unions from automatically deducting worker dues, Walker was a top target of the AFL-CIO, which hoped to send a message.

Instead, Walker won by a fairly comfortable margin, as did Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder, who signed the 2012 law making Michigan a right-to-work state.

Those victories may embolden other GOP governors to follow in Walker's footsteps.

Grover Norquist, president of Americans for Tax Reform, notes that 25 states now have GOP governors and legislatures.

Of those, he says, "10 to 15 states are going to do what Walker did" in the coming years.

The most surprising GOP victory came in Maryland, where businessman Larry Hogan beat Lt. Gov. Anthony Brown by making 40 tax hikes under outgoing Democratic Gov. Martin O'Malley the campaign's central issue.

Likewise, in Obama's home state of Illinois, Republican Bruce Rauner rode to victory while pledging to repeal a hike in the income-tax rate from 3.75% to 5%. Ousted Gov. Pat Quinn had first pitched the tax hike as temporary but later decided it should be continued indefinitely.

"I think the Democrats have misread the country," said Peter Morici, University of Maryland business professor. "In these states, the whole emphasis has been on more taxes and more government employees, and you saw a backlash to that."

Democrats failed to oust Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback to deter others from copying his reform replacing business and income taxes with sales taxes.

Maine GOP Gov. Paul LePage, who cut taxes while shaving social benefits to spur work and spurning ObamaCare's Medicaid expansion, also was re-elected.

Pennsylvania's Tom Corbett was the sole Republican governor to lose. He lost badly, 55%-45%, to Democrat Tom Wolf.

Taxes also played a role, but Democrats charged Corbett with breaking his no-tax-hike pledge by signing on to a higher gas tax.