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The Advocate



AGC of America
THE ASSOCIATED GENERAL CONTRACTORS OF AMERICA
Political Action Committee



The Advocate is a bimonthly publication for AGC PAC contributors, and contains the latest political news from "inside the beltway."

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Romney Decides Against 2016 Campaign

Today in a conference call with key aides and supporters, former Massachusetts Gov. **Mitt Romney** (R) announced he would not run for the Republican nomination in 2016.

In a statement, Romney said, "After putting considerable thought into making another run for president, I've decided it is best to give other leaders in the party the opportunity to become our next nominee."

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Walker's First Ad

Wisconsin's Gov. **Scott Walker** (R) appears to be the first unofficial national candidate to release a [video](#) promoting what looks to be the underpinnings of a 2016 presidential campaign; and, the piece is not your typical soft bio ad.

Gov. Walker's affiliated "Our American Revival" political organization is promoting a two-minute film that challenges President Obama and presumed Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton. The attack message also appears to include the Republican congressional leadership when railing against "failed Washington leaders."

The video piece clearly outlines what will undoubtedly be Walker's theme as he begins to construct a 2016 campaign. That is, "local vs. Washington." The ad highlights the states as "incubators of reform," and contrasts Walker's Wisconsin record to Washington's "government dependency."

The message also says that our future solutions will not be found "in the past," just as Hillary Clinton's picture comes into view. But, there is also a veiled message that potential Republican nomination opponents such as **Mitt Romney** and **Jeb Bush** are also included in that swipe.

It appears that Gov. Walker is already off to a fast start, going for an early break out within the tier of lesser-known candidates. This video represents a solid first step from the Wisconsin chief executive, while likely ruffling a few feathers within the Republican establishment - an intended result, no doubt.

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Illinois Another California?

Much of the early Senate political coverage has been devoted to the open California Senate race, but now the Illinois contest is about to make an equivalent amount of news.

For several weeks, speculation, not denied by her staff, that Rep. **Tammy Duckworth** (D-IL-8) is seriously considering challenging Sen. **Mark Kirk** (R) came true last week when the Congresswoman herself confirmed the sentiment. She had recently given birth towards the end of 2014 and had previously not been granting interviews.

Sen. Kirk, representing a highly Democratic state after his tight 48-46% win over then-state Treasurer **Alexi Giannoulious** (D) in the Republican landslide year of 2010, later suffered a serious stroke that put him on a long road to recovery. The presidential year turnout model in a reliably Democratic state against a weakened Republican incumbent sets this race as the party's best 2016 conversion opportunity in the nation.

Ms. Duckworth is the first female double-amputee of the Iraq War. She sustained severe injuries to both legs when an enemy rocket struck the helicopter she was co-piloting. After a long recuperation, she decided to embark on a career in public service. She challenged Rep. **Peter Roskam** (R-IL-6) in a marginal district in the heavily Democratic year of 2006. Backed as one of the strongest Democratic challengers in the nation that year, she still fell short, losing 51-48%.

After then serving as an Assistant Secretary at the Veterans Department for President Obama, Ms. Duckworth again ran for Congress in a re-drawn 8th Congressional District in 2012, drawing freshman Republican **Joe Walsh** as her opponent. Though the Democratic legislature drew the seat specifically for her, and Walsh had been a fluke winner in 2010, her victory, though strong (54%) was far from overwhelming.

The same is true for her 2014 re-election percentage (56%) against an unknown Republican in a race that never became competitive. Though combined with a stellar resume, her historical vote performance has consistently lagged behind pre-election predictions.

Possibly seeing that she is not invincible even in Democratic primary, no less than three of her colleagues are also confirming that they, too, are looking at the possibility of entering the race to eventually challenge Sen. Kirk.

Reps. **Robin Kelly** (D-IL-2), **Bill Foster** (D-IL-11), and **Cheri Bustos** (D-IL-17) are all reportedly weighing their own chances for a Senatorial bid. Though it is unlikely that all four will enter the March 2016 primary, it would be a very interesting match if they do. All four have different strengths, and each a path to victory.

Rep. Duckworth has a Cook County base, better statewide name ID than the rest, and a compelling story.

Rep. Kelly has a Chicago base and the opportunity of developing a strong African American constituency that has catapulted Democrats to primary victories in other similarly crowded fields.

Rep. Bustos may have the best record of this group of candidates. Defeating an incumbent, then-freshman Rep. **Bobby Schilling** in 2012 in a rural western Illinois district, she then scored a 56-44% re-match victory in last year's Republican landslide. Though lacking a Chicago or Cook County constituency, she would have the possibility of uniting a downstate base significant enough to constitute a victory in a crowded, fractured candidate field.

Finally, as the only male in such a field with a Cook County base and a large political war chest, Rep. Foster could also make a credible case for charting a win in his own right.

Therefore, while the California race to succeed retiring Sen. **Barbara Boxer** (D) may be winnowing down to a defined number of strong candidates from both the northern and southern portion of the state, the Illinois Democratic battle seeking the strongest challenger for Republican Sen. Mark Kirk is beginning to simmer to a boil.

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Toomey Vulnerable in Pennsylvania

Last year, a record number of publicly-released polls led us to tracking what proved to be an extraordinary set of US Senate races. For the 2016 election cycle, we can expect more of the same.

Public Policy Polling commences the off-year campaign with a survey from what promises to be one of the more competitive of the in-cycle US Senate states, Pennsylvania. Here, first-term Republican Senator **Pat Toomey** begins a drive for re-election before a presidential year electorate that normally backs a Democratic candidate in the national vote. Sure to be a top presidential campaign target state, Pennsylvania voters can expect to witness an onslaught of political communication about both the presidential campaign and their important US Senate contest.

Though viewed as a swing entity, the Keystone State has voted Democratic in the presidential race consecutively since 1992. But, during that same period, Pennsylvanians have elected and/or re-elected three Republican US Senators and two GOP Governors.

According to this new PPP survey (1/15-18; 1,042 PA registered voters), Sen. Toomey registers tepid numbers, relatively commonplace at this point in time for a Senator who belongs to the state's minority

party. And, as typical for a Public Policy Polling survey, almost every political figure tests with a negative favorability image.

While President **Barack Obama**'s job approval is a poor 42:51% in a state where he received 52 and 54% in 2012 and 2008, respectively, Sen. Toomey registers a 28:35% favorable to unfavorable ratio. Sen. **Bob Casey, Jr.** (D), who doesn't again face the voters until 2018, does much better at 41:33%. The only other political figure to score a positive rating is former Gov. **Ed Rendell** (D), and he can only muster a 43:42% score.

Also typical of a PPP poll, is the testing of many well known politicians who will not be candidates in this particular Senate race. Among the six scenarios polled, only former Gov. Rendell, surely a non-candidate, outpolls Sen. Toomey. According to the results, Rendell would lead the incumbent, 44-41%. Against all others, the Senator leads by margins of four to eight percentage points, but never breaks the 43 percent support level.

The one pairing that matters most, however, is with the only announced 2016 Senatorial candidate, and the man that Toomey beat 51-49% in 2010, former US Rep. **Joe Sestak** (D-PA-7). Here, Toomey has a 40-36% advantage.

Mr. Sestak, a former Navy Admiral who was a member of President **Bill Clinton**'s National Security Council, served two terms in the House from a Philadelphia suburban district after unseating 20-year veteran **Rep. Curt Weldon** (R) in 2006. Sestak was re-elected in 2008, and then ran for Senate two years later. Already announcing his statewide candidacy last year, Sestak has raised \$1.6 million for the race through last September, with \$1.28 million on hand. By contrast, Sen. Toomey had more than \$5 million in the bank during the same time frame.

The Pennsylvania race promises to be one of the most polled during the 2016 election cycle. The fact that an incumbent Senator registers numbers only in the low 40s under all scenarios is not necessarily a harbinger of a poor re-election performance, but it clearly indicates Sen. Toomey's support must grow. In the last cycle, Sens. **Mark Begich** (D-AK), **Mark Pryor** (D-AR), **Mark Udall** (D-CO), **Mary Landrieu** (D-LA), and **Kay Hagan** (D-NC) each found themselves mired in the low 40s for more than a year, and all lost. It remains to be seen if a similar pattern ensnares Sen. Toomey, or whether he expands his appeal.

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Salmon and Schweikert Consider Challenge to McCain

Sen. **John McCain**, first elected in 1986 after spending four years in the House and then rising to the peak of political party politics by winning the 2008 Republican presidential nomination, is likely headed for a competitive re-election next year. And, his strongest opponent may not even be a Democrat.

This week, Reps. **Matt Salmon** (R-AZ-5) and **David Schweikert** (R-AZ-6) held a meeting; one that could prove to be of great importance fast forwarding to their state's August 2016 Republican primary. Both members have said publicly that they are considering launching an intra-party challenge to Sen. McCain.

The session apparently produced at least one major point of agreement. That is, both will not enter the race. They correctly reason that two Congressmen jumping into the contest will guarantee McCain victory. This is particularly true in a plurality nomination state like Arizona because the anti-incumbent vote will be split several ways, allowing the target to win with a mere base vote sometimes far under the 50% threshold. The pair has not yet agreed upon which man will run, only that it will be one.

The history of right-of-center challenges to more establishment political figures suggests a narrow path to

victory, but part of the long odds calculation is that the conservative activists rarely coalesce to form a cohesive election strategy.

For example, the conservative/right-of-center/Tea Party movement's internal ploy against House Speaker **John Boehner** (R-OH) earlier this month is a case in point. Because the challenge featured three Speaker opponents haphazardly announcing within a day to three days before the opening session, the 25 votes registered against Mr. Boehner fractured and made the opposition seem much smaller. Little notice was paid to the fact that more than 10% of the Speaker's own conference voted against him, and that he failed to reach absolute majority support. A coordinated pre-vote strategy would have scored both points without gaining any additional votes, while improving the challengers' combined image instead of allowing it to become further tarnished.

Turning back to Arizona, if this Salmon-Schweikert meeting leads to McCain drawing only one strong opponent, then the challenge gains credibility and victory over the incumbent becomes possible.

Five years ago in the 2010 election, Sen. McCain also drew a primary challenger. That year, former Rep. **J.D. Hayworth** who had been defeated for re-election in 2006, challenged the veteran Senator for re-nomination. He and a minor candidate, neither of who ran a particularly strong campaign, held McCain to a 56% victory. Projecting forward to six years later, this type of anti-McCain base suggests that a one-opponent challenge from a credible candidate with a well-run campaign has a chance to make the 2016 challenge quite a serious one.

Rep. Salmon could prove to be the strongest potential McCain opponent. He ran for Governor in 2002 after keeping his pledge to serve no more than three consecutive US House terms, thereby not seeking re-election in 2000. He secured the Republican nomination and almost beat then-Attorney General **Janet Napolitano** (D) in the general election. Salmon scored 45.2% of the vote against Napolitano's 46.2%, a margin of less than 12,000 votes from 1.26 million ballots cast.

Out of office for twelve years, Salmon returned to win an open congressional seat in 2012, and being re-elected to a fifth non-consecutive term with 70% of the vote last November.

Should things continue upon this early-chartered course, Sen. McCain may find himself facing the most difficult re-election challenge of his career.

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Weak Democratic Prospects in NY Special Election

Things continue to go badly for Democrats in the upcoming special election to replace resigned Staten Island/Brooklyn Rep. **Michael Grimm** (R).

Though Gov. **Andrew Cuomo** (D) has still yet to schedule the election date, it is clear that Richmond County District Attorney **Dan Donovan** will be the eventual Republican nominee. The latest developments suggest he is now becoming a prohibitive favorite to win the seat, too.

Staten Island Assemblyman **Michael Cusick** was commonly viewed as the likely Democratic nominee. With polling showing him already 20 points behind Donovan, Mr. Cusick announced that he will not run for Congress after all. This leaves the Democrats with second tier choices.

Coming into view is New York City Councilman **Vincent Gentile**, who is reportedly seriously looking at the race. But, Gentile is part of a continued losing Democratic formula in this district.

The 11th CD, formerly numbered 13, captures all of Staten Island and part of Brooklyn. The Staten Island portion represents 2/3 of the district's population, and therefore candidates hailing from there have the upper hand. Previous Brooklyn Democratic candidates such as 2014 nominee **Domenic Recchia**, a former NYC Councilman, fared poorly in general elections...especially this last time when Staten Island native Grimm won 53-41% even though he was facing a 20-count federal indictment.

Lagging in the polls and now possibly turning to another Brooklyn candidate in the person of Mr. Gentile, even staff members at the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee are conceding that they face a difficult road in the special election. But, they say, their chances will improve in the 2016 general under a presidential election turnout model.

Unless he makes a major gaffe, Mr. Donovan is about to punch his political ticket to Washington.

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Political Snippets from across the Country

Presidential Race

Hillary Clinton: Originally planning to announce her presidential campaign around the present time but postponed to early spring, the Clinton organization spokespeople are indicating that a more formal presentation of the former Secretary of State and First Lady's 2016 intentions will now occur in the summer. With little in the way of early opposition, even from sitting Vice President **Joe Biden** who is planning an active run, **Hillary Clinton** has the luxury of waiting to officially enter the campaign fray. The person who once appeared on the horizon as her greatest early threat, Massachusetts Sen. **Elizabeth Warren** (D), has said repeatedly that she will not become a presidential candidate in this election cycle.

Sarah Palin: Coming from a roundly criticized Iowa speech before a group of that state's conservative activists, former Vice Presidential nominee and Alaska Governor **Sarah Palin** is saying that she is seriously considering a 2016 presidential run. She now becomes the 26th Republican to say she is at least entertaining the thought of running nationally next year, and possibly the 18th who could reasonably be expected to enter the race.

Sen. Marco Rubio: Always saying that he will not run for both President and US Senate in 2016, Sen. **Marco Rubio** made a statement last week suggesting that he may be moving toward entering the presidential contest. In a response during an interview, he suggested several specific Florida Republicans who might be interested in succeeding him in the Senate should he enter the national campaign.

US Senate Races

California: It was much quieter on the California Senate front. Only two significant developments occurred. First, billionaire businessman **Tom Steyer** (D), who publicly discussed running for the open Senate seat, decided not to do so. Secondly, Rep. **Eric Swalwell** (D-CA-15), who during the previous week said he was considering jumping into the statewide contest, now says he will seek a third term in the US House, and then officially endorsed Attorney General **Kamala Harris** for the Democratic Senatorial nomination. It is becoming clear that Harris is unifying the northern California Democratic base, meaning the eventual race could develop into a Golden State North-South political rivalry. Such a battle should favor the southern California candidates since the region has a much greater population, but it is the northern California candidates: Harris, Gov. **Jerry Brown**, Sens. **Dianne Feinstein** and **Barbara Boxer**, and Lt. Gov. **Gavin Newsom**, who have

won the major races since the beginning of the new century.

Colorado: Sen. **Michael Bennet** (D) has drawn his first official Republican challenger. El Paso County (Colorado Springs) Commissioner **Darryl Glenn** says he will enter the GOP primary for Senate next year. A much stronger Republican, possibly Rep. **Mike Coffman** (R-CO-6), is expected to emerge with the nomination, however.

Florida: Now that Sen. **Marco Rubio** (R) is sending clear signals that he may leap into the presidential contest and not seek re-election, many Florida pols are making it known that they would consider a statewide run to succeed him. On the Republican side, Lt. Gov. Carlos **Lopez-Cantera** and former House Speaker **Will Weatherford** are two names that Sen. Rubio mentioned as possible successors. Attorney General **Pam Biondi** is another person who would consider a run. She is also a potential gubernatorial contender in 2018. Within the US House delegation, Reps. **Jeff Miller** (R-FL-1), **Ron DeSantis** (R-FL-6), **John Mica** (R-FL-7), and **Vern Buchanan** (R-FL-16) have all indicated that they are not ruling out a race for Senate. For the Democrats, House members **Alan Grayson** (D-FL-9), **Patrick Murphy** (D-FL-18), and **Debbie Wasserman Schultz** (D-FL-23) are among the federal officials expressing interest. In an open configuration, this would be a highly competitive race. The presidential voter turnout model makes such a contest even closer because of Florida's history in such elections.

Louisiana: North Star Opinion Research conducted a poll for state Treasurer **John Kennedy** (R) to help determine for which office he should run. The survey (1/10-13; 600 LA registered voters) gives Kennedy favorable marks if he were to enter a 2016 Senate race...assuming Sen. **David Vitter** (R) wins the Governor's office and is not on the ballot for re-election. In a proposed open Senate race with no appointed Vitter replacement running, New Orleans Mayor **Mitch Landrieu** (D) would lead the jungle primary with 39% of the vote. Kennedy place second, and tops for Republicans, at 18%; Rep. **Charles Boustany** (R-LA-3) is third registering 13%; and Rep. **John Fleming** (R-LA-4) posts only 7 percent. Of this group of prospective candidates, only Fleming has indicated a desire to run for the Senate.

Ohio: Cincinnati City Councilman **P.G. Sittenfeld** (D) announced that he will challenge Sen. **Rob Portman** (R) next year. Other Democrats are certain to join the race. Rep. **Tim Ryan** (D-OH-13) took a step closer to launching a statewide bid by publicly changing his statements about the abortion issue, now aligning himself closer with the official Democratic Party position. Previously, Ryan had been one of the stronger pro-life Democrats. Former Gov. **Ted Strickland** (D), who lost his position to current incumbent **John Kasich** (R) in 2010, also has not ruled out a challenge to Sen. Portman and promises a decision within the next few months.

Nevada: While Minority Leader **Harry Reid** (D) undergoes eye surgery as he recovers from his recent exercise-related injuries, former Lt. Gov. **Brian Krolicki** (R) confirms that he is considering launching a challenge to the five-term veteran Senator. For his part, Sen. Reid says he will seek re-election and is actively looking to hire a campaign manager, despite retirement rumors swirling around him. Republicans are attempting to recruit Gov. **Brian Sandoval** (R) into the race, but he appears intent on finishing his second term as the state's chief executive. Already, Reps. **Mark Amodei** (R-NV-2) and **Joe Heck** (R-NV-3) have said they plan to seek re-election in 2016 and will not challenge Sen. Reid.

Utah: Former Rep. **Jim Matheson** (D-UT-4) joined the Washington, DC-based Patton Boggs law firm during the past week, which is one of the premier K Street lobbying entities. This suggests that Mr. Matheson will not be returning to Utah to challenge either Sen. **Mike Lee** (R) or Gov. **Gary Herbert** (R) in the 2016 campaign. As a Democrat who consistently won in strong Republican districts, he is the Utah Democratic Party's first choice to run statewide in the next election.

US House of Representatives Races

CA-13: Rep. **Barbara Lee** (D) has been repeatedly mentioned as the leading option to become the first US

Ambassador to Cuba under President Obama's plan to create more normal relations with the communist island government. This week, however, Rep. Lee said she is not interested in the position and plans to continue her career in the US House.

LA-4: With Rep. **John Fleming** (R) saying he will run for the Senate in 2016, speculation is growing around who will succeed him in the House. Last week the National Journal reports that Caddo County state Rep. **Alan Seabaugh** (R) is confirming his interest in vying for the Shreveport-anchored congressional district. We can expect a large jungle primary field that will be sorted out on Election Day 2016. A succeeding December run-off will undoubtedly occur.

MN-2: House Education and the Workforce chairman **John Kline** (R) has just drawn two 2016 opponents, one from each party. Engineer **David Gerson** is challenging the Congressman from the right in the Republican primary. St. Jude Hospital executive **Angela Craig** (D) announced her campaign this week. It is unclear whether Gerson will force a primary after the state Republican convention nominates Kline. Normally, the party conclave decides the nominations in Minnesota. It is also unknown how strong first-time candidate Ms. Craig will prove. The 2nd District, located in the southern Minneapolis suburbs, is a swing seat but Rep. Kline has consistently run ahead of the typical Republican voter trend. He begins as a heavy favorite for a re-election in the mid-50s percentile.

MN-7: Rep. **Collin Peterson** who, as a Democrat, represents the second-strongest Republican seat in Minnesota has been on the retirement speculation list during the last two election cycles, and has waited until just before the candidate filing deadline to commit to running. The GOP challenged him in 2014, but he easily turned back the relatively strong challenge, 54-46%. This week, Rep. Peterson said he is already planning to run for re-election, which should end retirement talk and likely keep this seat away from the GOP until 2018 at the earliest. Mr. Peterson was first elected in 1990.

NE-2: The Omaha congressional district will be the site of a highly competitive 2016 campaign as freshman Democrat **Brad Ashford** attempts to retain the largely Republican seat he won from now-former Rep. **Lee Terry** (R). The surprising event of the week is Ashford already receiving what could be a serious primary challenge. Former statewide candidate **Scott Kleeb**, who ran for the 3rd Congressional District in 2006 and US Senate in 2008, says he may move to the 2nd District to challenge Ashford for the Democratic nomination. Kleeb won his party nomination for both positions in his previous efforts and was highly touted, but fared poorly in each general election. It is likely national and state Democratic leaders will do everything possible to avoid a primary challenge for their new incumbent, considering the general election is guaranteed to be a hard fought affair.

NY-13: Former state Assemblyman **Adam Clayton Powell IV** (D) announced that he will run for the open congressional district from which veteran Rep. **Charlie Rangel** (D) will retire next year. Powell, the son of former Rep. **Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.** whom Rangel defeated in the Democratic primary of 1970 after a highly publicized and stormy political career that ended in the former being denied his seat in the House, fined, and finally losing re-nomination, ran unsuccessfully against Rangel in 1994 and 2010. The Democratic battle to replace Rep. Rangel in this Harlem-anchored district will feature a large field of candidates and expects to be highly competitive. Giving only 5% of its vote to **Mitt Romney** in 2012, the NY-13 is one of the safest Democratic seats in the country.

NY-19: Two GOP state legislators are already expressing public interest in succeeding retiring Rep. **Chris Gibson** (R). State Sen. **James Seward** and Assemblyman **Peter Lopez** both say they are considering running for the open seat. With the tight Republican majority in the state Senate, it is a sure bet that New York GOP leaders will attempt to dissuade Seward from running for Congress in order not to risk his Senate seat.

PA-6: **Michael Parrish**, a Republican-turned-Democrat businessman who was looking to enter the 2014 open seat congressional race but yielded to former nominee **Manan Trivedi** (who never became competitive), is considering challenging freshman Rep. **Ryan Costello** (R) in 2016. Local Democratic Party leaders are said to

be pushing the idea, and would be fully behind a Parrish congressional bid. The Philadelphia suburban 6th District is a marginal seat and was previously represented for six terms by ex-Rep. **Jim Gerlach** (R) who prevailed in multiple close re-election battles.

Gubernatorial Races

Kentucky: Candidate filing closed on the 2015 gubernatorial race, and it appears that Attorney General **Jack Conway** has little in the way of opposition for the Democratic nomination. The same is not true on the Republican side, as four individuals officially filed as candidates. State Agriculture Commissioner **James Comer**, former state Supreme Court Justice **Will Scott**, ex-Louisville Metro Councilman **Hal Heiner**, and businessman **Matt Bevin** who challenged Sen. **Mitch McConnell** (R) in the 2014 Republican primary, will vie for the GOP nomination. The primary is scheduled for May 19. The general election contest will be held November 3.

Louisiana: The aforementioned North Star Opinion Research poll (see Louisiana Senate above) also tested the upcoming 2015 Governor's race. The results of this question do show Sen. **David Vitter** (R) leading the October 24 jungle primary field, but with only 24% of the committed vote. State Rep. **John Bel Edwards**, the only Democrat tested, was second with 20%. State Treasurer **John Kennedy**, who sponsored the poll, was third posting 13%; Lt. Governor **Jay Dardenne** (R) fourth at 10%; and Public Service Commissioner **Scott Angelle** (R) drew only 2 percent. The top two finishers, regardless of political party affiliation, would advance to a November 21 run-off election.

Missouri: As expected, Missouri state Auditor **Tom Schweich** (R) announced his 2016 gubernatorial candidacy this week. He is expected to be a major contender. Already in the Republican primary race is former US Attorney and state House Speaker **Catherine Hanaway**. Republican-turned-Democrat Attorney General **Chris Koster** is the lone announced Democratic contender so far. Gov. **Jay Nixon** (D) is ineligible to seek re-election to a third term.

North Carolina: Though saying he will formally announce at a future date, four-term Attorney General **Roy Cooper** (D) publicly committed to challenging Gov. **Pat McCrory** (R) in 2016. Mr. Cooper was first elected AG in 2000 and has been frequently mentioned as a candidate for higher office. In the past, he has always retreated to seek re-election, however. Winning the state four times for a major office, Cooper is widely believed to be a strong candidate, meaning the McCrory re-election bid will be a highly competitive one. The presidential election turnout model should also help the eventual Democratic nominee in this increasingly political marginal state.

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