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Number 712, November 5, 2007

Virginia: Mark Warner Strong Early Favorite

US Rep. **Tom Davis's** (R) decision not to run for the US Senate next year paves the way for former Gov. **Jim Gilmore** (R) to get the GOP nomination, but it also underscores that former Gov. **Mark Warner** (D) is likely to win the Senate seat currently held by US Sen. **John Warner** (R), who is stepping down next year. The turn of events also reinforces the trend toward a Democratic resurgence in Virginia. If, as is likely after next year's election, the Old Dominion has a Democratic governor and two Democratic senators -- and perhaps a Democratic state senate as well -- it will be difficult to color Virginia red or even purple. It will be turning a bright shade of blue.

There are, of course, some benefits to Gilmore from Davis's decision. Davis's withdrawal "effectively gives Gilmore the nomination without any significant costs," says **Boyd Marcus**, a Richmond consultant working with Gilmore. He adds that both Davis and Gilmore "were looking at five or six months of a race for the nomination that drains resources, and that has been effectively avoided now." This, says Marcus, is "the biggest plus" for Gilmore's candidacy.

While Gilmore has not announced his candidacy for next year's race, Marcus says he

is likely to make his candidacy official in mid-November, after this fall's state legislative elections, or in early December.

While Mark Warner's wide lead over Gilmore in recent polls -- as much as 30 percentage points -- isn't likely to hold through November 2008, the betting in Virginia is still that Warner is a solid bet to win the Senate race next year. "Warner is a heavy favorite," says Virginia political guru **Larry Sabato**, adding that Warner "is now considered the most likely Senate candidate to turn a red state into a blue state, by both the (national) Democratic and Republican campaign committees."

In addition to winning the GOP nod *gratis*, the Gilmore camp is counting on the state's normal Republican trend in presidential races to give their candidate a boost. Says Marcus, "**Hillary Clinton** is going to motivate the Republican base to come out in droves." However, one recent poll found that 52% of Virginia voters want the next president to be a Democrat, to 41% who prefer a Republican.

Sabato does say, however, "The only real shot [Gilmore]'s got is if Hillary Clinton's the nominee and she's a disaster." But he adds,



“Even then, Warner’s got a good chance of winning.”

As for Davis, don’t look for him to retire from politics, even if he decides to step down from his 11th District (Fairfax County, etc.) congressional seat. The rumor mill -- published and otherwise -- is that he’s about to take a very well paid job as a Washington lobbyist. But he can leave that anytime and jump back into politics. The most likely spot? Running against freshman US Sen. **Jim Webb** (D-VA) in 2010. Stay tuned.

Louisiana: Party Dominance at Stake

When Bayou State voters go to the polls on Nov. 17, they will decide whether newly elected Gov. **Bobby Jindal** (R) will have a Republican house of representatives to pave the way for his first few months in office, and whether he will have an attorney general of his own party.

Currently there are 34 Democrats and 30 Republicans who received a majority in the Oct. 20 non-partisan primary and have been elected. Another 23 seats -- 12 Republican and 11 Democratic -- will be decided in runoffs between two candidates of the same party. Thus, the two parties are going into the runoffs with 45 Democratic seats and 42 Republican seats secure.

There are 16 districts with partisan runoffs (and one where a Democrat faces an independent). For the Democrats to hold a majority -- 53 seats -- they will need to win eight seats. For the GOP, it will take eleven runoff victories to produce a majority. In a majority of districts with legislative runoffs, in the first primary, the combined votes of the Democratic candidates exceeded that of the Republican candidates, which is favorable to Democratic victories in the runoff. However,

in 11 of the 16 partisan runoffs, the Republican candidate won a plurality.

The two candidates for speaker of the house are Republican leader **Jim Tucker** of Algiers and Democratic state Rep. **Don Cazayoux** of New Roads. “The house will be controlled by Jim Tucker,” forecasts Southern Media pollster **Bernie Pinsonat**, who has polled in some 30 state legislative races this year. He expects the Democrats will win a narrow numerical majority in the house, “but it won’t tip so far that they will end up with the house,” he says, because GOP leaders will be able to persuade enough Democratic lawmakers in the house to jump ship and vote for Tucker to put him in the speaker’s chair.

With the state senate already in Democratic hands, albeit more conservative as a result of this year’s elections, if the GOP controlled the lower chamber, Jindal would very likely find smoother sailing for his much-touted ethics reform package as well as his educational and budget proposals. However, in Louisiana, partisan lines blur easily, and Jindal, who has announced that he will not take part in the runoff campaigns, is likely to find allies and opponents for his policies in both parties, particularly when it concerns the rules that govern the legislative bodies.

Runoff for Attorney General

The only statewide office on the Nov. 17 runoff ballot will be the contest for attorney general between District Attorney **Buddy Caldwell** (D) and Shreveport attorney **Royal Alexander** (R). The two edged out incumbent **Charles Foti** (D) in the Oct. 20 vote, in which Caldwell led with 36%, followed by Alexander with 32%+ and Foti with 32%-. Both candidates have some baggage and the runoff campaign could get nasty, with lots of negative ads on both sides.



Even if Caldwell wins, the Republicans will have the major share of state government offices. After the first primary, Agriculture Commissioner **Bob Odom** (D), one of the political mainstays of the Louisiana Democratic Party, withdrew after winning a plurality of only 41%, giving the office to state Rep. **Mike Strain** (R). Odom's withdrawal gives the GOP five of the seven state government officials -- governor, secretary of state, treasurer, insurance commissioner and agriculture commissioner; the Democrats have one state official, Lt. Gov. **Mitch Landrieu**.

Turnout

The presence of only one statewide race in the runoff means that turnout will be driven largely by local races. In the first primary, despite having a hotly contested governor's race at the top of the ballot, voter turnout was the lowest since 1975, with the exception of the 1991 **Edwin Edwards-David Duke** election. The number of African-American voters declined sharply, with a black turnout rate of 36% compared to 51% for whites. In Orleans Parish -- New Orleans -- turnout was down 44% from four years ago. In this majority black, heavily Democratic parish, which in 2004 **President Bush** lost by 109,763 votes and US Sen. **David Vitter** (R) lost by 101,756, this year the eleven Democratic and other candidates for governor combined led Republican Jindal by only 23,234.

Part of this can be attributed to more blacks than whites emigrating after the 2005 hurricanes, part to the lack of a gubernatorial candidate with strong appeal to African-American voters. If this pattern continues into the runoff, it should favor the Republicans. Racial patterns were clear in the first primary, with the GOP's Jindal receiving an estimated 10% of the black vote and about 67% of the white vote.

Southern Senators Mostly Well-Funded

With a year to go before the 2008 election, the South's eleven US Senators who will be seeking re-election are, for the most part, in good financial shape according to the Federal Election Commission (FEC). At the top of the list, Senate Minority Leader **Mitch McConnell** (R-KY), who is drawing fire both nationally and in Kentucky for his support of the war in Iraq, had more cash on hand -- some \$6.8 million dollars -- at the end of the 3rd Quarter than any other Dixie lawmaker.

In second place is Sen. **John Cornyn** (R-TX), with \$6.6 million, which puts him in very good shape now that his wealthy, self-funding foe, trial lawyer **Mikal Watts** (D), has withdrawn from the race. Cornyn's other opponent, state Rep. **Rick Noriega** (D), who is popular with liberal activists, had just \$500,000, but had more individual contributions than Watts.

Three other Republican senators who are in the money for 2008 are **Lindsey Graham** (SC), **Saxby Chambliss** (GA) and **Jeff Sessions** (AL), none of whom is likely to face a serious challenge next year. Indeed, their hefty war chests have probably helped ward off serious competition.

Two Democrats on the list, **Mary Landrieu** (LA) and **Mark Pryor** (AR), are also in good shape, but their outlooks differ. Landrieu is likely to need all of her nearly \$3.4 million and more, given that she's a top GOP target and her home state has just elected a Republican governor. Pryor, on the other hand, is deemed a safe bet for re-election, and his nearly \$3.3 million serves mainly as insurance in case a significant GOP challenger should emerge.

The four Dixie lawmakers trailing the list include several that may need a bigger campaign fund come next fall. **Elizabeth Dole**



(R-NC) has \$2.3 million, which will be plenty if she doesn't draw a major foe. Her polling numbers are not impressive, however, and she would be more secure if she had more money in the bank. Similarly, **James Inhofe** (R-OK), with \$1.9 million, could face serious opposition in 2008; Inhofe's opponent so far, state Sen. **Andrew Rice** (D), has \$260,000 on hand, which is a start.

Lamar Alexander (R-TN) at nearly \$1.5 million and **Thad Cochran** (R-MS) with \$1.1 million aren't sitting on major bucks. On the other hand, Alexander is a heavy re-election favorite, despite facing **Mike McWherter** (D), the son of popular former governor **Ned McWherter**, and Cochran is a lead-pipe cinch in 2008. You can take that to the bank.

US Senate FEC Reports

July 1 to Sept. 30
Incumbents in bold

	3rd Qtr	On Hand
Alabama		
Jeff Sessions/R	\$584,000	3,590,000
Vivien Figures/D	25,000	21,000
Arkansas		
Mark Pryor/D	557,000	3,269,000
Georgia		
S. Chambliss/R	1,000,000	3,918,000
Dale Cardwell/D	57,000	35,000
Vernon Jones/D	187,000	266,000
Rand Knight/D	81,000	20,000
Kentucky		
M. McConnell/R	1,478,000	6,814,000

Louisiana		
M. Landrieu/D	824,000	3,357,000
Mississippi		
Thad Cochran/R	44,000	1,084,000
North Carolina		
Elizabeth Dole/R	1,004,000	2,303,000
Oklahoma		
James Inhofe/R	527,000	1,651,000
Andrew Rice/D	311,000	260,000
South Carolina		
L. Graham/R	472,000	4,224,000
Tennessee		
L. Alexander/R	658,000	1,477,000
Texas		
John Cornyn/R	1,648,000	6,610,000
Rick Noriega/D	531,000	510,000
Virginia		
Mark Warner/D	1,109,000	1,017,000

US Senate Updates

North Carolina: Dole Gets a New Foe

State Sen. **Kay Hagan** (D), who has strong ties to Gov. **Mike Easley** (D), former Gov. **Jim Hunt** (D) and others in the Tar Heel Democratic establishment, announced last week that she will enter the race for the Democratic nomination to oppose US Sen. **Elizabeth Dole** (R) in 2008. Hagan, 54, had said early in October that she would not be a candidate, but changed her mind, citing Dole's



vote against the Democratic child healthcare proposal as her main reason for re-entering the race.

There has been widespread speculation, however, that Hagan re-entered the race because Chapel Hill investment banker **Jim Neal** (D), already in the race, had revealed that he is gay. Neal said this was known to his family and friends, and treated it as no big deal, comparing it in a published interview to “the color of your eyes.”

SPR talked to several knowledgeable Tar Heel sources and got somewhat different, but not mutually exclusive, explanations for Hagan’s re-entry into the Senate race.

The inside story, according to one Raleigh source, is that both Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee Chair **Chuck Schumer** (D-NY) and ex-Gov. **Jim Hunt** (D-NC) had asked Hagan to stay out of the race in favor of state Rep. **Grier Martin** (D). Hagan agreed to step aside for Martin. Then Martin, son of popular former Charlotte congressional candidate **D. G. Martin**, backed out, leaving Neal as the only significant contender.

Schumer and Hunt then went back to Hagan, an influential member of the state senate, and asked her to get back in the race. Moreover, given that Neal, 50, though a North Carolinian by birth and education, had lived in New York and Los Angeles until a year ago, there is some doubt about whether he would be a strong nominee even were he not gay. (Neal has, however, raised money for Tar Heel Democrats in the past.)

Another informed Raleigh source tells essentially the same story, but adds that once Martin bowed out and some Democratic powers-that-be found out that Neal is gay -- which was known to his friends and family but

not to the public at large -- “they intensified their pressure on Kay” to get back in the race, “for fear that [Neal] would bring down the rest of the ticket.” A Charlotte source adds, “I’m sure that some people see [being gay] as a non-starter in North Carolina.”

Several openly gay candidates have been elected to public office in North Carolina, including a state senator and a mayor, but voter acceptance of gay candidates has not been tested statewide.

In any case, the Democrats’ business-oriented establishment is expected to support Hagan, while the party’s liberal activists are likely to back Neal. At this point, Dole, 71, is the early favorite.

Texas: Watts Drops Out

The decision of wealthy trial lawyer **Mikal Watts** (D) to withdraw from the 2008 US Senate contest has thrown Lone Star -- and Washington, DC -- Democrats into a quandary. With the self-funding Watts out of race, now party honchos -- state and national -- must decide whether to look for another heavy-duty contender or get behind state Rep. **Rick Noriega** (D), an idealistic long shot with heavy “blog” backing. Meanwhile, US Sen. **John Cornyn** (R-TX), who had \$6.6 million on hand as of Sept. 30 to Noriega’s \$510,000 -- and Watts’ \$8,304,000, mostly his own money -- must be breathing a little easier.

Kentucky: McConnell’s So-So Numbers

US Sen. Minority Leader **Mitch McConnell** (R) gets a positive rating from 47% of the voters, a negative rating from 46%, according to a Research 2000 poll taken for the Lexington *Herald-Leader* and Channel 36. The survey, taken Oct. 22-24, showed McConnell leading all of the Democrats mentioned as potential opponents, but he failed to break 50%



in any of the matchups. McConnell led US Rep. **Ben Chandler** 46% to 41%, led state Auditor **Crit Luallen** 45% to 40%, led Attorney General **Greg Stumbo** 46% to 37% and led Iraq War veteran **Andrew Horne** 45% to 34%. Meanwhile, the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC) and a variety of liberal groups (Move On, etc.) are continuing their TV attack ads, hitting McConnell's support for Bush's policies in Iraq.

Tennessee: Alexander Strong.

It's 60% for US Sen. **Lamar Alexander** (R), 29% for likely challenger **Mike McWherter** (D), says an Ayres McHenry poll taken recently for Alexander.

Virginia: Dates Set for 1st District Race

The Republican and Democratic Parties in Virginia's 1st District (Hampton Roads, etc.) will hold their nominating conventions on Saturday, Nov. 10 to choose a successor to the late US Rep. **Jo Ann Davis** (R). The special election will be held on Tuesday, Dec. 11.

So far, at least eleven Republican candidates and two Democrats have announced they are running for the vacancy and more could still enter the race. The GOP contenders, in alphabetical order, are **Richard Black**, a former Delegate and strong conservative; **Jim Bowden**, who just stepped down as 1st District GOP chairman; **Sherwood Bowditch**, executive director of the Virginia Alliance of Boys and Girls Clubs; **David Caprara**, former state housing official; **David Corderman**, a retired FBI agent; **Charles "Chuck" Davis**, widower of the late congresswoman; **Catesby Jones**, president of Peace Frogs, Inc., a sportswear company; **Paul Jost**, millionaire and party activist; **Kevin O'Neill**, an attorney with Patton Boggs, a prominent Washington

lobbying firm; **Rob Quartel**, a businessman and former member of the US Maritime Commission; and Del. **Rob Wittman**.

Davis, says a local journalist, "is the sentimental favorite," but whether sentiment influences a convention as much as a primary remains to be seen.

On the Democratic side, the two candidates are **Philip Forgit**, who won a Bronze Star for his military service in Iraq, received a teacher-of-the-year award from the National Education Association, and ran a strong race for the House of Delegates in 2003; and **Edward "Ted" Hontz**, a vice president of Basic Commerce and Industries and a decorated Navy veteran.

The district has a Republican voting history; **President Bush** carried it with 60% in 2004.

Grits

? **Tennessee: Thompson Strong.** Former US Sen. **Fred Thompson** (R-TN) rates 63% favorable, 18% unfavorable; **President Bush** gets a 48% favorable, 47% unfavorable rating; and **Hillary Clinton** gets 44% favorable, 48% unfavorable, says the Ayres McHenry poll taken recently for US Sen. **Lamar Alexander** (R-TN). In a Clinton-**Rudy Giuliani** match-up, it's down to the wire: Giuliani 46%, Clinton 44%.

? **North Carolina: Edwards Weak.** In a mid-October presidential survey by the Civitas Institute, among Tar Heel Democrats, **Hillary Clinton** led with 31%, followed by 18% for homestater **John Edwards** and 18% for **Barack Obama**. For the GOP, **Rudy Giuliani** had 21%, **Fred Thompson** 19% and **Mitt Romney** 16%.