



**WEIST CAPITOL GROUP**

**MEMO**

TO: Clients of Weist Capitol Group  
FROM: Jeff Weist and Laura Long  
DATE: June 27, 2018  
RE: 2018 Colorado Primary Election Results and Insights

The prelims for the first post-Trump election in November are over. Last night, both Republican and Democrat voters picked their nominees for the races that will help determine which party controls the US House of Representatives and the Colorado State Senate, as well as Colorado's Governor. Here are a few quick take-aways that WCG thought you should know. You can find the results of all the state and federal races on the Colorado Secretary of State's [primary elections results page](#).

**The Parties Continue to Drift Left and Right**

- The national media is focused on the narrative of which factions within each party are winning – the populist grassroots factions of the Democrat and Republican parties versus the more establishment candidates.
- Nationally and in Colorado, there are many data points on both sides of the argument. But – with a few notable exceptions like the Democrat Attorney General primary – Democrats picked the more progressive candidate yesterday, especially against candidates identified as open to business interests.
- And – again with some exceptions – the Republicans picked the more conservative candidates over real or perceived moderates.

**Colorado's New Quasi-Open Primary**

- Those of us registered as an Unaffiliated voter had the chance to vote in either the Republican or Democrat primaries (not both) for the first time this year.
  - More than a quarter-million Unaffiliated voters did so, or about 25% of the total primary vote.

- The latest data show 60,000 more U's voted the Democratic ballot versus the Republican ballot.
- In addition, 50,000 more registered Democrats voted in the primary overall than did Republicans.
- Those numbers should continue to make Republicans worried about the outcome of the November general election.
- While the new quasi-open primary system was supposed to help moderate both party's candidates as they chased after Unaffiliated voters, based on the conclusions above, that dynamic hasn't yet played out.
  - But this is a weird election in a weird political environment, so we shouldn't give up hope yet.

### **Colorado Governor's Race**

- Both front-runners for Governor – Jared Polis (D) and Walker Stapleton (R) – walked away with their nominations by larger-than-expected margins. A late surge from Victor Mitchell (R) evaporated while second place Democrat finisher Kerry Kennedy had been slipping back for weeks.
- Both parties got what they wanted from the other one:
  - The Republicans think their best (only) chance at victory in November is to run against Polis, the Boulder congressman long thought to be too liberal even in trending blue Colorado.
  - Meanwhile, the Democrats are eager to attack Stapleton for a number of primary campaign gaffs and his connections to Trump.
- Between Polis' own millions, Stapleton's proven ability to raise money from his Bush family connections and the oil and gas industry's determination to defeat Polis, the Colorado Governor's race is shaping up to be the most expensive race in Colorado history.

### **Statewide Races**

- The only two contested races in the primary were for Attorney General and State Treasurer.
- The more interesting of the two was Attorney General, a race that deserves a lot of attention from the business community.
  - Former CU Law School Dean Phil Weiser squeaked out a victory over State Rep. Joe Salazar, who many Democrat voters must have assumed was part of the Colorado Salazar political family. Salazar had held a meaningful lead in polls all year. Weiser will face Arapahoe County DA George Brauchler in November.

- The State Treasurer's race was interesting chiefly because most of the candidates were state legislators we have all known for years.
  - Democrat and current JBC member Dave Young handily won that party's nomination.
  - On the Republican side, one-time state legislative candidate Brian Watson barely edged out Rep. Justin Everett. Rep. Polly Lawrence was a distant third, reinforcing the impression that it's tough to be a woman or a "moderate" in today's Republican party.

### **Colorado Legislature**

- As usual, about one-quarter of the legislature will be new in 2019, thanks to term limits. There will be at least 24 brand new faces.
- In addition to Reps. Joe Salazar and Justin Everett, here is a list of those legislators who won't be coming back next year or heading off to another office:
  - Rep. Mike Foote, known chiefly for his antagonism toward the state's oil and gas industry, lost his primary race for Boulder DA.
  - Freshman Republican Reps. Phil Covarrubias and Judy Reyher both lost primary challenges, while two other incumbent Republicans withstood theirs. No sitting Democrat legislator faced a primary challenge.
  - Rep. Dan Thurlow's unusual and unpopular primary challenge against Sen. Ray Scott failed, another testament to the party's lack of appetite for moderates.
  - Sen. Owen Hill lost his primary challenge to US Rep. Doug Lamborn. However, Sen. Hill is midterm and not up for reelection anyway and will return in 2019.

With the preliminary contests over, all attention now turns to the November elections. For WCG and our clients, the most important concern is which party will control the State Senate and, to a lesser extent, the Governor's office. After a decade of on-again, off-again, split partisan control, we know the ability to easily defeat bad Democrat AND Republican bills is important to the stability of the state's regulatory environment. However, solving major problems – like transportation funding – is always much harder under split control. It will likely all come down to just three races in the Senate.

Please contact us if you want more details about any of the above or how the competitive races are shaping up for November.

Thank you, as always, for your confidence in Weist Capitol.