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## Utah Legislative Update: September 2016

### Insight — September 14, 2016

Just about everyone has had it with this election cycle and the post-Labor Day ramp up to Election Day has barely started. No one seems to like our presidential choices as evidenced by the colleagues who regularly swing by my office to vent about the process, and voice plans to work remotely from Canada no matter the election outcome. My job is part firm lobbyist and part political grief counselor these days.

However, as a political professional and a recovering campaign junkie, I can't help but point out that there is a lot riding on this year's election cycle, and some unique forces at play this year could impact other local races. Admittedly, I'm a fan of state-level politics. It is the level of government still capable of solving big problems and getting stuff done. If you're an election watcher that just can't take any more special electoral college maps this year, let me point you toward some interesting local races guaranteed to be nail biters!

The races I've highlighted below are all Salt Lake County House seats. The entire Utah House is up for election this cycle, while only half of the State Senate is up this year. A presidential cycle brings a higher voter turnout statewide, which can significantly impact how races further down the ballot plan their "get out the vote" strategy. For instance, in 2008 during the Bush/Kerry election cycle, Utah's turnout was 67.8%, but dropped to 51.55% in 2010 during a local legislative cycle. Voter turnout was again significantly up in 2012 during the Obama/Romney election cycle to 80.15%, thanks to Utah's special love for Mitt Romney. Compare that to 2014, where the statewide turnout again dropped to 46.25% for the local legislative cycle.

The question for many local races this year is what impact will the top of the ticket have on voter turnout? It is fairly safe to assume that Utahns don't have the same warm-fuzzy feeling for Donald Trump that they did for Romney. And as a deeply red state, many that are turned off by Trump still don't find Hilary Clinton an acceptable alternative, which could drive down voter turnout. Expecting a voter turnout closer to 2008 levels is a more realistic expectation this cycle, but we might set a new record for low turnout in a presidential cycle. However, this campaign is bringing out more visceral feelings in voters than I have ever witnessed. Third party candidates are a factor like they haven't been since Ross Perot managed to capture 26.08% of the Utah vote in 1992. Local legislative campaign managers that can usually wait until after Labor Day to start serious campaigning have been plotting all summer for the best way to reach voters and get them to the polls this crazy election cycle!

See below for the three races I've highlighted this month. If you have questions about other races this year or clients that have political giving questions, please feel free to contact me.

**House District 30 (West Valley City area)**

**Candidates: Mike Winder (R) and Frank Bedolla (D)**

**Kate's Prediction: Winder**

This district is one of the most competitive in the entire state. In 2014, the outcome was decided by just 43 votes. In fact on election day, it was called as a win for the Democratic candidate, but when the final canvass was complete, the Republican had gained enough votes to squeak out the victory. In this year's matchup, the incumbent Republican (Fred Cox), was defeated in an inner-party convention fight, so both major party candidates are fresh faces. Former-West Valley City Mayor Mike Winder is the Republican candidate running against newcomer Frank Bedolla who is a youth counselor. Not only is Bedolla a newcomer to politics he is new to West Valley City. The Winder name (Winder Dairy) is well known statewide, but especially in West Valley City where he was a two-term councilman and two-term Mayor. In a swing seat, securing endorsements that show your ability to reach across the aisle is important and Winder has secured the endorsements of several labor Unions. He is also leading in campaign cash by about \$10,000 as of the last report which doesn't include a recent major fundraiser. This race will be close because of the pressure at the top of the ticket, but I believe the name recognition and active fundraising during the past 12 months by Winder, swings this one in his favor.

**House District 31 (West Valley City, West Millcreek area)**

**Candidates: Sophia DiCaro (I) (R) and Elizabeth Weight (D)**

**Kate's Prediction: DiCaro**

This particular seat was re-drawn significantly in the 2010 census redistricting, which only gives us two-cycles of voting history. In the 2012 presidential cycle, only 77 votes separated the candidates in which the Democratic candidate won, but in 2014 with a lower turnout, 205 votes separated the candidates with the Republican candidate winning. The incumbent is Sophia DiCaro who is the former deputy director of the Governor's Office of Economic Development. She now works in venture capital. Elizabeth Weight is a teacher in the Granite School District. DiCaro is very popular in Republican circles and is seen as a rising star of the freshman class, but is also gaining fans from the traditional left, namely the AFL-CIO which endorsed her. She has been actively fundraising for over a year and has hired professional campaign help. She has about \$21,000 in cash-on-hand heading into the final push compared to \$7,000 for Weight. The failure by Weight to lock up the Union endorsement is a rookie mistake and could cost her in this blue-collar district where the ability to drive voter turnout is the most important factor.

**House District 44 (Murray, Midvale, South Salt Lake)**

**Candidates: Bruce Cutler (i)(R) and Christine Passey (D)**

**Kate's Prediction: Passey**

Everyone loves a rematch of a close race, and that is exactly what this particular district is offering. Bruce Cutler and Christine Passey faced off as political newcomers in a 2014 open seat. Passey won narrowly on election

day, but when the final canvass was completed, Cutler had won by just 53 votes. This year the rematch is on and fierce. Passey spent the last two years working on the campaign of Salt Lake City Mayor Jackie Biskupski to hone her campaign and fundraising skills. Cutler had a fairly quiet freshman term as a legislator and combined with a mellow and soft-spoken personality, hasn't gained much traction in a freshman class that featured a lot of big personalities. Total fundraising and cash-on-hand is about even for both candidates right now. In this district, I think the influence from the presidential cycle likely pushes the turnout in Passey's favor, but like each of the races I've highlighted, it will be close!

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