

Iowa Politics Roundup: Parties Announce Headliners for Major Fundraisers

Written by Lynn Campbell
Friday, 03 September 2010 12:45

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A pair of governors -- one current and one former -- will headline Iowa's major-party fundraisers in the months before the November election.

Former Alaska Governor Sarah Palin will headline the Iowa GOP's Ronald Reagan Dinner on September 17; Palin was last in the state in December, for a book signing in Sioux City.

Tickets for the event are \$100 each or \$1,000 for a table of eight. The Iowa GOP is also offering Iowans the opportunity to volunteer at any of its 10 statewide "Victory Centers" in exchange for a ticket to the "Salute to Freedom" dinner.

A month after Palin's appearance, the Iowa Democratic Party will host Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell as the keynote speaker for the October 16 Jefferson Jackson Dinner.

Rendell, 66, was chair of the Democratic National Committee during the 2000 presidential election, and served as chair of the National Governors Association from 2008 to 2009. He's married to Marjorie Rendell, a federal judge for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit.

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Secretary of State Predicts More than 1 Million Voters in November

Early voting in Iowa's general election begins September 23, and the state's top election official is predicting that more than 1 million Iowans will turn out to vote this fall.

"November 2 is Election Day, but really the election begins September 23," Secretary of State Michael Mauro told reporters. "That's the first day ballots are going to be available in county auditors' offices. They can come in and vote. They're going to start to be sent out in the mail."

While Democrats have previously used early voting to their advantage, early voting is expected to be key in both Republicans' and Democrats' efforts this year. "I think they'll work very hard at it," Mauro said. "I know they've had a mailing sent out. I anticipate mailings from both parties."

Expect election activities and advertising to ramp up after Labor Day. "We're confident that there'll be good turnout for this November election," Mauro said. "I think we're going to see very close to what we saw four years ago, which is 1,050,000. I think we'll exceed a million voters. ...Fifty percent, little over 50 percent."

Mauro said early voting is changing the dynamic of campaigns. For example, he said newspapers may not want to wait until right before the election to make their endorsements, because 30 percent of the people have already voted. "It changes how you campaign as a candidate and it changes how you do your advertisements, and it changes how the media approaches the election," he said.

New voter-registration numbers released show that Iowa Democrats maintain an advantage of more than 54,000 voters over Republicans.

As of Wednesday, there were 2,102,528 registered voters in Iowa: 699,707 Democrats, 645,606 Republicans, 755,513 no-party voters, and 1,702 others.

Business Leaders See Recovery Slowing

The Iowa Business Council is projecting a pause in the state's economic recovery, based on results of its third-quarter survey of executives of the largest businesses in the state.

Activity in the three areas measured by large employers to gauge the strength of business for the coming six months -- sales, capital spending, and employment -- did not vary significantly from results of the previous quarter.

The Iowa Business Council's overall economic-outlook survey index fell to 61.3 in the third quarter, which is one point lower than three months ago (62.3) but 12.6 points higher than one year ago (48.7). The survey was completed by the 20 corporate members of the Iowa Business Council during the second half of August.

"These survey results, while still indicating an overall positive sentiment for the next six months, suggest that the economy is still unpredictable," said Iowa Business Council Chair Tom Aller, president of Interstate Power & Light. "The question appears to be whether recovery momentum can be sustained. In essence, is business activity pausing to adjust strategically before continuing forward, or has growth peaked and expansion been maximized? Most certainly, the resiliency of the Iowa economy continues to be tested. Insightful and transformative leadership in the coming months will determine the level of success achieved in the long term."

Meanwhile, an August Business Conditions survey of supply managers in a nine-state region including Iowa declined to the lowest level since January, with more than one-third of supply managers expecting a recession in 2011, according to results released by Creighton University.

The index for the mid-America region declined to 55.8 from July's 60.8 and June's 62.5. However, this was the ninth straight month that the index is above growth-neutral.

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Iowa's Business Conditions Index slipped to 66.9 in August from July's 68.2. "Very healthy growth in Iowa's durable-goods-manufacturing sector has more than offset weaker conditions among nondurable-goods producers, especially food producers," said Creighton University economics professor Ernie Goss. "Egg recalls among Iowa producers will only further weaken the sector."

Many businesses could also see an increase in their unemployment contribution rate on January 1 to keep the Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund at sufficient levels to adequately provide for unemployment benefits, Iowa Workforce Development announced.

Record unemployment claims over the last two and a half years coupled with the recession triggered the adjustment. The rate of increase depends on an employer's taxable payroll limit and ranges from no increase to a 1.6-percentage-point increase.

"This is extremely disappointing news," John Gilliland of the Iowa Association of Business & Industry told IowaPolitics.com. "This additional tax increase on Iowa businesses only makes it more difficult for them to hire."

Iowa has traditionally had some of the lowest employer rates in the country. However, as Iowa has been besieged by unemployment claims and individuals are remaining on unemployment longer due to the recession, the potential liability to the trust fund has increased. Iowa law dictates that more money is needed to maintain the solvency of the trust fund.

Egg Recall Becomes Focal Point for Ag-Secretary Race

Democratic secretary of agriculture candidate Francis Thicke is calling on Agriculture Secretary Bill Northey to explain why habitual violator Austin "Jack" DeCoster was allowed to avoid state feed-mill inspections that could have identified a strain of salmonella before 1,470 Americans were sickened and a half-billion eggs were recalled.

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But Northey's campaign said he would have been overstepping the law if the department required inspection of Wright County Egg and Hillandale Farms.

Thicke called the recall a "a national embarrassment to the state of Iowa."

He added: "For my opponent to defer all responsibility to federal authorities when Iowa law gave him authority to ensure the safety of the feed thought to be the cause of the salmonella contamination calls into question his leadership and commitment to the integrity of Iowa's food and agriculture."

Northey's campaign said Thicke was wrong about the authority of the agriculture secretary.

"It is very disconcerting that a candidate for Iowa secretary of agriculture would advocate stepping beyond the department's legal authority and violating private-property rights," said Northey campaign spokesperson Dustin Vande Hoef. "In Mr. Thicke's statement, he expresses a desire to target private-farmer feed mills based on size, and the definition of what constitutes 'large' would rest with him alone and have nothing to do with what the law actually says."

Vande Hoef said state law authorizes the department to license and inspect commercial feed mills that sell or distribute feed. "As a result, it does not apply to private individuals that mix feed for their own animals," he said. "The law makes no distinction based on size and gives no authority for the Iowa secretary of agriculture to pick and choose private feed mills to inspect."

Thicke said that the egg-recall scandal is damaging the image of Iowa agriculture, and that Northey should be front-and-center on this issue but has issued no official statements and has not acknowledged the recall on his department or his campaign Web site.

But Vande Hoef said Northey and his office have responded to every request for information and comment on the egg recall, which includes interviews with *Time* magazine and the *Des Moines Register* and providing information to the *New York Times*

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Wall Street Journal
, ABC News, and WHO Radio.

Fiscal Responsibility, Tax Increases, Regulation Major Themes at Farm Bureau Conference

Iowa Farm Bureau Federation President Craig Lang said Thursday that the last 15 months have been trying for farmers in the state -- from record snowfall and low temperatures in the winter to a wet spring and a record summer of heat and humidity -- and that government policies have only added to those woes.

"If those numerous and pestering weather challenges weren't enough, think about the past legislative year and the growing fiscal problems in all levels of government," Lang said. "I have found that our enormous growing debt, increased regulation, and a nagging concern about the lack of interest in ag issues from some lawmakers permeates farm country."

Lang spoke Thursday to voting delegates of the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation during the group's annual summer policy conference in West Des Moines. The economy was a repeated theme from Lang and Farm Bureau members throughout the day.

"I can't say I always vote Republican; I just tend to vote for people who are pretty conservative in their spending habits, which happens to be Republicans a lot of the time I guess," said Matt Siefker, a delegate from Wright County. "I don't see Republicans sweeping back into power at the state level, maybe at a federal level, but I think people with the economy the way it is are starting to be more conscientious about fiscal responsibility."

Lon Tweeten, also from Wright County, echoed Siefker's sentiments. He said the state needs to elect people who will balance the budget, and he said that means throwing out Democratic Governor Chet Culver and others.

"Democrats, Republicans, it doesn't mean a lot to me," Tweeten said. "I more ask what the

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voting record is, who the person is, what they're going to do for us to try to use the funds, the resources that they have to make this go. If I ran my business like they run the state, I would have been bankrupt a long time ago."

Lang challenged the members to get involved in their communities and support candidates who are friends of agriculture.

The Iowa Farm Bureau Political Action Committee recently selected five top Republican candidates -- former Governor Terry Branstad, Agriculture Secretary Bill Northey, U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley, and U.S. Representatives Tom Latham and Steve King -- for its 2010 Friends of Agriculture endorsements. The list of 67 endorsements contains just a handful of Democrats.

"With the 2010 elections quickly approaching, it will be imperative for all of us to look closely at candidates' records on the budget and property taxes before voting," Lang said. "We've seen the effects of a broken budgeting process on our K-12 schools and on property taxpayers. That's why it's so critical that we elect lawmakers who make budget reform a top priority."

Siefker said members of the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation -- a grassroots organization that represents more than 153,000 families in Iowa -- need to do their part to remind people of the importance of agriculture to Iowa as the November 2 general election approaches.

"People say farmers are looking out for themselves, and that's true, but farming is the backbone of Iowa, so what's good for farmers is good for Iowa, and people need to realize that," he said.

This weekly summary comes from IowaPolitics.com, an online government and politics news service. Reporter Andrew Duffelmeyer and other correspondents contributed to this report.