

# 5 things to know about the Florida midterm election

Brendan Farrington 11:45 p.m. EDT September 1, 2014

Florida's governor's race will be a nationally watched contest between unpopular Republican Gov. Rick Scott, who won office during the tea party surge and now advocates for more government spending, and former Gov. Charlie Crist, who used to call himself a Ronald Reagan Republican and now cozies up to President Barack Obama. And it will be brutal.

Here are five things Florida voters should know about the upcoming campaign:

## Warchests

Scott has already spent more than \$20 million on television ads — most of them criticizing Republican-turned-Democrat Crist for taking different sides on major issues ranging from health care to gay rights. And despite Crist's reputation as a nice guy, his campaign has also been negative as he's constantly attacked Scott by reminding voters that the former hospital chain CEO ran a company that paid a \$1.7 billion settlement for Medicaid fraud. Crist has held on to most of his money until after the primary, while Scott has spent millions trying to catch up in the polls. The air war will intensify even more over the next two months.

Upcoming debates will also be key. Most observers expect the ultra-polished Crist to prevail over the awkward Scott. But if Scott can stick to his message that the state's economy tanked under Crist and improved under his watch, he could score points with voters.

## 2016 impact

The contest will also decide who will be in the governor's office during the 2016 presidential election. Florida is the largest swing state, and both parties will want to use the influence of the governor's office to help their nominees in the contest to replace Obama.

## Cabinet races

In other races, Democrats have basically conceded two of the three Cabinet seats, chief financial officer and agriculture commissioner. George Sheldon, a former Obama administration official, is a longshot to capture the third against Attorney General Pam Bondi.

Not that there aren't points of attack — Bondi has used her office to challenge state and federal court rulings that have declared the state's gay marriage ban unconstitutional, a position that puts her on the opposite side of a social issue that has gained more public support. She also opposed a ballot measure that could legalize medical marijuana, which polls show has overwhelming support. And she made the embarrassing decision to ask Scott to postpone an execution because it conflicted with a political fundraiser.

Democrats, however, have failed to generate interest in the race.

## Medical marijuana

Outside of the governor's race, the most debated issue is the ballot question that asks voters to legalize marijuana for medical use. While opposed by Scott and other Republican leaders, polls show overwhelming support for the issue, and it could bring out young Democratic voters and potentially be a boost for Crist.

## Congress

As Republicans and Democrats fight for control of Congress, two seats in Florida will be watched closely.

Democrat Gwen Graham, daughter of popular former Sen. and Gov. Bob Graham, is in a tight race against two-term Republican Rep. Steve Southerland in the Panhandle. And freshman Democratic U.S. Rep. Joe Garcia of Miami is targeted by Republicans, who hope to win back the seat U.S. Rep. David Rivera lost in 2012 amid election fraud allegations.

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