



Michael Barone comments on Virginia politics, campaigns, and elections

JULY 20, 2012

By: RICHARD SINCERE

As coauthor of the long-lived biennial [Almanac of American Politics](#), Michael Barone has a wealth of knowledge to draw upon when he offers a unique perspective on campaigns and elections. A columnist at the Washington Examiner and senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, Barone spoke at a Cato Institute event on July 18, where [the Charlottesville Libertarian Examiner](#) took the opportunity to ask him a few questions about [Virginia politics](#).

"If you look at the polling for the U.S. Senate race this year" in Virginia, he said, "you'll see it is dead-even tie between former Governor [George Allen](#) and former Governor [Tim Kaine](#). It's about as close as you can get - perhaps even closer than that six- or seven thousand votes by which Jim Webb beat George Allen in 2006."

Asked to explain this narrow margin, Barone quipped: "Half the voters are on one side and half the voters are on the other side."

Turning more serious, he explained that Allen and Kaine "are both governors who left office with generally positive assessments of their performance as governor. They're each people who have substantial core constituencies -- George Allen [has] conservative Republicans, Tim Kaine [has] Northern Virginia, which has been trending Democratic, and also metro Richmond, where he was mayor before he was governor.

'National average'

Moreover, Barone pointed out, "Virginia was the national average in 2008, 53-46 for Obama. It was close to the national average in the House popular vote in 2010."

Consequently, he said, "Virginia is going to be very close in this Senate race."

Regarding Virginia Governor [Bob McDonnell](#)'s prospects to be GOP presidential candidate Mitt Romney's running mate, Barone said that he does not know "whether Bob McDonnell remains on the short list for VP or not. He's an attractive candidate in many ways."

'Cultural issues'

At the same time, he added, McDonnell "brings with him a record on cultural issues and an involvement in cultural issues which the Romney people and Governor Romney may find problematic in a year when voters are concentrating primarily on economic issues."

Looking forward to 2013, when Virginia and New Jersey are the only states holding gubernatorial elections, Barone said "you can make a case that Virginia and New Jersey have forecast national trends at various times"

In 1993, for instance, "they both voted against Democrats in the governorship and that proved to be a forecast of the 1994" takeover of the U.S. House of Representatives by Republicans for the first time in four decades.

Both states also voted Republican in 2009, he noted, but if you “go back to 1981, they voted very narrowly for a Republican in New Jersey and for a Democrat in Virginia and that proved to be kind of a harbinger for 1982.”

Despite these past examples, Barone cautioned, “like all political science rules, this one breaks down if you go far enough back in time or if you live long enough into the future to see it broken.”