

Local GOP hopes Brown's just the start

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By Robert Preer, Globe Correspondent | January 24, 2010

Scott Brown's victory in Tuesday's Senate race has buoyed the hopes of Republican activists south of Boston as they eye the fall election.

GOP leaders say they expect more candidates to come forward to run for office and more volunteers to work on campaigns because of Brown's win over Democratic state Attorney General Martha Coakley.

"In a span of 24 to 48 hours, there has been a sea change," said Brock N. Cordeiro of Dartmouth, a Republican State Committee member whose district stretches across the south suburbs. "I've gotten many, many calls from people now thinking about running for office this year."

Geoff Diehl of Whitman, a Republican candidate for state representative, said Brown's win has brought new attention to GOP candidates. "The night of the election, I was getting text messages on my phone saying, 'You're next.'"

Since the late 1990s, Democrats have dominated elections for state and county offices south of Boston. Democrats now control all but a handful of state Senate and House positions in the region.

Brown's win was a jolt to the Democratic establishment. "It's a wakeup call for Democrats," said Philip W. Johnston, former state chairman of the party and now a member of the Democratic State Committee. "Brown caught a wave of anger and resentment that had a particular impact in suburban areas."

Democratic state Representative Allen McCarthy of East Bridgewater is trying to fend off Diehl's challenge in the 7th Plymouth House District, which is made up of Abington, Whitman, and East Bridgewater. "It's a district that has tended to be independent," said McCarthy. "It votes for the candidate, not the party. I expect a tough race, but I think I will be successful."

Claire Naughton, a Democratic State Committee member from Foxborough, said her party needs to focus its efforts. "Democrats need to get our message out and not let it be twisted," she said.

With the fall election still months away, fields of candidates are still taking shape for most state and county offices.

In the Suffolk and Norfolk state Senate district, which includes Dedham, Norwood, and Westwood, as well as southern sections of Boston, Democratic incumbent Marian Walsh of West Roxbury has not declared whether she will seek reelection. Democratic state Representative Mike Rush of West Roxbury is considering a bid for the Senate post, while Republican Brad Williams of West Roxbury is an announced candidate.

Williams said his campaign will be helped by Brown's win. "Scott Brown's election was about taxes, jobs, and health care. Those three things will carry over to the state election."

Two Republicans, Swansea Planning Board member David Saad and former Seekonk selectman Steven Howitt, have announced bids for the House seat now held by Steven D'Amico of Seekonk. The district is made up of Rehoboth, Seekonk, and parts of Norton and Swansea.

Howitt, who ran unsuccessfully for the House seat in 2004 and 2006, said Brown's victory gives GOP candidates momentum. "There's an excitement now. It energizes people to get involved in politics," Howitt said.

Two Democratic state representatives from the region have already announced they will not seek reelection. David L. Flynn of Bridgewater is retiring, and John F. Quinn of Dartmouth is planning to give up his seat to run for Bristol County sheriff, an office held now by Republican Thomas Hodgson of Dartmouth.

Candidates from both parties are considering running for the House seats Flynn and Quinn are vacating.

Many Democrats had anticipated a Coakley victory and had started making plans to run for offices that would open up with a vacancy in the attorney general's office. Norfolk District Attorney William R. Keating of Sharon had planned to run for attorney general, and Bristol District Attorney C. Samuel Sutter of Fall River also was considering a bid for that job.

Sutter said last week he will seek reelection and not run for attorney general. Keating could not be reached for comment.

State Senator Michael W. Morrissey, a Quincy Democrat, had been planning to run for Norfolk district attorney if Keating ran for attorney general. Democratic state Representatives Bruce J. Ayers and A. Stephen Tobin, both of Quincy, had been eyeing Morrissey's Senate seat, while several Quincy politicians were considering bids for the House.

But if Coakley seeks reelection - and her aides say she will - the dominoes remain in place, according to Morrissey. "I assume Bill Keating is running for reelection, and so am I," Morrissey said.

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