

Conservatives score huge victories in off-year elections across the nation

The Daily
202

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Just like the
midterm Election
Day one year ago,
Tuesday was an
awful night for
Democrats.

To start with,
Republican Matt Bevin won a
big upset in the Kentucky
governor's race. The guy who
Sen. Mitch McConnell crushed
by 25 points in a 2014 primary
now becomes the second
Republican in four decades to
govern the Bluegrass State.

Democrats failed to pick up
Virginia's state Senate. It's a
huge blow to Gov. Terry

McAuliffe (D), who went all in to
make it happen. Democrats
could have prevailed by
capturing one seat because of
the tie-breaking authority of Lt.
Gov. Ralph Northam (D). But
Republicans held every single
seat.

The Houston Equal Rights
Ordinance, designed to protect
the rights of gays and others,
failed by a wide margin. Ohio
rejected marijuana legalization
by a ratio of 2 to 1. Even in San
Francisco, the sheriff who
steadfastly defended the city's
"sanctuary city" policy went
down. The city also rejected new
regulations on Airbnb.

The Kentucky surprise was
the biggest story of the night.
Here are some takeaways from
Bevin's blowout in the Bluegrass
State:

• This really is the Year of the
Outsider. Democratic Governors
Association Executive Director
Elisabeth Pearson chalked up
Jack Conway's (D) defeat to
"Trump-mania" in a news
release: "Jack Conway ran a
strong campaign. . . .
Unfortunately, he ran into the
unexpected headwinds of
Trump-mania, losing to an
outsider candidate in the Year of
the Outsider."

• Focusing on social issues,
including promises to defund
Planned Parenthood and
defend Kim Davis, helped drive
the conservative base to turn
out. I wrote about Bevin's focus
on energizing evangelical
Christians as Election Day
neared, and it clearly paid off.

Kim Davis called herself
"ecstatic" about Bevin's victory
in a statement: "He is such a
genuine and caring person. I will
be forever thankful that he came
to visit me while I was in jail. At
a clerks' meeting he hugged me
and said he was praying for me. I
am looking forward to his
leadership as our new
Governor."

• The South is becoming even
redder, and the realignment
that began a half-century ago is
nearly complete. President

Obama is toxic, even in non-

*"Not only has President Obama destroyed the party
in Kentucky, he's destroyed the bench. The bench
that was supposed to rise up and run for office —
that's gone."*

Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.), Republican presidential candidate

federal elections. Mississippi
Gov. Phil Bryant (R) easily won
reelection, too, and the GOP
increased its majority in that
state's House to a near-
supermajority. Republicans even
toppled the House minority
leader.

• Pressure will let up a bit on
Rand Paul to drop out of the
presidential race to focus on his
2016 Senate reelection
campaign. The incumbent state
auditor, Adam Edelen, who
national Democrats hoped
would challenge Paul in next
year's Senate race, lost in a
stunning upset. "What this
election shows is that people
who've been promoting
Democrats on the rise in
Kentucky have been completely
wrong," Paul told The
Washington Post's David Weigel
and Paul Kane. "Not only has
President Obama destroyed the
party in Kentucky, he's destroyed
the bench. The bench that was
supposed to rise up and run for
office — that's gone."

• The Republican win is
another nail in the coffin for
big labor unions in the South.
Bevin's top economic priority is

making Kentucky a right-to-
work state.

• Bevin will be a bull in the
china shop, but he is unlikely to
govern as radically as many of
the postmortems will suggest.
I've spent more than 24 hours
with the governor-elect going
back to January 2014. Bevin is
certainly an ideologue, but he
also has a profound pragmatic
streak. He told me last week that
he'll lead in the tradition of John
Brown Jr., a former KFC chief
executive and moderate
Democrat who was not beholden

to anyone and cleaned up state
government in the early 1980s.
Bevin's efforts to make nice with
Senate Majority Leader
McConnell, who attacked him
fiercely last year, show that he's
capable of becoming a serious
politician.

• There should be more soul-
searching among pollsters, who
once again got it wrong. Every
survey of Kentucky showed
Conway ahead, which
meaningfully altered
perceptions of the race.

• But, but, but: Turnout was
very low across the country.
Republicans overinterpret
Tuesday's results at their own
peril. The presidential election,
one year away, will have
dramatically larger and more
diverse turnout, which works
against the GOP. Serious
structural problems persist: The
Grand Old Party is still too
white, too male and too old.
Hillary Rodham Clinton's
political director, Amanda
Renteria, tweeted a photo of a
"Vote Here" sign overnight and
wrote: "Wish more people did
this today."

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