

South Carolina Politics: Four Things to Watch in 2020

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Now that the holidays are over and we are well into 2020, it is a good time to consider some things to watch for in South Carolina this year. In political terms, the new decade is already red hot.

Census Year

The once every decade is the biggest of big deals. This accounting of the U.S. population sets the stage for everything from federal funding, to congressional districting, or to whether an area will get a new post office.

Over the course of South Carolina's history, the state has had as few as four congressional districts and as many as nine. South Carolina's Seventh District Congressional seat was re-established in 2011 after the census a year earlier revealed a sharp population increase. The state had 4.6 million residents in the 2010 census. Estimates show that number increasing to about 5.1 million now. But, it does not appear South Carolina will have grown enough to earn an eighth congressional seat. However, a recent projection from the Brookings Institute predicts that North Carolina will add a new congressional seat based on 2020 census data.

GOP Primary Lawsuit

During every presidential election cycle since 1980, the South Carolina Republican Party has held its "First in the South" primary in January. But, it appears that will not be the case this year after the S.C. GOP opted to do without a presidential primary all together.

Former U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis, a Greenville Republican, sued to force the party to hold its primary. But, in December, Circuit Court Judge Jocelyn Newman dismissed the suit, ruling the law “does not give Plaintiffs a legal right to a presidential preference primary.” There has been speculation about a potential appeal, but with the primary usually coming in late January, the matter appears moot in 2020.

The Democratic Presidential primary is set for Saturday, February 29. Fourteen candidates have been certified on the ballot.

Carolinas Take Center Stage

Two huge political events will turn all eyes toward the Carolinas in 2020. Just days before the state Democratic primary, CBS News, the Congressional Black Caucus and Twitter will join forces to produce the tenth Democratic presidential primary debate. The event is set for Tuesday, February 25th at the Gaillard Center in Charleston.

This summer, the National Republican Convention will be held just up I-77 in Charlotte. The event is set for Monday, August 24th through Thursday, August 27th and will have a major impact as it draws tens of thousands to Charlotte and nearby Palmetto-state locations like Rock Hill.

The Democratic primary was held in Charlotte in 2012. A study commissioned afterwards estimated that convention generated an economic impact of \$164 million -- including more than \$90 million in direct spending by visitors.

Election Laws Change

Politicos and election leaders should take note of changes involving South Carolina elections law over the past year. The legislature made more than a dozen changes to state election law in 2019.

Lawmakers passed a law extending the time for bids and evaluations of new voting machine systems. Thanks to the extension, the election commission announced a new paper-based system in June. It is replacing the paperless machines that had been utilized since 2004.

Another change involves how we elect sheriffs. Now, to be a candidate for a county’s top law enforcement officer, a person cannot have been convicted of or plead guilty to a crime of “moral turpitude.” That goes for any state, not just here in S.C. The new law also says a sheriff must be eligible for a Class 1 law enforcement certificate. The change was put into place as a safeguard in case someone has avoided a conviction but has done something that would otherwise disqualify them from earning a certificate.

Another important change in the law details residency requirements for poll managers and their assistants. A 2019 change in the law says that both must be a resident and registered to vote in the county “in which he is appointed to work or in an adjoining county.”

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