



Final HPI Forecast: Donnelly, Pence

Mourdock disaster shows signs of impacting races down ballot

By BRIAN A. HOWEY
INDIANAPOLIS – Howey Politics Indiana is forecasting a Democratic U.S. Senate seat pickup in Indiana as Joe Donnelly is likely to defeat Republican Richard Mourdock, probably in the 7 to 9% plurality range.

The most fascinating 11th hour dynamic is the RMDE - the Richard Mourdock Disaster Effect - that is impacting the Indiana gubernatorial and other down ballot races. The impact is that Mourdock's "God intends" rape remark is likely to devour any notion of a GOP "wave" in the gubernatorial and Indiana House races.

It could also impact the 2nd CD race where Democratic Party tracking had Donnelly winning big and Brendan Mullen within 2% of Republican favorite Jackie Walorski.

While the pro-life and evangelical movements have embraced Mourdock, we believe that Mourdock has alien-



ated independent and female voters.

Howey/DePauw Indiana Battleground pollsters Christine Matthews, a Republican, and Fred Yang, a Democrat, both believe the Senate race will tighten up from the Oct. 28-30 survey that had Donnelly leading 47-36%. HPI believes that some of the undecided GOP voters will return

Continued on page 4

A teachable moment in polling

By BRIAN A. HOWEY
NASHVILLE, Ind. – When you have \$25 million of mostly outside, special interest money spilling into a U.S. Senate race, it isn't surprising that emotions run high with the investment, particularly when one campaign realizes it is about to lose.



On Friday, we watched the campaign of Republican U.S. Senate nominee Richard Mourdock, wobbling like an Iranian centrifuge, take shots at the credibility of our fourth poll of this cycle, the Howey/DePauw Indiana Battleground Poll. Our complete analysis of this polling data and our survey



“Obama has temporarily been a bipartisan figure this week. He has been comforter-in-chief and that helps.”

- Karl Rove



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top lines can be found at the top of this homepage under the "Howey/DePauw" tab at www.howeypolitics.com.

The Mourdock campaign suggested we were "backtracking" on the results that showed Democrat Joe Donnelly leading 47-36%. They demanded we release our cross tabulations, the data set that represents the statistical underpinnings of any poll.

I find no necessity to defend this poll or any of the three others we conducted this year. Nor do I have to defend the integrity of our polling team, Republican Christine Matthews and Democrat pollster Fred Yang.

Instead, I view this as a "teachable moment." It's a good opportunity to talk about polling in the context of an intense political race.

Here are some things I believe you should know.

1. I am in the information business, not the propaganda business.

I have published Howey Politics Indiana since 1994. My subscribers pay good money to read analysis, commentary and accurate election forecasts. If I were to go into the propaganda business, I would end up going out of business.

2. I actually wear several hats.

In addition to publishing Howey Politics Indiana, a bipartisan newsletter and website, I also write a newspaper column that appears on opinion pages and reaches 300,000 readers weekly. Since it is published on opinion pages, I have the opportunity to express, though not inflict, my opinion. In 2011 and through the May primary this year, my newspaper readers knew that I supported the reelection of U.S. Sen. Dick Lugar. I explained why on a number of occasions. In April and again in May of this year, I published the first two Howey/DePauw polls.

The first one showed Lugar leading Richard Mourdock 42-35%. With that data, I moved the Senate race from "leans Lugar" to "tossup." An incumbent at 42% reveals his vulnerability. In May, the second Howey/DePauw

poll showed Lugar trailing Mourdock 48-38%. With that data, I forecast that Mourdock would not only win, but probably in landslide fashion. And he did, 61-39%. But Howey Politics Indiana subscribers had the most accurate forecast in Indiana. I work for my subscribers. I am a capitalist journalist.

3. In order to provide the best data set I could, I put together a polling team of Matthews and Yang.

Matthews was the pollster for Gov. Mitch Daniels and she has also polled for the Indiana Republican Party and Chairman Eric Holcomb. I am confident that both Daniels and Holcomb would confirm what I will say now, that Christine Matthews is a consummate professional. Fred Yang has polled for Indiana Democrats, Gov. Frank O'Bannon, Mayor Bart Peterson and Indiana House Democrats. In my view as a political analyst, Fred Yang is one of the best pollsters there is. He is smart, sharp and has wonderful insights. The intriguing part about this team was that Christine and Fred had wanted to work on a project together and saw this as a unique opportunity to do so. HPI readers are the beneficiaries of this extraordinary union.

4. Battleground polling is a great concept.

Not that there were trust issues, but when you write a poll, the wording, sequence and then develop the data receiving after the survey, it adds integrity when you have a Republican and Democrat working in tandem. There are a number of these "battleground polls" where we find pollsters like Bill McInturff and Stan Greenburg, or Ed Goetas and Celinda Lake working together. When HPI brought Matthews and Yang together, it was the first time in Indiana that the "battleground" concept has been used.

5. We had an informal oversight board in conjunction with DePauw University.

On this board are John Hammond III, who is a Republican National Committeeman and 7th CD chairman, and Dave



Bohmer, who heads the DePauw University Pulliam Center of Contemporary Media and is also Putnam County Democratic chairman. Another part of our oversight team is John Willey of Anthem, one of our corporate sponsors. Willey is a former Hancock County Republican chairman. I can guarantee you HPI, our sponsors and our DePauw affiliation would never give the imprimatur of fixing the numbers or cooking the books to achieve a partisan outcome. As you can see, there are a series of checks and balances associated with the Howey/DePauw Indiana Battleground Poll.

6. Polling is a "snapshot in time." It reflects what is going on with likely voters for the time period our pollsters are in the field. In the case of our latest poll, we were in the field Oct. 28-30. What we published on Friday was a "snapshot." But after we finished polling, the electorate still evolves. In the Senate race, for instance, there were 11% undecided. They won't stay undecided. So while we have Donnelly leading Mourdock 47-36%, none of us believe that will be the final outcome. The race will continue to evolve. What this snapshot did for me, a political analyst, was to give me a look at trends involving likely voters, and I will make a forecast for my readers based partially on this data.

7. Races do evolve. On Friday, the Mourdock campaign pointed to our May survey in which we had him leading Lugar 48-38%. But he won by 61-39%. They said this proves our poll was inaccurate. C'mon, man. In our forecasting analysis, we told HPI subscribers that Mourdock was likely on his way to a landslide. And he was. No one on our team expected the race to remain at 48-38%.

8. We release survey top lines. The top lines are the sequence of questions that are asked, how they are worded, and the demographic nature of the poll respondents including party affiliation, race, age, gender, geography. Top lines also allow readers to discern whether this is a credible poll, or whether it was "pushed," that is, when a leading and controversial question is asked before we ask the head-to-head "who are you going to vote for?" Pushed polls are for propaganda, designed to achieve an artificial outcome as opposed to providing snapshot information. Some observers will look at the McLaughlin survey the Mourdock campaign released on Friday showing the Republican leading and surmise that it was "pushed" to

achieve a propaganda purpose. I guess we'll just have to wait until Tuesday evening to see how things settle. I will say that the Howey/DePauw data corresponds with the events on and after the Oct. 23 debate, what we hear from Republicans, voters, as well as the conduct of both the Donnelly and Mourdock campaigns.

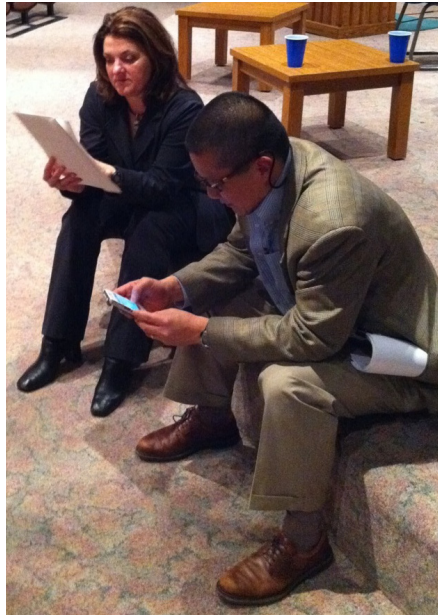
9. The Mourdock campaign demanded HPI release our cross-tabulations.

We never do. They are worth a lot of dough. Hey, Mourdock, go get your own cross tabs. Or have Chris Chocola do it for you. Nor did the Indianapolis Star, WTHR-TV, WISH-TV, WSBT-TV and the South Bend Tribune release cross tabs when they polled. The cross tabulations are proprietary. They allow our analysts to see why a head-to-head number occurs. When we see Richard Mourdock attracting only 17% of independents and only 70% of Republicans, that gives us a statistical understanding of how Joe Donnelly had jetted out between Oct. 28-30 to an 11% lead. Will he have an 11% lead on Saturday? Or Tuesday? No one can know, unless you do daily tracking, which I can't afford. We won't have a reliable outcome until Tuesday night, when the actual votes are counted. To release cross tabulations into an active political environment is to transform our data from informational to propaganda. Howey/DePauw is not into funding political campaigns. The data will

be used for research and forecasting purposes.

10. Why do we poll? Again, to give my paid subscribers a trending analysis on what is likely to happen. Howey Politics Indiana is one of the smallest media entities in this state, but we were the only ones with a credible polling program for the cycle. I like sharing the data with the masses. Most of the time, it allows us to make accurate predictions. Every once in a while, a political race will evolve in the intervening time and the outcome will differ from the polling snapshot. That is what we call an "upset." We hope that doesn't happen, though occasionally even the best pollsters will experience such a scenario. And that's the beauty of human nature. No one can ever predict human nature every time.

Am I backing away from the Howey/DePauw Poll we released on Friday? No way. Or, perhaps more emphatically stated, hell no! It is a vital part of the process. It's a fascinating view into the evolving human condition when we survey, and when people, sometimes emotionally, react.



Howey/DePauw pollsters Christine Matthews and Fred Yang at DePauw University on Super Tuesday last March.



Forecast, from page 1

to the fold.

However, anecdotally we continue to hear stories of GOP voters planning to "scratch" on the race or vote for Libertarian Andrew Horning. We've heard stories of callers at the Indiana GOP "Victory Centers" spending much time dealing with the Mourdock fallout as the push the state ticket.

HPI believes that Mourdock also alienated women with the debate rape remark, and the October survey bears that out. In the September poll, Donnelly had a 6% point lead among women, ballooning to 18% - 50-32% - in the survey released last week.

HPI is still forecasting a Mike Pence gubernatorial victory, but the likelihood is that his triumph will be more in the 50-45% range than in the double digits, which was conventional wisdom throughout the summer and early fall. Last week, we were struck by the fact that in the Howey/DePauw Indiana Battleground Poll and in Pence's internal poll, he never topped out over 47%.

Since Pence called for Mourdock to apologize on Oct. 24 after the debate rape fiasco, the congressman has backtracked and last week was actually embracing the controversial Senate nominee. He may take a political hit for doing so.

Democrat John Gregg may have waited too long to break out of his Sandborn TV ad format and go into the attack contrasting ads that we believe have tightened this race, though probably not into the upset zone.

"If I were Mike Pence, I would worry about my margin," said Indiana Democratic Chairman Dan Parker.

Pence has not responded in kind to two Gregg assaults: one TV ad tying Pence to Mourdock, and another to the Tea Party. Parker said this morning, "Pence not responding to the Tea Party and Mourdock ads was very dangerous."

Howey/DePauw polling showed the Tea Party unpopular with Hoosier voters with a 27%

favorable to 42% unfavorable.

In the superintendent of public instruction race, Republican incumbent Tony Bennett had a mere 40-36% lead over Democrat Glenda Ritz, whose campaign reported a vigorous reaction over the weekend to those polling numbers. And while some observers see a potential upset, high ranking sources in both parties believe that Pence will ultimately pull Bennett in, just as Gov. Mitch Daniels did in 2008.

However, keep in mind that while Daniels had a 18% plurality in 2008 and Bennett's was just 2%, Pence is likely not to have the double digit coattails. But Bennett will not be fighting the Barack Obama headwind that he had in 2008.

U.S. Senate: Record money continues

The life movement and Republican Super PACs, already having invested heavily in the self-destructing Mourdock, poured more money in the final days. Evansville Courier & Press reporter Eric Bradner reported: On the airwaves over the last week, American Crossroads - former President George W. Bush aide Karl Rove's group - is spending the most, at \$1.53 million. Combined with Rove's sister group, Crossroads GPS, the two are spending \$5.3 million on Indiana's Senate race. The second-biggest spender in the final week will be the National Republican Senatorial Committee, which is investing \$1.5 million. A close third and fourth are two Democratic groups - the Senate

Majority PAC, the supergroup run by a former Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid aide, with \$1.3 million, and the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, at \$1.2 million. Those two groups have topped \$4 million each on the race so far. One huge Republican group that bolstered Mourdock in the primary, the Club for Growth, has spent more than \$5 million on the race, but is trailing other groups with \$383,000 on the air in the last week.

On Saturday and Sunday, Fort Wayne businessman and philanthropist Daryle Doden ran full-page newspaper ads in 11 publications - the Indianapolis Star, South Bend Tribune, Fort Wayne Journal

One Nation Under God

"All men...are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights... Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

...discuss, debate and then vote on the critical issues facing our nation.

Mr. Mourdock, with courage and compassion, reminded us that...
We are a moral people. Two wrongs do not make a right. Each life is sacred. If an unborn life has no value, then neither your life nor mine has value.

We the people should support those candidates for office who declare they will serve to protect and preserve these God-given rights, chief among them the right to life.

Vote morally on Tuesday.

Thank you Mr. Mourdock.
Daryle Doden, CEO
Ambassador Enterprises
Fort Wayne, Indiana

Paid for by Daryle Doden (260-446-3299) and not authorized by any candidate or candidate's committee.

Indiana

Lean Democratic

FIFTYTHREE PROJECTIONS	DEM	REP	MARGIN
Polling average	44.9	40.4	Donnelly +4.5
Adjusted polling average	46.6	41.5	Donnelly +5.1
State fundamentals	44.5	46.8	Mourdock +2.3
Now-cast	45.8	43.4	Donnelly +2.4
Projected vote share	50.0	47.5	Donnelly +2.5
Chance of winning	68%	32%	

POLLS	538 WT.	DATE	DEM	REP	MARGIN
Rasmussen	...	11/1	45.0	42.0	Donnelly +3.0
Howey/DePauw *	...	10/30	47.0	36.0	Donnelly +11.0
Rasmussen	...	10/11	42.0	47.0	Mourdock +5.0
YouGov	...	10/11	41.0	45.0	Mourdock +4.0
Howey/DePauw	...	9/23	40.0	38.0	Donnelly +2.0
Rasmussen	...	8/1	40.0	42.0	Mourdock +2.0
Howey/DePauw	...	3/27	35.0	35.0	Tie



HOWEY *Politics Indiana*

Gazette, Post-Tribune, Times of Northwest Indiana, Evansville Courier & Press, Terre Haute Tribune-Star, Bloomington Herald-Times, Columbus Republic, Marion Chronicle-Tribune, Kokomo Tribune and the Jeffersonville Evening News/Tribune.

Doden's ad urged more than 850,000 households receiving those newspapers to "vote morally on Tuesday." Doden explained, "Mr. Mourdock, with courage and compassion, reminded us that . . . We are a moral people. Two

wrongs do not make a right. Each life is sacred. If an unborn life has no value, then neither your life nor mine has value. We the people should support those candidates for office who declare they will serve to protect and preserve these God-given rights, chief among them the right to life."

But by this morning, some Republicans were concerned about the newspaper ad's impact on female voters and independents.

On Saturday, Mourdock attended a "laying on of

Indiana House

<i>As of 10:15 a.m., 11/5/2012</i>		Supplemental Contributions 10/13/2012 thru 11/5/2012		Contributions 1/1/2012 to 10/12/2012		Cash on Hand 10/12/2012	
Dist.	Candidate	DEM	GOP	DEM	GOP	DEM	GOP
12	Mara Reardon	14,500		56,130		14,365	
	William Fine		5,000		63,770		18,122
15	Tom O'Donnell	57,957		84,136		22,992	
	Hal Slager		50,500		119,918		5,627
19	Shelli VanDenburgh	37,778		112,365		20,763	
	Ron Johnson				87,253		11,641
31	Katie Morgan	48,383		108,663		14,826	
	Kevin Mahan		5,000		101,030		22,050
34	Sue Errington			81,068		24,908	
	Brad Oliver		3,000		21,462		2,123
35	Melanie Wright	7,900		108,262		9,702	
	Jack Lutz		43,000		96,435		16,258
42	Mark Spelbring	11,000		95,307		14,228	
	Alan Morrison		15,500		183,222		36,305
45	Kreg Battles	38,500		189,775		54,029	
	Bruce Borders		118,800		110,640		1,657
56	Phil Pflum	35,580		81,015		11,799	
	Dick Hamm		20,500		48,527		1,941
60	Peggy Welch	11,000		148,532		28,613	
	Peggy Mayfield		67,285		256,032		14,749
66	Terry Goodin	23,500		67,286		7,746	
	Justin Stevens		149,069		126,823		572
69	Jim McCormick	38,449		70,907		8,261	
	Jim Lucas		30,750		35,547		5,463
74	Mike Schriefer	41,579		129,281		22,667	
	Lloyd Arnold		161,000		33,717		4,432
76	Trent VanHaften	39,050		144,291		26,499	
	Wendy McNamara		80,000		177,519		6,342
81	Win Moses	31,500		130,237		66,374	
	Martin Carbaugh		35,500		87,501		18,247
87	Christina Hale	48,586		124,532		7,369	
	Cindy Noe		26,952		78,532		9,822
92	Karlee Macer	5,000		41,039		14,239	
	Tim Motsinger		49,840		108,269		25,750
97	Justin Moed	3,000		99,505		27,012	
	AJ Feeney-Ruiz		27,536		55,392		36,782
100	Dan Forestal			38,092		10,656	
	Scott Keller				49,374		48,257
		493,262	889,232	1,910,423	1,840,963	407,047	286,138



Indiana Senate

<i>As of 10:15 a.m., 11/5/2012</i>		Supplemental Contributions 10/13/2012 thru 11/5/2012		Contributions 1/1/2012 to 10/12/2012		Cash on Hand 10/12/2012	
Dist.	Candidate	DEM	GOP	DEM	GOP	DEM	GOP
5	Deb Porter	12,956		72,432		8,343	
	Ed Charboneau		18,000		261,406		157,111
30	Tim DeLaney	110,795		372,980		64,812	
	Scott Schneider		322,128		555,803		39,084
36	Mary Ann Sullivan	86,215		167,156		39,407	
	Brent Waltz		55,754		86,606		58,776
		209,966	395,882	612,568	903,815	112,562	254,971

the hands" revival in Selma, Ind., attended by 200 and conducted by Muncie evangelist Andrew Phipps, according to Rick Yencer of the Muncie Free Press. The media was banned from the event, with a Mourdock supporter telling Yencer, "You are trouble."

Indiana House Races

We believe the Richard Mourdock impact is now being felt in down ballot races, essentially taking the Republican "wave" away.

The State Democratic Party and the House Democratic Caucus sent out a total of more than \$250,000 to Tom O'Donnell (HD15), Shelli Van-Denburgh (HD19), Katie Morgan (HD31), Phil Pflum (HD56), Jim McCormick (HD69), Mike Schriever (HD74), and Trent VanHaaften (HD76).

HPI is forecasting a Republican majority of between 60 and 63 seats.

It goes beyond Mourdock. Pence not pushing back at the Gregg campaign's tying the Republican to Mourdock - honoring a long-standing pledge not to go negative - also has the potential of impacting down ballot races.

Indiana Democrats began running "two peas in a pod" ads and mailers against Republicans like Cindy Noe and Jack Lutz featuring those legislators and Mourdock.

We have taken the six tossup races from last week and created "Tossup Leans R" and "Tossup Lean D" for forecasting purposes, but keep in mind that these races are all close and could go either way.

We believe that State Rep. Bruce Borders has a slight edge over State Rep. Kreg Battles in HD45. The Democrats have had a provisional TV ad buy they have not acted on. Borders is polling very well in Sullivan County.

But if there's a John Gregg surge in the gubernatorial race, Battles could benefit.

House Republicans believe that Hal Schlager in HD15 and Martin Carbaugh in HD81 against State Rep. Win Moses are moving in the right direction, but we still view Moses and Tommuy O'Donnell in HD15 as strong candidates both working hard. They both get a slight edge.

We see State Reps. Jack Lutz and Cindy Noe as potential upset victims susceptible to the "Murdock disaster." Indiana Democratic Chairman Dan Parker said, "The Mourdock effect will be felt heavyist in Marion County."

Republicans believe that Bill Fine in HD12 is coming on strong, but unsure whether he can get over the hump.

Republicans believe that Peggy Mayfield is poised for victory over State Rep. Peggy Welch, in part because of a huge Morgan County early vote. But Parker believes that Welch might pull off the "upset of the night." Democrat tracking there had Welch up 1%.

HRCC also believes that State Rep. Wendy McNamara has maintained her polling lead over Trent Van Haaften.

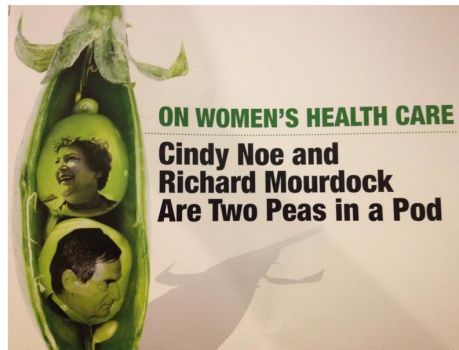
In HD92, Democrats sent mailers out tying Republican Tim Motsinger to convicted businessman Tim Durham, who has been in the news lately as his attorneys object to a proposed 225 year sentence. We see Macer as a very slight favorite.

Indiana Senate

Again, the Mourdock Disaster impact is poised to have a bearing on two Marion County Senate races involving State Sens. Scott Schneider and Brent Waltz.

Of the two, Schneider may be more vulnerable because he was appointed to the Senate seat, while Waltz has more ballot familiarity.

HPI lists the Schneider-Tim DeLaney race "Leans DeLaney" and the Waltz/Sullivan race "Tossup." ❖





Indiana House Races

Democrats **Republicans**

40 60

Pure Tossup

HD42: Alan Morrison (R) v. Mark Spelbring (D)

Tossup Leans R

HD45: Rep. B. Borders (R) v. Rep. K. Battles (D)

HD60: Rep. P. Welch (D) v. Peggy Mayfield (R)

Tossup Leans D

HD15: Tommy O'Donnell (D) v. Hal Schlager (R)

HD35: Rep. Jack Lutz (R) v. Melanie Wright(D)

HD81: Rep. W. Moses (D) v. Martin Carbaugh

HD87: Rep. Cindy Noe (R) v. Christina Hale (D)

HD92: Karlee Macer (D) v. Tim Motsinger (R)

Leans D

HD12: Rep. M. Reardon (D) v. Bill Fine (R)

HD19: Ron Johnson (R) v. Rep. S.VanDenBurghD)

HD66: Rep. Terry Goodin (D) v..Justin Stevens (R)

HD74: Mike Schriefer (D) v. Lloyd Arnold (R)

Leans R

HD5: Dale DeVon (R) v. Jerod Warrnock (D)

HD69: Jim McCormick (D) v. Jim Lucas (R)

HD76: T. Van Haaften (D) v. W. McNamara (R)

Likely D

HD34: Sue Errington (D) vs. Brad Oliver (R)

HD56: Rep. Phil Pflum (D) v. Dick Hamm (R)

HD100: Dan Forestal (D) vs. Scott Keller (R)

Likely R

HD31: Rep. Kevin Mahan (R) vs. Katie Morgan (D)

Safe

Democrats (23): Austin, DeLaney, Klinker, Lawson, Harris, C. Brown, Bauer, Niezgodski, Dvorak, Pelath, V. Smith, Moseley, Kersey, Pierce, Stemler, GiaQuinta, Pryor, Bartlett, Porter, Reicken, Summers. **Incoming freshman:** Justin Moed, Robin Shackelford

Republicans (60): Dermody, Clere. Heaton, Davisson, Karickhoff, Rhoads, Lehe, Kirchhofer, Baird, Ubelhoer, McMillan, Bacon, Truitt, Morris, Heuer, Kubacki, Van Natter, Frye, Speedy, Messmer, Neese, Gutwein, Wolkins, Friend, J. Thompson, Richardson, Turner, Davis, Lutz, Torr, Steuerwald, T. Brown, Culver, Leonard, Cherry, Saunders, Soliday, Eberhart, Burton, M.Smith, Koch, Crouch, Lehman, Pond, Wesco, Bosma, Behning, Frizzell. **Incoming freshmen:** John Price, Todd Huston, Steven Braun, Timothy Harman, Rick Niemeyer, Sharon Negele, Dennis Zent, Ben Smaltz, Cindy Meyer Ziemke, Thomas Washburne, David Ober,

Bold faced races denote status change.



Three takes on the Obama Romney presidential race

Here are three takes on the presidential race:

Prof. Larry Sabato, University of Virginia

With a slight, unexpected lift provided by Hurricane Sandy, Mother Nature's October surprise, President Barack Obama appears poised to win his second term tomorrow. Our final Electoral College projection has the president winning the key swing states of Colorado, Iowa, Nevada, New Hampshire, Ohio and Wisconsin and topping Mitt Romney, with 290 electoral votes.

This has been a roller-coaster campaign, though very tight ever since Romney dramatically outshone Obama in the first debate in Denver on Oct. 3. Yet for a challenger to defeat an incumbent, the fates must be with the challenger again and again. Who could have imagined that a Frankenstorm would act as a circuit-breaker on the Republican's campaign, blowing Romney off center stage for three critical days in the campaign's last week, while enabling Obama to dominate as presidential comforter-in-chief, assisted by his new bipartisan best friend, Gov. Chris Christie (R)?

Adding to the president's good fortune was a final jobs report that was basically helpful because it wasn't disastrously bad -- that is, the unemployment rate failed to jump back above the psychologically damaging level of 8%. Romney could have used that number to build a crescendo for change. Instead, the final potential obstacle to Obama's reelection passed by as a one-day story. While Romney surged after the first debate, he never quite closed the deal in the key swing states. And now, we believe he has run out of time.

First, the easy ones. Obama has no chance in Indiana and Missouri (the former he won and the latter he nearly captured in 2008), nor in Arizona. This guarantees that a victorious

Obama would be the first president ever who failed to win an additional state in his successful reelection bid that he did not win in his initial victory. (We are not counting FDR's third and fourth elections.) Meanwhile, after having placed North Carolina in the Republican column for more than a year, we have seen no indication that Obama really has a chance there, even though Romney's margin of victory is unlikely to be huge. We feel less confident about Florida, which teeters between Romney and toss-up status. Obama could steal the Sunshine State from Romney if the Democrat has an unexpectedly strong night.

With two-thirds of the votes likely already cast in Nevada, Obama appears to have a solid lead in the Silver State. Our decision to move Nevada even more strongly into Obama's column is bolstered by the state's political guru Jon Ralston, who picked Obama to win his state on Sunday.

Iowa and Wisconsin may very well be tight, as they were in 2000 and 2004. But these states have a Democratic lean (even Michael Dukakis won them in 1988), and according to the poll averages, Obama has never trailed in either state during this campaign. Recent surveys from credible, state-level pollsters (Ann Selzer in Iowa and Charles Franklin in Wisconsin) show Obama with solid leads in both states, and these results have reinforced our inclinations.

We have had Ohio in Obama's column since late September, and nothing we have heard from our sources in the Buckeye State has caused us to move it anywhere else. Like Iowa and Wisconsin, it may be excruciatingly close, but we favor Obama in all three.

We believe the three closest states are Virginia, Colorado and New Hampshire; in reality, all three are toss-ups, but because we feel obligated to pick every state, we're splitting these 26 combined electoral votes right down the middle -- 13 for Obama (nine from Colorado and four from New Hampshire) and 13 for Romney from Virginia. It's not very scientific, but in these three states the polling averages and our sources aren't giving us enough to work with.

Sunday's Battleground Polls

	Pollster	Sunday Poll	Change from Post-Denver Poll
CO	Ipsos / Reuters (online)	tie	Obama +2.0
CO	YouGov	Obama +1.0	Romney +2.0
FL	YouGov	Romney +1.0	Romney +1.0
FL	Public Policy Polling	Obama +1.0	unchanged
FL	Ipsos / Reuters (online)	tie	unchanged
FL	InsiderAdvantage	Romney +5.0	
FL	Mellman	Obama +2.0	unchanged
IA	YouGov	Obama +1.0	Romney +3.0
IA	Public Policy Polling	Obama +2.0	Romney +3.0
MI	FMW / Baydoun Consulting	Romney +0.6	Romney +1.0
MI	YouGov	Obama +7.0	Romney +3.0
MN	YouGov	Obama +7.0	Romney +1.0
MN	SurveyUSA	Obama +11.0	Obama +4.0
NC	YouGov	Romney +2.0	Romney +1.0
NC	Public Policy Polling	Romney +0.2	Romney +0.2
NC	Gravis Marketing	Romney +4.0	Obama +4.0
NH	U. New Hampshire	Obama +4.0	Obama +4.0
NH	YouGov	Obama +4.0	
NH	Public Policy Polling	Obama +2.0	unchanged
NM	YouGov	Obama +6.0	
NV	YouGov	Obama +4.0	Romney +1.0
OH	YouGov	Obama +3.0	Romney +1.0
OH	Ipsos / Reuters (online)	Obama +4.0	Obama +3.0
OH	PPP	Obama +5.0	unchanged
PA	Muhlenberg	Obama +3.0	Romney +2.0
PA	YouGov	Obama +8.0	Obama +1.0
VA	Marist / NBC / WSJ	Obama +1.0	Obama +2.0
VA	PPP	Obama +4.0	Obama +1.0
VA	Ipsos / Reuters (online)	Obama +1.0	Romney +2.0
VA	YouGov	Obama +2.0	Obama +1.0
WI	YouGov	Obama +4.0	Romney +1.0
	Average		unchanged



If Obama sweeps all three of these very close states, he will win 303 electoral votes. If that number sounds familiar, it's because both Harry Truman in 1948 and John F. Kennedy in 1960 achieved the same total in the Electoral College. In other words, it's a lucky number for Democratic presidential nominees.

A footnote: Maine and Nebraska award their electoral votes by congressional district, and Romney has an outside shot at grabbing Maine's Second District, just like Obama has an outside shot at Nebraska's Second (which he won in 2008). We don't foresee an electoral vote split in either state this year, but these are worth watching Tuesday night for a possible surprise.

Alex Castellanos, CNN

So it comes down to this: On Tuesday, the president who can't possibly win re-election confronts the challenger who can't possibly beat him.

Licensed, as I am, to pump gas and commit punditry in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, I am obligated to make a prediction.

Or, in other words: It's time to guess.

Three weeks ago, on NBC's "Meet the Press," I ventured that something happened at that Denver debate beyond President Barack Obama not showing up for work.

The president, I noted, had never run a campaign to get re-elected, just a campaign to stop the other guy, Mitt Romney, from getting elected. When the Romney who arrived to debate was not the sulfur-breathing demon the president had led us to expect, Obama was left with no campaign at all. "This is a man with two empty holsters," I noted. "His campaign could collapse."

I think it did.

Then an unexpected voter named Sandy resuscitated Obama's campaign. What factors must we understand in these final hours to identify the winner of this election?

First, we'd have to understand who is going to win independents.

Four years ago, Obama won independents by 8 points over John McCain. After the Denver debate, that ad-

Sunday's National Polls

Pollster	Sunday Poll	Change from Post-Denver Poll
Battleground / Politico	tie	Romney +1.0
CNN	tie	
Rasmussen Reports	tie	unchanged
Gravis Marketing	tie	Obama +2.0
Google Consumer Surveys	Obama +0.3	Obama +1.3
Ipsos / Reuters (online)	Obama +1.0	unchanged
NBC / WSJ	Obama +1.0	Obama +1.0
U.P.I. / CVOTER	Obama +1.0	unchanged
Wash. Post / ABC News	Obama +1.0	Obama +1.0
YouGov	Obama +2.0	Obama +1.0
Public Policy Polling	Obama +2.0	Romney +1.0
Pew	Obama +3.0	Obama +3.0
RAND Corporation	Obama +3.2	Obama +0.5
Average	Obama +1.1	Obama +0.7

vantage reversed itself. In recent Washington Post/ABC News tracking polls, Obama has trailed Romney among independent voters by 16 to 20 percentage points. Recent CBS polls also reported that Romney has led Obama among independents by 5% in Ohio, 6% in Florida and a massive 21% in Virginia.

If this lead among independents held through Election Day, Romney would win these states. Post-Sandy survey data, however, indicates the storm may have blown away Romney's advantage with independents, at least

temporarily.

The Politico/GW Battleground Poll has the president pulling within 1 point among independent voters, 43% to 44%. Our own PurplePoll of swing states has the president taking a one point lead among purple state independents, 45% to 44%. However, the final NBC/WSJ national poll reports that Romney is winning independents by 7 points. And the new CNN/ORC poll gives Romney a 22% lead with independents.

Who wins independents might depend upon whether Obama's "Sandy bounce" was a real change or a temporary bump in the president's fortunes. If voters believe the president's energetic response indicates he has learned a lesson and will be more responsive to them in a second term, this election could break Obama's way.

Second, to identify the winner, we'd have to see whether Romney has closed the gender gap.

The latest Associated Press poll has Romney erasing a 16-point gender gap in the past month. Pew Research tells us Romney's and Obama's favorability ratings among women voters are now nearly equal. Pew analyst Michael Dimock expects the gender gap "to look very similar to the last few election cycles, with women somewhere between 6 and 8 points to favor Obama, and fairly consistent with where we've been since 1980." Our own post-Sandy PurplePoll has Romney closing the gender gap to 7 points, enough for him to win.

Third, to call the election for Obama, I'd have to believe he doesn't hit his head on the ceiling every time he stands, but he does. The president's percentage number is stuck some 2% or 3% short of the 50% mark.



The Real Clear Politics national average has Obama stuck at 47.8% with Romney tight on his heels at 47.3%. Our last two PurplePolls of likely voters in swing states have Obama at 47% to 48%.

What else would we have to understand to identify the likely winner?

Fourth, we'd have to see who has captured the powerful remnants of the 2010 surge that renewed the "silent majority's" voice and secured GOP control of the House of Representatives.

Fifth, to identify our next president, we would have to understand who has the edge, compared with '08, in early and absentee voting.

GOP sources tell me that in Ohio, for example, Republicans have increased their early turnout by more than 100,000 from 2008 while Democrat turnout is down 150,000. That is a 250,000-vote swing in a state Obama only won by 260,000 votes at the apogee of his popularity. This pattern, I'm informed, holds in other swing states.

Sixth, we have to examine whether the Obama campaign can compensate for dimming passion among its supporters with a more energetic turn-out-the-vote machine on Election Day.

Add it all up, and this is a close call. Perhaps it is best made both with my heart and my head.

Four years ago, Obama's campaign claimed a unique energy. Electing the first black president of the United States was a singular moment of national pride. Now the Obama campaign pretends the opposite: They tell us that history-making event was ordinary. Team Obama and many others model their turnout predictions and surveys upon 2008, overloading them with Democrats. They would have us think that the electoral cosmos has been realigned in a stable and permanent way.

In the end, I cannot embrace as common the rarest of political astronomies. I do not believe Obama's comet comes around every day.

That leaves Mitt Romney as the next president of the United States.

Nate Silver, Fivethirtyeight, New York Times

If President Obama wins re-election on Tuesday, the historical memory of the race might turn on the role

played by Hurricane Sandy.

Already, some analysts are describing the storm as an "October surprise" that allowed Mr. Obama to regain his footing after stumbling badly in the first presidential debate and struggling to get back on course. Some Republicans seem prepared to blame a potential defeat for Mitt Romney on the storm, and the embrace of Mr. Obama by New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie and other public officials.

The theory has some appeal. The last three days of polling have brought what is almost certainly Mr. Obama's strongest run of polling since the first presidential debate in Denver. Mr. Obama led in the vast majority of battleground-state polls over the weekend. And increasingly, it is hard to find leads for Mr. Romney in national surveys — although several of them show a tie.

When the hurricane made landfall in New Jersey on Oct. 29, Mr. Obama's chances of winning re-election were 73 percent in the FiveThirtyEight forecast. Since then, his chances have risen to 86 percent, close to his highs on the year.

But, while the storm and the response to it may account for some of Mr. Obama's gains, it assuredly does not reflect the whole of the story. Read more...

It appears that President Obama is likely to go into Election Day with a very modest lead in the average of national polls.

As of this writing, on Sunday evening, Mr. Obama led by an average of 1.3

percentage points across 12 national polls that had been published over the course of the prior 24 hours. The range was quite tight, running from a tied race in the polls issued by Rasmussen Reports, CNN and Politico, to a three-point lead in three other surveys.

This happens to be a reasonably friendly group of polls for Mr. Obama, and it's more likely than not that at least some national polls published late Sunday or on Monday will still show Mitt Romney ahead.

Nevertheless, there is enough data to conclude that Mr. Obama probably has a slight edge from national surveys, which until recently had pointed toward a tie — or perhaps a modest advantage for Mr. Romney in the immediate aftermath of the Denver debate. ❖

