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WHAT MATTERS TODAY

PERSPECTIVES

An Election About GOP Extremism, Unions, Wages and Dollarocracy

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by John Nichols

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So if [Democrat Terry McAuliffe](#) is elected Tuesday, there's a message there — and it could tell us a lot about the evolving politics not just of Virginia but of the United States as it heads toward the critical mid-term elections of 2014.

What message?

It has something to do with the extremism of Republicans at the state level when it comes to social issues. The Republican nominee for governor of Virginia, Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli, is pretty much the embodiment of the social conservatism that has the potential to create a permanent gender gap. But past Republican nominees in Virginia have been opposed to abortion rights and marriage equality. What made things even rougher for Cuccinelli was a mid-campaign government shutdown shocked and outraged Virginians — a lot of whom happen to be federal employees. President Obama made that point in a pre-election campaign swing on behalf of McAuliffe. “You’ve seen an extreme faction of the Republican Party that has shown again and again and again that they’re willing to hijack the entire party and the country and the economy and grind progress to an absolute halt if they don’t get 100 percent of what they want,” the president told Virginians. “You cannot afford to have a governor who is thinking the same way.”

If McAuliffe, a first-time candidate with plenty of baggage as a veteran campaign fund-raiser and fixer, wins big on Tuesday, the message Democrats will take away from the election is that Ted Cruz and the shutdown caucus have handed them a political hammer. And they will use it again and again and again in 2014.

2. Is Chris Christie as Big a Deal as Chris Christie Thinks Chris Christie Is?

The Republican governor of New Jersey has mounted a reelection campaign that reaches out not just to Republicans but to Democrats and independents. He's even made nice with [Barack Obama](#). Why? Not because he likes Obama. What Christie likes is winning — big. And he knows that a big enough win could make him a serious contender for th

“In the year 2000, Republican mayors governed half of the country’s dozen largest cities by population. Some of the party’s most provocative leaders had come out of city hall, including New York’s Giuliani, Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan and Indianapolis Mayor Stephen Goldsmith, the celebrated policy wonk and George W. Bush adviser,” [explains Politico’s Alexander Burns](#). “Today, you have to go all the way down to Indianapolis — the country’s 13th-largest city — to find just one Republican mayor.”

It’s not just the conservative stances on issues such as marriage equality and a host of other [LGBT](#) concerns. It’s also the opposition to infrastructure improvements and jobs programs, and the relentless assault on public education, social services and food stamps. The trouble with the GOP today is that, instead of focusing on the practical concerns of people who live in cities, [Mesa, Arizona, Mayor Scott Smith](#) says party leaders “put ideology above all.” Smith is the president of the US Conference of Mayors. He’s also a Republican.

4. Are Voters Tired of Politicians who Pick on Unions?

When Wisconsin’s union-bashing Governor Scott Walker showed up to rally support for Ken



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