

POLITICAL INTELLIGENCE

Republicans Seek to Nationalize Their Local Races

Political events in Kentucky and Mississippi offer examples of the dynamic at play in state and local races



Supporters of Mississippi Lt. Gov. Tate Reeves at a campaign rally at the Neshoba County Fair in Philadelphia, Miss., last week.
PHOTO: ROGELIO V. SOLIS/ASSOCIATED PRESS

By Andrew Duehren

Aug. 6, 2019 11:54 am ET

This item first appeared in the Capital Journal newsletter. Read today's full newsletter [here](#) or [sign up here](#) for daily updates in your inbox.

A pair of recent political events in Kentucky and Mississippi offer examples of the dynamic at play in state and local races: Republicans attempting to nationalize elections while Democrats try to keep it focused on local issues.

Two Democratic attorneys general, Andy Beshear in Kentucky and Jim Hood in Mississippi, aim to take the governors' mansions in their deep-red states. In a move reminiscent of effort to link Democratic House candidates to Nancy Pelosi in 2018, Republicans in both states have tied the Democrats to national figures. Democrats, of course, flipped more than 40 seats to win back the House despite the attacks on Mrs. Pelosi, now the Speaker of the House.

“It’s a bad idea to help liberals against President Donald J. Trump, ” said Tate Reeves, the lieutenant governor of Mississippi who is running in Tuesday’s primary election to be the Republican candidate for governor. “Our political enemy is the liberal policy ideas of the party of Chuck Schumer and Nancy Pelosi and Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton and Jim Hood.”

Mr. Reeves spoke at the Neshoba County Fair, a major event on Mississippi’s political calendar. Mr. Hood, who has won statewide as a Democrat in Mississippi four times, cautioned against party labels in his stump speech at the same event.

“You’re going to hear them get up here and talk about some liberals up in Washington,” Mr. Hood told the audience. “When they start talking about labels and not about issues there’s something going on there, and it’s something you need to look through.”

President Trump carried both states by wide margins, giving Republicans an electoral cudgel to wield against members of the opposite party. Democrats in Kentucky and Mississippi will need to appeal to voters who support the president. In states where Mr. Trump is unpopular, one could expect to see the inverse dynamic: Democrats who emphasize national political issues that are popular in the area and Republicans who look for more advantageous local issues.

Matt Bevin, the Republican governor of Kentucky hoping to fend Mr. Beshear off, made several appeals to Mr. Trump’s popularity and sought to exploit divisions in the national politics, in his speech at the Fancy Farm picnic, a major Kentucky political event.

“Do you stand with Donald Trump, the president of America? Or do you stand with ‘the squad’ or whatever they call themselves these days? Which side are you on? This is the question,” Mr. Bevin said, referencing the four Democratic congresswoman repeatedly targeted by Mr. Trump.

Write to Andrew Duehren at andrew.duehren@wsj.com