

## INTRODUCTION



The Bisig Political Report is produced by the Bisig Impact Group, 640 S. Fourth Street, Louisville, KY. This report is intended to help regional media in their coverage of Election Day 2015. A fall report will come out in October 2015. The Bisig Impact Group is a leader in political consulting in the state of Kentucky since 1991.

### Note

- A. Questions/Comments regarding the report should be directed to Matt Willinger, Director of Public Relations, at the *Bisig Impact Group*: [mwillinger@bisig.com](mailto:mwillinger@bisig.com) or (502) 583-0333
- B. Disclosure: Larry Bisig is a registered Republican. Bisig has donated to the Comer campaign.

## STATE RACE



### Kentucky State Governor

With a few days out, what will it take for the candidates to win?

Let's begin with the perceived frontrunner, Hal Heiner.

#### HAL HEINER

Heiner, 62, is a former two-term Louisville Metro councilman and candidate for Louisville-Jefferson County mayor in the 2010 General Election. Earlier in that year he defeated Chris Thieneman, a well-known real estate developer, and Jonathan Robertson, who ran third. Heiner received 33,198 of the 49,175 votes cast or 67.5%. Like Bevin's vote tally last year, this will bode well for Heiner in the May primary. Heiner's

net worth is unknown. What is known is that he has loaned his campaign upwards of \$4,000,000.00 and has been spending freely, causing his opponents to play catch-up in the fundraising department. Heiner is a member of the conservative mega-church, Southeast Christian in eastern Jefferson County, and is well known as a social and fiscal conservative. By education, Heiner holds a Bachelor's and Master's Degree in Engineering from the University of Louisville.

Hal's race to the finish line must come with a strong showing in the state's largest county, Jefferson, a county which probably has the most GOP moderates of anywhere in the state. While Heiner has always been a social conservative, his greatest claims in politics have always been his business acumen. One of his commercials has put the spotlight on Commerce Crossings, a very successful commercial development in Okolona, a part of southern Jefferson County. The jobs aspect of his platform may be enough to push moderates to support Heiner over the other candidates, all of whom have created for themselves a less-than-urban persona. Heiner needs to run two campaigns from the this point forward to ensure a victory - one in Louisville focusing on his no-nonsense approach to government, touting the legislation he sponsored or passed while serving his two terms on the Louisville Metro Council; the other elsewhere in the state, particularly northern Kentucky where his endorsement by the Right To Life will garner him votes from the heavily Catholic region. Heiner will run best in the metropolitan areas of Louisville and the Cincinnati suburbs.

#### MATT BEVIN

Our next candidate is Matt Bevin. Matt Bevin, 48, is the New Hampshire-born businessman who challenged United States Senator Mitch McConnell in last year's Republican primary for the senior senator's unprecedented sixth term. McConnell handily defeated Bevin, a resident of suburban Louisville (although he rarely mentions that), by a vote of approximately 214,000 to 126,000 with three others in the race. The 126,000 votes Bevin garnered in 2014 may be his best asset in 2015. The total number

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of votes cast in the 2011 Republican primary for governor was 141,130. Bevin got these votes one year ago on a statewide ballot, more recently than Scott's on the judicial ballot of 2012, Comer's appearance on the ballot in 2011, or Heiner, on Jefferson County's ballot in 2010 in the latter's race for Louisville mayor. Bevin claims the mantle of the Tea Party and of the underdog, and by association then, that by comparison of Rand Paul in his race five years ago against the party-establishment candidate for the United States Senate, C. M. "Trey" Grayson. Despite running a horrible campaign for Senate in 2014, with gaffes and incidents too numerous to mention, he still received 35% of the vote against the architect of the modern Kentucky GOP, Mitch McConnell. More than one-in-three votes is an accomplishment against McConnell no matter how big the loss. Bevin entered the race for governor in the closing hours before the filing deadline. Bevin, who spent four years in the Army, holds a Bachelor's Degree from Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia.

Bevin's supporters are drawn to his combination of rural appeal along with the knowledge that he is a successful businessman. But more important than past accomplishments seems to be his identity as an outsider. He is the only one of the four who has not held elective office and has been making that point in his stump speeches across the Commonwealth. He is also benefiting from the announced candidacy for president of Kentucky's most famous Tea Partier/Libertarian, United States Senator Rand Paul. Paul's statewide organization isn't taking an official stance in the race but it is widely known that many in the Paul camp supported Bevin's uphill battle against McConnell last year and may see this year as the opportunity for vindication. It seems clear his supporters have the hungry gene, that fire-in-the-belly, which is needed in a heated primary where, due to low turnout, every vote is worth that much

more. Bevin's key will be keeping up the appearance of an outsider, something he is doing well. The problem is that may not play in Louisville where many of the votes will be cast. Bevin then must play against Louisville and against Frankfort. We all know that everyone allegedly wishes to "vote the ins out" but in reality usually support incumbents. In this race, there are no incumbents but Bevin is the most "outsider" of the candidates. "Voting the ins out," his three opponents all of whom have been elected, must continue to be the keystone of these final few days of the race. Lack of an endorsement of leader McConnell after the bitter primary still Haunts Bevin and may be the difference in this race. Bad move.

### JAMES COMER

State Agriculture Commissioner James "Jamie" Comer is attempting a Frankfort move no one has made recently, a jump from one constitutional office to that of governor. Paul Patton, who had served as lieutenant governor under Governor Brereton Jones, was the last person to do so in 1995. Governors Jones, Collins, Carroll, and Ford had also done it, but that is reaching back to the 1970s. All had been elected as lieutenant governor when it was a stand-alone office. James R. Comer, 42, is the current Agriculture Commissioner and the only Republican serving in a non-federal statewide office. Comer began his political career in his hometown of Tompkinsville, running and winning an election for State Representative at the age of 27. He served in that position until his election as Agriculture Commissioner in 2011, running on a platform to bring respect back to the office after the scandals of his predecessor. Comer handily defeated his Republican primary opponent, Shelby County Judge/Executive Rob Rothenberger by a 2-1 margin. As Agriculture Commissioner, Comer has enjoyed the reputation as something of a moderate. He has championed the return of hemp for certain purposes,

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building on and making more mainstream the ideas of the late Gatewood Galbraith. Comer has a few weeks ago outlined a plan to revise and eventually replace Obamacare not by repeal but rather by better business practices, promising to bring more affordable insurance plans to Kentucky. Comer holds a Bachelor's Degree in Agriculture from Western Kentucky University.

Jamie is the name we've all known him by since he left the legislature to clean up the Agriculture Commissioner's shop, a job he did quickly and effectively. He has used the office as a springboard for this race, becoming the face of Kentucky-made products, and bringing hemp out of the backrooms once occupied by the late Gatewood Galbraith and into the front pages and onto the courthouse steps in debates. Comer fully expected to be in the lead at this point as did most pundits. Commissioner Comer easily won the Republican primary in 2011, carrying several counties by 3 and 4 to 1 margins. In November of 2011, he became the only Republican winning statewide polling more votes than any other candidate on the ballot collecting 24815 more than Democratic front-runner Alison Lundergan Grimes. He clearly had a base in 2011. What has happened? Two things. First, Matt Bevin put up a less-than-stellar challenge to Mitch McConnell in last year's Senate primary but in doing so garnered a great deal of attention as the Tea Party underdog and was strongly encouraged to stick around and make another race. And then Hal Heiner, the other millionaire from Louisville, wrote his own campaign a check for \$4 million. Comer endorsed McConnell in the Senate race very early, July 2013, and largely sat the race out afterwards. He has been busy attending to his Constitutional duties which, despite the title, are for a very important office of economic development in a state which still claims to be agricultural and rural in nature. Lurking in the gossip circles are ugly stories about Comer's past, which may challenge his hopes, true or not. If untrue,

a hell of an injustice. For Comer to move into the winner's circle on May 19th, he will have to return to his more moderate roots and reinvigorate the hemp crowd that made him a statewide name. He has been busy out-righting his opponents knowing that most of the GOP's electorate can be found on the right. But with all four candidates claiming to be "the conservative" is there any one of them who can pursue the more moderate voters? Heiner is trying with his business ties in the Louisville area. Comer must as well if he is to win. As the youngest of the four candidates, he needs to woo those less-ideological younger voters into his fold. While there is little reason to go after voters under 35, Comer has more of an incentive to do so than any of his opponents. He can't out-right all three of them. He must out-moderate just enough to sneak past Heiner and Bevin.

### WILL T. SCOTT

The final candidate of the four, Will T. Scott, is running a much less sophisticated (and thus less costly) race than his three opponents. Former Kentucky Supreme Court Justice Will T. Scott, 67, of Pikeville has run one statewide race in the past, in 1995 for Attorney General. In that race he had defeated his primary opponent Eurie Hayes III by a 3-1 margin but lost to Democrat Ben Chandler in the fall. In 2004, Scott was elected to the Kentucky Supreme Court from the 7th Judicial District, an area of 22 counties in eastern Kentucky. He resigned from that post at the end of 2014 and entered the Republican race for governor on January 6, 2015 at a press conference in Louisville. Scott opened his campaign by announcing his opposition to the Affordable Care Act, more commonly identified as Obamacare. Scott received his Bachelor's Degree from Pikeville College (now the University of Pikeville) and his Law Degree from the University of Miami.

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Judge Scott's path to victory is hard to find. His most recent race for the Supreme Court provides a base of support from which to begin that path. In 2012, he handily carried 18 of the 22 counties in the 7th District against longtime Appellate Court Judge Janet Stumbo. The question is will that be enough of a base. There are no counties in the 7th to provide more than 1000 or so votes in a Republican Primary on a good day, Pike and Johnson being the leaders. For Scott to succeed he will need some help from the others splitting the votes between themselves, especially in vote-rich Jefferson and Fayette counties, leaving him to work the rural counties around the state, splitting the votes there will Bevin and Comer. Scott's biggest obstacle is Bevin, who ran well in the rural counties against McConnell in last year's statewide race. Judge Scott's folksy speech on the stump will yield him some votes here and there but not enough for a win. He has introduced some novel ideas for state government, the most interesting of which is a proposal to overhaul our drug laws with some prisons serving more as treatment and rehab centers than sites of incarceration. For an eastern Kentucky judge with some very conservative supporters, this seems to be an idea which would appeal to the moderates who will be voting. He has also called for the creation of a system of Charter schools outside of the control of the state Education Department, a subtle swipe at Heiner who has been unsuccessful in his legislative work on behalf of Charter schools. But any of these initiatives require a presence in Louisville and its suburbs, and other pockets of moderate voters. Scott has begun a tour of meetings around the eastern edge of the state but it is questionable exactly what the message will be at each stop other than some music and his trademark entertaining speeches. Is that enough? Will the rest of the state be so divided - Heiner and Bevin in the cities, Bevin and Comer in the rural areas, Heiner and Comer among the moderates - that an eastern Kentucky

judge can work his way between them as a path to the governor's mansion? One question: why get in the race without proper financial backing?



**Heiner:** Too much money to lose.

**Comer:** Grass roots against last minute chaos.

**Bevin:** Could carve a victory ala Wallace Wilkinson in his primary vs John Brown and Steve Beshear.

**Notes:**

- Pac money attack ads are flooding airwaves and mailboxes. Republicans doing what they do best: eating their young.
- Jack Conway's stock is going up by the minute as a result of the G.O.P. bloodletting.
- On election night, watch and learn as candidates concede and really show their colors.