



Goehring likely faces tough race

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Newly minted North Dakota Agriculture Commissioner Doug Goehring could face the toughest statewide election in 2010, according to the first batch of political research conducted on the next election.

Dean Mitchell of St. Paul, Minn.-based DFM Research compiled the list of North Dakota legislative and statewide races and released his findings last week, pointing to the contests that he said are likely to be competitive. He plans on continuously updating his projections until the election.

"(Goehring has) run twice for statewide office and lost both times, so that naturally makes it the most competitive race," Mitchell said, who also notes: "This is the fourth commissioner that (Gov. John) Hoeven, has appointed and the previous three have won an election on their own."

For that reason, Mitchell said the edge should go to Goehring.

Democrats are already recruiting for the post, a statewide office held by a Democrat since 1988 until Roger Johnson left in April. Goehring unsuccessfully challenged Johnson in 2004 and 2006.

"We had success in beating the current occupant of that office," said David Strauss, chairman of the Democratic-NPL party. "So that will definitely be a priority for the party."

North Dakota GOP Chairman Gary Emineth agreed that Goehring will have a challenging race in 2010.

"We think that's going to be one of the toughest seats to defend," Emineth said.

Mitchell said the state Senate and House are likely to keep their GOP majorities intact, but could expand or contract depending on the state of the economy in North Dakota. Currently, the GOP controls the Senate with a 26-21 majority.

The House has 58 Republicans to 36 Democrats, with seven of those Republicans in potentially competitive races while two Democrats are considered vulnerable, according to Mitchell. One district in Fargo, previously held by Republican Rep. Rick Berg, also is up for grabs.

The looming 2010 question is whether or not Hoeven decides to challenge Democratic incumbent Sen. Byron Dorgan for the U.S. Senate.

Many national pollsters are skeptical at the notion, pointing to Dorgan's growing war chest of \$2.7 million cash on hand, with \$1.3 million of that raised in the first quarter this year, according to federal campaign documents.

Pollster wunderkind Nate Silver, who runs the Web site FiveThirtyEight.com, lists the North Dakota Senate race among the least competitive in the country, noting "A nice 1Q fundraising haul by Dorgan reduces the already-slim chance that popular GOP governor John Hoeven might decide to challenge him."

Even if Hoeven did decide to run, would national Republicans - a breed growing rarer by the election - be willing to pony up for what would most definitely be a competitive race?

Hoeven will have a lot to weigh before making a call, said Mark Jendrysik, a political science professor at the University of North Dakota.

"Every day he doesn't enter is another day lost for fundraising," Jendrysik said. "It's going to be an expensive race."

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