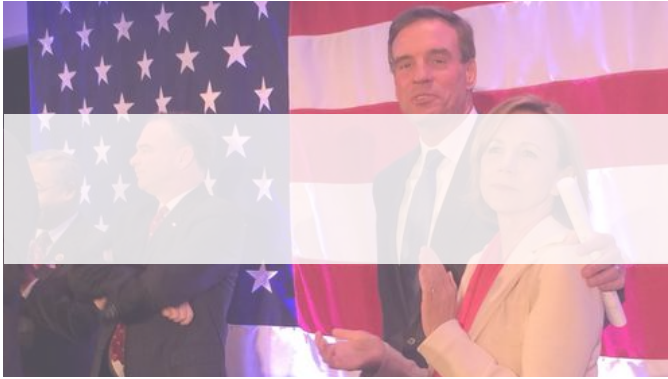


Warner edges Gillespie by less than 1 percentage point



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Warner claims victory late Tuesday in Virginia Senate race.

ARLINGTON – U.S. Sen. Mark Warner was re-elected by a razor-thin margin of less than one percentage point Tuesday in a race that polls had predicted him winning handily.

At 8:40 a.m. Wednesday, the unofficial results from the State Board of Elections, reported through Politico, with 99.5 percent of the state's 2,557 precincts reporting, were: Democratic Sen. Mark Warner, 1,072,487; Republican Ed Gillespie, 1,060,337; Libertarian Robert Sarvis, 53,594. The state website failed to function for most of the night, so the Board of Elections directed readers to Politico, which also gets its information from the state.

In percentage terms, it stands at Warner 49.1 percent, Gillespie 48.5 percent and Sarvis 2.5 percent.

According to the State Board of Elections, the outstanding ballots are virtually all provisional ballots -- those cast by voters who did not have acceptable identification. Those voters have until Friday to provide identification to their local elections boards.

The margin between Warner and Gillespie of less than a percentage point sets up a potential recount.

The close margin shocked many Democrats, who had hoped Warner could be depended on to deliver good news in the face of GOP gains around the country. It left Republicans wondering what might have been if Gillespie's candidacy had drawn some of the big outside money other Senate races took in around the country as Republicans pressed to win a majority in the U.S. Senate.

Warner told supporters gathered at an Arlington hotel, "It was a hard fought race. It went a little longer than we thought. I'll go back to Washington and recognize that we've got to find that common ground.... And in this new Senate I'll work with anyone."

Gillespie, gathered with supporters in Springfield, did not concede defeat.

He said, "We will have a better idea of the outcome of this race tomorrow, or maybe after that."

He said they were expecting a canvass on Wednesday and the results will not become official until later this month.

There are no automatic recounts in Virginia. They must be requested, and only when the margin is within 1 percent.

The margin was closer than any but the most optimistic Gillespie supporters predicted. The results were wildly different from Warner's first-term election in 2008, when he walked to victory.

That was expected in a midterm election, which is traditionally a tough time for sitting presidents, but not to this extent. Polls consistently showed Warner with a double-digit lead until last week, when a pair of polls had the race narrowing to a 4- to 7-point contest.

Tuesday night, Gillespie performed better than expected in Northern Virginia, a bastion for Democrats. He picked up a percentage point here and there compared to the Republican efforts in the 2013 gubernatorial and 2012 presidential votes.

On the Peninsula, Warner won Hampton and Newport News, but not by quite the margins President Barack Obama did in 2012.

Warner supporters were surprised by the tight race. State Senate Democratic Leader Richard Saslaw, who has a long career in state party politics, said there's no way to sugarcoat the unexpectedly close race.

He said Democrats "have had a very strong wind at their faces tonight and it showed." Polls were off all over the country, predicting close races in some states that turned into Republican blowouts.

Saslaw also said Virginia Democrats need to put together a stronger turnout operation for midterm elections, particularly in Northern Virginia.

Another potential factor: U.S. Rep. Robert C. "Bobby" Scott, D-Newport News, was unopposed in the 3rd District, which includes most of the Peninsula's Democratic precincts. With U.S. Rep. Scott Rigell, R-Virginia Beach, facing a challenger in the more conservative 2nd District, which he won by some 17 percentage points, Gillespie may have benefited from a difference in turnout between the districts.

Warner is a popular former governor with a reputation for bipartisanship that Gillespie tried to chip away at during this campaign by pointing to his voting record, and particularly his vote for Obama's signature Affordable Care Act.

Warner's connection to an ongoing scandal in state politics couldn't have helped. He called former state Sen. Phil Puckett's son shortly before Puckett retired, and flipped the Senate's balance of power to Republicans, in an effort to keep Puckett in the Senate.

The two discussed possible jobs for Puckett's daughter, and the prospect of a federal judgeship came up. Warner said he simply called a family friend to "brainstorm," and that he never made any sort of job offer.

Voters may not have noticed, though. A Roanoke College poll from late October reported that only 24 percent of likely voters followed the Puckett story closely or somewhat closely, despite repeated media coverage.

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