Romney sweeps April’s final primary; chief rivals drop

Mitt Romney concluded a successful April by sweeping the final primaries of the month. He was able to win the primary elections in New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. This will all but makes it official that Mitt Romney will be the Republican nominee for the 2012 Presidential election, especially after both Rick Santorum and Newt Gingrich announced that they would drop out of the race for the GOP nominee.

Santorum cited his daughter’s ongoing illness as one of the main reasons for suspending his campaign. Newt Gingrich has yet to explain his decision to drop out. However, speculation has been that the Gingrich campaign is heavily in debt and he has realized that winning the nomination is near impossible.

Romney has two more steps to complete in his Presidential bid. First, he has to secure the delegates to win the nomination outright and although Romney is the front-runner with little competition from the Republican Party, he must secure 1,144 delegates for the nomination. Second, Romney needs to choose his Vice Presidential running mate.

Several candidates are rumored to have a shot at becoming Romney’s running mate, Rep. Paul Ryan (Wisc.), Sen. Marco Rubio (Fla.), Sen. Rob Portman (Ohio), Gov. Mitch Daniels (Ind.), and Gov. Bob McDonnell (Va.) have been mentioned and all have strong backgrounds and would offer varying strengths and weaknesses for the Romney general election campaign.

Congress works to fix financial woes of the Postal Service

Last week, Congress moved one step closer to fixing the financial problems associated with the post office in recent years. The United States Postal Service has been informing Congress for a number of years that they were in the process of shutting down due to financial problems.

Last week, the Senate passed a bipartisan bill with a vote of 62-37. The package includes $11 billion in buyouts to employees, early retirement incentives to hundreds of thousands of postal workers, and an offered to pay off the USPS’ debts. In addition, USPS will be permitted to no longer provide Saturday service after two years. One of the biggest issues with the bill is the restrictions on when, where, and how post offices in rural communities could be closed.

Darrell Issa (R-Calif.) and other Republicans have been criticizing the Senate because the bill will not allow the postal service to close down these unprofitable offices quick enough. Issa has said the 100 offices that will stay open, according to the Senate bill, will end up costing $900 million dollars a year.

Whether the USPS can continue to deliver mail on Saturdays and whether they will be able to shut down non-profitable offices in the near future are also the two contentious issues associated with the House debates.

The House will have to bring this controversial bill to a vote soon and much debate is anticipated. It will likely end up with a last-minute vote to pass the bill. Interestingly, the legislation will likely pit urban lawmakers against more rural ones with regards to post office closures as rural Americans are more likely to be affected by closures.
According to a Federal Elections Commission year-end report, the amount of money raised in 2011 by political action committees far exceeds the amount of money raised in previous years. The FEC report looks at the 2011 data for the Presidential Candidates, Congressional Candidates, and PAC contributions and compares it to previous data.

In the Presidential contributions report, figures show that in 2003, the last time an incumbent was running for President, just over $271 million dollars were given to the collective group of candidates. In 2011, a similar $280 million dollars were given to the group of candidates.

Congressional candidate’s contributions have shown a large difference since 2001. Since 2003, Congressional candidates received $248 million more in contribution dollars in 2011 than in 2001. This averages out to approximately $523,000 per candidate compared to $261,883 per candidate in 2001 showing a dramatic increase in the cost to win a seat in Congress.

Meanwhile, general PAC contributions raked in $601 million dollars last year with corporate and labor PACs raising the most money last year.

This year, there are expected to be many close elections from House races, member vs. member primaries, and the Senate races. As usual, money is going to play an important role in the outcome of many races. It is important to note some members of Congress and their challengers who have a large war chest in the bank to spend helping them get elected or reelected.

There are several key races to watch this November. California’s 7th district race includes Rep. Dan Lungren who has $900,000 in the bank while physician challenger Ami Bera has $1.1 million raised. Another expensive House race is Florida’s 18th district, which includes Rep. Allen West who has raised $3.3 million dollars and Patrick Murphy has raised more than $1 million dollars.

In the members vs. member’s primaries, there are some important races to watch, including California’s 30th District, which has Howard Berman, who has raised over $4 million, and Rep. Brad Sherman, who has raised almost $2.5 million dollars. This is one of the most contested races, and money will play significant role in the outcome.

Senate races have been fundraising at an astounding pace as well and several races are expected to spend over ten million dollars. The Massachusetts Senate race between Sen. Scott Brown and Elizabeth Warren is going to be one of the most expensive races in Senate history. Brown raised $15 million and Warren raised $11 million last year.

This year’s congressional races are shaping up to be some of the most expensive ever proving that there is no separation between financial contributions and members of Congress.

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The worst ties in Congress

In April, Ties-necktie.com posted a blog on the worst dressed members of Congress. The list includes a three-way for first place with Sens. John Barrasso, Joe Lieberman, and Bernie Sanders all being named for this relatively inconsequential “honor.”

Ties-necktie.com stated that Sen. Barrasso was poorly put together and wore a red tie every day. Sen. Lieberman was said to wear his shirts so tight it could cut off breathing, and Sen. Sanders looks like he just rolled out of bed with his wrinkled shirts.

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**Blue Dogs’ may not bark as loud this November**

For members of the Blue Dog coalition, it is likely going to be another tough election year. In the 2010 elections, the Blue Dog Coalition shrunk from 54 members to 26 members due to retirements and defeats. November’s elections will likely diminish the Blue Dogs even further. Blue Dog Democrats are moderate to conservative Democrats who are fiscally more conservative compared to their Democratic colleagues. This leaves Blue Dogs in a vulnerable position with their own party and with Republicans.

Several Blue Dogs have been placed in a vulnerable position because of redistricting. Members who have had their districts redrawn into a more conservative area include Rep. Jim Matheson (Utah), Rep. John Barrow (Ga.), and Rep. Mike McIntyre (N.C.). All three are vulnerable to a Republican challenger in November’s elections.

Other Blue Dogs have been redistricted into more liberal districts leaving them susceptible to a primary challenge from a more liberal candidate. They include Rep. Tim Holden and Rep. Jason Altmire, both from Pennsylvania, members who **lost their primary battles** earlier this month. Come November, it is likely the Blue Dogs will lose much of their “bark” in Congress.

**North Dakota Senate race leans Democrat**

Congressman Berg has proved to be a stronger fundraiser than Heitkamp. Currently, Berg is leading Heitkamp: Rep. Berg has raised over $1.5 million while Heitkamp has $850,000 in her war chest. The amount of money that will go into this race will have a direct impact on which of the two will win.

The last several elections have seen North Dakota go for both John McCain and George W. Bush leaving a very bumpy road ahead for Heitkamp. This race is likely to come down to a few points where the general national political mood. Finally, in order for the GOP to reclaim the Senate as has been predicted, they will need to win this seat.