



Florida House Speaker Richard Corcoran has long been an insider in Florida politics. | Daniel Ducassi/POLITICO

## **Eye on governor bid, Corcoran hires former Trump, Scott pollster**

By **MARC CAPUTO** | 07/10/2017 05:08 AM EDT

MIAMI — With an eye on running for governor, Florida House Speaker Richard Corcoran has hired GOP strategist Tony Fabrizio for polling and the type of strategic advice he employed in 2010 when he helped mastermind Gov. Rick Scott's surprising win against the Republican establishment.

As in 2010, the GOP movers and shakers in Tallahassee are rallying around a gubernatorial candidate, this time Agriculture Commissioner Adam Putnam who has about \$10 million in the bank between his campaign and his Florida Grown political committee. And as happened seven years ago, Fabrizio said the establishment favorite could have trouble with his right flank.

But Fabrizio said there's a difference between Putnam in the 2018 race and former Florida Attorney General Bill McCollum in the 2010 race against Scott: "Putnam is Bill McCollum without the conservative credentials."

"If Adam Putnam had no money, would you even be talking about this guy?" Fabrizio asked. "There are people who have compelling records. He has money and a record that is just abysmal. Putnam voted for virtually every payday that came down the pike in Congress. He was for amnesty. He voted for endless spending, for cash for clunkers and what he stands for is anathema to the Republican Party today."

Putnam, 42, has continually held elected office since he was first elected — at age 22 — to the Florida Legislature. He then won a congressional seat and then successfully ran for the first of his two terms as agriculture commissioner in 2010.

Corcoran has long been an insider in Florida politics, but Fabrizio said Putnam's record as a career politician could hurt and that Republican voters would look kindly on Corcoran's staunch opposition to Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare, when he was House budget chief in 2015 and 2016.

"He was the one-man wrecking ball to expending Medicaid in Florida," Fabrizio said. "While they're up there in Washington talking about fighting Obamacare, here's a guy who actually stopped Florida from falling into the trap. While they're up in Washington talking about what they're going to do about spending and all this waste, here's a guy who made it impossible for all of these guys to bury their turkeys in all of these bills. Putnam doesn't have that record."

Fabrizio is being paid through Corcoran's new Watchdog PAC — an indication that the House speaker we'll run for the state's highest office in 2018.

"It's great to have someone of Tony's experience in helping us push forward an agenda that helps Floridians," Corcoran said.

"One of the metrics Corcoran was looking at is, can he put together the money? ... and he posted some pretty good numbers. It's a comfort to him," said Fabrizio. The Watchdog PAC, formed in late May, has reported raising more than \$2 million.

"Republican Primary voters have shown a great desire to vote for people who are going to get things done. What they see in Richard Corcoran is a man with a conservative record who get things done," added Fabrizio.

He expects Democrats to have "a spirity primary," in which "their own demons will come into play. The fight between the mainstream and Bernie Sanders Democrats."

"You already see, in their Democratic retreat, they're racing as fast as they can to the left," he said. "You don't win as a Democrat by being seen as too far left."

Fabrizio, a Fort Lauderdale resident, is one of the nation's most sought-after Republican consultants. He briefly polled for President Donald Trump's campaign and, four years before, worked for then-Texas Gov. Rick Perry's presidential campaign. Over the decades, Fabrizio has worked for presidential candidates Bob Dole, Pat Buchanan, Perry and Paul; for former Sens. Connie Mack of Florida, Alfonse D'Amato of New York and Bob Bennett of Utah; and for former Govs. Bob Riley of Alabama, Tim Pawlenty of Minnesota and Mike Foster of Louisiana. He has also advised the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and numerous political committees.

Though Florida House speakers aren't well-known, Corcoran might be polling better than other predecessors of his because of his well-publicized squabbles with Scott when he got to the right of the governor and accused his administration of favoring corporate welfare and wasteful spending on tourism and economic-development promotions.

In polls, Putnam has slightly higher name ID than Corcoran, Fabrizio said. But about 60 percent of likely Republican voters have no preference in the race for governor. "The race is wide open," he said.

Fabrizio last year worked for one potential gubernatorial rival of Corcoran's, U.S. Rep. Ron DeSantis' short-lived U.S. Senate campaign. But, Fabrizio suggested, DeSantis' role in what's widely derided as a do-nothing Congress, could be problematic.

“While I like Ron and he’s a great guy, that’s all they do is talk in Washington,” Fabrizio said. “I’m not debating whether or not Ron DeSantis is a conservative. What I’m debating whether he’s a conservative doer vs. a conservative talker. I know Richard Corcoran is a conservative doer and leader who gets things done.”

Fabrizio dismissed the chances of state Sen. Jack Latvala, the Senate budget chief. “No offense to Jack Latvala, but he is the Paula Dockery of 2018,” he said referring to the former state senator from Lakeland who dropped out early in the 2010 gubernatorial GOP primary after polling in single digits.

“He’ll flirt with it,” he said. “He’ll use it to raise some money. But at the end of the day, I don’t see what his angle is to run for governor. He is to the left of Adam Putnam.”