Arizona Senate:
Flight Path to Victory

By Leah Askarinam

A year ago, Republican Martha McSally left her House seat behind only to lose a high-profile Senate election. Now, McSally is an appointed U.S. Senator in the state’s other seat and gearing up for another high-profile campaign with the majority potentially at stake.

Arizona is the only state in the country where the candidates for a competitive Senate general election seem to be in place. Neither McSally nor Democratic candidate Mark Kelly seems likely to face a credible primary challenge at this stage. The two aviators—the former for the Air Force, the latter for the Navy—are just getting started, laying the groundwork for an 18-month battle.

McSally was appointed to the late Sen. John McCain’s seat on Jan. 3 of this year, less than two months after she lost an open-seat race, 50-48 percent, following GOP Sen. Jeff Flake’s retirement. While McSally fell short in her first statewide race against Kyrsten Sinema, some Republicans are optimistic that she’ll fare better in a presidential year.

Of course, losing one race does not mean that a candidate is destined to lose future races. Just last year, Democrat Angie Craig and Republican Jim Hagedorn flipped Minnesota districts, two years after losing races. McSally will run with lessons learned from her previous campaign in a different political environment. Her 2020 race will include the backdrop of a crowded Democratic presidential primary, and Republicans hope freshmen like New York City Rep. Alexandria Ocasio Cortez debate the feasibility of progressive policy initiatives and dominate the media landscape.

The Lay Of The Land

Before Sinema’s 2018 victory, Republicans had carried every statewide office in Arizona since at least 2010. And a Democratic presidential candidate hasn’t carried the state since Bill Clinton’s victory in 1996, and that was with 47 percent.

Sinema ran against the partisan trend in a state where, at the time, the Baseline Democratic performance was 44 percent, 9 points behind the Republican Baseline.

But 2018 was a different story. Sinema was one of four Democratic women to win statewide office—along with the secretary of state, superintendent of public instruction, and the corporate commissioner who won with a plurality (26 percent). In the House, Democrats flipped the 2nd District (which McSally left to run for Senate), while Democrat Tom O’Halleran held the 1st District (which President Donald Trump carried in 2016). Following the 2018 election, Republicans’ Baseline advantage decreased by 4 points and is now 52-47 percent.
Amidst Breaking News, Expect the Status Quo to Prevail

By Nathan L. Gonzales

The Mueller Report is out, the media coverage is saturating, but I’m skeptical that it will fundamentally change the political dynamic. President Donald Trump is a polarizing figure, most voters chose a side before the latest news, and that makes it difficult for any individual event to be a “game-changer.”

Too often, every Tweet, remark, event, or economic number receives disproportionate coverage compared to its political consequence. But based on the president’s static polling, it’s best to assume that nothing matters until proven otherwise.

Up to this point, Trump’s job approval rating has been remarkably steady. It was 44 percent approve and 52 percent disapprove, according to the RealClearPolitics average through Thursday. And that’s where the president has been for more than a year. His approval has varied between 41 and 45 percent and his disapproval between 51 and 56 percent going back to early February 2018.

The best way to analyze the political fallout from the release of the redacted Mueller Report is to wait. It will be a few days before polling reveals whether attitudes toward the president have changed. And it will take a few months to know whether any immediate movement lasts and has fundamentally changed the political dynamic.

Mark me down as skeptical. Trump did a good job of discrediting Robert Mueller and the investigation to his supporters in the months leading up to the grand reveal. Most Republicans believe it was a witch hunt or, at a minimum, a waste of time and resources. And there’s nothing in the report that will dissuade Democrats from opposing the president.

It’s possible that swing voters could be persuaded, but they are fewer in number and more likely to change their mind based on other news that breaks closer to the election, which is still 18 months away.

Of course it’s also possible that the Mueller Report becomes a game-changer after reporters and people outside of Washington have more time to analyze the findings, and media coverage changes. But we’re living in a polarized country and environment, where dramatic changes are unlikely. And the status quo will continue to lead to a close and competitive race for the White House next year.

Candidate Conversation

Wesley Hunt (R)
Texas’ 7th District — Lean Democratic

Interview Date: April 9, 2019
Date of Birth: Nov. 13, 1981;
Houston, TX.
Education: West Point (2004);
Cornell (M.B.A, M.P.A 2015;
MILR 2016)

Elected Office: None; First run for office

Current Outlook: Hunt has the potential to be the type of top-tier challenger Republicans need to regain the majority. But he’s running in a suburban Houston district that President Donald Trump lost to Hillary Clinton, 49-47 percent, against incumbent Lizzie Fletcher, who is part of Democrats’ strong class of new Members. Hunt had his eye on running for Congress in the future, but Fletcher’s defeat of GOP Rep. John Culberson in 2018 sped up the timeline.

Evaluation: On paper, Hunt is impressive. He’s a retired Lieutenant Colonel in the Army who flew Apache helicopters in Iraq, earned three degrees from an Ivy League school, and worked for Perry Homes, a large Texas home builder founded by a prominent GOP donor. In person, Hunt was energetic and relaxed, particularly for a first-time candidate. With two siblings who also served in the Army — and were deployed at the same time in 2006 — Hunt was particularly passionate about his family history of service and he is clearly compelled to run because of his fallen classmates.

On issues, Hunt looks like a traditional, pre-Trump conservative Republican, although he didn’t cite any policy differences with President Trump beyond government spending. The Houston native believes in repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act and agrees with President Trump’s national emergency declaration to secure funding for a border wall, where necessary. Hunt is running to protect jobs in the energy sector and is anxious to contrast with the Democrats’ Green New Deal. Overall, Republicans want to dent Fletcher’s moderate image and believe Republicans lost the seat in 2018 because of a flawed congressman rather than President Trump’s shadow. Hunt is confident in his ability to win crossover supporters who might oppose the President in 2020. But it’s still unclear how Trump will perform and what environment Hunt will be facing.
New York 1: Democrats Long for a Pick-Up

By Leah Askarinam

The 2018 Democratic wave resulted in a new House majority and some districts—namely in the suburbs—that hosted closer-than-expected elections. For some of those districts, the 2018 result could have been an aberration, the result of a particularly strong year for Democrats. For others, however, those margins could be foreshadowing races to come.

New York Rep. Lee Zeldin is one of the GOP congressmen who was prepared for his race to become competitive and avoided getting caught off guard by a wave. The 1st District election wasn’t perceived as a top-tier Democratic pickup opportunity, however. An early October Siena/New York Times poll found Zeldin leading 49-41 percent, and an online poll by Change Research, a Democratic firm, later that month found Zeldin leading 52-37 percent. But the congressman ended up winning his race by just 4 points, 51-47 percent.

The 1st District is a suburban district that Donald Trump carried in 2016, making it difficult to read the tea leaves for 2020. It doesn’t fit neatly into a category of Trump districts, suburban districts, or highly-educated districts. The district has swung before—it was represented by a Democrat as recently as 2014—and it’s unclear which direction voters will go next year.

Democrats are hoping to recruit a candidate who could make it a top-tier race. They obviously don’t need this district for a majority, since they already have it without it. But this is the type of race Democrats want to be competitive to keep Republicans on defense rather than the GOP spend money on offense elsewhere. And Republicans will be ready.

The Lay Of The Land

There were 25 districts in the last midterms where Republicans won by less than 5 points, according to data collected by Dave Wasserman of The Cook Political Report. The narrowest GOP victory took place in Georgia’s 7th District, which will be an open seat in 2020 after Rep. Rob Woodall announced his retirement. Further down the list, New York’s 1st District hosted the 18th narrowest GOP victory, when Zeldin won re-election by 4.1 points.

The 1st District is south of the Long Island Sound, covering eastern Suffolk County. It stretches from Smithtown and Hauppauge, east toward Calverton to include the rest of Long Island, including Montauk (South Fork) and Greenport (North Fork). The South Fork includes the Hamptons, and the North Fork includes farms and dozens of wineries, according to CQ’s Politics in America.

The district is categorized as “sparse suburban,” according to CityLab. Three-fourths of the population is non-Hispanic white, according to the 2017 Census American Community Survey. Of every Republican-held district in the country, New York’s 1st District ranks 23rd in terms of the share of the population with a college degree or higher (35 percent).

Barack Obama narrowly carried the district in the presidential elections of 2008 (by 3 points) and 2012 (by one-half of 1 percent). At the time, Democrat Tim Bishop, who was first elected in 2002 after defeating GOP Rep. Felix Grucci, represented the district. But Bishop lost his seat to Zeldin in the 2014 GOP wave, and Trump resoundingly carried the district two years later, 55-42 percent.

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The Incumbent
A Major in the U.S. Army Reserves, Zeldin previously served as a Military Intelligence Officer and Military Magistrate, including a 2006 deployment to Iraq. He returned to New York in 2008 to open a law practice, a year after leaving active duty. Zeldin first ran for Congress in 2008, running 17 points behind Bishop. He was elected to the state Senate in 2010 before running for Congress again in 2014, when he defeated Bishop by 8 points, 53-45 percent.

When Zeldin was first elected to the House, he was 34 years old and the only Jewish Republican member, according to Politico. Now he sits on the Financial Services and Foreign Affairs committees, and is co-chairman of the House Republican Israel Caucus, the Congressional Portuguese Caucus, and the Long Island Sound Caucus.

The Challengers
Perry Gershon is seeking a rematch after coming up short in 2018. He

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opened a New York sports bar in 1984 before a 25-year career as a lender in commercial real estate. Gershon is now retired and campaigning full time. In his 2018 race, he raised $5.1 million for the primary and general elections, which included nearly $2 million in personal funds. He also faced a competitive primary, which he won with a plurality (36 percent).

Gershon’s campaign includes GBA Strategies for polling, Berlin Rosen for direct mail, and media consultant Bill Hyers of WIN.

Stony Brook Univ. professor Nancy Goroff is seriously considering running for the Democratic nomination. Goroff teaches chemistry and has been a Democratic fundraiser who may be able to use those connections for her campaign. She has spoken with EMILY’s List and Democratic consultants about a potential bid for the 1st District seat, including pollsters Jeffrey Pollock and Nick Gourevitch of Global Strategies, direct mail consultants Ed Peavy and Peter Jones of Mission Control, and media consultant Martha McKenna of McKenna Media.

Southampton Town Supervisor Jay Schneiderman, who has a background in property management, has also been mentioned as a potential candidate, though his assistant told Inside Elections that he was running for re-election this year. Lawyer/Navy reservist Jack Harrington has also been mentioned.

The Democratic Primary
The field remains unsettled. Some Democrats weren’t blown away by Gershon’s candidacy in 2018, though he was a strong fundraiser. And a March Newsday article reported that some Democratic activists have been vocal about searching for a Democratic candidate whose profile better fits the Long Island district—a veteran or police officer, for example.

In the 2018 primary, Gershon narrowly defeated Kate Browning, a school bus driver who hired a professional campaign but raised just $581,000. Gershon, on the other hand, had raised $2.1 million in his pre-primary filing report, including a $900,000 personal loan and a $432,000 personal contribution. In a five-way race, Browning received 30 percent, running five points behind Gershon (who received 35.5 percent).

If Goroff chooses to run, some Democrats are confident that she’ll be a stronger fundraiser than Browning. And some also believe that she’ll enter the race with built-in advantages, including that she’s from Brookhaven, the hub of the district, and is a woman scientist who could appeal to Democratic primary voters. Like Goroff, Bishop, the last Democrat to represent the district, also worked in academics, with a nearly 30-year career at Southampton College that included serving as provost.

How It Plays Out
Democrats believe that previous candidates haven’t been the right fit for the district, coming from the wealthier parts like the Hamptons. The 2016 nominee, Anna Throne-Holst, was backed by EMILY’s List but came from the Hamptons, when the bulk of the district is in Brookhaven. Plus, Trump on the ballot likely boosted Republicans among working-class voters. Gershon is from East Hampton.

Democrats will likely focus on the GOP tax bill and health care as key issues. It’s possible that, after the tax bill went into effect, voters in Democratic states like New York could re-evaluate their previous support of the President. Democrats also point to their party’s gains in local elections on Long Island since 2016.

After focusing on name ID in his last campaign, if Gershon wins the
primary, he could focus on persuadable voters, especially blue-collar voters who live in places like Selden. The district includes just one media market — New York City — making it difficult and expensive for challengers to introduce themselves to the district.

But the party is not united around Gershon. One Democrat argued that Gershon struggled to connect with voters after sustaining GOP attacks about being an outsider. And several operatives argued that a Democratic candidate with deeper connections in the district would be preferable in a general election race against Zeldin, who grew up in Suffolk County. But it’s also possible that any “carpetbagger” attacks will fade in his second run, given that he’s better known in the district. Plus, Gershon managed to come within 4 points of Zeldin just two years after Throne-Holst lost by 16 points — without support from outside groups that helped other Democrats in competitive races.

Zeldin raised $601,000 in the first three months of this year after raising $4.5 million for his 2018 race.

One Republican is confident that despite the fact that the district is suburban, there’s a reason Trump carried it in 2016, and messages connecting Democrats to socialism, Medicare for All, and the Green New Deal will be effective this cycle. Another Republican argued that the 1st District suburbs are not composed of the white, college-educated women who flipped districts across the country in 2018. Rather, the Long Island suburbs include blue-collar workers and New York City first responders. In that case, Trump on the top of the ballot could help Republicans.

Democrats, however, point to the fact that district’s median household income ($92,378) is higher than the state’s average ($62,765, according to Census Community Survey estimates five-year estimates for 2017), putting it in the same category as other anti-Trump suburbs. Plus, it’s possible that working-class voters in the district — and across the country — were voting to oppose Clinton rather than to support Trump. And if Trump loses support in his second election — following the trend of other presidents — this district could be the kind of place where Republicans struggle.

Democrats would need to run up their numbers in the Hamptons, which traditionally votes Democratic, and overperform in Brookhaven, the most populous part of the district. Republicans tend to win the Smithtown area, which is largely blue-collar.

Gershon is determined to label Zeldin as a rubber stamp for President Trump, but it’s still unclear whether that will be a liability, depending on the outcome of the 2020 presidential race.

The Bottom Line

There’s plenty of data to suggest that the national environment and demographics swayed the outcome of the 2018 midterms: 28 of the 43 seats that Democrats flipped were suburban, 22 of 25 Republican districts that Clinton carried flipped, and all three Republican pickups were in predominantly white, rural districts.

But results in a handful of races prove that candidates and campaigns matter. In Arizona’s 1st District, we reported earlier this month, both parties agreed that Democrat Tom O’Halleran benefited from facing a series of underwhelming Republican challengers. On the other side of the aisle, even Republicans who are confident in keeping control of New York’s 1st District believe that Democrats have yet to present a candidate who could wage an effective challenge in a district that could swing.

Gershon could enter the race, equipped with lessons from his previous run and some pre-existing name ID, with a stronger campaign in 2020. But it might take more than a strong campaign to win in this district. It might take the right candidate instead — and even then, this is a tough district for Democrats.
Continued from page 1

Despite those Democratic victories in 2018, Arizona is not a blue state. GOP Gov. Doug Ducey was the top statewide performer, winning re-election by 14 points, 56-42 percent. And four other Republicans won statewide, including the attorney general, treasurer, mine inspector, and a winning second-place finisher in the multi-candidate race for corporation commissioner.

Populous Maricopa County (including Phoenix) is an important battleground. Ducey carried it easily 57-43 percent in 2018, identical to his 2014 performance. McSally was the only Republican Senate or gubernatorial candidate to lose Maricopa County since at least 2012, falling short 52-48 percent. Considering about 60 percent of the state’s votes stem from there, Maricopa County is critical for both parties.

In Pima County (Tucson), the state’s Democratic stronghold, Sinema overperformed every other statewide Democratic candidate since 2012 when she carried the county with 58 percent. Her performance was less than 1 point better than Hillary Clinton’s in 2016 (57.3 percent) and 2012 Democratic Senate nominee Richard Carmona (57.4 percent). Both McSally and Kelly’s wife, former Rep. Gabby Giffords, used to represent Pima County in the House.

Sinema also managed to stem her losses outside Maricopa and Pima counties. In the rest of the state, Sinema received 44 percent. In comparison, Clinton and Kyrkpatrick received 41 percent in their 2016 losses. Carmona overperformed Sinema outside the two major Democratic hubs, receiving 45 percent, but that wasn’t enough to compensate for his 53-47 percent loss in Maricopa County.

The Senator

A retired U.S. Air Force colonel, McSally was the country’s first woman to fly a fighter jet in combat. She was deployed to Saudi Arabia on Sept. 11, 2001, and would later execute and oversee operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. In 2010, after 26 years of service, she retired. McSally first ran for the 2nd District in 2012 against Democratic Rep. Ron Barber, a former aide to Giffords who was shot in the same attack that wounded the congresswoman. McSally lost that initial race but won a rematch two years later by 167 votes, narrowly ousting Barber after a recount. She won by a more comfortable margin in 2016 against Democrat Matt Heinz. But, facing re-election in a district that Hillary Clinton carried, McSally chose to run for Senate instead. (In the end, 22 of the 25 districts with GOP house representation that Clinton carried flipped to Democrats last November, so she would have had a competitive race with either decision.)

McSally became ensnared in a primary with controversial former Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio and former state Sen. Kelli Ward. The state chairwoman of the state Republican Party. While McSally was the favorite to win the GOP nomination, both Arpaio and Ward had feasible paths to victory in a three-way race in which a candidate could win with a plurality. McSally ended up winning by 25 points with 53 percent in a late-August primary, giving her only a little more than two months to pivot to a general election message.

After she fell short 50-48 percent in November, McSally released a postmortem memo, arguing that Sinema “was a fundraising magnet for national Democrat donors” and that “[George] Soros and [Sen. Chuck] Schumer funded entities” attacked McSally during the GOP primary. The memo also argued that Sinema, who represented Maricopa County in the House, benefited from a “home court geographical advantage.” The memo went on to blame the media, divisions in the Republican Party, and historical precedents of a midterm dynamic that puts the political party that holds both chambers of Congress and the White House at a disadvantage.

But it was conventional wisdom during her campaign that, even if McSally lost, she would likely end up serving in the Senate in 2019. After McCain died, Ducey appointed Jon Kyl to the Senate on Sept. 5. But Kyl, who had previously served in the Senate from 1995-2013, left open the door for McSally, explaining that he would only commit to remaining in his role “through the end of session.” In December, Kyl announced he would resign at the end of the month, and Ducey appointed McSally to replace him.

A veteran, McSally is a member of the Armed Services Committee. She’s also a member of the Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee, the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, and the Indian Affairs Committee.

McSally is retaining her 2018 consultants, Jeff Roe and Axiom Strategies, for her 2020 campaign.

The Challenger

Kelly is a retired U.S. Navy captain, flying combat missions in the First Gulf War, including Operation Desert Storm. In 1996, he joined NASA as an astronaut, working in Houston and flying four missions on the Space Shuttle Endeavor and living on the International Space Station. He and his identical twin brother, Scott, who is also an astronaut, participated in a NASA study on how space travel affects people’s health. The findings of the study, conducted while Scott was in space in 2016, were published this month.

Mark Kelly retired from NASA in 2012 after his wife, former Rep. Gabby Giffords, was shot while meeting with constituents outside a supermarket in Tucson. Kelly moved to Arizona and co-founded GIFFORDS, an anti-gun violence organization, with the congresswoman after the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School. He also co-founded a Tucson business that “sends hardware into near-space.”

Prior to moving to Arizona, Kelly had been registered as an Independent, though the Arizona Republic reported that he voted in the 2012 Republican primary in Texas and that Kelly does not remember who he voted for in that primary.

Kelly was the first high-profile candidate to announce he would run...
for the Democratic nomination, setting up a potential competitive primary against Rep. Ruben Gallego, who was being courted by progressive groups. But Gallego opted not to run for the Senate seat, and EMILY’s List is not actively recruiting an alternative candidate, meaning Democrats will likely avoid the tension that plagued the Arizona GOP last year, but also that Democrats are relying on an untested candidate as their only option.

Kelly’s campaign includes GQR for polling, Left Hook for media, and Mission Control and Radar Strategies for direct mail.

**How It Plays Out**

If the 2020 race is going to turn out any different than 2018, McSally is going to have to do something different. She will need to improve her performance in Maricopa County—and likely carry it—in order to win statewide. Her campaign has hired Tanya Wheeless as the campaign’s state director, who is connected in Maricopa County. Plus, McSally now has the advantage of running as a statewide official who should be able to garner more earned media attention, compared to her 2018 campaign as a congresswoman from Tuscon (Pima County), in Baja Arizona and detached from the Phoenix media market.

McSally is an incumbent who is unlikely to face a GOP primary this year, allowing her to enter the general election with more time

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**Arizona Election Results**

**Statewide**

**Maricopa County**

**Outside Pima and Maricopa Counties**

**Pima County**

*Calculated using two-party results*
to cultivate a general election message that highlights her résumé. Republicans noted that McCain’s death meant that her already short general election timeline was cut even shorter, when his funeral, his family’s feud with Trump, and coverage of the Senator’s legacy became the main focus of Arizona press and politics for weeks at the beginning of the important general election sprint.

Trump’s feud with the McCain family while the Senator was sick also complicated McSally’s efforts to unite the party, according to a Republican operative. Trump’s most fervent supporters largely united behind Kelli Ward in the GOP primary, and the McCain family’s feud with Trump made it even harder for McSally to win them over. Then, Trump’s comments on birthright citizenship further divided the party and alienated persuadable voters.

Republicans have already started attacking Kelly for his connections to corporate interests, including a paid speech for an event in the United Arab Emirates that was sponsored by the crown prince. Kelly has since returned the $55,000, according to CNN. The GOP will also likely focus on speeches Kelly has given to tie him to other corporate interests.

Republicans will use those issues, along with a lack of information about his policy positions or previous votes in political elections, to build a narrative that Kelly is a politician trying to appease everyone in order to win. Republicans will also likely mine records at GIFFORDS PAC, including arguing that Kelly is a political operative rather than an independent voice.

In response to Republican attacks, Kelly’s campaign released the transcript of his paid speeches, believing that transparency will help end any public concern. (The speech was largely autobiographical.) And Kelly has started to talk to local media—in an effort to prevent the race from becoming nationalized—to clarify his positions on key policy issues. On a local NBC affiliate on Monday, for example, he supported employer-provided health care rather than Medicare for All.

One Democrat also noted that, if Republicans choose to make the influence of money the focus of their messaging, Kelly’s campaign would be well-positioned. In 2018, Senate Majority PAC funded an ad that attacked McSally’s position on health care, arguing that she supported an “age tax” and put “Washington ahead of Arizona.”

Democrats could use a playbook against McSally that’s similar to Republican attacks on Kelly, sewing distrust by highlighting her previous positions on Trump’s candidacy and presidency. In 2016, after the president’s infamous Access Hollywood tape went public, McSally said in a Tweet: “Trump’s comments are disgusting. Joking about sexual assault is unacceptable. I’m appalled.” But, after the GOP primary, in which McSally supported the President, she accepted Trump’s endorsement.

One Democratic strategist argued that voters simply didn’t like McSally in 2018, and she has yet to re-invent herself. McSally also tied herself closely to Trump in 2018, which could have hurt her in the Phoenix suburbs, but voters are unlikely to remember the details of that primary in the 2020 election. Another Democrat believes that McSally also has yet to develop a solution on health care, one of the issues that could have cost her the election in 2018.

If anyone dislikes McSally it’s likely because they don’t know her well, according to a Republican operative. But McSally did struggle to introduce herself to voters after a long GOP primary, during which Sinema was able to define herself as a moderate while Republicans battled for support from the party’s base. This time around, Arizona Republicans may be able to count on the President to turn out his base, allowing McSally more leeway to appeal to moderate, suburban women, especially in Maricopa County. She recently shared at a congressional hearing that she was raped while she was serving in the Air Force, an example of sharing more details of her personal story.

There are some concerns about McSally’s first quarter spending. Between the beginning of the year and the end of March, McSally spent $914,000, more than any other Senate candidate. Democratic Sen. Doug Jones, running for re-election in Alabama, ranked second nationally in terms of Senate spending, but still spent $241,000 less than McSally. In comparison, fellow vulnerable Republicans Sens. Susan Collins (Maine) and Cory Gardner (Colorado) spent $343,000 and $290,000, respectively. But McSally is focusing on building an infrastructure to cultivate small-dollar donations, which is expensive but could result in a more loyal donor base.

Democrats were able to argue that Sinema had a moderate voting record in the House, but they also acknowledge that Sinema enjoyed months of attack-free campaigning while Republicans attacked each other in the primary — a dynamic that Democrats can’t depend on in 2020. Sinema built her positive image during that time — airing ads where she promised to cross party lines and be an independent voice. McSally, who didn’t have that luxury, was more susceptible to the post-primary negative attacks from Sinema’s campaign and Democratic outside groups.

Both parties are confident about their candidate’s résumé. McSally’s experience as an aviator for the Air Force could help her in a state with Air Force bases and retired military. While her resume didn’t break through in 2018, one Democrat acknowledged that it had worked in her House races in Pima County. But Kelly is a retired Navy pilot and an astronaut, who could appeal to some of those same voters if he runs a strong campaign. While Sinema’s path to victory will likely serve as a roadmap for Democrats in 2020 — given that there are few other examples of Democratic victories to draw upon — Kelly’s profile could allow him to naturally appeal to a different set of voters, especially veterans and seniors.

Democrats will also try to highlight some lesser-known parts of his bio, including that his parents were police officers. The question is whether Kelly is a strong candidate beyond his résumé, and whether his work against gun violence could be used against him among conservative voters. Some Democrats are optimistic given his strong early fundraising—$4.1 million in the first quarter, ahead of McSally’s $2.1 million. One operative also argued that Kelly is personable in one-on-one meetings and a strong public speaker. Plus, his first quarter fundraising haul, which is greater than any other Senate incumbent or
challenger this year, could discourage other Democrats from waging a primary challenge.

Sinema was able to focus on Social Security and health care during her campaign, but with what will likely be an 18-month general election, there will likely be more time to comb through other issues. Democrats will still likely try to focus on health care, since it’s an issue that helped Democrats win the House majority in 2018.

Arizona is also experiencing demographic change that could help Democrats, as it’s becoming younger and more diverse. The GOP has to reach out to Hispanic voters, one Republican noted, along with other persuadable voters who might not be part of Trump’s base of fervent supporters.

But one Democratic strategist also noted that many of Arizona’s new residents fit the demographic profile of the GOP — older, white voters from the Midwest. And further complicating the argument that demographics help one party over another is the state’s Mormon population, which tends to vote Republican but is divided on Trump. (Former Arizona Sen. Jeff Flake, for example, is a Mormon.)

While most Senate races will likely come down to a referendum on the President, Arizona is one of a handful of states that could buck that dynamic. Arizona is set to host a high-profile, expensive race with candidates who are already being unveiled and introduced, before the presidential general election begins in earnest. Depending on whom Democrats choose as their presidential nominee, it’s unclear whether (or if) the presidential ballot will hurt one party.

Some Republicans believe that McSally could win even if Trump loses the state in the presidential race, while Democrats believe Kelly could win even if Trump wins at the top of the ballot. Republicans point to voters who split their ticket between the Senate and presidential candidate in 2016. While Trump carried Arizona by less than 4 points, McCain won his Senate race by 13 points. One Democratic strategist argued that while Democrats should be more optimistic about Arizona than Ohio, the result will ultimately depend on who wins the Democratic presidential nomination.

The Bottom Line

Arizona will be a major focus in the 2020 race for a handful of reasons. Sinema’s 2018 victory makes some Democrats believe that Arizona should be in play in the presidential race. At the same time, Democrats are two seats short of a majority in the state House (31 Republicans and 29 Democrats). In the U.S. House, Democrats are targeting the 6th District, and Republicans are targeting the 1st and 2nd districts.

In this race, McSally and Kelly will both need to transfer their strong résumés into top-tier candidacies. Republicans can’t afford to let Kelly define himself while Democrats can’t let Arizona voters get too comfortable with McSally as their senator.

Despite efforts to keep each race from becoming nationalized— neither party wants to depend on the top of the ticket in the Senate race—it’s impossible to isolate one from the other. The eventual Democratic presidential nominee and Trump’s performance will influence the outcome of down-ballot races across the country, and Arizona is no exception. The question is which party benefits from the top of the ticket, and that remains unknown.

And the stakes are high for this race. Democrats need to gain three or four seats for control of the Senate, so this is virtually a must-win contest.
New York 15: Republicans Need Not Apply

By Leah Askarinam

Hillary Clinton carried New York’s 15th District with 94 percent in 2016, according to Daily Kos Elections, but that doesn’t mean the race should be ignored. Republicans don’t have a chance of winning, but the Democratic primary will elect a future lawmaker, and a crowd of candidates could become a proxy for the larger fight within the Democratic Party.

Democratic Rep. José E. Serrano will not seek re-election in 2020, after he announced that he has Parkinson’s Disease. “Although this disease has not affected my work in Congress, over the last few months I’ve come to the realization that Parkinson’s will eventually take a toll, and that I cannot predict its rate of advancement,” Serrano said.

A crowd of Democratic hopefuls have begun to eye the solid blue seat, and we’ll have more analysis in the future. For now, here’s a list of names that have been mentioned as potential successors:

**New York City Councilman Member Ritchie Torres:** Torres represents the central Bronx as the youngest member of the Council. He told The New York Times before Serrano’s retirement that he was considering challenging the congressman in the primary. In March, Voices of New York reported that Torres was considering running for the open congressional seat. Torres was first elected in 2013 and is the first openly gay elected official in the Bronx. He was featured in a Dec. 2016 New Yorker article as a “rising star.”

**State Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie:** The first black speaker of the New York State Assembly, Heastie represents the northeast Bronx. He told The New York Times that he was not considering running. When he became speaker in 2015, he told WNYC that his priority was ethics reform after the previous speaker was accused of receiving bribes.

**State Sen. José Serrano:** The congressman told Roll Call that his son, who shares the congressman’s name, is not considering running. The state senator also told The New York Times that he would not run because he wanted to spend time with his family.

**Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr.:** In a recent interview with MetroFocus, Diaz Jr. said he was “not at all” interested in running for Serrano’s seat. “It’s mayor or nothing,” he said, referring to his plans to run for New York City mayor in 2021. Previously a seven-term member in the state legislature, Diaz. Jr. is serving his third term as Bronx Borough President. He is term-limited and cannot run for a fourth term.

**New York City Councilman Ruben Diaz Sr.:** The father of the Bronx Borough president is considering running, according to the Gothamist, though he recently lost his committee chairmanship for anti-gay remarks.

**State Rep. Marcos Crespo: The Gotham Gazette** reported that all of Crespo’s Assembly district falls into the 15th Congressional District, but that he may be too closely tied to Diaz Sr.

**State Sen. Gustavo Rivera:** Rivera is considering running, according to the Gothamist. He has served in the state Senate since 2010, and previously was a community organizer for candidates including Serrano. Born in Puerto Rico, he’s lived in Kingsbridge Heights for two decades and is now the chairman of the Senate Health Committee.

**State Rep. Michael Blake:** Blake has spoken with national Democrats about running, according to Politico. He was born in the Bronx and worked on Barack Obama’s 2008 campaign in Iowa, featured in a 2007 article in Time. He worked in the Obama White House in the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs.

**Amanda Septimo:** Formerly Serrano’s district director, the Gothamist reported that Septimo, a millennial, hasn’t decided whether to run yet. Septimo lost her race for New York State Assembly last year as an incumbent.

**Former New York City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito:** In 2017, when Mark-Viverito ruled out running for Puerto Rico’s governor, she also said she would consider running for mayor or Congress, according to the Observer, which also reported that there were rumors she hoped to succeed Serrano. She recently lost an election for New York City public advocate.

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### 2020 Presidential Ratings

*Electoral Votes*

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270 needed to win

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# moved benefiting Democrats, * moved benefiting Republicans

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