

2016 Primary Election Update

Perhaps not an official battleground state, Arizona at least looks competitive this year going into the final sprint before the General Election. Presidential contenders Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton are within a few points of each other, depending on the poll, and Arizona's races for U.S. Senate and congressional districts 1 and 2 are among the most closely-watched in the country. Is this the year that crimson Arizona begins to change its colors?

Federal Races

Sen. John McCain easily bested challengers Kelli Ward and Clair van Steenwyk on Tuesday. Sen. McCain's reward: Perhaps his toughest-ever General Election challenge - a matchup with Congresswoman Ann Kirkpatrick (D-Flagstaff). Especially if Trump underperforms, this race could be close.

With the departure of Congresswoman Kirkpatrick, the lure of an open seat drew six Republicans and 2 Democrats to a crowded Primary ballot. On the GOP side, Pinal County Sheriff Paul Babeu claimed an early lead in this race and never looked back as he topped retired U.S. Air Force pilot Wendy Rogers; former Secretary of State Ken Bennett; rancher Gary Kiehne; and small-business owner Shawn Redd. House Speaker David Gowan dropped out weeks ago. Meanwhile, former legislator Tom O'Halleran claimed the Democratic nomination by defeating Miguel Olivas. This sets up what is sure to be a pitched contest between Babeu and O'Halleran in a swing district that leans left.

In the state's other competitive congressional district, CD-2, former legislator Matt Heinz won the Democratic nomination by defeating another former legislator: Victoria Steele. Heinz now squares-off against GOP Congresswoman Martha McSally – unchallenged Tuesday – who has raised more than \$5 million and attempted to stake out the political middle in the race for the Pima County-dominated congressional seat that has flipped between Republican and Democrat hands in recent cycles.

Congressman Paul Gosar handily defeated GOP challenger Ray Strauss in CD-4 and – given the conservative makeup of this district – should have little trouble with Democratic candidate Mikel Weisser in November.

The coming retirement of Congressman Matt Salmon drew four Republicans and 2 Democrats to the Primary ballot. Former Go Daddy executive Christine Jones looks to be the winner of the GOP field, narrowly defeating State Senate President Andy Biggs, former Maricopa County Supervisor Don Stapley and state Rep. Justin Olson. Talia Fuentes defeated Kinsey Remaklus to claim the Democratic nomination, but it likely matters not – CD-5 is strongly Republican. So, the race for who will represent this district come January 2017 was almost certainly decided in the Primary.

In CD-6, Congressman David Schweikert easily defeated GOP challenger Russ Wittenberg. On the Democratic side, John Williamson got the nod over Brian Sinuk. The General Election contest is little more than a formality in this heavily-Republican district.

CD-8 featured one of the political oddities of the Primary season, with GOP challenger Clair van Steenwyk running (unsuccessfully) for both this seat and U.S. Senate. He was easily dispatched in this race by GOP Congressman Trent Franks, who faces no competition in the General Election.

In CD-9, which has behaved more like a safe Democratic district than its voter registration would suggest, Congresswoman Kyrsten Sinema was unchallenged in the Primary. The contest is now between her and Republican Dave Giles, who faces long odds after defeating John Agra in the Primary.

Statewide Races

The Primary Election was relatively quiet in terms of statewide races, with only three Corporation Commission seats up for grabs. On the Republican side, Commissioners Bob Burns and Andy Tobin advance, along with former Chandler Mayor Boyd Dunn. They defeated state Rep. Rick Gray and former state Sen. Al Melvin. Democrats put forth just two candidates – former state Rep. Tom Chabin and former Corporation Commission member William Mundell – who each move to the General Election ballot. With control of the 5-member regulatory body at stake, get ready for accusations to fly surrounding issues like net metering, solar power, “dark money” and more.

Legislative Races

The power of incumbency proved not to be a guarantee of re-election this Primary season as it appears three and potentially four sitting legislators were defeated. Being swept out were incumbent Reps. Matt Kopec (D-Tucson) and Celeste Plumlee (D-Tempe), along with Sen. Jeff Dial (R-Chandler). Also, Rep. Jonathan Larkin (D-Glendale) is losing by a whisker in a see-saw race in LD-30.

Among legislative Primary results of note:

Rep. Noel Campbell (R-Prescott) won his LD-1 Primary handily, with the second slot going to Prescott businessman, David Stringer. . In the LD-5 Senate race, Rep. Sonny Borrelli (R-Lake Havasu City) fended off former legislator Ron Gould in Borrelli’s successful switch to the upper chamber.

In the East Valley, Rep. Warren Petersen (R - Gilbert) jumped to the Senate seat in LD-12, and Rep. Eddie Farnsworth (R-Gilbert) was victorious along with teammate Travis Grantham.

LD-16 Reps. Kelly Townsend (R-Mesa) and Doug Coleman (R-Apache Junction) easily withstood a crowded Primary field; Rep. Steve Montenegro (R-Litchfield Park) won the Senate contest in LD-13; Becky Nutt and Drew John earned the GOP nomination in LD-14; Rep. Rusty Bowers (R-Mesa) and

Michelle Udall earned House nominations in LD-25; and Maria Syms and Mary Hamway advanced to the General Election ballot in LD-28.

On the Democratic side, Sen. Catherine Miranda (D-Phoenix) survived a challenge in LD-27 from her step-daughter, Maritza Miranda Saenz; and Sen. Martin Quezada (D-Phoenix) turned back challenger Lydia Hernandez in LD-29.

Other Dem winners of note included: Rep. Rosanna Gabaldon (D-Green Valley) and Daniel Hernandez in LD-2; former legislator Jamescita Peshlakai was victorious in her Senate Primary in LD-7; Rep. Stefanie Mach (D-Tucson) won alongside Kristen Engel in LD-10; Rep. Juan Mendez (D-Tempe) successfully won his Senate bid in LD-26 and is unopposed in the General Election; Reps. Rebecca Rios (D-Phoenix) and Reginald Bolding (D-Laveen) will return in the House; Rep. Richard Andrade (D-Glendale) and former legislative assistant Cesar Chavez won Democratic nominations in LD-29. Lastly, LD-30 may have one of the bigger surprises of the Primary, with Rep. Larkin narrowly losing at the moment to Otoniel Navarrete and Ray Martinez.

Key Legislative Districts to Watch in the General Election

LD-2 House: In 2014, Rep. John Ackerley (R-Sahuarita) was a surprise victor in this strongly Democratic district, overcoming a 15+% voter-registration disadvantage. The voter makeup makes this district low-hanging fruit this time around for Democrats, who have put forward strong candidates with incumbent Rep. Gabaldon and Daniel Hernandez, who gained notoriety as the intern who helped save the life of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords after she was shot in 2011.

LD-6 Senate: Sen. Sylvia Allen (R-Snowflake) faces Democrat Nikki Check Bagley. Bagley has built an impressive resume having served as Mayor and councilmember in Jerome. Sen. Allen has a strong following among her rural constituents and has fended off challengers before, but can she do it again?

LD-8 Senate: This is a swing district in which Democrats slightly outnumber Republicans, but Independents are the largest voting bloc. Sen. Barbara McGuire (D-Kearney) faces strong General Election competition from Rep. Frank Pratt (R-Casa Grande). This is a key race in determining control of the Senate, so expect to see heavy outside spending on behalf of both candidates.

LD-18 Senate: This district has seen loads of independent spending as it has trended to become increasingly competitive. That will no doubt be the case again, as the Primary Election defeat of Sen. Dial by conservative Frank Schmuck makes this seat vulnerable to Democratic pick-up.

LD-18 House: Democrats are employing their favored “single-shot” strategy here, putting up challenger Denise “Mitzi” Epstein. Epstein faces two strong incumbents in Reps. Bob Robson (R-Chandler) and Jill Norgaard (R-Phoenix). Neither will be an easy “out” – Rep. Robson’s name ID is

strong after nearly two decades in elective office, and Rep. Norgaard has worked hard during her first term to preserve her conservative credentials while working well across the aisle.

LD-20 House: A single-shot Democratic candidacy has worked in this district before, and Democrat challenger Chris Gilfillan is hoping it will again this year. Republican Reps. Paul Boyer (R-Phoenix) and Anthony Kern (R-Glendale) will work to defend their seats in this GOP-leaning district.

LD-28 Senate: This promises to be the most contested and expensive legislative race of the cycle, with total spending likely to top \$500,000. The departure of Sen. Adam Driggs (R-Phoenix) has created a free-for-all between a pair of House members looking to leap to the Senate: Reps. Kate Brophy-McGee (R-Phoenix) and Eric Meyer (D-Paradise Valley). Rep. Meyer has a strong constituency, but his past single-shot success in the House won't translate to a one-one-one Senate campaign. Rep. Brophy-McGee, meanwhile, has community backing of her own, along with support from industry.