

Inside Elections

with

Nathan L. Gonzales

Nonpartisan Analysis

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Alabama Senate Special: What a Short Strange Trip It's Been

By Nathan L. Gonzales



With an unpopular governor finally headed for the exits because of term limits and without a U.S. Senate seat up for re-election, Alabama was slated for a sleepy 2018 cycle. But President Donald Trump tapped Republican Sen. Jeff Sessions to be his Attorney General, opening up his Senate seat which has shaken the political landscape in the Yellowhammer State.

GOP Gov. Robert Bentley appointed state Attorney General Luther Strange to the seat, but the entire situation was complicated by allegations that Bentley misused state resources in connection with an extramarital affair.

Bentley resigned as governor on April 10, pleaded guilty to two campaign finance violations, and left his stain on Strange. Many Republicans in Alabama were upset about the process considering Strange asked the state Legislature to stop its investigation of the governor (presumably so his office could begin one) and then Bentley followed with a Senate seat for Strange.

New Republican Gov. Kay Ivey changed the special election from 2018 to 2017, leaving less time for people to forget the controversial appointment process.

The filing deadline is less than two weeks away (May 17) but the field is starting to take shape. Even though Strange hasn't received a single vote for the seat he holds, the Washington establishment is treating him like one of their own and the new senator will enjoy the perks and support of incumbency. But that doesn't mean the race for the remainder of Sessions' term will be easy.

The Lay of the Land

Even though Bentley and Strange created a mess of the situation, it's still highly unlikely that it develops into a Democratic opportunity.

Trump won Alabama 62-34 percent over Hillary Clinton in 2016 for the 10th consecutive victory by a GOP presidential nominee. Georgia Gov. Jimmy Carter was the last Democratic presidential candidate to win Alabama, and that was in 1976 on his way to the White House. Republicans also control six out of the state's seven House seats.

The last Democrat to win a U.S. Senate race was Richard Shelby, currently the state's Republican senior senator, who won in 1992 as a Democrat and switched parties in late 1994 after Republicans won control of Congress.

Continued on page 6

2018 Senate Ratings

Toss-Up

Donnelly (D-Ind.) Manchin (D-W.Va.)
Heitkamp (D-N.D.) McCaskill (D-Mo.)

Tilt Democratic

Baldwin (D-Wis.)
Nelson (D-Fla.)
Tester (D-Mont.)

Tilt Republican

Lean Democratic

Brown (D-Ohio)
Casey (D-Pa.)

Lean Republican

Heller (R-Nev.)

Likely Democratic

Kaine (D-Va.)

Likely Republican

Flake (R-Ariz.)

Solid Democratic

Cantwell (D-Wash.)
Cardin (D-Md.)
Carper (D-Del.)
Feinstein (D-Calif.)
Gillibrand (D-N.Y.)
Heinrich (D-N.M.)
Hirono (D-Hawaii)
King (I-Maine)
Klobuchar (D-Minn.)
Menendez (D-N.J.)
Murphy (D-Conn.)
Sanders (I-Vt.)
Stabenow (D-Mich.)
Warren (D-Mass.)
Whitehouse (D-R.I.)

Solid Republican

Barrasso (R-Wyo.)
Corker (R-Tenn.)
Cruz (R-Texas)
Fischer (R-Neb.)
Hatch (R-Utah)
Strange (R-Ala.)
Wicker (R-Miss.)

	GOP	DEM
115th Congress	52	48
Not up this cycle	43	23
Currently Solid	7	15
Competitive	2	10

It's OK to Wait Before Jumping to Conclusions

By Nathan L. Gonzales

Everyone take a deep breath. Democrats taunting Republicans on the House Floor. Republicans taking a victory lap in the White House Rose Garden. It's all a little premature.

First of all, the American Health Care Act isn't even law yet and it's not clear what it will look like if/when the Senate is finished with it. Of course, Democratic strategists can still use pieces of the legislation against GOP incumbents even if it stalls. But there is no guarantee how Americans will feel about the Republicans' actions or how they will prioritize health care when casting a ballot in Nov. 2018.

It's amazing that roughly the same group of politicians, strategists and reporters who believed Hillary Clinton would be elected president just a few weeks before Election Day are now certain about outcomes of an election that will take place a year and a half from now.

Using history as a guide, House Republicans were at risk of significant losses in the midterm elections before the health care vote. House Republicans remain at risk after the health care vote. But there is still plenty of time for the cycle to develop and be redefined by exterior news events. **IE**

Republican "No" Votes on American Health Care Act

District/Name	Race Rating	District/Name	Race Rating
AZ 5 Biggs	Solid R	OH 14 Joyce	Solid R
CO 6 Coffman	Lean R	PA 6 Costello	Likely R
KY 4 Massie	Solid R	PA 7 Meehan	Likely R
NC 3 Jones	Solid R	PA 8 Fitzpatrick	Lean R
NJ 2 LoBiondo	Solid R	PA 15 Dent	Solid R
NJ 7 Lance	Likely R	TX 23 Hurd	Toss-Up
NY 11 Donovan	Solid R	VA 10 Comstock	Lean R
NY 24 Katko	Likely R	WA 3 Herrera Beutler	Solid R

Candidate Conversation



Thomas McKibless/CQ Roll Call

Harley Rouda (D)
Candidate for California's 48th District
Interview Date: April 25, 2017
Date of Birth: Dec. 10, 1961; Columbus, Ohio
Education: Univ. of Ky. (1984); Capital Univ. Law School (J.D. 1986); Ohio State Univ. (MBA 2000)

Political Office: None; First run for office

Current Outlook: Rouda is a credible challenger to long-time GOP Rep. Dana Rohrabacher. The congressman hasn't had a serious race in years, but Donald Trump was the first Republican presidential candidate to lose Orange County since 1936, sparking new Democratic optimism about winning the seat. Hillary Clinton won the district 48-46 percent, but Mitt Romney carried it 55-43 percent in 2012 against President Barack Obama.
Evaluation: Rouda had the confidence of a businessman mixed with some naivete of a first-time candidate. The former real estate company executive's first challenge might be convincing local Democrats that he is a true believer. He was formerly a Republican and donated to Ohio Gov. John Kasich in the presidential primary. (Their families are friends and the governor's wife was in the Roudas' wedding). But he also supported Clinton in the Democratic race. Rouda is also relatively new to the Southern California district, but that's not fatal in this part of the country.

Even though it might hurt him in fundraising, Rouda isn't afraid of the moderate label and it is the type of profile probably necessary to be acceptable enough to any Republican voters who have grown tired of Rohrabacher. The congressman has been in office since 1989 and has a reputation for being too deferential to Russia and his conservative views on climate change and abortion don't match neatly with upscale voters.

There is always a chance Rohrabacher retires, leaving an open seat, but Rouda should be a credible nominee, if he can finish in the top two primary. Rouda has some personal money, but not as much as his late father, Harley Sr., past president of the National Association of Realtors and major political donor, including to now-NRCC Chairman Steve Stivers, who is tasked with defeating Harley, Jr. Getting known and delivering a message in Orange County can be difficult with the overlap of the expensive Los Angeles media market, but Rohrabacher could get in his own way and Rouda could develop into a credible alternative.

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Nathan L. Gonzales
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Nathan L. Gonzales
Editor & Publisher
nathan@rothenberggonzales.com
IE @nathangonzales

Robert Yoon
Contributing Reporter & Analyst

Inside Elections with Nathan L. Gonzales provides nonpartisan analysis of campaigns for Senate, House, governor and president. It does not endorse candidates.



Stuart Rothenberg
Senior Editor
stu@rothenberggonzales.com
IE @stupolitics

Will Taylor
Production Artist

IE @InsideElections
f facebook.com/InsideElections
IE InsideElections.com

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840 First Street NE, 3rd Floor
Washington, DC 20002
202-546-2822

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Florida 27: Taking Her Talents to Retirement

By Nathan L. Gonzales

Republican Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen has been in office so long that her first campaign manager served two terms as governor of Florida and his brother served two terms as president since she was first elected to Congress. But now that she's not seeking re-election, Democrats have an opportunity to win a seat they've been salivating over for at least a decade.

The long-time congresswoman leaves behind a South Florida seat that Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama won in the most recent presidential elections and it's the type of seat Democrats need to win at the congressional level in order to gain the 24 seats necessary to retake the House majority.

Democrats hope that Ros-Lehtinen is the first in a wave of retirements from Republicans who are fed up with President Trump and the House Freedom Caucus, particularly after the recent passage of the American Health Care Act. Some Democrats are old enough to remember when key retirements boosted Republican gains in the 2010 midterms.

But Republicans believe they have a strong bench and can find someone who can lock down the district once again.

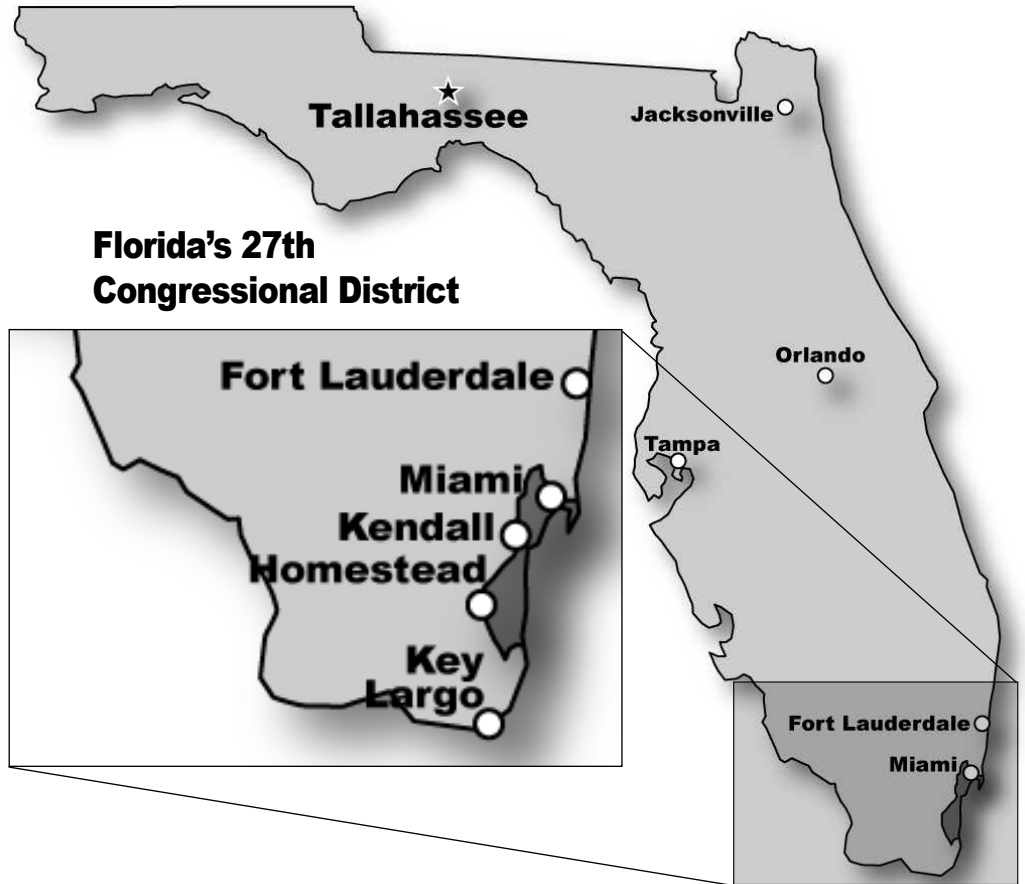
The Lay of the Land

Ros-Lehtinen's retirement, first reported by Patricia Mazzei of the Miami Herald, came as a surprise to some GOP strategists who are now tasked with defending the open seat. She is one of 23 Republicans who currently represent a district where Clinton outperformed Trump.

Clinton won the 27th District, which includes portions of Southeast Miami-Dade County, 59-39 percent in 2016, while Obama carried it 53-46 percent over Mitt Romney in 2012, according to Daily Kos Elections.

Even though the district leans Democratic, Ros-Lehtinen hasn't been in serious jeopardy of losing re-election. She won by 10 points last year, although she did spend \$3.4 million in the process. But it will be difficult for a new GOP candidate to immediately replicate her success.

GOP strategists tend to dismiss the presidential results as the exception rather than the rule because Republicans didn't have a South Florida resident running for president. But even though GOP Sen. Marco Rubio won re-election statewide by nearly 8 points in 2016, he



Ileana Ros-Lehtinen

Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call

lost the 27th District by 1.3 points, according to Decision Desk HQ. That shouldn't be encouraging for Republicans.

Republican strategists also point out that even if they lose Ros-Lehtinen's seat, it can be countered by winning Minnesota's 1st District, where DFL Tim Walz is leaving behind a seat Trump won by 15 points in order to run for governor. That could be how the cycle plays out, but it also shows how confident some GOPers really are about holding the 27th District.

Replacing Ros-Lehtinen will be difficult. She had a moderate reputation after not supporting Trump last year and disagreeing with the President on deportations, LGBTQ rights (she has a transgender son), budget cuts and health care, including a vote against the recent Affordable Health Care Act.

Even though they don't have a Ros-Lehtinen clone, there are plenty of local Republicans interested in her seat.

The Republicans

Carlos Lopez-Cantera (or "CLC" as he is more commonly referred as) is one potential candidate. Under normal circumstances, a statewide official running in a congressional district should have a significant advantage. But Lopez-Cantera does not have a good reputation as a candidate or a fundraiser.

His campaign for Senate in 2016 is widely-panned by most sources. He eventually dropped out when his close friend, Sen. Rubio, decided

Continued on page 3

Florida: Jeb Bush Jr. Among Potential GOP Contenders

Continued from page 3

to run for re-election. But CLC wasn't gaining much traction up to that point and he was consistently criticized by Republicans and Democrats for not having a rigorous schedule as lieutenant governor.

Even though he is a statewide official, he doesn't come to the race with particularly high name identification because of his low-profile office and the congestion of the Miami media market.

Lopez-Cantera, a former Miami-Dade County property appraiser, may end up running for Congress and would likely have the implicit support of Rubio. But he wouldn't scare everyone out of the race. The former state House majority leader may also run for the newly open state

senate seat, left vacant after Republican Frank Artiles resigned in the wake of a profanity laced tirade mixed with racial slurs.

Some Florida Republicans believe state Rep. Jose Felix Diaz would be the strongest candidate. He's regarded as a hard worker who can raise money. But Diaz is also caught between the criticism that he didn't support Trump enough in 2016 and the fact he was a contestant on Season 5 of The Apprentice, Trump's reality show, a decade ago.

It's certainly not a guarantee that Diaz, who was elected to the Legislature in 2012, will run for Congress. He's up for a U.S. attorney position, according to local media reports, and he may run for Artiles' state senate seat.

State Rep. Jeanette Nunez is also a potential candidate. The health care executive is regarded as more conservative than Felix Diaz and as a nice legislator who is close to Rubio and his wife, but may not have gravitas for a congressional race nor be able to raise the money necessary to compete.

Miguel Diaz de la Portilla may run. He's a former Miami-Dade County commissioner and former state senator who lost re-election to state Rep. Jose Javier Rodriguez 49-46 percent after the courts ordered the district be redrawn and it was made more Democratic. Depending on how the result of the congressional primaries, the two men could face off for this seat in 2018.

If past is prologue, former Raquel Regalado is unlikely to go along with the crowd. The attorney was elected to the Miami-Dade County School Board in 2010 and ran unopposed in 2014.

In 2016, Regalado challenged Miami-Dade County Mayor Carlos Gimenez, a fellow Republican, in a nonpartisan race. Regalado shocked the local political community by keeping Gimenez under 50 percent in the primary (he received 48 percent to her 32 percent), even though she went on to lose the general election 56-44 percent.

Regalado is also the daughter of Miami Mayor Tomas Regalado. Not only has he been mayor since 2009, he was previously the voice of Cuban radio, and has high name identification in the Cuban community. Raquel was also a Spanish-language radio show host. She is regarded as a moderate and would be a credible contender.

Ros-Lehtinen's long-time (and only) chief of staff Art Estopinan is exploring a run, according to a recent email he sent to friends. He is well-regarded but some Republicans have a hard time viewing him as a congressional candidate. Neighboring Rep. Carlos Curbelo's chief of staff, Roy Schultheis, has been mentioned but isn't a "political" chief and seems unlikely to run.

State Sens. Anitere Flores and Rene Garcia are also mentioned, as well as Miami-Dade County Commissioner Bruno Barreiro.

The final big name is Jeb Bush—junior, that is. The 33-year-old son of the former governor and presidential candidate is considered a potential candidate in this race. He's been active in local Republican politics, but also isn't regarded as having the same candidate skills as his father or brother, Texas Land Commissioner George P. Bush. But with his last name (and first for that matter) in a crowded primary field, and some of his father's supporters, Jebby would have to be taken seriously in this race.

The Republican Primary

The final field of contenders is likely to winnow before the primary in August of 2018. For now, the list of potential candidates is extensive

Continued on page 5

2018 House Ratings

Toss-Up (3R, 4D)

AZ 1 (O'Halleran, D)	NH 1 (Shea-Porter, D)
GA 6 (VACANT, Price, R)	NJ 5 (Gottheimer, D)
MN 1 (Open; Walz, DFL)	TX 23 (Hurd, R)
MN 2 (Lewis, R)	

Tilt Democratic (2D)

FL 7 (Murphy, D)
NV 3 (Rosen, D)

Tilt Republican (3R)

CA 49 (Issa, R)
FL 26 (Curbelo, R)
NY 19 (Faso, R)

Lean Democratic (3D, 1R)

FL 13 (Crist, D)
FL 27 (OPEN; Ros-Lehtinen, R)#
MN 7 (Peterson, DFL)
MN 8 (Nolan, DFL)

Lean Republican (10R)

CA 10 (Denham, R)
CA 25 (Knight, R)
CA 39 (Royce, R)
CO 6 (Coffman, R)
IA 1 (Blum, R)
NE 2 (Bacon, R)
NY 22 (Tenney, R)
PA 8 (Fitzpatrick, R)
PA 16 (Smucker, R)
VA 10 (Comstock, R)

Likely Democratic (6D)

CA 7 (Bera, D)
CA 24 (Carbajal, D)
IL 10 (Schneider, D)
IA 2 (Loebsack, D)
PA 17 (Cartwright, D)
WI 3 (Kind, D)

Likely Republican (13R)

AZ 2 (McSally, R)
CA 21 (Valadao, R)
CA 48 (Rohrabacher, R)
IA 3 (Young, R)
KS 3 (Yoder, R)
ME 2 (Poliquin, R)
MN 3 (Paulsen, R)
MT A-L (VACANT, Zinke, R)
NJ 7 (Lance, R)

	GOP	DEM
115th Congress	241	194
Currently Solid	211	179
Competitive	30	15
Needed for majority	218	
<i># moved benefiting Democrats, * moved benefiting Republicans</i>		
<i>Takeovers in Italics</i>		

Florida: Democrats Searching for Top Recruit in Prime Opportunity

Continued from page 4

and could even grow once the state Legislature is out of session. The uncertainty makes the early race difficult to handicap.

Republican sources don't believe CLC, Nunez, and Felix Diaz would all run against each other. The group of friends would come to some sort of agreement and only one of them would likely run. But someone like Regalado looks likely to run anyway and almost ensures there is a competitive primary.

In a competitive primary, the basics of campaigning (fundraising, voter contact, name identification, and message) will become very important.

Avoiding divisions is one key to GOP success in the region, according to a Republican source in Florida. Being able to unite and consolidate support before the late primary is often an advantage over Democrats in the area. But it seems unlikely Republicans will be able to do that this cycle in this seat, which makes it even more difficult to hold in Ros-Lehtinen's absence.

The Democrats

Democrats have been waiting for a generation for this seat to come open and seriously challenge for it, and yet their field is still taking shape.

The three most prominent names are state Sen. Jose Javier Rodriguez, Miami Beach City Manager Jimmy Morales, and Miami Beach City Commissioner Kristen Rosen Gonzalez, who was running before the congresswoman announced her decision.

Fruit juice bottling company owner Scott Fuhrman, who ran and lost to Ros-Lehtinen last cycle 55-45 percent, is running again. He spent \$888,000 last cycle including \$750,000 of his own money. But the open seat has already attracted a higher tier of candidates.

Gonzalez is a single mother from South Florida who is also an

associate professor at Miami Dade College, the largest community college in the country, and could end up as the favorite of EMILY's List. Rodriguez showed some political fortitude by defeating a GOP state senator last cycle. And Morales is an attorney and former Miami-Dade County Commissioner who could develop into a serious candidate.



Kristen Rosen Gonzalez

Alberto Carvalho, the superintendent of Miami-Dade County Public Schools, could also run.

The (Early) Bottom Line

Even though Trump was crushed in the district, Republicans are cautiously optimistic because they believe the area is somewhat insulated from national trends (using Ros-Lehtinen and Curbelo victories as examples) and believe in their bench of candidates. But it will be difficult for a non-incumbent Republican to swim against a national tide (or wave), should one develop.

One of the keys to previous GOP success has been the ability to avoid

bitter primaries. But Ros-Lehtinen's longevity helped grow a list of up-and-coming Members of Congress, and the prospects for a consolidated Republican field seem unreasonable.

Democrats have learned, particularly from the Curbelo district, that a quality candidate is necessary to win, even in Miami. And they could have a bitter, ideological primary of their own balancing moderate voters with liberal voters in Miami Beach and Coral Gables.

We're changing our initial rating of the race from Solid Republican to Lean Democratic, based on the lean of the district and absence of Ros-Lehtinen. But this could be a more difficult takeover than Democrats would like, based on the individual nominees.

Republicans' bigger fear is if a dozen or more districts like this one come into play, putting the House majority further at risk.



2017-18 Gubernatorial Ratings

Toss-Up	
FL Open (Scott, R)	
MI Open (Snyder, R)	
NV Open (Sandoval, R)	
Tilt Democratic	Tilt Republican
<i>Rauner (R-Ill.)</i>	OH Open (Kasich, R)
Lean Democratic	Lean Republican
Wolf (D-Pa.)	Branstad (R-Iowa)
CO Open (Hickenlooper, D)	Sununu (R-N.H.)
CT Open (Malloy, D)	
<i>ME Open (LePage, R)</i>	
<i>NM Open (Martinez, R)</i>	
VA Open (McAuliffe, D)	
Likely Democratic	Likely Republican
<i>NJ Open (Christie, R)</i>	Ducey (R-Ariz.)
	Hogan (R-Md.)
	Walker (R-Wis.)
	GA Open (R-Ga.)
	KS Open (Brownback, R)
	OK Open (Fallin, R)
	TN Open (Haslam, R)
Solid Democratic	Solid Republican
Brown (R-Ore.)	Abbott (R-Texas)
Cuomo (D-N.Y.)	Baker (R-Mass.)
Ige (D-Hawaii)	Hutchinson (R-Ark.)
Raimondo (D-R.I.)	Ivey (R-Ala.)
CA Open (Brown, D)	McMaster (R-S.C.)
MN Open (Dayton, DFL)	Ricketts (R-Neb.)
	Scott (R-Vt.)
	ID Open (Otter, R)
	SD Open (Daugaard, R)
	WY Open (Mead, R)
Lean Independent	
Walker (I-Alaska)	
# moved benefiting Democrats, * moved benefiting Republicans Takeovers in Italics	

Alabama: Delegation Sits out Special Sprint

Continued from page 1

Sessions was first elected in 1996, when Democratic Sen. Howell Heflin retired after three terms, and became the first Republican to hold that seat in over a century. But Sessions hadn't had a serious re-election race in years.

Texas Sen. Ted Cruz invoked Sessions' name routinely in the 2016 presidential nominating contest as an ally, right up until the Alabama senator endorsed Trump. The president repaid Sessions, who was not up for re-election until 2020, for that early support with a cabinet position.

Under normal circumstances, aspiring politicians are reluctant to challenge incumbents. But, considering Strange has never been elected to the position and the circumstances in which he obtained the seat, at least a handful of candidates look poised to run against him.

Ivey (who was previously the Republican lieutenant governor) set the primary for August 15 and a runoff between the top two finishers on September 26, if no candidate receives a majority in the initial balloting. The special general election will be December 12.

Aside from getting an appointment, it's as close to the quickest way someone can get to the U.S. Senate. But it's not clear yet how many folks are going to jump at the opportunity.

No Thanks, I'll Pass

Due to the new timing of the election, elected officials don't have to give up his or her current office in order to run. But even though it's a "free pass," it looks like the members of the congressional delegation will pass on running in the special election.

Rep. Mike Rogers, who was first elected in 2002, values his House seniority, according to GOP sources, and is in line to become chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security. In the Senate, he would be starting at the bottom of the seniority ranks.

Rep. Robert Aderholt waited a little longer to make a decision, but is not running. Republican sources were skeptical he would run even before his public announcement because they are more likely to run into him in northern Virginia, in the Washington, D.C. suburbs, rather than in Alabama. Rep. Gary Palmer is out, citing a 20-year friendship with Strange, as is Rep. Bradley Byrne, who finished ahead of Bentley in the 2010 gubernatorial primary but lost in the runoff.

Considering just five of the 52 Republican senators are women, it seems like there should be an appetite for Rep. Martha Roby to run. But she ran afoul of a portion of the party base last cycle when she withdrew her support for Trump after the Access Hollywood tape revealed the presidential nominee's crude comments about assaulting women.

Roby defeated tea party activist Becky Gerritson 66-28 percent in the primary, but Gerritson mounted a write-in campaign in response to Roby's Trump reaction and received nearly 11 percent. That pulled the congresswoman's winning percentage over her Democratic opponent to just 49-41 percent in a solid GOP district. State Rep. Barry Moore has already announced his 2018 primary

challenge, giving Roby enough to worry about for now.

Rep. Mo Brooks appears to be the only holdout from the delegation. The former Madison County Commissioner and state representative made national news recently when he implied during an interview with CNN about health care that people with pre-existing conditions live bad lives or don't live the right way.

Continued on page 7



Alabama: Marsh Might Be Looking to Drain the Swamp

Continued from page 6

Those comments may not hurt him with some Republicans, but they aren't usually the best way to kick off a statewide campaign. But Brooks, a member of the House Freedom Caucus, could attract attention from



Martha Roby

Members have considerably lower grades including Roby (58 percent), Rogers (57 percent), Aderholt (62 percent), and Byrne 77 percent. Palmer has a 96 percent score, but is also the newest member of the delegation.

Even though the delegation remains on the sidelines, Strange will have company in the GOP race.

The Republican Field

State Rep. Ed Henry, apparently no relation to the former Roll Call columnist/FOX News correspondent by the same name, is running. He led the impeachment drive against Bentley in the Legislature and talks about the need to "drain the swamp." Henry was also a top Trump supporter during the presidential primary in a state where the Manhattan real estate mogul received 43 percent of the primary vote, well ahead of second place finisher Ted Cruz (21 percent).

Former state Supreme Court Chief Justice Roy Moore is also running. The so-called "Ten Commandments Judge" challenged incumbent GOP Gov. Bob Riley in 2006 and lost in the primary, 67-33 percent. Four years later, when Riley was term-limited, Moore ran again and finished fourth in the primary with (19 percent), putting him behind Byrne, Bentley, and Tim James.

Moore, 70, considered challenging Shelby in 2016, but was explicitly told by the senator's allies that his life would be laid bare for primary voters. A couple of days later, Moore announced he wasn't running. This time around, he doesn't appear to have the same fear of challenging an incumbent.

Moore may not need to raise as much money as other candidates because of his popularity with a piece of the GOP base. He was first elected Chief Justice of the state Supreme Court in 2001 but was removed two years later for refusing a court order to remove a Ten Commandments monument he commissioned on the grounds of the Alabama Judicial Building. Moore was elected again in 2012, but suspended three years later for directing lower-court judges to enforce the state's same-sex marriage ban, which had been overturned. Moore resigned last month.

Randy Brinson, a physician and former head of the Christian Coalition of Alabama, is also running for the Senate seat. While his past position and title look formidable, local sources explain that the group isn't particularly

anti-establishment outside groups if he decides to run.

The congressman has an 86 percent lifetime score with the Club for Growth, the free-market outside group, which is currently monitoring the race. Most of the other Alabama

powerful, Brinson has a reputation for being too close to gambling interests, and social-issue conservatives are more likely to support Moore.

Strange's toughest challenger could be state Senate President Pro Tempore Del Marsh. He hasn't officially announced his decision but is widely expected to join the field before the filing deadline.

Marsh, who has been in the Legislature since 1998 and in his current position since the end of 2010, has a solid reputation among Republicans in the state. Although according to the Montgomery Advertiser's Brian Lyman, Marsh pushed legislation that he says expands school choice but critics say uses public money to subsidize private schools, and has been less hostile to the gambling industry than other Republicans. But in general, one GOP source described Marsh as being much closer to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell than



Del Marsh

position into considerable fundraising cash but he also has personal money he could spend on a campaign.

Strange won't be suffering from a lack of funds. He finished March with \$764,000 in his campaign account and has raised even more since. As an incumbent sitting on committees (Armed Services, Agriculture,



Luther Strange

Budget, and Energy & Natural Resources), he is an attractive target for Washington donors.

Strange, 64, was born in Birmingham and played basketball at Tulane, where he also earned his law degree. He worked as an attorney and lobbyist in Washington before returning to Alabama, where he started his own firm.

The 6'9" Republican known as "Big Luther" ran unsuccessfully for lieutenant governor in 2006. He won the GOP nomination (including defeating Mo Brooks and others in the primary) but lost to Jim Folsom Jr. in the general election. Four years later, Strange defeated incumbent Attorney General Troy King in the primary, 60-40 percent, and won the general election with 59 percent. He was re-elected in 2014 with 58 percent.

Last year, his office prosecuted state House Speaker Mike Hubbard, a Republican, but some local Republicans are upset that Strange didn't

Ted Cruz on a scale of pragmatism.

Marsh previously announced that he wasn't running for re-election and was eying the governorship next year, but he appears to be on the verge of joining this race.

He should be able to leverage his current

position into considerable fundraising cash but he also has personal money he could spend on a campaign.

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Continued on page 8

Alabama: Bentley Created Big Problems for “Big Luther”

Continued from page 7

apply the same standards in taking on Bentley and then ended up with a Senate seat.

The Strange campaign team includes media consultant Doug McAuliffe, pollster Jim McLaughlin, and Phillip Stutts of Go BIG Media for digital media. Stutts, an Alabama native and University of Alabama graduate, was national GOTV director for President George W. Bush’s 2004 re-election campaign and his firm recently worked on Shelby’s re-election race.

The GOP Primary

In his desire to become a senator, Strange underestimated the impact of Bentley’s appointment, according to multiple Alabama sources. What’s ironic is that Strange would probably be a heavier favorite in the special election without having accepted the nomination. Some Republicans wonder if he would have even agreed to be appointed if he had known the election would be this year instead of next.

Even though the race might be difficult, Strange won’t be left alone to fend for himself. A recent Politico story that filtered down to the local media, including comments from Henry, talked about the National Republican Senatorial Committee warning consultants not to work for candidates who challenge the senator or else risk losing future business from the committee. The story specifically mentioned Strategic Perceptions Inc. and Jamestown Associates, which has worked for anti-establishment candidates in the past and produced ads for Trump.

Some GOP consultants find the committee’s stance amusing considering OnMessage Inc. is regarded as the lead consultant for the NRSC this cycle as part of now-Chairman Cory Gardner’s campaign team, but the firm stuck with wealthy Senate candidate Carlos Beruff last cycle in Florida, even after Sen. Marco Rubio decided to run for re-election. Rubio won 72-18 percent.

It’s certainly not the first time the committee has tried to be heavy-handed about challengers to their incumbents, but the threats might not be as feared this time. Moore appears undeterred and Marsh had a meeting at the NRSC last week, something that would not have happened in recent cycles.

When Sen. Thad Cochran of Mississippi and Sen. Pat Roberts of Kansas faced primary challengers in recent elections, the support of the NRSC included money for direct mail and extensive help in turning out voters, but not television ads.

It’s unclear what the committee will do this cycle to boost Strange. And if the NRSC doesn’t do enough, Senate Leadership Fund (which is aligned with Senate Leadership) may come in and help the senator. There are also rumors of a multi-million dollar Super PAC being formed to oppose Strange.

If an Establishment goal is to keep someone like Roy Moore from becoming a senator, then scaring other candidates out of the race or hamstringing their campaigns may have the opposite effect. Moore won’t get a majority in the initial primary, but if he makes a runoff against Strange, enough anti-Bentley voters may decide to rid themselves of any of the former governor’s legacy and back the polarizing former justice.

“A Luther vs. Moore runoff would be a disaster,” according to one GOP source. In 2006, Moore wrote that Minnesota DFL Rep. Keith Ellison could not honestly take the oath of office as a Muslim and should be

barred from Congress.

Moore and Henry may end up splitting the most conservative voters anyway, even if Henry can’t raise a lot of money. Marsh is likely to end up as the most formidable challenger, even if opponents pick up his long voting record. But Strange risks becoming the collective target of all attacks because of Bentley and the appointment.

For all the typical complaining about too much money in politics, some perspective can be helpful. The combined spending in the race for this U.S. Senate seat is still unlikely to exceed the \$11 million Nick Saban is scheduled to make next season coaching the University of Alabama’s football team.

Any Democrats?

Senate strategists are talking over the possibility with few specific public names at this point.

But there’s a growing list of elected officials who have taken themselves out of the running, including Rep. Terri Sewell, Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox (a rising star who is being courted to run for governor next year), former state Chief Justice Sue Bell Cobb, and former House Minority Leader Craig Ford (who may run for the Legislature or governor), according to the Montgomery Advertiser.

It doesn’t help that the “party’s structure has burned down almost to the foundation after two disastrous state elections in 2010 and 2014,” as described by the Montgomery Advertiser.

The Bottom Line

Bentley’s appointment of Strange just doesn’t pass the smell test to many Alabamians, according to multiple sources. It’s hurting the new senator worse than he imagined and could end up being his demise.

Since the field of candidates isn’t set, it’s difficult to handicap whether Strange can garner enough support to avoid a runoff. But just because he is an incumbent with the full support of the Washington Establishment doesn’t mean he is guaranteed to win the special election.

If the race is a referendum on Bentley and the appointment, Strange will lose. If the race is just about Strange, he should be fine until at least the next regular election. **IE**

CALENDAR 2017

May 16	South Carolina’s 5th Special Runoff Election
May 25	Montana’s At-Large District Special General Election
June 6	California’s 34th Special General Election
June 6	New Jersey Gubernatorial Primary Elections
June 13	Virginia Gubernatorial Primary Elections
June 20	Georgia’s 6th Special Runoff Election
June 20	South Carolina’s 5th Special Primary Election
August 15	Alabama Senate Special Primary Election
Sept. 26	Alabama Senate Special Runoff Election
Nov. 7	Virginia, New Jersey Gubernatorial Elections
Dec. 12	Alabama Senate special general election