THE YEAR OF THE GROUND GAME

AND THE MONEY
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NEW JERSEY POLITICS IS THE GREATEST SPECTATOR SPORT EVER, AND AS EXPECTED, 2018 DIDN’T DISAPPOINT ANYONE.

The year started with a Jersey-style transition, as Phil Murphy replaced Chris Christie as governor. In New Jersey, perhaps one of the bluest states in the nation, there is a transition every eight years when a Republican is governor, and since 1977, every four years when a Democrat wins.

The dominant story of the year has been Murphy’s strained relationship with the Legislature and with top New Jersey Democrats. That hasn’t stopped the governor from some significant achievements – at least as far as the Democratic wing of the Democratic Party is concerned – but a lack of dialogue with Senate President Steve Sweeney and Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin has substantially limited Murphy’s ability to deliver.

Some of Murphy’s core promises – the legalization of marijuana and a $15 per hour minimum wage – have stalled. These were initiatives the Murphy administration wanted to enact during his first year.

Murphy has benefited from a shrinking news media in New Jersey, which doesn’t cover his every move the way other governors were reported. His struggles with the Legislature are mostly inside baseball. Real voters, who generally like Murphy but still don’t know much about him, seem to give him high marks. Some say what people like best about Murphy is that he’s not Christie.

The dysfunctional relationship between power New Jersey Democrats did not affect their success at the voting booth. Democrats might not like each other, but there sure are a lot of them. In Election Day, New Jersey had more than 930,000 more Democrats than Republicans.

The 2018 cycle was the Year of the Ground Game, and the Money.

Democratic congressional candidates Mikie Sherrill, Tom Malinowski and Andy Kim combined to raise more than $20 million to win seats held by Republicans. That doesn’t include millions more in independent expenditures.

Grass roots activists, almost all on the Democratic side, provided an unprecedented number of boots on the ground.

At the local level, the ground game led to the defeat of several entrenched incumbent mayors.

Democrats won control of Burlington County. They won freeholder seats in Somerset County for the first time since 1979. Democrats wrestled away county clerk posts in Passaic and Burlington.

Republicans flipped Salem County, a small consolation since the entire county is about the size of Old Bridge.

Still, Democrats in New Jersey continue to eat their young. They survived a warette in Hudson and now face a battle for control of the state party between Murphy and the faction of his own party that opposes him.
Bob Menendez survived a federal indictment and ten-week bribery trial, faced a Republican opponent who spent $36 million – mostly on TV ads calling him corrupt – and won a third term in the United States Senate by eleven percentage points.

This year, Menendez faced major hurdles – not once, not twice, but three times. Who does that?
The first was when the government announced that they would retry him, even though eleven of thirteen jurors refused to convict him. The Justice Department ultimately backed off after the federal judge who presided at the trial dismissed several of the charges.

Next was a severe admonishment by the Senate Ethics Committee that Menendez had hoped would not come until after election day.

Third was the entrance of millionaire pharmaceutical company executive Bob Hugin into the race.

Republicans thought they had finally figured out how the secret formula for winning the U.S. Senate seat that has eluded them for 46 years and recruited a candidate who was able to outspend the incumbent by a 3-1 margin.

Menendez had the option of retreating. He could have retired from the Senate, made some money in the private sector, skipped the constant dialing for dollars, and avoid that kind of severe, very public attacks that most people could never handle.

Menendez has been a shrewd tactician since the early days of his political career. He took on the legendary Billy Musto in Union City at a time when others wouldn’t dare challenge him. He out-maneuvered his running mate to become mayor and helped nudge a seven-term incumbent in retirement two days before the filing deadline in order to become New Jersey’s first Hispanic congressman.

Indeed, there’s nothing timid about Bob Menendez.

He’s not afraid to throw a punch. Most importantly, in 2018 Menendez understood that he had a problem. There was no burying his head in the sand, as other longtime officeholders sometimes do. He rarely took a day off, maximizing his time in New Jersey when the Senate was not in session.

Menendez also had fortunate timing: he was running as a Democrat in a deep blue state in Donald Trump’s mid-term election. Under similar circumstances with Hillary Clinton as president, Democrats might have pushed Menendez out.

The Democratic base came through for Menendez. Gov. Phil Murphy and U.S. Senator Cory Booker campaigned tirelessly for him. Democratic county chairs delivered huge pluralities in urban areas. He owes Democrats big time, but it’s not like Menendez doesn’t understand that.

Menendez heads back to Washington for another six years. He has reclaimed his post as Ranking Minority Member of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, a job that puts him in the national limelight with a regular seat on Sunday morning news shows.

In New Jersey, Menendez now holds two electoral records: the most votes ever cast for a statewide candidate (2012), and now, the most votes ever received by a statewide candidate in a non-presidential election year.
WINNER OF THE YEAR

With the Democrats taking control of the U.S. House of Representatives, Rep. Frank Pallone is poised to become chairman of the House Energy & Commerce Committee. That will make him one of the most influential members of the 116th Congress.

But his influence doesn’t start on Capitol Hill. The 17-term congressman is still the Long Branch Democratic Municipal Chairman. In May 2018, Pallone got to settle a massive personal grudge when his brother, John, unseated 28-year Mayor Adam Schneider by a 62%-33% margin.

Frank Pallone and Schneider began their political careers as close friends and allies, but the relationship soon deteriorated amidst political squabbles in their hometown. Some locals say there is nobody Pallone hates more than Schneider.

“New Jersey is finally moving in a new direction. Help build a stronger, fairer New Jersey. Go to newdirectionnj.com to get involved.”

– Governor Phil Murphy

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Once the front-runner to become the next governor of New Jersey, **Steve Fulop** finishes 2018 as a political eunuch who is largely irrelevant as a player outside of Jersey City.

Fulop’s political woes began in 2016 when he unexpectedly dropped out of the gubernatorial race without telling a bunch of Democrats who had been supporting him. He won a landslide re-election as mayor of the state’s second-largest city in 2017 and appeared to be on a path that might allow him to someday fulfill his grand ambitions.

That didn’t last long.

Early in the year, Fulop decided to flex what he thought were some political muscles in Hudson County. He promised to deliver Jersey City’s 362 county committee votes to Union City Mayor/State Sen. Brian Stack in his bid for Democratic county chairman in exchange for dumping Hudson County Executive Tom DeGise from the ticket in 2019.

On a snowy day in March, Fulop and Stack met with DeGise at the Coach Diner in North Bergen and told him he was out.

The result of the ensuing three-month Hudson County warette was the election of DeGise’s daughter as county chair and the public defenestration of Fulop.

Fulop retreated from the fight weeks earlier, when it became clear that he couldn’t deliver his own county committee. He spent his time going to a polo match and even tweeting that he was home reading a book. He was AWOL.

On election day, sources from both sides estimate that Stack won Jersey City by just 25 votes, with DeGise winning the race by 92 votes.

Stack, who no longer speaks to Fulop, has since made peace with DeGise. But Fulop has no seat at the table. The rest of the Hudson Democratic leadership doesn’t want him there.

In Jersey City, Fulop has had a controversial fifth year as mayor. He angered many residents in April when he announced plans to move the Katyn statue memorializing the Soviet Union’s 1940 massacre of more than 20,000 Polish people.

Fulop sat out U.S. Senator Bob Menendez’s re-election campaign, but the nine Jersey City councilmembers worked around the mayor and delivered a 41,000 vote margin.

He also sat on a $3 million super PAC that was supposed to help Mikie Sherrill and Tom Malinowski, spending just $50,000 to help Democrats flip congressional seats. DeGise, as always, said it best.

“He didn’t do anything during the campaign. No appearances, nothing. He sat it out,” the county executive told the New Jersey Globe. “He could have helped, sure. I’m sure it was a conscious decision. But who cares? You become irrelevant.”
George Youngkin was forced to suspend his campaign for Burlington County freeholder after the story that he had been arrested on domestic violence charges twelve years ago surfaced. He won the election anyway. He’ll get sworn in as a freeholder and serve for a few minutes before submitting his resignation.

Michael Saudino resigned as Bergen County Sheriff in September after getting caught on tape making racist and homophobic comments.

Arthur Barclay was forced to give up his safe State Assembly seat after his arrest on domestic violence charges.

Brendan Gill
President & CEO

The BGill Group is a full service public affairs, political consulting and digital media firm. The company has accumulated decades of successes, winning federal, state, and local campaigns as well as delivering desired results for their corporate and non-profit clients.

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When Bob Menendez faced the toughest campaign in his 44 years in New Jersey politics, he turned to Michael Soliman to serve as his campaign chairman.

After a ten-week corruption trial, Menendez’s approval ratings in New Jersey were upside-down, and he was facing an opponent with what seemed like a bottomless pit of money. This race was no slam-dunk.

As Menendez’s longtime top political advisor, Soliman had to balance two full-time jobs: running the re-election campaign, and the New Jersey office of Mercury Public Affairs, where he is a partner.

Menendez needed voters to dislike Bob Hugin more than they disliked him. The challenge for Soliman was that Hugin had more money to spend defining Menendez. He needed to stretch his resources against an opponent who put $36 million of his own money into the campaign.

Soliman was an early architect of a campaign to define Hugin as a “greedy CEO … unapologetic about getting rich off the backs of cancer patients.”

He ran a surgical campaign, carefully identifying exactly where Menendez needed to get his votes. He concentrated on the big Democratic strongholds – Essex, Hudson, Middlesex, Union, and Camden – running an exceptional field organization. Soliman worked closely with county chairs, most of whom he knew well from his six years as Menendez’s state director.

Another tricky assignment was navigating the factions of the New Jersey Democratic Party. Menendez couldn’t afford to get caught up in the fight between the state’s new Democratic governor, Phil Murphy, and the Democratic legislative leadership. Soliman was able to work closely with Murphy and George Norcross simultaneously. That’s a special skill these days.

He also needed to reassure party leaders and grass roots activists to stick to the Menendez campaign plan, which often involved rationing resources.

Soliman needed to make sure Democrats took the race seriously, but also to prevent panic in the wake of Hugin’s negative TV ads and a couple of polls that showed the race tightening.

Menendez won re-election by a plurality of 354,299 votes, a 54%-43% margin.

Soliman has now run two winning statewide races.

In his victory speech, Menendez called Soliman “the greatest strategist in the state of New Jersey.”
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Loretta Weinberg is at the pinnacle of her political clout as the liberal lion of the New Jersey State Senate, where one of her many super powers is a unique ability to move Senate President Steve Sweeney to the left when she needs to.

When Weinberg wants to influence the Senate’s agenda, she can. She is one of the most important legislators in the state today.

Another superpower of the Senate Majority Leader: she was never one of the Democrats with a crush on Gov. Chris Christie. Indeed, he had no fiercer a critic than Weinberg. She spent eight years waiting out Christie, and now has a real ability to pursue a progressive agenda that Weinberg has advocated since the 1960s.

Weinberg is one of Sweeney’s closest allies. There is some irony to that, since she has seemingly waited a lifetime to get a governor who is nearly as supportive of many core progressive issues as she is.

The first bill Murphy signed was to restore the funding for Planned Parenthood that Christie cut. When the Legislature passed a new law guaranteeing equal pay for women, Murphy held off the bill signing until Weinberg could join him.

Still, Weinberg doesn’t hesitate to call balls and strikes. At this point in her career, Weinberg has developed an uncanny gut instinct on what to say and when to say it. She appears entirely comfortable in her own skin.

In September, during the confirmation battle of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh and after the Legislature adopted a new sexual harassment policy, Weinberg decided to tell an intensely personal story about being sexually assaulted at age 13 by a man who had been a welcome visitor in her home.

Weinberg is now the co-chair of the Legislative Select Oversight Committee, which is investigating the Murphy administration’s decision to hire Al Alvarez even though some transition officials were aware of allegations that he had sexually assaulted a campaign worker during Murphy’s 2017 gubernatorial campaign.
People who know Rodney Frelinghuysen were not especially shocked by his decision to retire, even though he was at the pinnacle of his political career. He always wanted to be a congressman, like his father. But he didn’t want to go out a loser. Those who watched him after losing a congressional primary in 1990 know that this is a guy who hates losing a lot more than he likes winning.

This year, Frelinghuysen was in real trouble. His district was not the same as the one his father carried eleven times with ease. The last round of redistricting was not especially kind – he was asked to take on new, more Democratic towns after New Jersey lost a House seat in the new census.

Some of his wounds were self-inflicted. His failure to recognize genuine voter anger for refusing to hold town hall meetings or respond to constituent requests spawned NJ11forChange – the most impressive and effective grass roots organization since Hands Across New Jersey in 1991. Equally as dumb was his postscript in a fundraising letter to Saily Avelenda’s employer complaining of her involvement in the rebel group.

As a holder of a safe seat, Frelinghuysen had the opportunity to spend his time governing. He embraced the seniority system and spent twenty years paying his dues on the House Appropriations Committee. Eventually he joined the College of Cardinals – the group of appropriations subcommittee chairs.

In 2017, he became chairman of the full committee – one of the most powerful men on Capitol Hill. His moment came at age 71, just as Donald Trump became president. Some critics say that Frelinghuysen never felt comfortable with the inside game needed to get the chairmanship. POLITICO reported that the House leadership had threatened to yank his chairmanship after he voted against the GOP tax bill.

Many political observers thought that Frelinghuysen was dead man walking. He’s been running for office every two or three years since 1974 and he’s never had a tough general election. Frelinghuysen lost the only two competitive races he’s run in – House primaries in 1982 and 1990. Lots of people thought he wasn’t up to a real campaign.

For many Republicans, the real question was if Frelinghuysen understood that he was in trouble. Apparently, he did.
Axel Owen, Rasheida Smith, Wendy Martínez and Missy Balmir executed a masterful ground game that turned out the Democratic base vote for Bob Menendez.

Chazz Aden was Mikie Sherrill's field director in a campaign that came up with a 47,362 vote-margin in a district that Republicans had held since 1984. Hat tips to Sherrill political director Jill Hirsch, outreach coordinator Kellie Doucette, and Jen Grisafi, who commanded an army of volunteers.

Kelly Zimmerman was Andy Kim's field director, threading the needle in a complicated district that turned out more votes in Burlington than Tom MacArthur got in Ocean. She gets some of the credit for Democratic control of the Burlington County freeholder board too.

Daniel Fleiss ran a staff of more than a dozen field organizers to help Tom Malinowski unseat five-term incumbent Leonard Lance in a district that hasn't sent a Democrat to Congress since 1956. Hat tip to Mitchelle Drulis, whose institutional knowledge was critical to the Malinowski campaign.

Ned Miller managed Jeff Van Drew's campaign for Congress, flipping a district that the Republicans held for 24 years. He navigated a primary against progressive challengers calling Van Drew too conservative and a general against Seth Grossman's claims that Van Drew as a Nancy Pelosi puppet.

Anibal Ramos and Sammy Gonzalez moved their political operation from the North Ward to the East Ward to help ally Augie Amador hold his Newark City Council seat in a runoff.

Middy Baraka ran the re-election campaign of his brother, Newark Mayor Ras Baraka. Baraka got 77% of the vote, carrying all five wards and achieving the highest percentage in a contested mayoral election in Newark history.

Edward Correa ran the Dover First campaign that swept Alderman and County Committee seats, becoming the first Hispanic Democratic Municipal Chairman in a town that is 69.4% Hispanic.

Dave Parano scored big wins in Trenton, Paterson and Long Branch.

Christina Zuk and Geri Jannarone played key roles in a decisive win for John Pallone in the Long Branch mayoral race.

Brendan Neal managed Reed Gusciora’s successful runoff campaign for Mayor of Trenton. Gusciora, a gay white man, is now the mayor of a city that is more than 80% Black and Hispanic.

Jay Coltre got re-elected Roseland Democratic Municipal Chairman after learning the art of suburban retail politics.

Kari Osmond managed the campaign of her wife, Julia Fahl, in a race that unseated a 28-year incumbent Mayor of Lambertville.

Justin Shoham and Ryan Yacco helped run Michael Wildes’ campaign for Mayor of Englewood, winning a comeback bid off the line by a 64%-36% margin.

Phil Alagia, as usual, excelled at the ground game. The North Ward gave 80% wins to Mayor Ras Baraka and Councilman Anibal Ramos; Essex gave a Bob Menendez a 140,531-vote margin.

Joe DeMarco and Susan Ragheb get high marks for a massive ground game in Bayonne, where Mayor Jimmy Davis was re-elected with 57% of the vote.

A big part of the Democratic ground game was from the state party, where Adam Alonso helped build a massively-enhanced data base and central operation that helped keep a Senate seat, pickup 4 House seats, and win a large number of local races all over New Jersey.
In the Year of the Ground Game, most of the winning candidates for office this year – from Bob Menendez, Andy Kim, Tom Malinowski and Mikie Sherrill to contenders for local office – relied on a plethora of volunteer-heavy grass roots activists and organizations that enhanced awareness of issues and/or put boots on the ground to help win elections.

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In a year of exceptional political operatives, **Mollie Binotto** was the best.

As campaign manager for Mikie Sherrill’s bid for Congress in New Jersey’s 11th district, Binotto flipped a district that had been held by Republicans for 34 years.

She presided over a nationally prominent House race that mounted an exceptional ground game and raised an enormous amount of money.

**Sherrill for Congress** had a huge number of volunteers and raised $8.5 million.

Binotto also served as the pied piper for an exceptional campaign staff that made no mistakes – at least none that anybody noticed.

When Binotto signed on to run the race for Sherrill, a former U.S. Navy helicopter pilot and federal prosecutor, she expected to face incumbent Rodney Frelinghuysen, the chairman of the powerful House Appropriations Committee. Frelinghuysen, who had held public office since 1974 and had won re-election in 2016 by nineteen percentage points, decided not to run for re-election.

Sherrill won a five-candidate Democratic primary with 77% of the vote, and the general election with 56%.

Originally from Pittsburgh, this was Binotto’s second stint in New Jersey; she managed Dawn Zimmer’s 2013 re-election campaign in Hoboken. She worked for Barack Obama in 2009 and has done campaigns in Nevada, Montana, Alaska, Virginia, Maryland, Iowa before signing on with Sherrill.

**RUNNER UPS:**

**Colston Reid** was campaign manager for Democrat Tom Malinowski in his successful bid to oust GOP congressman Leonard Lance in New Jersey’s 7th district.

Reid, who ran the Democratic legislative campaign in Atlantic County in 2017, was offered the job of managing Josh Gottheimer’s re-election bid, but she wanted to flip a district. When she joined Malinowski, there was no certainty that he would be the Democratic nominee. After winning the Union County Democratic organization line by just one vote, Malinowski mostly cleared the field and won 67% in Democratic primary.

Under Reid’s tutelage, Malinowski blossomed as an arguably inspiring general election candidate. He attracted hundreds of volunteers and raised nearly $6.3 million; the campaign raised and spent about double what Lance, a five-term incumbent, did. The campaign appeared relatively flawless.

Reid kept the campaign focused and disciplined. MalinowskiZack Carroll was campaign manager for Andy Kim, who ousted two-term incumbent Rep. Tom MacArthur by a narrow margin in New Jersey’s 3rd district.

Of the four Republican House seats that flipped, the Kim race was the toughest, partly because MacArthur ran an excellent campaign that just couldn’t withstand changing demographics in Burlington County and the Democratic tide that swept New Jersey.

Kim got better as a candidate as the campaign progressed and a lot of the credit goes to Carroll, who built a strong staff and trained a first-time candidate.

Carroll has been working campaigns for a decade, starting as a field organizer in Illinois and then working as a tracker for Tammy Duckworth’s congressional campaign. He worked in Iowa, Virginia and California before coming to New Jersey to work for Kim.
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Nick Fixmer ran State Sen. Nicholas Scutari’s campaign for Union County Democratic Chairman in a February special election following Jerry Green’s resignation.

Scutari won in a landslide: 412 to 341 over Colleen Mahr. In a race where you can count all 753 possible votes, a ten-point win is decisive; often candidates drop out if their internal counts are so far away from winning to spare their political allies the penalties that come from backing the wrong person.

Now Fixmer has emerged as one of Scutari’s top political advisors. That’s not a bad place to be since Scutari is also the Senate Judiciary Committee chairman.

A second-generation Democratic political consultant, Phil Swibinski has one of the best win records in the state: in Bayonne, where mayor Jimmy Davis won a landslide 57%; in Belleville, where Michael Melham ousted a three-term mayor; and in Englewood, where Michael Wildes won 64%-36% running off the line in the Democratic primary. He ran Amy DeGise’s winning race for Hudson County Democratic chair, scored local wins for his clients in North Bergen and Hackensack, and handles communications for the Democratic State Committee.

Mitch Seim is a Democratic political consultant in one of the most Democratic states in the nation, but he decided to take the road less travelled and works for candidates in Ocean and Monmouth counties – two of the last places where strong Republican organizations still exist. He gets points for playing in a tougher lane.

Still, the guy racks up key wins – like getting John Ducey elected mayor of Brick twice and helping Vin Gopal oust a three-term Republican State Senator in Monmouth County.

In the May municipal elections, Seim ran John Pallone’s campaign to unseat 28-year mayor Adam Schneider.

Adam Silverstein is a North Jersey Democratic political consultant who rarely loses an election in Bergen County. While Bergen trends Democratic, the numbers are still in the “don’t take your eye off the ball” range.

Silverstein keeps Bergen County in the Democratic column. County Executive Jim Tedesco was re-elected by a wide margin, and Sheriff Anthony Cureton won comfortably.

HONORABLE MENTION

An Honorable Mention goes to South Jersey Republican political consultant Steve Kush. He doesn’t get to win much, but it’s not for lack of trying. His clients give him little money to work with, but you must admire his testicular fortitude. Kush keeps politics fun.
Mikie Sherrill won New Jersey’s 11th district House seat by 47,362 votes, the first Democrat to win the congressional seat since 1982.

Julia Fahl unseated 28-year incumbent David Del Vecchio in the Lambertville Democratic mayoral primary.

Tom Malinowski defeated five-term Republican Rep. Leonard Lance in New Jersey’s 7th district. He is the first Democrat to win the seat since 1954.


Michael Melham was elected Mayor of Belleville, unseating three-term incumbent Raymond Kimble.

John Pallone was elected Mayor of Long Branch, ousting 28-year incumbent Adam Schneider and winning a rematch of their 1994 campaign.
Chris Smith is the last Republican standing, the lone GOP congressman in a New Jersey delegation that in January will have eleven Democrats. He took an aggressive and well-funded challenger seriously, and won re-election to a 20th term by a 55%-43% margin.

Newark mayor Ras Baraka won a stunning landslide victory for re-election to a second term on Tuesday, taking 77% of the vote against Central Ward councilwoman Gayle Cheneyfied Jenkins. Baraka carried all five wards by massive margins as he beat Cheneyfield Jenkins by 15,176 votes – 21,490 to 6,314.

Union City Mayor Brian Stack was unopposed for re-election in the May non-partisan municipal election but turned out more than 11,000 voters, just because he could. The race for county chairman was an outlier – Stack runs one hell of a campaign.

REPUBLICANS Running IN NEW JERSEY don’t have an easy path.

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Assemblyman Reed Gusciora was elected Mayor of Trenton, winning a runoff election.

Anibal Ramos was re-elected to his Newark North Ward City Council seat by an 80%-13% margin.

On his third try, Andre Sayegh was elected Mayor of Paterson, winning 51%-21% in a field of six candidates. He outpaced the second place finisher by 4,236 votes.

Somerset County Democratic Chair Peg Schaffer picked up two seats on the Somerset County Board of Freeholders. It was the first Democratic freeholder win since 1979. The defeat of two Republican incumbents reduces GOP control from 5-0 to 3-2.

North Bergen Mayor Nicholas Sacco was in charge of two impressive campaigns: his three school candidates won by a 10-1 margin in a field of 23. Since candidates in school board elections are not bracketed, the ability to get voters to pick out 3 names out of 23 contenders took an impressive level of organization. Sacco got voters to pass a December school bond issue with 74%. You don’t see that every day.

In Stafford, Greg Myhre ran as a pro-Trump “Make American Great Again” Republican and ousted the incumbent in the GOP primary. His slate also captured all seven council seats, including Mayor John Spado fora. In all, five incumbents went down. Myhre won the general election easily.
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Hirsh Singh, a 33-year-old engineer lost his bid to succeed Frank LoBiondo in the Republican primary for Congress in the 2nd district — his second loss in two years, after winning 10% in his bid for the 2017 Republican gubernatorial nomination.

Singh spent $1 million in that race, taking advantage of a loophole in state campaign finance laws that allowed his father to loan money to his campaign because he still lives at home with his parents.

He initially entered the race for U.S. Senate, pledging to spend $2 million in the Republican primary. That spooked some party leaders, like Republican National Committeeman Bill Palatucci, who worried that Singh would force Bob Hugin to spend money on the primary, instead of moving into general election mode after securing party endorsements. Those party leaders pushed Singh on South Jersey Republicans as a way of clearing the field for Hugin.

Singh never really connected with Republicans, losing votes for organization lines in Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester and Salem counties. Some of the people who publicly supported him privately said they wouldn’t vote for him.

His campaign hit a rough patch when he missed the deadline to file his personal financial disclosure. “I’m trying to get it done soon,” Singh said. “Haven’t had a chance yet.” When he did, he joked around on the official disclosure form filed with the U.S. House of Representatives about his Roulette winnings in Atlantic City and used a smiley face.

But what really pissed Republican leaders off was the disclosure that Singh had no money of his own and had no ability to self-finance. Essentially, he bluff ed Palatucci and Ocean County GOP chairman George Gilmore into handing him four organization lines for an open seat the Republicans held for 24 years. Federal election law would not allow Singh’s father to contribute more than $2,700 in the primary — something the GOP establishment ought to have known.

Singh had little to spend on his campaign — although he had more than his rivals.

In the end, he lost by 2,200 votes — 39%-31%, to former Atlantic County freeholder Seth Grossman. Grossman did well in his losing race against Jeff Van Drew, but he was a major headache for national and state Republicans.
When Louis Stellato was elected Bergen County Democratic Chairman in 2011, Democrats were having a tough time. Joe Ferriero had been convicted on federal corruption charges, and his hand-picked successor, labor leader Buzzy Dressel, also had legal issues. Democrats had lost the County Executive and Sheriff posts in 2010, when voters tossed incumbents Dennis McNerney and Leo McGuire; they also lost three Freeholder seats that year, giving Republicans control. The new Republican majority was propped up by a Republican Governor.

A former Lyndhurst mayor, Stellato had been the Democratic Municipal Chairman for two decades. He had mulled a primary challenge to State Sen. Paul Sarlo but decided instead to run for Chairman. Democrats were unhappy with the interim leader, Michael Kasparian. One of his first tasks was a name change: the Bergen County Democratic Organization became the Democratic Committee of Bergen County – a symbolic gesture of a leader who acknowledged that the party preferred a leader to a boss.

In 2011, Stellato helped protect State Sen. Bob Gordon (D-Fair Lawn) and the two 38th district Assembly seats in a tough year, won two Freeholder seats, and engineered the victory of John Hogan for Bergen County Clerk against the incumbent, Lisa Randall. Democrats won back control of the Freeholder Board in 2012 when Steve Tanelli and Tracy Zur beat a pair of GOP incumbents.

By 2014 – a Republican year nationally – Stellato had transformed Bergen to solidly Democratic. Paramus Mayor James Tedesco ousted GOP County Executive Kathleen Donovan. Democrats now have a 7-0 majority on the Board of Freeholders. Democrat Josh Gottheimer unseated Rep. Scott Garrett (R-Wantage) in 2016. This year, Stellato presided over three special elections in the 38th after Gordon resigned to join the Board of Public Utilities. The county chairman’s choice, Joseph Lagana, moved up to the Senate. Assemblyman Tim Eustace, who wanted the Senate seat, left the Legislature to become deputy executive director of the North Jersey Water Commission; Stellato picked former Bergenfield council president Christopher Tully and Fair Lawn mayor Lisa Swain to go to the Assembly.

And when Gov. Phil Murphy picked Marlene Caride to join his cabinet, Stellato sent Clinton Calabrese, scion of Cliffside Park’s first family, to the Assembly. In September, Sheriff Michael Saudino resigned after getting caught making racist and homophobic comments. Stellato got his pick, Anthony Cureton, elected Sheriff. Tedesco won re-election with 62% of the vote, and Gottheimer is now a two-term congressman. Bergen County gave U.S. Senator Bob Menendez a 41,829 vote plurality (55%-43%). Democrats have won more than 60 local seats in the last three years.

It’s unclear how long Stellato plans to stay as county chairman. He mulled leaving earlier this year – that’s when a Murphy aide considered running to replace him – and is now awaiting confirmation as a commissioner of the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority. But right now, Stellato still has 18 months remaining in his term.
When Gary Schaer picked the wrong horse in the race for speaker, he lost the chairmanship of the powerful Assembly Budget Committee. Six months later, nobody really missed him. The new chair was Eliana Pintor Marin, a 38-year-old four-term legislator from Newark who was unflappable during her first year on the job and won rave reviews from veteran legislators of both parties. Pintor Marin’s political stock is so high that Speaker Craig Coughlin picked her to co-chair a high-profile joint legislative committee to investigate the hiring of Al Alvarez.

Nick Iacovella, 26, who served as Bob Hugin’s press secretary, was a pit bull when it came to attacking Bob Menendez. That’s meant as a compliment. He was always working, and always on message. Don’t expect to see the Florida native back in Blue Jersey anytime soon; this guy was built for a red state.

James Kern, 29, will take office as the new Warren County freeholder in January. He first won public office when he defeated two incumbent Pohatcong councilmen while still a senior at Rutgers. He was elected mayor one year later and re-elected in 2015 with 88% of the vote. If Doug Steinhardt doesn’t get there first, Kern could be the first governor from Warren County since Bob Meyner.

Scott Salmon, 28, impressed Democrats during a brief run for the Democratic nomination for Congress in New Jersey’s 7th district. He endorsed Tom Malinowski and served as his campaign counsel. He also built a cult following for his online show, Politically Driven, where he interviewed top New Jersey politicians while driving around in his car. Look for him to run for office again.
Congratulations to All!

“The measure of a man is what he does with power.” - Plato

Dave Parano
www.paranoandassociates.com
Private citizen Alfred P. Doblin had three jobs in 2018. He started the year as the editorial page editor of The (Bergen) Record.

The Record fired him in February after finding out that he was interviewing for a job with Senate President Steve Sweeney, while he was still writing editorials about the Legislature.

He went to work for Sweeney in March, but the transition from editorials to editing press releases from legislators was not completely smooth.

Let’s just say being a statehouse staffer wasn’t a great fit for Doblin – or for Sweeney.

In October, Sweeney helped him land a job at the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

If trackers are judged by how much they annoy the opposition and by their fearlessness – which they are – then the best of the year is Kevin Tober, who worked for Rep. Tom MacArthur.

It’s almost as if Tober has no inhibitions at all. And he really got under Andy Kim’s skin.

The classic Tober moment came on July 4, when Kim had his “Dude, where’s my car” moment. For Kim, it was the perfect storm. He was Unstaffed for an event in Mount Holly, couldn’t remember where he parked, and was carrying a bag of cotton candy and talking on his phone while Tober followed him for eight minutes and asked him more than fifteen times whether he supported abolishing ICE.

One local news site, which had not exactly grasped the concept of trackers, wrote about a complaint lodged by the moderator of the LeisureTowne Civic League candidates forum.

“This threatening behavior occurred at the closing event when residents and candidates were given time to mingle and engage in civil discourse,” Sylvia Teehan wrote in a letter to the editor. “The MacArthur staff member held his cellphone inches from the face of Andy Kim while asking leading questions in an attempt to goad Andy Kim into responding.”

Another Tober moment came in September when Tober started in pursuit of Kim and ended up talking to a freeholder candidate who was trying to run interference for Kim. “I know who you are,” Tober said. “You’re George Youngkin.” “Yeah, that’s right,” Youngkin replied in a sort of tough-guy voice.

Tober didn’t miss a beat.

“I have some questions for you too,” he said. “You’re another winner.”
North Arlington Mayor Joseph Bianchi passed away October 10, nearly a month after the deadline to replace him on the general election ballot and after some votes had already been cast. That didn’t deter Superior Court judges in Bergen County, who after a two-week legal battle and with two weeks left until Election Day, allowed Republicans to swap out Bianchi for councilman Dan Pronti. Pronti wound up winning.

One candidate for Congress promised he would vote the way his constituents tell him to – literally. Patrick Allocco promised to “check his own ideology and convictions at the door” and let his constituents use “American Idol technology” to decide how he’d vote on every bill. Maybe voters in the 11th district Republican primary didn’t want that kind of responsibility; Allocco got just 4% of the vote.

Peter De Neufville had a secret plan to win the Republican nomination for Congress in New Jersey’s 11th district: wait until 5 PM on the day before the primary – thirteen hours before the polls open – and roll out the endorsement of 95-year-old former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. To De Neufville’s credit, he had a Plan B. Around 10 PM on the night before the primary, announce the endorsement of Pete Wilson, who had served as governor of California in the 1990’s. DeNeufville lost the primary to Jay Webber; Kissinger doesn’t influence the world the way he used to.
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Mitchell Cobert, a former assistant New Jersey Attorney General who ran as a Democrat in the 11th, received the least number of votes of the 49 men and women who ran for Congress in the June 5 New Jersey primary: 885 votes. 263 Democrats signed his nominating petition.
Wishing you happy holidays and a joyous new year!

LAZARUS OF HUDSON

On a snowy day in March, Tom DeGise was left for dead in the dumpster of the Coach House diner in North Bergen, told that his career was over. By June, his daughter Amy was the new Hudson County Democratic chair and he is a shoo-in for re-election to a sixth term in 2019.

BOOK OF THE YEAR

MSNBC and NBC News national political correspondent Steve Kornacki, who began his journalism career as a reporter for PoliticsNJ.com in 2002, is the author of one of the best books of the year on national politics. It’s a must-read.
In 2018: Richard Pezzullo lost his 9th bid for public office when Frank Pallone defeated him for Congress. Murray Sabrin lost his fifth statewide race, winning less than 1% as the Libertarian candidate for U.S. Senate. In that race, Sabrin received less votes than Green Party nominee Madelyn Hoffman, who was running for the third time. Pezzullo, Sabrin and Hoffman were all independent gubernatorial candidates in the same race one – 1997.
With a unique blend of public sector insight and private sector expertise, O'Toole Scrivo delivers effective and innovative solutions to its clients, especially when the stakes are highest.
Bob Hugin spent $36 million of his own money in his bid to unseat U.S. Senator Bob Menendez, spending $27.85 for each of his 1,375,335 votes. Menendez spent $14 million and spent $8.23 for each of the 1,711,654 votes he received. Mikie Sherrill raised almost $8.5 million to flip the 11th district from red to blue. She spent $32.51 per vote. Jay Webber raised nearly $1.7 million. He wound up spending $12.26 per vote. Tom Malinowski raised and spent more than double what his five-term incumbent opponent did, bringing in $6.3 million. Leonard Lance raised just a little less than $2.6 million. Malinowski spent $36.70 per vote, while Lance spent $18. Even Tom MacArthur, who got elected four years ago as a self-funder, found himself outspent this time. Andy Kim raised $6.2 million and spent $40.60 per vote. MacArthur spent more than any other Republican House candidate in the state – almost $4.8 million – spending $31.24 per vote. Democratic incumbent Josh Gottheimer, the Human Fundraising Machine, outspent Republican John McCann by a 3-1 margin and still $4.1 million left of the $7 million he raised in 2018.

The huge amounts of money raised and spent by Democratic congressional candidates merits a shout out to the campaign finance directors: Hilary Badger for Sherrill, Zachary Taylor for Malinowski, Sam Rivers for Kim, and Alex Milofsky for Gottheimer. Super PACs played a huge role in the New Jersey Senate race, where David Mitchell of Patients for Affordable Drugs Action and Donald Scarinci and Julie Roginsky of Leadership New Jersey helped put Menendez over the top.

If you’ve seen a Hudson County political war, you’ll know the fight to dump Hudson County Executive Tom DeGise wasn’t one of them. It was just a warette.

Even three decades later, the battle scars of the War of 1987 were omnipresent among many of the players this year.

“You pray for peace and you prepare for war”

After a heated couple of months that threatened to divide the party, a private meeting between Hudson County Democratic powerhouses led to a peace treaty that included everyone but Jersey City Mayor Steven Fulop.

“No one’s looking for a fight,” Tom DeGise told the New Jersey Globe in August. “The only guy who’s rumbling is Fulop.”

Brian Stack, who led the opposition forces, made it clear that Hudson was back together.

“We waste a lot of resources on fights,” Stack said about the peace treaty. “I can get more accomplished this way.”

Stack said he hasn’t spoken to Fulop since June.

“You pray for peace and you prepare for war,” DeGise said.
**GIVE A MAN ENOUGH ROPE**

Rep. Leonard Lance thought he was amongst friends when he defended Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh to a small group of college Republicans at Rutgers University. “I tend not to believe the charges,” Lance said of Christine Blasey Ford’s allegations that the judge sexually assaulted her while they were teenagers. But someone in the room taped Lance and his comments became a Malinowski for Congress ad. Did Lance not know that every college student carries a recording device in his or her pocket?

**BOARDWALK EMPIRE**

Atlantic City Mayor Frank Gilliam had a rocky first year. There were controversies over his campaign finances after accusations that a $10,000 check payable to the Atlantic City Democratic Committee made its way into the mayor’s campaign account. In November, Gilliam was involved in a late-night brawl outside a casino nightclub; surveillance cameras caught him on tape. In December, the FBI raided his house. It’s been sixteen years since an Atlantic City mayor served more than one full-term. The recent record for the shortest tenure as an elected mayor is held by Bob Levy, who lasted 648 days before a scandal forced him out. That was in 2006 to 2007. The big question, at least right now: will Gilliam beat that record?

**IN BURLINGTON, THE END OF AN ERA**

Democratic control of Burlington County has been a long-time coming. If not for the exceptional political skills of Bill Layton and Glenn Pausen, it would have happened a decade ago. But changing demographics finally kicked in – the Democratic voter registration has expanded to 39,167; in 2007, Burlington had 746 more Republicans than Democrats. A freeholder candidate who suspended his campaign in September after his arrest on domestic violence changes became public still beat a popular Republican incumbent by more than 10,000 votes. Come January, Democrats, with a 4-1 majority, will control county government for the first time since 1975. In December, Layton passed the baton to Sean Earlen.
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Sean M. Darcy, President
For a few months in 2018, Seth Grossman was the talk of the town. A month after an upset victory in the Republican primary for Frank LoBiondo’s 2nd district congressional seat, it looked like Grossman was being left for dead.

He received some national attention after a tape emerged of him saying that diversity is “a bunch of crap.” When a report surfaced that he shared a social media post from a white supremacist website that referred to blacks as a “threat to all who cross their paths,” the National Republican Congressional Campaign Committee withdrew their support of Grossman’s candidacy.

Just like that, Republicans walked away from a House seat they had held for 24 years.

The thing is, Grossman wasn’t going to beat Democrat Jeff Van Drew anyway.

But now that everything Grossman said was news, the former Atlantic County freeholder tried to turn lemons into lemonade. The controversies helped him raise money, and frankly, no Republican in New Jersey motivated the conservative GOP base the way Grossman did. While other Republicans ran away from Donald Trump, Grossman embraced him.

Van Drew won the seat by a nearly 20,000 votes, 53%-45%. Grossman said he lost because allegations that he was a racist distracted voter from the real campaign.
When Vincent Squire decided to run for Camden County Freeholder, he didn’t tell Republicans that he had been convicted of burglary under an alias and was facing second-degree assault charges on a criminal complaint filed by his son. When the GOP found out about it, they told Squire to get off the ticket. He refused, so the party pulled their support of him in August. Democrats prevailed by a 2-1 margin – the GOP hasn’t won since 1990 – but Squire, running on his own, only finished 457 votes behind his running mate.

Essex County Executive Joe DiVincenzo broke his own record, winning a re-election to a 5th term with 81% of the vote. He carried 21 of 22 municipalities, winning 191,045 votes. DiVincenzo has now won more total votes than any countywide candidate in Essex history.

Middlesex County Democrats haven’t been this solid since the John Lynch Era ended almost fifteen years ago, and they haven’t enjoyed this kind of statewide clout since the Wilentz machine helped rule New Jersey.

They have an Assembly Speaker, Craig Coughlin. Middlesex is dominant in six legislative districts. Four Democratic State Senators all chair Senate committees. Three Assembly Democrats chair committees, plus another three for Assemblymen who represent large portions of Middlesex. At the municipal level, Republicans victories have been limited to just a small handful of towns.

After Chris Christie carried Middlesex twice, Phil Murphy won it by almost 30,000 votes; Bob Menendez won it by more than 50,000. The power of Middlesex is a testament to the political skills of Democratic County Chairman Kevin McCabe, an experienced insider, former state labor commissioner, and Port Authority commissioner.
In a year when voting rights were a hot topic from Georgia to North Dakota, Passaic County Freeholder and voting rights lawyer John Bartlett notched up two key courtroom wins in a single election cycle. Reprising his dual role as Freeholder candidate and counsel to Bob Menendez’s U.S. Senate campaign, Bartlett successfully defeated an effort by the Republican acting county clerk to publish a ballot that separated federal and non-federal candidates with three inches of white space. Averting down-ballot undervotes that might have been fatal to Chairman John Currie’s efforts to re-capture the county clerk’s seat. Then on Election Day, Bartlett went toe-to-toe with Hugin campaign lawyer over whether 7,000 new voters whose signatures didn’t appear in the poll books would have to vote provisionally and won again. Passaic County Democrats swept to victory, with Bartlett cruising to a third term.
It was Animal House meets Super Troopers in Mountainside. Where six police officers filed a lawsuit on Friday alleging the borough’s leadership has failed to counteract systematic violations and harassment, they claimed to have experienced in the police department – including claims of an officer harassing his colleagues and at least one civilian with a sex toy dubbed “Big Blue.” Most of the offending cops retired, including the chief of police, and Republicans held their 5-0 majority on the Borough Council.
THE DECIDER

Garwood has just 4,226 people, but Democratic Municipal Chairman Hugh Sinclair may be the man who flipped a House seat.

Back in March, Rep.-elect Tom Malinowski was still battling for the Democratic nomination for Congress in New Jersey’s 7th district. He had won organization lines in Hunterdon, Morris and Warren counties, but rival Linda Weber had the lines in Somerset and Essex.

Heading into a vote of Union County Democratic chairs to determine the organization line, Malinowski and Weber each had six votes. Sinclair was the lone undecided voter.

He voted for Malinowski, and by a vote of 7-6, Malinowski had scored the line in Union County. Weber dropped out, and Somerset and Essex coalesced behind the former Assistant U.S. Secretary of State. He won 67% in the Democratic primary and then ousted five-term incumbent Leonard Lance in the general by 16,000 votes.

DON’T MESS WITH OROHO

Republicans have not lost a freeholder race in Sussex County since 1999, when Democrat Howard Burrell ousted incumbent Richard Darina by 501 votes. Races for freeholder are settled in GOP primaries – Sussex has had competitive June elections for the last nine years – and in 2018, the tradition continued.

The 2018 primary was a throw a body on a tarmac story: Freeholders Jonathan Rose and Carl Lazzaro were not helpful to State Sen. Steve Oroho during his brief primary challenge from Assemblywoman Gail Phoebus last year, and the Senator – easily the most powerful politician in Sussex County – needed to show others that disloyalty carries a penalty.

Rose and Lazzaro were ousted in the Republican primary by Sparta Mayor Josh Hertzberg and Franklin Borough Council President Dawn Fantasia, who went on to easily win the general election.

ROBIN HOOD OF MORRIS COUNTY

Bob Hugin gave $37,000 to each of the county Republican organizations.

That money wasn’t supposed to be a gift. Hugin expected the county parties to use the money to help turn out votes that would make him New Jersey’s next United States Senator.

Morris County Republicans struggled through a series of high-overhead events – they paid $30,000 for Fox News personality Greg Gutfeld to speak at their winter fundraiser – and was nearly broke. That left the three GOP freeholder candidates to raise their own money in an increasingly competitive campaign.

The Republican Chairman Ron DeFilippis had his own plans for Hugin’s money. The party owed him $10,000 from a loan he made to pay Gutfeld’s speaking fee. So DeFilippis used Hugin’s money to pay himself back.
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to advocate for students, educators, public schools and a better New Jersey for everyone.
With a population about the size of Old Bridge, Salem County is New Jersey’s smallest county – and the site of the New Jersey Republican Party’s biggest win in 2018.

After losing one incumbent freeholder in 2017, the GOP still had a 3-2 majority on the Salem County Board of Freeholders. But five days before Christmas, Republican Melissa DeCastro switched parties and turned control of county government over to the Democrats.

That was a skillful revenge play by Senate President Steve Sweeney, who had just survived an $18.7 million contest for his own Senate seat against Salem GOP chairman Fran Grenier. Grenier resigned in February and Republicans replaced him with Linda DuBois, a former mayor of Pittsgrove.

Republicans didn’t like the way they lost, and voters didn’t like it either.

In a Democratic year, Republicans swept Salem County. Bob Hugin and Seth Grossman carried the county comfortably. Sheriff Chuck Miller won easily. And with longtime GOP freeholder Ben Laury winning re-election by a wide margin, the Republicans took out DeCastro by 1,151 votes.

Republican Ronald Fava had not won an election since 1975, when he was elected to the State Assembly in the Democratic-leaning, Paterson-based 35th district. He lost after one term to John Girgenti and went on to serve as Passaic County prosecutor and acting sheriff.

In 2018, he was the GOP candidate for county clerk as Republicans ought to hold on to their only countywide office. This was the first match-up between John Currie and Peter Murphy in eighteen years.

Murphy, who ran the party in the days when Republicans had complete control of government, gave up his post in 2001 after being charged in a kickback scheme. His conviction was eventually overturned by the 3rd Circuit and he later pleaded guilty to a single count of mail fraud in exchange for not going through a second trial.

Currie, the Democratic State Chairman, has been the Passaic County Democratic Chairman since 1990. Currie mulled running himself but decided not to enter the race.

Passaic County has a near 2-1 Democratic voter registration edge; the county has 57,275 more Democrats than Republicans. That gave Currie the win: Danielle Ireland Imhof, the Prospect Park business administrator, beat Fava by a 59%-41% margin.
Somerset County Democrats have been in the mix since 1999, when Becky Perkins nearly won a freeholder seat. In 2018, they finally closed the deal when they elected two Democrats to the Board of Freeholders – their first win since 1979. In January, GOP will have a tenuous 3-2 majority when two women, Sara Sooy and Shanel Robinson, become freeholders.

With 14,798 more Democrats than Republicans, Somerset is New Jersey’s new swing county. Bob Menendez won by 8,986 votes, and Tom Malinowski outpolled Leonard Lance by 8,758.

Control of county government will be up for grabs in 2019 when Freeholder Patricia Walsh is up for re-election. Democrats, who elected a county clerk last year, will also have a shot at taking out Sheriff Frank Provenzano.

One more thing: women now have a majority of seats on the Somerset County freeholder board.

Morris County Republican Chairman Ron DeFilippis’ top political strategist took to Facebook to attack Pope Francis.

“The Pope should go take care of pedophiles in his own church before he starts talking about America,” wrote King Penna, who helped DeFilippis score a four-vote win in a bitter intra-party fight last June.

“Someone should inform the hypocrite that he lives in a compound with walls; why don’t you take all the refugees there?”
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WON’T YOU BE MY NEIGHBOR?

Dan Rodrick has had an interesting ride.
In November 2017, Rodick was one of three Democrats elected to the Toms River Township Council, breaking the 7-0 GOP majority.
In June 2018, he ran for Toms River Democratic Chairman. He held the reorganization meeting at his own home but lost by five votes.
In July 2018, he announced that he was switching parties. It wasn’t immediately clear that his four Republican colleagues wanted him.
In October 2018, he was charged with a defamation lawsuit during a council meeting. Court documents allege that Rodrick owns several fake news sites.

THE WEEDMAN

In what he’s calling an act of civil disobedience, Edward “NJWeedman” Forchion sold weed outside the governor’s office last September to call attention to his opposition to making marijuana a “white only marijuana distribution industry” in New Jersey.
Forchion, a frequent candidate for public office, was seeking an unexpired term in the State Assembly from the 15th district in November.
State Troopers declined to take the bait and stood by in amusement.

MOTHER OF THE YEAR

After Palisades Park Mayor James Rotundo lost renomination in the Democratic primary to Councilman Christopher Chung, his 80-year-old mother took to her Facebook page to go on a racist rant against Korean Americans.

“All of us AMERICANS are so done. I am going to suggest that only English be spoken in our Boro Hall at least while an AMERICAN is still the mayor.”

“Go to hell PALISADES PARK, let the GD KOREANS have this F’n town,” the first mother wrote. “All of us AMERICANS are so done. I am going to suggest that only English be spoken in our Boro Hall at least while an AMERICAN is still the mayor.”

Chung won the general election and in January will become the first Korean-American mayor in a town that has a majority Asian population.
Kevin Jenkins, the husband and chief political strategist of Gayle Cheneyfield Jenkins, encouraged his wife to give up what would have been a safe city council seat — she was repeatedly offered a spot on the Baraka Team slate — to embark on a truly disastrous campaign for mayor. His wife received just 23% of the vote — the worst defeat in the history of Newark mayoral elections — losing all five wards, including the Central Ward, where she has served as a city councilwoman. (To be clear, the Central was Cheneyfield-Jenkins’ best ward — she got 25.1% of the vote there.)

Jenkins failed to meet fundraising goals, came up with a flawed strategy and ground game, either misread the polling (or never did a real poll at all), and possibly ruined the political careers of several young prospects whom he helped convince to join his wife’s slate. He couldn’t hold former mayor Sharpe James in place — the onetime Baraka critic endorsed the incumbent a week before the election. Most stinging is that the candidate for his wife’s Central Ward council seat failed to even make it to the runoff.

Without his wife on the city council, Jenkins — once the Central Ward Republican Chairman — will lose some clients too. The last sitting of Cheneyfield-Jenkins was an attempt to latch on to Bob Hugin’s U.S. Senate campaign.
From defending our healthcare, standing up for workers’ rights, and protecting our most vulnerable communities, we are looking forward to the new chapter in New Jersey. But the fight doesn’t end here.

JOIN US TO STAND UP AND FIGHT FOR ECONOMIC AND RACIAL JUSTICE FOR WORKING FAMILIES!

Newton Mayor Wayne Levante, who was censured by his colleagues in March after a Facebook post alleged a “crisis actor” conspiracy after the Parkland, Florida school shooting, was defeated for re-election in May. Levante, who called Parkland survivor David Hogg a “crisis actor,” fell 29 votes short.

Monmouth County Freeholder John Curley lost Republican Party support for re-election after his GOP colleagues censured him for sexual harassment, bullying and using vulgar language. Curley ran as an independent and scored just 4% of the vote.

One day after a controversial Facebook post comparing immigrants to raccoons, Mendham Township Deputy Mayor Rick Blood has resigned.

“Ilegals are everywhere,” Rick Blood wrote on the since-deleted Facebook post in February, “We are being invaded by illegals, we are becoming a nation of victims where every Tom, Ricardo and Hasid is a special interest group with special rights to a point where we don’t even recognize the country we were born and raised in.”

Blood later apologized for the posting, but he was ultimately unable to control the hullabaloo as criticism grew exponentially in his small Morris County municipality.
The final sixteen days of Chris Christie's term as governor of New Jersey were largely uneventful, although he beat up on Phil Murphy's transition a little bit at the end. He couldn't help himself. He left office with the lowest approval ratings for any governor in New Jersey history – and with a million Twitter followers paid for by the people of New Jersey.

The former governor hasn’t gone away, but nobody expected him to. He’s built a small law firm in his basement, bought a beach house on the Jersey shore, secured a contract with ABC News, and continues to advise President Donald Trump and others.

In June, Christie was overheard on an Amtrak train to Washington bashing Murphy and boasting of the advice he’s been giving to Senate President Steve Sweeney. In November, he smacked the governor for his response to a snowstorm. When it comes to Christie, Murphy punches back.

Christie’s ties to Trump likely help his boutique law practice, but the president continues to pass him over for high-profile jobs. He didn’t get to succeed Jeff Sessions as attorney general, and he dropped his bid for White House Chief of Staff after a private meeting with Trump. He was never going to get the job anyway.

His book comes out in January. Stay tuned!
Essex County Democratic Chairman LeRoy Jones delivered a 156,805 vote margin for U.S. Senator Bob Menendez and picked up two congressional seats with victories by Mikie Sherrill and Tom Malinowski. This is the first time since 1966 that Essex County was represented by only Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Nicholas Scutari is at the height of his political power: he’s chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee and in February won a special election for Union County Democratic Chairman. He had a setback in June when rival Derek Armstead prevailed in the Linden Democratic mayoral primary, but he picked up a congressional seat (Tom Malinowski) and delivered a 48,699 vote margin for Bob Menendez. He also picked up a Democratic mayor in traditionally-Republican Berkeley Heights, and a Democrat took out an incumbent in Roselle Park.

Somerset County Democratic Chair Peg Schaffer won two seats on the freeholder board – both women. They were the first Democrats to win countywide since 1979.

Bergen County Democratic Chairman Louis Stellato carried everything, again, including the installation of his guy as the new Sheriff.

Monmouth County Republican Chairman Shaun Golden dumped an incumbent freeholder and held his 5-0 majority. He delivered a 27,178 vote margin to Republican U.S. Senate candidate Bob Hugin.

Salem County Republican Chair Linda DuBois was the only Republican in the state to flip control of county government from Democrat to Republican.

Sussex County Republican Chairman Jerry Scanlon retained two freeholder seats after the incumbents were defeated in the primary, and came through with 62% of the vote for Bob Hugin.

Passaic County Democratic Chairman John Currie reclaimed the county clerk’s office for the first time in a decade.

Middlesex County Democratic Chairman Kevin McCabe came through with a 39,280 vote plurality for Bob Menendez and dominated at the local level.
President Donald Trump is hugely unpopular in New Jersey, even though he visits the state most weekends during the summer. An October Quinnipiac University poll had his approvals upside-down at 35%-62%. More than six out of ten New Jerseyans said they wanted a Congress that would be a check and balance of the president.

Trump was the pivotal player in the 2018 mid-term election. Ultimately, nobody mattered more than he did to New Jersey voters. Trump helped save Bob Menendez – a bittersweet reality for Bob Hugin, who spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to help get Trump elected in 2016. If not for Trump, Rodney Frelinghuysen, Leonard Lance and Tom MacArthur might still be in Congress.

Voters making decisions about local offices based on who occupies the White House is nothing new in New Jersey; some of the greatest successes for a political party were the result of how voters viewed Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. So, in this case, Trump is completely normal.
2018 was not an easy year for Phil Murphy, who took office as New Jersey’s 56th governor on January 16. In one of the most Democratic states in the nation, Murphy has pursued an unabashedly progressive agenda, rolling back some of the policies established during the eight-year reign of his Republican predecessor, Chris Christie.

Murphy has enjoyed achievements that have endeared him to his Democratic base. Voters seem to like him – his approvals were at 43%-28%, according to a November Rutgers-Eagleton poll. He played a major role in helping New Jersey Democrats from top to bottom win elections in November.

For now, New Jerseyans are not blaming him for massive problems at New Jersey Transit. And he has not been held accountable for the state’s slow motion consideration of legalized marijuana – a top promise of the 2018 campaign – and on raising the state’s minimum wage to $15 per hour. He averted a state government shutdown, and voters don’t really care how the sausage gets made.

For the new governor, is greatest obstacle is his failure to forge a relationship with the Democratic majorities in the Legislature. He barely speaks to the legislative leadership. He can’t succeed as governor if he doesn’t fix that.

In a bold and courageous move, Democratic activist and Murphy administration appointee Katie Brennan went public with her accusations that Al Alvarez, a top Murphy for Governor staffer and an administration official, raped her during the 2007 campaign. Her allegations, which include massive frustrations with a system that she says failed her, have rocked New Jersey politics and has led to a legislative probe of how the administration came to hire Alvarez.

Bob Hugin was supposed to be the secret Republican weapon. A mega millionaire CEO and former Marine who could self-fund a campaign against a Democratic U.S. Senator with upside-down approval ratings after spending ten weeks on trial on federal bribery charges. Hugin spent $36 million of his own money to take out Bob Menendez. The incumbent fought back hard, making Hugin’s record of profiting off life-saving cancer drugs as a top campaign issue. Between that and his ties to Trump, Hugin wound up doing no better than other recent Republican U.S. Senate candidates in a state where Democrats have won every Senate race since 1972.
The first time Brendan Byrne made an in-print list of potential candidates for governor of New Jersey was about a month after Richard Nixon’s landslide re-election in the 1972 presidential race. Watergate wasn’t really a thing yet, but Democrats sensed that the GOP incumbent, William Cahill, was vulnerable.

Democratic State Chairman Salvatore Bontempo compiled a list of about 25 possible candidates - he called it the A to W list, because it started with former Assemblyman Vito Albanese of Bergen and ended with Assemblyman S. Howard Woodson of Mercer.

Bontempo kept the list in alphabetical order, so Byrne was second. Byrne, a man of irresistible wit and charm who served as governor of New Jersey from 1974 to 1982, died on January 4. He was 93.
The New Jersey Globe wishes to remember the many members of the New Jersey political community who passed away in 2018.

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