DONALD TRUMP’S NEW BEST FRIEND: JEFFERSON VAN DREW
SMOOTH, CHOPPY, OR SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN, TRUST THE TEAM.

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IN NEW JERSEY POLITICS, THE STORY IS TYPICALLY, THERE IS A WHOLE LOT OF GRAY.

My collection of Fitzgerald’s Legislative Manuals – many people just called them the “Red Books” --- goes back to the 1870s. Collectively, they are the bible of state government in New Jersey.

That’s where I went to look at the detailed history of mid-term elections to see how many seats the governor’s party won or lost two years into his or her term.

The numbers are what they are, but there are no asterisks to explain circumstances beyond just the partisan breakdown.

Here’s an example: history shows that Democrats picked two Senate seats and three Assembly seats in Gov. James E. McGreevey’s 2003 mid-term elections despite upside-down approval ratings of 35%-52%.

What the red books don’t show is that one GOP senator lost because of his own ethical woes and another was defeated by just 63 votes after George Norcross spent millions to win the seat. Still, the Democratic gains are eternally associated with McGreevey.

In New Jersey politics, the story is often not just black and white. Typically, there is a whole lot of gray.

2019 was a year full of asterisks.

Phil Murphy is about half-way through his term as governor of New Jersey, and the Democrat vs. Democrat civil war continues to dominate his administration – even though few rank and file voters know about the fighting.

As governor, Murphy has been unable to accomplish his top two priorities: a millionaire’s tax, and the legalization of marijuana.

The historical footnote to Murphy’s legislative losses was that it was his fellow Democrats, Senate President Steve Sweeney and Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin, that stood in his way. Republicans were inconsequential.

Democratic legislators were unwilling to follow Murphy the way they did when Brendan Byrne established a state income tax or when Jim Florio raised taxes by $2.8 billion.

Byrne’s party lost 17 Assembly seats in his mid-term; Democrats lost 10 Senate seats and 21 Assembly seats in the Florio mid-term. Refusing to back up Murphy left them down three legislative seats in the first district, where the Democratic incumbents weren’t Murphy fans to begin with.

That removes one typically automatic Sweeney vote from the Senate Democrats, unless the senate president can convert Mike Testa into a Sweeneycan.

There were also two prominent party switchers: freshman Rep. Jeff Van Drew became a Republican, and State Sen. Dawn Addiego is now a Democrat.

In the year of the unlikely voter, just 27% of New Jersey voters cast their ballots in 2019 – a number that was up 5% over 2015 thanks to the state’s new vote-by-mail law that caused the participation of many New Jerseyans who would never have voted if ballots didn’t show up at their homes. A 5% increase was significant.

Off-year elections like 2019 when State Assembly candidates head the ticket happens twice every other decade, so New Jersey won’t see another one until 2035.

The race for Democratic State Chairman ended in a draw – John Currie keeps the job for eighteen months, when LeRoy Jones takes over. Legislative reapportionment, which was the entire reason for the state chairman battle, gives an edge to the anti-Murphy faction – if that’s where Jones is when the new districts are drawn.

Murphy continues to struggle to win the approval of New Jersey voters, yet he appears – at least right now – to have a lock on the Democratic nomination when he seeks re-election in 2021.

And the GOP could be in contention to win the governorship again, even though New Jersey will likely have more than one million more Democrats than Republicans sometime next year.

Donald Trump continues to be unpopular in New Jersey, not that he cares: New Jersey hasn’t voted Republican in a presidential election since 1988.

Trump didn’t hurt Republicans this year the way he did in 2018; in fact, an impeachment inquiry approved days before the November 5 general election appears to have emboldened the GOP base in several key legislative races.

New Jersey seems to be over Chris Christie. Attacks on Republican Assembly incumbents in the mid-term elections didn’t work. Murphy owns New Jersey’s problems now.

Just before Christmas, Attorney General Gurbir Grewal assumed Christie’s old mantel as a political corruption buster. While Christie used to hunt whales, so far, all Grewal has caught are a bunch of minnows who lost elections. That could change in 2020.

New Jersey’s print media continues to flounder, with fare more attention going to burgers and shopping mall openings than public policy. It’s not unusual for Murphy to get knocked out of the news by the Real Housewives of New Jersey.

The acquisition of Gannett by GateHouse Media means that 15 of New Jersey’s 17 daily newspapers are under the control of two national media conglomerates.

Within the last 27 years, New Jersey has dropped from 23 daily newspapers – all with local news bureaus and individual editorial boards – to 17 with staffs that are a fraction of the size of their past and in many cases, without editorial writers commenting on local issues.

More layoffs are expected.

Democrats are looking to unseat Van Drew and Republicans work to regain the congressional seats they lost to Andy Kim and Tom Malinowski last year.

Josh Gottheimer, the Human Fundraising Machine, continues to raise money at gargantuan levels. The titan of congressional fundraising had $6.4 million cash-on-hand as of October.

At press time, Cory Booker is still a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination.

New Jersey is never boring and 2020 won’t be an exception.

2019: YEAR IN REVIEW | 3

David Wildstein
Editor, New Jersey Globe
This time last year, Jefferson Van Drew would have been the last freshman congressman New Jersey would have expected to become a national political figure.

Van Drew went to Congress as a 65-year-old right-of-center Democrat. Less than a year later, he’s a Republican who has pledged his “undying support” for President Donald Trump.

The adjustment from state legislator to congressman has not been easy for Van Drew, who made a name for himself on his first day in office when he flubbed his first vote: a roll call on the election of the Speaker of the House.

The job for each House member was simple: say the name of who you want for Speaker. Not everyone voted for Nancy Pelosi or Kevin McCarthy. Eighteen votes were cast for ten other individuals.

Asked to declare his choice for Speaker, Van Drew rose for the first time on the House floor and said “No.”
That caused some noticeable laughter in the House chamber and immediately enhanced Van Drew’s name ID among his colleagues.

At the end of the vote, the Clerk of the House went back to Van Drew and after a quick tutoring session; he voted present.

But Van Drew really found himself in the spotlight when he was one of two House Democrats to vote against launching an inquiry into the impeachment of Trump.

A week later, three Democratic legislators who ran for re-election as “The Van Drew Team” lost their seats. Democrats blamed Van Drew’s vote for the defeat – one that allowed Republicans to increase their seats in the legislative elections.

That didn’t stop Van Drew from opposing impeachment, telling USA Today, “I don’t see anything there worthy of actually taking a president out of office.”

Atlantic County Democratic Chairman Michael Suleiman told Van Drew that he might have a problem winning a primary next year if he doesn’t vote to impeach Trump.

Van Drew asked Democratic county chairmen to sign a letter backing him for re-election. The answer for many of them was no.

That didn’t stop Van Drew from opposing impeachment, telling USA Today, “I don’t see anything there worthy of actually taking a president out of office.”

Key New Jersey Democrats, like Gov. Phil Murphy, U.S. Senator Bob Menendez, and Democratic State Chairman John Currie, refused to offer endorsements of Van Drew’s re-election. Murphy had offered an endorsement of all incumbent House members, including Van Drew, in July.

That left only Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr., the chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, as the only prominent Democrat willing to publicly support Van Drew after the South Jersey congressman announced his intention to vote against impeachment.

Rumors of a party switch had been whirling through New Jersey for more than a month.

Most Republicans didn’t want Van Drew, and many said so publicly.

“Jeff has proven to be a chameleon,” said former GOP Assemblyman Sam Fiorucci. “If the wind is blowing the Republican way, that’s the way he goes.”

Privately, GOP insiders expressed a feel of inevitability about Van Drew becoming a Republican.

The narrative for Trump was a good one: a veteran of more than 25 years in public office as a Blue State Democrat comes to Washington and discovers that House Democrats are on some sort of witch hunt.

To the president, Van Drew was the ultimate validator.

So Van Drew shows up in the Oval Office, switched parties, and he’s Trump’s new best friend.

Republicans aren’t happy about it, but they are coming around – some more quickly than others.

Three Republicans who were already in the race to challenge Van Drew in the general election now find themselves facing him in a Republican primary. All three say they’re in the race to stay, but that could change.

The other GOP candidates will likely wait to see how rank-and-file party members react to the switch. Trump is expected to come to New Jersey’s 2nd district to hold a rally for Van Drew. A Trump-allied PAC will spend $250,000 in the next few weeks to advocate for the party-flipping congressman.

One thing that’s clear: if the anti-Van Drew Republicans can’t winnow the field to a single challenger, there is no stopping him in a primary.

It’s possible that Congress was never the right fit for Van Drew, who shows up on the House floor wearing plaid suits and chunky gold jewelry as if he’s still attending Cape May County freeholder meetings.

Van Drew never grasped the idea that Washington was different from Trenton and that he couldn’t plead for a pass just because he came from a district that was more conservative than the House Democrats.

Perhaps he was spoiled. As an assemblyman and state senator, Van Drew frequently sought and received dispensation to vote against legislative Democrats to protect his Republican-leaning seat. He spent his entire career in the majority party and leadership was typically positioned to accommodate him.

All but two of Van Drew’s seventeen years in the New Jersey Legislature were spent with a South Jersey Democratic ally having his back – either Joe Roberts as Majority Leader and then Speaker, or Senate President Steve Sweeney.

Jeff Van Drew is no rube, for sure.

Maybe Van Drew has been a pain in the ass over the years, but he’s a pretty good politician – he’s been winning races he never should have for years - and has figured out that his quickest path to a second term in Congress is to run as a Republican.

The national limelight will wear off, probably sooner rather than later, but Van Drew has rebranded himself in a district that gave Trump a five-point win in 2016.

Switching parties took some testicular fortitude – exponentially more than most New Jersey political insiders have him credit for.

His time in Congress might be short – or long – but that fact that he’s still in the game and playing at such a serious level – makes Van Drew the New Jersey Globe Politician of the Year.
There is no clear Winner of the Year for 2019. In defense of the non-winners, there were no colossal losers either.

New Jersey still sports a vibrant two-party system, but Republicans aren’t one of those two parties. Democrats are deeply divided into two factions, one controlling the governor’s office and the other with majorities in both houses of the legislature.

The GOP did cartwheels over their performance in Gov. Phil Murphy’s mid-term elections because they flipped one Senate seat and two Assembly seats. But those gains came entirely in the 1st legislative district, which sits in the southern-most part of South Jersey.

Bids to oust Democratic incumbents in three other districts failed.
DEMOCRATS ARE NEARING A VOTER REGISTRATION ADVANTAGE OF NEARLY 1 MILLION.

In the first eleven months of 2019, Democrats outpaced GOP registration by a 2-1 margin; New Jersey added 94,245 Democrats and 47,181 Republicans.

Even though Republicans are struggling, they may just win back the governorship in two years. As blue as New Jersey is, Democrats haven’t re-elected a governor since 1977. Republicans have done it three times since then.

Republicans have already regained one of the four congressional seats they lost in 2018 with the party switch of Jeff Van Drew, and have a shot at picking up at least two more seats next year.

Gov. Phil Murphy did what incumbent governors historically are supposed to do: his party lost seats in his mid-terms.

Murphy can point to some successes in 2019, which he does. In the general election, Democrats won control of the Somerset County Board of Freeholders for the first time since Lyndon Johnson was president. They added sheriffs in Burlington and Somerset, and ousted the last remaining Republican freeholder in Burlington.

By the single-digit margins, East Rutherford elected their first Democratic mayor in 49 years; Sayreville did it for the first time in 20 years. Democrats elected mayors in Hamilton and Dover.

Republicans held the Toms River mayorship – a huge freaking deal – and won a mayoral seat in Phillipsburg. They held the county clerk post in Salem County. These are some nice merit badges for New Jersey’s third party.

Democrats failed to pick up seats in four legislative districts where they spent a ton of money.

History won’t reflect the loss of opportunities for Democrats. Murphy explains that the rest of the decade went so well that 2019 was just playing on Republican terrain. He’s not entirely wrong.

Murphy’s opponents say that they lost the races because Murphy wasn’t popular in those districts. They’re not entirely wrong either.

A Monmouth University poll released in the fall had Murphy’s approval ratings at 40%-41%.

A year-long fight over the Democratic state chairmanship ended without a vote.

The good news for Murphy was that his pick, incumbent John Currie, gets to stay for another eighteen months. That allows him to avoid the possibility of losing control of his own state party just as he’s about to enter the national limelight.

But it’s not great that a sitting governor had to personally phone bank state committee members and still was never able to move Currie over 50% of the vote.

It took a deal to end the fight.

Murphy was the short-term winner, but he might be the loser in the long game.

If everyone keeps their word, Murphy won’t control legislative redistricting. South Jersey gets one seat and Middlesex County gets another. Essex will get a seat that will theoretically be named jointly by Murphy and LeRoy Jones. Expect that Jones, who is slated to become state chairman in June 2021, will get the Essex redistricting seat.

The junior United States Senator from New Jersey, Cory Booker, launched his bid for the Democratic presidential nomination in February. At the end of 2019, Booker’s candidacy has failed to catch on and he’s polling in the low single-digits. He failed to qualify for the December Democratic presidential debate.

The state’s senior U.S. Senator, Bob Menendez, returned to Washington this year to begin a six-year term. His mastery of international relations matters and his perch as the ranking Democrat on the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee puts him at the epicenter of world issues.

George Norcross is still the most powerful man in New Jersey, but a Murphy administration panel investigating tax incentives awarded by the Economic Development Authority has put him into the toughest spot of a political career that has made him a powerbroker for parts of five decades.

The EDA issue has dominated discussions inside the bubble of political insiders, but has not permeated beyond that to reach real voters. Neither did the investigation into the hiring of Al Alvarez and the controversial hires made by Lizette Delgado-Polanco of the New Jersey Schools Development Authority.

Regular New Jerseyans who live outside the statehouse bubble are not following the intense and often toxic fight between Murphy and Democratic leaders of the New Jersey Legislature.

The Monmouth poll validated that belief.

More than half of New Jersey residents (52%) have not heard about the relationship between Murphy, Senate President Steve Sweeney or Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin. Just 28% say that Murphy has a bad relationship with the Democratic legislative leadership and the legislature, while 14% think he has a good relationship.

A greater threat to Murphy next year: clean water and non-disclosure agreements.

But the 2019 Winner of the Year title goes to nobody.
A Stronger Democratic Party for a Fairer New Jersey.

The New Jersey Democratic State Committee is working with grassroots advocates and progressive voters to grow the Democratic Party. We are committed to electing Democrats who will fight to protect our values right here in New Jersey and in Washington. This year alone NJDSC has:

- Brought over 2,000 grassroots activists together for the NJDSC Conference, a record number
- Helped register more than 84,000 new Democratic voters
- Connected with the Democratic base through TeleTown Halls with Governor Murphy
- Added thousands of new emails to our database to recruit campaign volunteers and stay connected with New Jerseyans
- Provided new tools to Democratic campaigns and voters to help get people to the polls on Election Day
- Trained hundreds of new candidates and operatives to build the next generation of Democratic leaders
- Provided financial and operational support to county parties and Democratic campaigns throughout the state

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After Years of trying, Somerset County Democratic Chair Peg Schaffer has now led the county organization to control of the Board of Freeholders.

Democrats will assume a 3-2 majority of county government in January for the first time since 1965. Somerset’s new Democratic sheriff will also take office; with County Clerk Steven Peter, who won in 2017, Democrats will now control two of the three constitutional row offices.

Her law partner is heading the transition team, which means Schaffer is running things.

Schaffer is also the new vice chair of the Democratic State Committee, a post she'll now hold until June 2021.
Cumberland County GOP Chairman Michael Testa, Jr. won a special election for State Senate in 2019, capturing the 1st district seat for the Republicans for the first time in twelve years.

Tetsa ousted incumbent Bob Andrzejczak, a decorated war hero and Purple Heart recipient. Andrzejczak became a senator in January after Jeff Van Drew resigned to take his seat in the U.S. House of Representatives.

The political fortunes of the newly-elected senator – he took office in December – continue to rise even after his victory. Van Drew’s party switch, and Testa’s willingness to support him, effectively turns the Van Drew Team into Team Testa.

I think we can take them.

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Since 1996, George Gilmore led the most powerful Republican political machine in New Jersey.

Now his reign has come to a close.

Gilmore resigned as Ocean County GOP Chairman in April, after a jury convicted him on three of six counts on tax related issues. The jury was unable to reach a verdict on federal tax evasion charges.

He had been under indictment since January.

In March, Gilmore’s pick for mayor of Toms River, the crown jewel of Ocean County politics, won a closed-door vote of the GOP screening committee by just one vote and then won the endorsement of the local Republican Club by just 8 votes against Mo Hill, a longtime critic of the county chairman.

Those votes happened with Gilmore in the room.

In May, Frank Holman became the new county chairman. He beat Gilmore’s preferred choice to be his successor.

Then in June, Hill beat Gilmore’s pick in the Toms River mayoral primary.

Gilmore, who has not yet been sentenced, has tried to hang on. He helped set up a rival group to raise money outside the county organization, something that forced Holman to publicly bitch slap him.

LOSER OF THE YEAR
GEORGE GILMORE

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Assemblyman Joe Howarth lost GOP organization support for his third term after party leaders accused him of plotting to switch parties.

Republican leaders in Burlington, Atlantic and Camden counties concluded that Howarth considered becoming a Democrat after his close friend and ally, State Sen. Dawn Addiego, switched parties.

Democrats didn’t want him.

Howarth attached himself to President Donald Trump unsuccessfully sought to rebrand himself as a MAGA conservative. GOP State Chairman Doug Steinhardt called Howarth a fraud.

His ex-running mate, Ryan Peters, and former Burlington County Sheriff Jean Stanfield, beat Howarth in the Republican primary by a 2-1 margin.

Hamilton Mayor Kelly Yaede lost her bid for re-election to her third term after local residents decided they couldn’t stand the drama that came with her.

In September, Yaede faced charges that she deliberately published records about her Republican primary opponent, Dave Henderson, she knew had been expunged. A judge dismissed the charges, but her general election opponent, Jeff Martin, framed them well to the Hamilton electorate.

“What this case really showed us is the lengths Kelly Yaede will go to lie and mislead the public,” Martin said. “We learned that Mayor Yaede conspired and directed her campaign to intentionally lie and mislead voters and the public at large.”

Just days later, another Yaede campaign tactic backfired when she attacked Martin for following orders while serving in the Air Force. That prompted a series of veterans, including a retired general, to slam her – and mock her for not understanding the U.S. Constitution.
Republicans have won flipped two State Senate seats in the last two years and Brittany O’Neill was campaign manager for both races, ousting incumbents both time. That makes her New Jersey’s most successful Republican operative.

O’Neill was the campaign manager of Mike Testa’s State Senate campaign in the 1st district, here Republicans picked up a State Senate seat and two Assembly seats.

One of the reasons Republicans were less than aggressive in recruiting a candidate to replace Rep. Frank LoBiondo in 2018 was that they saw greater opportunities in the State Senate and Assembly seats in 2019.

The campaign to regain the first district began even before Jeff Van Drew won his congressional race. Testa had to first deal with a significant GOP rival, former Assemblyman Sam Fiocchi. Fiocchi left the race after Testa won conventions in Cumberland and Cape May counties.

O’Neill, who managed Chris Brown’s 2017 race, is now Testa’s chief of staff.

The proudly partisan political blogger who runs More Monmouth Musings was the campaign manager for Mo Hill’s campaign for mayor of Toms River.

Toms River is the 8th largest municipality in New Jersey, and the the largest one under Republican control.

Art Gallagher came in to run Hill’s off-the-line upset victory in the Republican primary, beating ex-GOP powerhouse George Gilmore and his hand-picked candidate. Then he had to navigate a treacherous general election against a well-funded Democrat – and a fractured GOP.

He figured it out the delicate roadmap to a win, albeit a narrow one, by flattening anyone who stood in his way.
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Rob Costello
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Ore Obiwumi
Political Director,
Morris County Democratic Party

Jonathan Castañeda
Campaign Manager
New Beginnings/ Gabe Rodriguez
West New York

Angelo Lamberti
Campaign Manager, Peters & Jean Stanfield for Assembly
8th District
Phil Swibinski of Vision Media Marketing continues his hot streak as a Democratic media consultant. What makes him the go-to guy in New Jersey is that his clients never seem to lose.

In North Bergen, Mayor Nicholas Sacco won 69% of the vote against self-funder Larry Wainstein, whose candidacy Swibinski dismantled even after spending $1 million of his own money.

In West New York, Swibinski was the consultant for a slate led by Gabriel Rodriguez, who unseated two-term incumbent Felix Roque.

In Jersey City, he was involved in the successful – and expensive – campaign to limit short-term rentals, like Airbnb.

Swibinski is the voice of the New Jersey Democratic State Committee, a non-profit allied with Gov. Phil Murphy, and a super PAC supporting Cory Booker’s presidential campaign.

Chris Russell of Checkmate Strategies is the dominant Republican strategist and media consultant in New Jersey today. There is nobody smarter or tougher.

He was the architect of the Republican victory in the 1st district, where Mike Testa ousted an incumbent Democratic state senator and Erik Simonsen and Antwan McClellan unseated two sitting Democratic assemblymen.

Russell heads into 2020 with horses in the top congressional races in the state and Jack Ciattarelli’s 2021 gubernatorial campaign.
Adam Silverstein is the consultant for Bergen County Democrats, transitioning seamlessly from Lou Stellato to Paul Juliano as he makes sure New Jersey’s largest county stays blue. He spent part of 2019 planning Josh Gottheimer’s 2020 re-election and Jim Tedesco’s 2022 campaign – a sign that Silverstein is always planning.

Mitch Seim is a Democratic strategist in one of the last bastions of Red Jersey, but he keeps scoring some amazing successes. He kept Brick Township blue in 2019, ousting a party-switching councilman, and his Dr. Seuss-themed mailer in Toms River was the best of the cycle.

It was a comeback of sorts for Chris Christie’s chief strategist Mike DuHaime, making sure that two of his close friends, Jon Bramnick and Anthony R. Bucco, won re-election in the toughest races of their political careers so far. He’s still got his fastball.

Harrison Neely, the longtime advisor to Senate Minority Leader Tom Kean emerged as a top political advisor to Republican State Chairman Doug Steinhardt and played a key role in the GOP victories in the 1st district.
NJ 32BJ SEIU members won a strong contract that provides raises, maintains quality, family health insurance, and contains strong protections against sexual harassment.

Union janitors clean some of the state’s most important businesses, schools and transit stations. Our contract win raises the floor for not just 7,000 janitors, but for the entire community.
Committee to Re-elect Kevin J. O’Toole for Port Authority Chairman

Democrat Phil Murphy has been governor for two years, but he can’t touch Kevin O’Toole, a former Republican state senator whose relationships with key Senate Democrats and Andrew Cuomo, the Democratic governor of New York, has set up a seemingly impenetrable force field. O’Toole gets to keep a post that is arguably more powerful than the governors of six U.S. states for about as long as he feels like it.

Mike Testa for Senate Erik Simonsen and Antwan McClellan for Assembly

He won a primary off-the-line against a powerful GOP organization, and then a general election against a Democrat with money while dealing with a Republican Party possessing a multitude of motives.

Mo Hill for Mayor of Toms River

He won a primary off-the-line against a powerful GOP organization, and then a general election against a Democrat with money while dealing with a Republican Party possessing a multitude of motives.

Jeff Martin for Mayor of Hamilton

The council president toppled a two-term mayor after a near-perfect campaign and now leads a town that is completely controlled by Democrats.
Best Campaigns of 2019

Brian Bergen for State Assembly
The West Point graduate and Army helicopter pilot was first in when Michael Patrick Carroll decided to retire, and won a primary in lineless Morris County through sheer hard work.

Sheena Collum for South Orange Village President
A landslide win for re-election came as a result of a smart, grassroots, social media savvy campaign.

Matt Moench for Mayor of Bridgewater
In the most methodical race of the cycle, the council president toppled an incumbent mayor in a GOP primary running off the line.

Frank Nunziato for Mayor of Rutherford
He won off the line in the Democratic primary, united the party, and then flipped the mayoral seat in the general in a low-key but well-organized campaign.

Dana Grilo for Mayor of East Newark
The first-time candidate took out Hudson County’s longest-serving mayor, eight-term Democrat Joseph Smith, in the primary.

Nicholas Sacco for Mayor of North Bergen
Facing a $1 million challenge from a self-funder, Nicholas Sacco decided he wanted to win big. He took 69% of the vote, winning every district in the municipality.

Carolyn Blackman for Mayor of Dover
The rebel alderwoman ousted longtime mayor James P. Dodd, who skipped the Democratic primary and south re-election as an independent. This now gives what started as an insurgent group in 2018 led by Edward Correa complete control of local government and the Democratic Party.

Heather Darling for Morris County Surrogate
The first-term freeholder scored an upset victory in the GOP primary for a rare open seat, just narrowly defeating Assemblyman Michael Patrick Carroll.

Gabe Rodriguez for Mayor of West New York
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Hypothetically, if you were to tell some of New Jersey’s most powerful Democrats that they would be forced to spend the rest of their lives on a deserted island, then give them the choice of spending it with Phil Murphy or Sue Altman, the governor would be the instant front-runner.

The idea that Altman inspires such vitriolic sentiments from so many influential people is evidence that she has emerged as a major player in New Jersey politics. She has really gotten under the skin of the anti-Murphy faction of the Democratic Party.

Altman is a relative newcomer to New Jersey politics. A staunch critic of Camden County Democrats, she became the state director of New Jersey Working Families in May when Analilia Mejia left to work on Bernie Sanders’ presidential campaign.

Her opponents dismiss her as a recent convert who used to be a Republican, as if they have a history in refusing to deal with the GOP.

Her public stature shot up in November when the State Police physically removed her from a Senate committee hearing just before New Jersey most powerful powerbroker, George Norcross, was about to testify about the state’s controversial tax incentive program.

Rivals say that she went to Trenton with the intention of getting arrested. There is no evidence of that. Supporters say that Norcross was behind her removal. There’s no evidence of that either.

But the State Police said it would conduct a review of the events that led to Altman’s removal from the Senate hearing, including a meeting with the committee chair, State Sen. Bob Smith. Smith is the one some say instructed the troopers.
Saily Avelenda
The executive director of NJ 11th for Change is taking an increasingly important role outside the confines of what was once Rodney Frelinghuysen’s district, serving as campaign manager for Democratic State Chairman John Currie’s now-successful re-election campaign.

Uyen “Winn” Khuong
The executive director of Action Together New Jersey is the leading proponent and implementer of grass roots vote-by-mail ballots.

Happy Holidays & Best of Luck in 2020!
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Pearl Gabel and Megan Coyne

“Who lets New Jersey have a Twitter?” tweeted someone with 88 followers. The reply – “Your mom” – had nearly a half-million likes and 85,000 retweets.

The brains behind New Jersey’s official Twitter account, @njgov, are Gov. Phil Murphy’s digital director, Pearl Gabel, and Megan Coyne, who joined Murphy’s staff after graduating from college earlier this year. These Jersey Girls have brought a quintessential sarcastic New Jersey attitude to Twitter.
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Eight members of the New Jersey Legislature won’t be back next year.

Four of them were defeated for re-election: State Sen. Bob Andrzejczak and Assemblymen Bruce Land and Matthew Milam – all 1st district Democrats, in the general election, and Republican Joe Howarth in the GOP primary.

The other four are retiring: David Wolfe, the senior member of the Assembly, is departing after 28 years; Michael Patrick Carroll after 25 years; Amy Handlin after 14 years; and Pat Egan Jones after a little more than four years.

To save you the trouble of doing the math: 93% of this year’s legislature will return in 2020.
The law firm run by Assembly Minority Leader Jon Bramnick pledged to help people accused of sexual assault by vilifying the victim.

“We will investigate your case and seek to discredit your accuser,” the firm’s website claimed. In a pitch to potential clients, the firm says it can work “to get the charges (of sexual assault) dismissed or at least downgraded.”

Bramnick, in the middle of a tough re-election campaign, distanced himself from the website of the law firm he owns and runs and pulled the text down.

An advocate for sexual assault victims said that “Bramnick’s law firm is relying on harmful, lazy stereotypes about survivors of sexual violence” and that “this is the type of conduct that makes survivors stay silent.”

The content on Bramnick’s website attracted a seismic reaction from inside the political bubble, but didn’t seem to hurt him with voters: he won re-election to a 9th term in the Assembly by a 3,431 votes.
Thank you to all the hardworking people who made 2019 such a special year. Here’s to a bright and prosperous 2020.

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State Sen. Dawn Addiego announced in January that she was switching parties and becoming a Democrat after 25 years as a Republican councilwoman, freeholder and legislator. It was a devastating blow for Republicans; Addiego was part of the GOP leadership team as the Senate Deputy Minority Whip.

Flipping a four-term Republican expanded – at least for most of the year – Senate President Steve Sweeney’s South Jersey base to seven votes. Addiego said that her support for Sweeney’s agenda played a major role in her decision to switch parties.

Republicans in Burlington went ripshit and her switch wound up costing one of her closest friends, Assemblyman Joe Howarth, his Assembly seat.

As a Democrat, Addiego’s voting record hasn’t been noticeably different from when she was a Republican.

It’s not immediately clear whether Addiego will seek re-election in 2021. Her former running mate, Assemblyman Ryan Peters, won re-election this year despite a barrage of negative ads financed by the South Jersey Democrats. He’s already gearing up to run for Senate, with or without Addiego in the race.
Sometimes it was scary just how bad a candidate Stacy Gunderman was.

One of the most puzzling aspects of the 21st district State Assembly campaign was that Jon Bramnick and Nancy Munoz worked hard to avoid debating Gunderman, whose lack of understanding of issues, simple and complex, was unreal. She memorized a couple of lines, but her repertoire was limited on a good day.

Gunderman brought little to the table: she raised about $15,000 on her own, relying on party coffers and her running mate to finance what at least for a while appeared to be the place in the state where Democrats had the best chance to flip two GOP Assembly seats. She had no political base – a couple of months into her candidacy, she was unexpectedly defeated for re-election as New Providence Democratic municipal chair. After that happened, she went out to her car and cried. But it didn’t matter locally because Gunderman hadn’t filed a full slate of candidates anyway.

In the end, she knocked on more doors than any other candidate in the state, but that only happened after Democrats threatened to pull the plug on her campaign – and after realizing that call time raising money was a waste of time.

If Gunderman had won, she might have fit in nicely as an order-taker, but there was never a moment that even her friends thought she might go to Trenton and author landmark legislation.
LIUNA promotes fairness in the workplace, fights for dignity for all people, and helps create a path to the middle class. We also provide the construction industry’s most diverse and versatile workforce.
Lt. Governor Sheila Oliver was rarely seen stumping for Democratic candidates in 2019 and there’s a decent chance nobody noticed.

Oliver is a good campaigner, but there is no evidence that candidates were knocking down her door asking for help. When Democrats announced a frenetic, barnstorming campaign schedule for Gov. Phil Murphy and First Lady Tammy Murphy for the final two days of the mid-term elections, there were no announced campaign appearances for Oliver.

It’s no secret that Oliver is not in Murphy’s inner circle. She’s still part of the Essex Democratic machine, and bucked Murphy in the fight for state chairman by endorsing LeRoy Jones over John Currie.

New Jersey has had two lieutenant governors and both had trouble getting along with the front office. Maybe that’s the way things were intended to be.
When Greg Lavavee tells you he’s got your back, you can take that to the bank – literally.

In 2016, the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 825 business manager told legislators that if they voted for a gas tax, he’d never forget it. He promised to essentially indemnify anyone who put their political careers at risk by voting yes. And Lalavee is a man who keeps his word.

Assembly Minority Leader Jon Bramnick found himself in trouble this year in what appeared to be the fight of his political life in an increasingly Democratic legislative district. The Operating Engineers came to his rescue with independent expenditures of more than $400,000 and boots on the ground.

Local 825 marches to their own drummer. Lalavee and Mark Longo make their own decisions on where to spend his ample war chest. Sometimes their choices match up with the Building Trades union and the AFL-CIO, and sometimes they don’t.

That works for the Operating Engineers, where every one of their endorsed candidates. And now they own Bramnick.
It was the end of an era in Bergen County in June when Louis Stellato stepped down as Bergen County Democratic Chairman to take a seat on the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority.

Stellato had won just about all there was to win in Bergen: a county executive, a congressional seat that had eluded Democrats since 1980, an all-Democratic freeholder board and a sweep of the countywide constitutional officers.

The new chairman, by acclamation, was Paul Juliano, a popular political insider who serves as the Fairview public works director. Juliano enjoyed several important wins in 2019, electing Democratic mayors in Bergenfield, Dumont, East Rutherford and Rutherford.

Juliano also took a big gamble the weekend before the election, siding with Gov. Phil Murphy and endorsing John Currie for re-election as Democratic State Chairman. The endorsement came after allies of LeRoy Jones tried to land Juliano.

Six months doesn’t make a man, but Juliano appears on his way to becoming one of New Jersey’s most powerful political leaders.

Longtime Trenton City Councilman George Muschal said in September that while he didn’t hear a colleague make an anti-Semitic slur but says he’s heard the term “Jew them down” referred to many times and thinks it’s “just a statement of speech.”

“You know, it’s like a car dealer, they wanted $5,000, you Jew ‘em down to $4,000,” Muschal said. “It’s nothing vicious. The expression has been said millions of times.”
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The resignation of George Gilmore following his criminal conviction on tax-related charges led to the election of a new Ocean County Republican Chairman for the first time since 1996.

**Frank Holman III**, the son of former state Republican Chairman Gen. Frank B. Holman, has been involved in politics for decades, but his bid to replace Gilmore was his first run at office. He defeated Frank Sadeghi by just 25 votes, 254 to 229.

During Holman’s first few months as chairman, he faced a challenge: Gilmore, who still has not been sentenced, wouldn’t go away – he was raising money for an outside group that competed for dollars with the county GOP organization. Holman told Republicans to stay away.

Holman did well in his first general election: Republicans held on to the Toms River mayoral post – the big prize in Ocean County politics.
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Assemblywoman Carol “The Bear” Murphy clawed her way past a bid by the Republican mayor of Mount Laurel to move next year’s November partisan local election to a May non-partisan race to avoid being on the ballot with President Donald Trump.

After Mayor Kurt Folcher got the 3–2 Republican-controlled council to change Mount Laurel’s local elections, Murphy – nicknamed “The Bear” in a Burlington County Times editorial opposing the GOP maneuver – sprung into action.

Murphy outmaneuvered Folcher by getting a new law passed to require a super-majority of the council to approve changing the elections. She did it before Folcher’s plan was able to go into effect.

Assemblywoman Carol “The Bear” Murphy clawed her way past a bid by the Republican mayor of Mount Laurel to move next year’s November partisan local election to a May non-partisan race to avoid being on the ballot with President Donald Trump.

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Democrats and Republicans agreed on one thing in 2019: Robocalls are dead. There were widespread reports of dissatisfaction with automated recorded phone messages as a form of voter contact in an era where people either carefully screen their calls or simply don’t answer their phones. It’s time to sit shiva for a very old-fashioned method of voter contact.

Two one-time political bosses attempted to return to politics, but without success.

Joe Mocco, who along with his brother, Peter, once ruled North Bergen, kept showing up at the campaign headquarters of mayoral candidate Larry Wainstein. He claimed his name was Frank, but plenty of people recognized him as the former township clerk who was convicted of racketeering charges involving an illegal garbage dumping scheme.

Former Bergen County Democratic Chairman Joe Ferriero, who spent more than a year in prison for his role in a racketeering scheme, was heavily involved in the losing re-election bid of West New York Mayor Felix Roque.
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Parano and Associates
You could say that Republican Reinier Prijten was gone almost as quickly as he arrived, but the thing is, he never actually showed up. The unknown financial services executive announced his bid to challenge Rep. Mikie Sherrill in April from his home in Los Angeles, where he moved after living in New York. He said he was moving to Morristown in May, but had never actually lived in New Jersey.

Residency issues weren’t his only problem. He had written a racially-charged blog post, missed 5 of 9 general elections since he became a naturalized citizen, and generated practically no enthusiasm for a run against the freshman congresswoman. He dropped out of the race six weeks later.
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For a few days in June, State Sen. Joseph Lagana was entrusted with a document that could trigger yet another nuclear war in New Jersey politics. He held a letter signed by Louis Stellato resigning as Bergen County Democratic Chairman.

Senate President Steve Sweeney made Senate confirmation of Stellato as a commissioner of the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority contingent upon his resignation as county chairman. Stellato agreed to that.

Still, there were some who were afraid of a double cross. Sweeney wanted the resignation first, so he was sure Stellato wouldn’t forget to resign after the Sports Authority seat was his. Stellato wouldn’t resign before he was confirmed. He’s a veteran of Bergen County politics and didn’t want to submit his letter and then be told Senate action would be again delayed.

In a world where nobody really trusts anyone, both sides trusted Lagana.
For a while in October, it looked like Assembly Republicans were going to be without a leader.

Conference Leader Anthony M. Bucco had moved up to the Senate and Minority Leader Jon Bramnick and Minority Whip Nancy Munoz were in danger of losing their own seats.

Some Republicans began openly discussing the prospects of a leadership succession plan if the Minority Leader lost. Bramnick got wind of it and had one of his top aides begin calling members. He shut that down – or so he thought.

It appears that Assemblyman Rob Clifton, a Monmouth County Republican, had emerged as the consensus candidate for Minority Leader. He would have headed a slate of candidates with enough votes to win a leadership battle.

Bramnick and Munoz won so the issue became moot.

Rep. Jeff Van Drew is sitting in the Oval Office next to the President of the United States announcing his switch to the GOP and he tells Donald Trump this story:

“I actually had a meeting with somebody about two weeks ago, I guess it was. And the individual was a local county chairman in the Democratic Party. And he sat down and he says, 'I just want to tell you something.' And he said, 'I want to tell you that you can't vote against impeachment.' I said, 'What do you mean I can't vote against impeachment?' He says, 'You can't vote against impeachment …. You will not get the line. You will not get the county. I will do everything to prevent that from happening, and everything to destroy you.' This is a pretty young guy, so it was pretty gutsy.”

Trump looks at Van Drew and says, “Yeah. A wise guy.”

Here’s what Michael Suleiman tweeted: “Well I can take ‘Get called a ‘wise guy’ by the President in the Oval Office’ off my bucket list.”
Kevin Corbett, who earns $281,000-a-year as president and CEO of New Jersey Transit, pays less than $25 annually on a 5 ½ acre portion of his property under New Jersey’s Farmland Assessment Act because he raises sheep at his Mendham Township home.

“Some people play golf. Kevin’s a farmer,” Corbett’s spokesman told the New Jersey Globe.

Corbett earns money breeding sheep. He also turns the wool sheared from his herd into blankets that he sells at a local farmers’ market.

A few days before the general election, The (Bergen) Record Executive Editor Dan Sforza made a pitch for new subscribers touting election coverage that never happened.

“A subscription to NorthJersey.com will also tell you everything you need to know to vote in the NJ Assembly and results on election night,” Sforza wrote.

Sforza’s representations are misleading – and maybe worse. Had someone they cover made such blatant representations, The Record would be all over it. The truth is they barely covered local elections.

Instead, The Record is much more focused on grand openings at Stew Leonard’s and the American Dream mall. On such coverage, they shine. Maybe that’s their lane.

Sforza is under a lot of pressure these days. His newspaper has lost 71% of their paid print circulation since the Borg family sold The Record in 2016. Now there are new owners – GateHouse Media has purchased Gannett – and huge layoffs on the horizon.
Jeffrey Dye was fired from his job at the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development after anti-Semitic and anti-Latino comments on his Facebook page came into public view. He called Assemblyman Gary Schaeer a “slave master” and told the New Jersey Globe “I don’t talk to fucking Jews.”

Dye was also removed from his post as president of the Passaic NAACP and the national organization suspended his membership.

Sadly, there are Runners Up: Trenton Councilwoman Robin Vaughn and Paterson Councilman Michael Jackson, who both used the term “Jew down” during council meetings.

Hours after Cedar Grove Councilman Harry Kumburis lost his seat by just 27 votes, he caught on a video ring.com doorbell in search of new mail-in ballots hours. A customer service manager at the Newark Main Post Office, which operates 24 hours-a-day, alleged in a letter to election board officials that a man approached a U.S. Postal Police officer at approximately 10 PM on Election Day requesting a postmark on the ballots. Essex County election officials referred the matter to federal and state law enforcement officials.

The man who delivered the ballots has not been identified. Those ballots received a postmark showing they were mailed on Election Day, but were invalidated because they did not include a bearer signature that is used to establish a chain of custody in the process.

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**ANTI-SEMITE OF THE YEAR**

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The New Jersey Globe could not function without Kevin Sanders.

It’s Kevin who runs the back office. He makes sure the website never crashes and zealously protects our user experience. He handles every aspect of revenue generation behind a thousand-foot high steel wall to separate the editorial and business sides of the company – a critical component to the highest level of integrity for a small and growing media company. No job is too small, including waiting outside for Cory Booker on a freezing February morning to take pictures of New Jersey’s newest presidential candidate. Kevin can be a nudge, but in his defense, at least one of the people he works with can be incredibly difficult.
IN MEMORIAM


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Assembly Speaker Bill Hamilton
Senator Alene Ammond
Senator Donald Bigley
Senator Thomas Gagliano
Assemblyman Michael Ferraro
Assemblywoman Arline Friscia
Assemblyman Hugo Pfaltz
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