



OPINION: NJ REPUBLICANS AND U.S. SENATE -- THE FIVE-DECADE LOSING STREAK

CARL GOLDEN | FEBRUARY 6, 2014

State GOP hasn't managed to win a Senate seat since 1972, the year of Watergate and gas at 55 cents a gallon



In any field of human endeavor, a half century of futility, of reaching for a goal, coming tantalizingly close but ultimately falling short, is understandable cause for frustration, discouragement, and a temptation to throw up one's hands, surrender, and move on.

The New Jersey Republican Party stands on the verge of just such a predicament as it enters another U.S. Senate election contest without a candidate capable of ending its losing streak,

which has endured since 1972, when Clifford P. Case won re-election.

In the 42 years since Case was defeated in the 1978 primary, Republicans have come close -- Christie Whitman in 1990 and former Assembly Speaker Chuck Haytaian in 1994, for instance -- but the Democratic domination has been and remains unbroken.

This year, Sen. Cory Booker, the former Newark mayor who won a special election last October to fill the unexpired term of the late Frank Lautenberg, is the presumptive favorite to secure a full six-year term. If so, he'll serve until 2020.

His colleague, Sen. Robert Menendez, is expected to seek reelection in 2018 and, if successful, will serve until 2024. The Republican losing streak will, at that point, exceed 50 years.

The fruitless history, the multimillions of dollars candidates have spent, the primary members up a safe seat to take up a Senate challenge.

Until last week, the only interest in taking on Booker came from Ramapo College professor Murray Sabrin, the Libertarian candidate for governor in 1997 and Republican candidate for Senate in 2008 (defeated in the primary), and Susanne LaFrankie, a former reporter for a Philadelphia TV station, about whom nothing is known.

Enter Jeff Bell.

Bell, who's been a resident of Virginia for the past 30 years, actually kicked off the Republican losing history when he defeated Case in the 1978 primary and went on to lose to Bill Bradley.

Sabrin and Bell are of the party's right wing, which has been spectacularly unsuccessful in winning statewide elections in New Jersey. By any objective political standard, they are incapable of appealing to a majority of the state's unaffiliated voters and, up against Booker, will be helpless in winning Democratic crossover voters.

No matter her political philosophy, LaFrankie won't be a factor. No money and no hope of raising it, no organization and no hope of creating one, no name familiarity and no hope of establishing it. She might be looking to resurrect her TV career.

While Sabrin and Bell are somewhat better known and their views notwithstanding, both face the nearly impossible task of securing the campaign cash essential to become competitive.

A \$10 million campaign certainly would not be out of the ordinary and, assuming Sabrin and Bell duke it out in a primary, the winner would face pulling in \$2 million a month between June and November. Not likely.

Because big money normally follows poll numbers, the only development that could loosen wallets and open checkbooks is polling that shows a bridgeable gap between Booker and either Sabrin or Bell. Again, not likely.

The chances of the Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee, optimistic about its chances of picking up six seats and taking control of the Senate, targeting New Jersey? Again, not likely.

Booker, on the other hand, has demonstrated his ability to raise prodigious amounts of campaign cash and there is nothing to even remotely suggest he won't do so again. Moreover, he'll enjoy the support of a united party, bolstered by an enthusiastic organization, an impressive get-out-the-vote machine, and the unqualified backing of the party bosses in both north and south.

Should something unforeseen occur and it's necessary