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WELCOME TO INSIDERNJ'S YEAR IN ADVANCE, WHERE WE DISTILL THE KEY COMING POLITICAL NARRATIVES, CHALLENGES, PERSONALITIES, AND CAMPAIGNS AND ELECTIONS OF 2018.

We're Excited!

If 2017 at times had a moribund quality, the consequence of Governor Chris Christie all but blowing up his party on his way out of office and a gubernatorial contest that looked over before it started, 2018 intrigues. The tenure of President Donald J. Trump has enlivened progressives, who want to send a message nationwide by weakening Republicans in federal contests. We have outlined the key races to watch in the pages that follow. We

have also noted those collisions at the local level, in a year defined by several very interesting contests, starting with Paterson, Bayonne and Newark. Paterson, in particular, entices, because no clear favorite defines the early terrain. Scene of a 2017 corruption-bagged former Mayor Jose 'Joey' Torres, Paterson collects 52 languages and multiple

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ethnic groups, and no clear organizations that translate to automatic citywide wins.

Notable too is the transition from eight years of Republican rule in the governor's office to the era of Governor-elect Phil Murphy. Murphy hasn't even assumed office yet, and an intraparty war already appears full-blown, with Democrats intent on devouring one another as Republicans recharge.

That subsequent pages represent the last third of InsiderNJ's year-end special sections, which included our Insider NJ 100: Power and Insider NJ 2017 Retrospective

publications. Our other two publications in this, our debut year, were Insider 100: Policymakers, and Insider 100: Media.

From our InsiderNJ family to yours, we hope you have a blessed holiday season and get ready for the year ahead, which in raw political terms promises considerable upheaval, heartache and decision. We plan to be there, on the ground, in the streets, in the Statehouse, on the boardwalks and at the foot of the Great Falls in Paterson, with all your up-to-the-minute political coverage. We wouldn't want to be anywhere else on the planet. Even without the crammed schedule in the coming

months, don't ever forget, it's New Jersey, and that in and of itself makes adventure inevitable!

Seasons Greeting and a Happy New Jersey New Year to One and All; and a special thank you to our publisher, a grand man, **John Francis Xavier Graham**, for making InsiderNJ's First Year such a grand success.

Max Pizarro,

Max Pizarro

Editor, InsiderNJ

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MURPHY VERSUS SWEENEY 2018: THE BIGGEST RIVALRY IN THE STATE RIGHT NOW



“It’s an unhealthy relationship.”
—Rod Steiger, On the Waterfront

They’re both Irish, they should be fine.

Yeah, right.

It doesn’t work that way.

If you doubt the dysfunction of this heavyweight Trenton train wreck, consider Senate President Steve Sweeney’s (D-3) decision earlier this month to ram numerous judges and other appointments, among them Middlesex County Democratic Committee Chairman Kevin McCabe’s installation on the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. Those posts might have been the patronage province of Murphy. Presumably, the governor-elect looked forward to rewarding some of his northern allies, including someone like Bergen County Democratic Committee Chairman Lou Stellato. In-

stead, Sweeney devilishly filled them up in lame duck with his and other people’s cronies and well-heeled pals.

Sources say the animus stems in part from Murphy’s beat-down of Sweeney during the pre-primary and the complicity of chairs like Stellato (and especially Passaic County Democratic Committee Chairman John Currie) to award Murphy with northern support instead of Sweeney, intensified by Murphy’s later decision to stay out of the LD3 debacle. Remember, that was the most expensive legislative contest in United States history, as the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) vainly attempted to take down the senate president with a millions-infused Salem factory worker. The effort backfired, but Sweeney didn’t forget Murphy’s unwillingness to exercise his fledgling power to halt the teacher union’s frontal assault on the senate prez’s South Jersey domain. He probably bristled, too,

when Murphy tapped former Speaker Sheila Oliver (D-34) to serve as his running mate, the kind of move, if Sweeney permitted himself the luxury of gaming it, that could be interpreted as yet another incomprehensible diss. Sweeney and Oliver, after all, had clashed. They hated each other. That’s well known. Was Murphy kicking sand in Sweeney’s face again? Was he flashing that winning smile one moment and then privately scheming with Currie and Stellato about how to humiliate him? Nah. Oliver was Essex County Democratic Committee Leroy Jones’ play. Wait a minute, Sweeney might have thought. Was Leroy in on the shenanigans too? No, no, no. Oliver’s Essex, and Murphy needed big Essex Election Day numbers. But still. It treaded at the edge of blatant disregard. “What, me – I love South Jersey!”

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Sweeney might have pictured Murphy saying, just before he did something like agreeing with Speaker Vincent Prieto (D-32) on Horizon before getting the hell out of town.

Ahh, maybe it was just Sweeney being paranoid. No big deal. It's politics! And anyway, Sweeney would go on to absolutely annihilate that NJEA-backed challenger Fran Grenier. But the contest cost a whopping, record-busting \$18.7 million.

Then Murphy turned around as the governor-elect and appointed NJEA President Marie Blistan to his transition team. It was disrespect compounded.

Then, as Matt Friedman wrote in Politico, the name of Logan Mayor Frank Minor surfaced on Murphy's transition team. Long a frightful pest in the South Jersey crucible, Minor had run against Sweeney's lifelong pal, U.S. Rep. Donald Norcross (D-1). When Sweeney was an ironworker, he had built the frames and Norcross – an electrician by trade – had done the wiring. I mean, this was a real relationship.

And Murphy had gone and allowed *Minor* a seat at the table?

Not cool, Phil.

Seriously, not cool.

Minor's name disappeared.

But there was a narrative now – and not a good one.

Adding to Sweeney's ire was Murphy's support after the election for the return of Currie to the position of Democratic State Party Chairman. Currie truly irritated Sweeney, for the senate prez had originally helped the Passaic County leader become state party chairman as part of a 2013



compromise. Sweeney also dutifully moved Currie's judges and other appointees through the intervening years. Then Currie endorsed Murphy. Then Sweeney struggled to get the signature of Currie's upper chamber lawmaker, Senator Nellie Pou (D-35) on a senate letter to the NJEA calling on the teacher's union to back away from trying to beat Sweeney. Come to think of it, Sweeney figured, Currie was leader of the party along with Murphy and neither one of them had a damned thing to say about the NJEA putting Sweeney through hell.

So when Currie signaled that he wanted the Passaic County clerkship, Sweeney intentionally stalled the swearing-in ceremony of state Senator-elect (and Passaic County Clerk) Kristin Corrado until past the deadline for a candidate to be able to file to run for clerk. Then in lame duck, he and Corrado deviously collaborated on a bill that would deny a state party chairman from being able to run for clerk. If sources understood the deeply rankled origins of Sweeney's agony, they felt that last bill finally displayed evidence of overkill. Surely lame duck Speaker Vincent Prieto (D-32) would never move the bill out of the Assembly this year, and Murphy would never sign such legislation once he assumed office in 2018. This was Sweeney just delighting in mayhem. If Currie and Murphy would allow the

NJEA to roll its tanks into Bridgeton, then the senate president intended, at the very least, to rattle the windows in their comfortable bungalows. Murphy thought he could let Blistan blitzkrieg the Trades, then show up in Gloucester slapping backs and wearing an Ironworkers sweatshirt pretending to be a wonderful friend of labor? No, Sweeney didn't roll like that, he appeared intent on letting Murphy know. If Murph was going to be passive aggressive, Sweens would set off some devastating legislative landmines before the Governor-elect got to town to let him know not to mess with him.

BOOM!

Happy Hanukkah.

What would the senate president do next, playfully drop a bill forbidding people named "Murphy" from being governor of New Jersey? Prevail on state Senator Nia Gill (D-34) to get behind an effort to name the municipal building in Montclair "Sweeney Hall?"

So that was the context of Murphy taking office vis a vis the leader of the Senate.

You mess with me and pretend like nothing's going on, I'm going to mess with you. And (Raging Bull reference, in honor of the late great Jake LaMotta, coming

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up) the horse you rode in on. And the cavalry behind you.

And the Democratic Senate was there, complicit; aiding and abetting Sweeney and of course, in return, getting all the plum stocking stuffers the senate prez (and an equally eager-to-muddy-Murphy Governor Chris Christie) could muster. Ed Oatman – state Senator Nick Scutari’s (D-22) guy – to the Kean University Board of Trustees.

Sarah Beth Johnson – wife of Senator for a minute Colin Bell – to the Superior Court. Middlesex County Democratic Committee Chairman Kevin McCabe to the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. Ready with a pen to sign off, Christie, for his part, got the likes of Joan Bedrin Murray, wife of Spokesman Brian Murray – a

tax court judgeship; and Anne Marie Bramnick, daughter-in-law of Assembly Republican Leader Jon Bramnick (R-21) a superior court judgeship.

WHAM!

Happy Kwanza.

“The senators are going to be the adults in the room,” state Senator Paul Sarlo (D-36) told InsiderNJ, rearranging one of the departing Christie’s favorite lines about how he had been the adult in the room in Trenton during his two terms in office. Perhaps stung by the repeated references to Democratic Party juvenilia, by osmosis Sarlo now assumed the mantle of maturity in Christie’s absence as Murphy – a political neophyte – bore down on the Gold Dome like a completely out-of-control political tricycle.

Others had a different view, preferring to see the entire exercise as sandbox excess. “State government is middle school,” a political player said as he observed Sweeney’s ongoing Mario Brothers bonking of Murphy, anticipating the worst outcomes from Democrats assuming both arms of power, legislative and now executive, the rivalry of Murphy and Sweeney weighing it all down with a political history of privilege and labor, money spent and misspent, heartbreak and injured ego, and the echoes of Corzine Corzine always threatening to erupt in the halls of the Capitol like some dreadful comedic soundtrack with the joke finally on Jersey.

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MURPHY IMMEDIATE 2018 CHALLENGE: THE MILLIONAIRE'S TAX



As if the political pillow fighting weren't enough irritation for Phil Murphy, the millionaire's tax-backing millionaire faces – most significantly – challenges posed by President Donald J. Trump's tax plan. Trump's plan would eliminate state and property tax deductions, which would hike taxes on New Jersey homeowners, the wealthiest of whom would get hit again if Murphy then implements a millionaire's tax.

The Democrat ran on a millionaire's tax to enhance state revenues, a plan that now appears in jeopardy as Republicans at the federal level at year's end moved to approve a federal tax overhaul bill that targets New Jersey taxpayers. Trump was attempting to get his tax bill done by Christmas, even before Murphy assumes office. "How do Democrats in the senate go out and ask for a millionaire's tax if Washington doesn't work out the SALT deduction?" a source wondered. "How do you do that?"

As Murphy prepared to head to hurricane-ravaged Puerto Rico, sources say he endured continuing early flare-ups behind the scenes, too, as he attempted to pull together his cabinet, with continuing December difficulties surrounding his choice of a state attorney general. The intrigue only added to the woes Murphy faced as Senate President Steve Sweeney (D-3) and Speaker-elect Craig Coughlin (D-19) – in light of Trump's intentions - appeared less than enthusiastic about Murphy's proposed tax.

"I think people are scared as heck when they look at this bill in Washington," Murphy told NorthJersey.com in November. "At the end of the day, it doesn't change my calculus for what we should do in New Jersey, and I'm highly confident that's where we're going to end up."

But Sweeney expressed caution on the same subject.

"I don't know what impact this Trump tax is going to have on us if it passes," said the Senate President, again quoted by NorthJersey.com. "I think we're going to have to evaluate everything if it passes."

If Murphy and Sweeney relations already looked very strained, the millionaire's tax – a cornerstone piece of the Governor-elect's agenda – contributed to the uncertainty of what would be Murphy's first-year fate. Heading into the New Year, internal discussions about who would serve as his attorney general began to widen to include serious consideration of which candidate for the top cop job had the white-collar finesse to go to war with the feds with an equal protections argument, ostensibly to save New Jersey from the Trump tax plan, to give Murphy's tax plan a chance to prevail.

It was volatile.



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BOOKER IN 2018 – AND BEYOND: MENENDEZ CEMENTED PROMPTS A PREZ RETHINK



Phil Murphy, Steve Sweeney and Bob Menendez hogged the headlines in 2017 amid ongoing persistent buzzing about U.S. Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) quietly opting out of the 2020 presidential sweepstakes.

Cory had the life he always wanted, which, to his critics, amounted to oratory without, finally, any real authority. Let Cory come in and rally the troops with that pseudo-intellectual, historical-reference-heavy hogwash of his, thought any number of fat party politicians on lily pads. Leaving him on that duty in perpetuity relieved literally hundreds of local poohbahs and their inarticulate underlings of speaking duties at pancake breakfasts, HQ openings, and fait accompli conventions.

But late in the year the old rumors re-intensified about Booker maybe rethinking Prez.

Maybe Booker wouldn't be around on the other side of 2020.

There was, of course, some context.

Trump was more than appalling. He was 1860 personified: a thoroughly bizarre time machine comic book villain straight out of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle meets Loch Ness.

How could Cory resist taking a crack at that?

Then there were the internal statewide politics.

With the feds ramming Trump's tax bill, Murphy – bucked by the 2017 national stage as a future party player - appeared stymied. Any plan he might have nursed for the presidency looked hampered by what would surely be a mass exodus out of New Jersey and raucous Statehouse antics.

Then there was the Menendez factor.

Although questions lingered at year's end about a federal retrial, New Jersey's senior

senator - saved by a hung jury in his 2017 corruption case - appeared entrenched. He was tried in the fires of a personal and public apocalypse and now had a coating of Biblical Teflon on him shining with the righteousness of Abraham. Now, that was good for Menendez, obviously, and his loyal retainers. But in the larger political arena it meant stagnation; for that seat – through the course of the pre-trial period and the trial – had suddenly enlivened the imagination of those who could picture it empty, as an existential reality separate from its current occupant, and that image had flared the nostrils of those hungering deal-seekers. Menendez strung up would be a tragedy for the state (that was always the public assessment, appraised with furrowed brows) - and an opportunity. For the empty seat always held the promise of political leverage – and movement. If U.S. Rep. Donald Norcross (D-1) could be promoted to the Senate, then Senate President Steve Sweeney (D-3)

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could be – mercifully, by the reckoning of Murphy World – offloaded to Congress. Presumably then Murphy could at least get a new senate president and not have to dance the jig of Sweeney, who appeared keen on having someone else dance the way Christie had made him dance. The governor had made Sweeney dance, now he was going to make the governor dance.

Well, now, Menendez was cemented.

He wasn't going anywhere.

Senator for life.

And yet those ambitions awakened on the NJ swampland festered.

Unabated.

The senate seat was almost *empty*.

I could've...

I would've...

No, No.

I can.

I *will*.

Good for Bob.

Bobaloo.

A fighter. A survivor. No one ever wished to supplant him, least of all me. That thing he said about those who had been digging his political grave? That's just Bobbo being Bobbo.

Right, Bobaloo?

Good for him.

We all feel that way. God knows, if anyone ever tried to sneak up on me while I was busy carrying out my duties as an elected official, I'd let everyone know they could expect to eat a bazooka round at close range. To quote West New York Mayor Felix Roque, long live "The Great Menendez!"

But one Senator spared the guillotine could now only mean another senator... for president!

If Menendez would not cooperate in going down and out, then Booker could certainly be persuaded to go *up* and out.

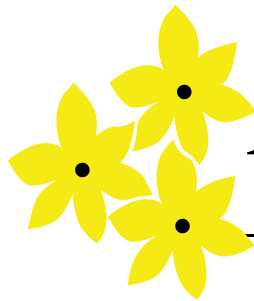
Booker for Prez. 2020.

President... Cory Booker of New Jersey.

So, if the machinations of Trenton had any bearing at all on the levers of Washington, he was back in the mix to lead the country.

Or maybe vice-president.

In any event, he had to be watched – and chronicled - with those dynamics in mind.




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Phil Murphy (left) and NRCC Executive Secretary-Treasurer John Ballantyne (right) at picket of Park and Shore development in Jersey City.



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STACK WORLD: THE COMING HCDO CHAIRMAN: HUDSON'S MOST FASCINATING LOCAL BOSS



“Every election produces casualties.”
—State Senator Ronald L. Rice (D-28)

When the northern chairs endorsed Phil Murphy back in 2016, Hudson County Democratic Organization (HCDO) Chairman Vincent Prieto looked as sturdy and obdurate as one of four supporting columns in the splendid and genteel Mansion of Murphy.

By the end of 2017, John Currie of Passaic looked buckled, Lou Stellato of Bergen appeared wobbled, Leroy Jones of Essex seemed to have uncomfortably internalized orders to make sure LG-elect Sheila Oliver didn't go off the reservation, and Prieto - Prieto was gone. Political sawdust. His remains awaited reanimation over at the Sports and Exposition Authority, according to sources with knowledge of the deal the man formerly known as

Speaker of the General Assembly struck with the allies of Governor-elect Murphy

Speaker-elect Craig Coughlin (D-19) prepared to take over where Prieto left off on the government front.

As for the chairmanship of the once mighty HCDO, the implications of his departure awoke the imaginations of those in Hudson trained for a decade to observe county politics as an ever-gradually more widely swinging pendulum between Senator Nick Sacco and Senator Brian P. Stack.

Prieto was Sacco.

In 2013, Sacco had cut the deal with George Norcross III to get his 32nd District lower house slate mate a seat on the throne. “She's unsustainable,” the always

phlegmatic North Bergen senator had apparently said when sizing up the future chances of Speaker Oliver, before landing Prieto on the throne in exchange for Hudson support for Sweeney. But soon Prieto was unsustainable, whatever goodwill he had with South Jersey turned bitter and his presence supplanted by Middlesex County's version of the same nice guy in the back of the chamber suddenly thrust into the spotlight on the strength of a deal.

Even as Sacco looked dimmed, Stack loaded buses with bodies and went south to help Prieto-Sacco nemesis Senate President Steve Sweeney (D-3), thereby sending a message that the road to the Hudson chairmanship might go through Bridgeton.

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As if preparing for new frontiers, Stack jacked up personal best numbers in the 2017 elections, leaving Sacco and company for roadkill in his quest to project as the sole figure atop the Hudson pyramid. Part of his calculation was to get the attention of Governor-elect Phil Murphy, just as he always made sure he had the purse-string affections of Jim McGreevy and Chris Christie. But Stack also looked ready to take over the chairmanship of the HCDO come June of 2018, succeeding Prieto and positioning himself in the pantheon of weakened northern chairs as the strongest boss in North Jersey. None of the other chairs wielded the power promised by Stack, a true throwback; a grandfathered dual office-holder who possessed full local control in Union City (both as a mayor and chair of the local party organization) as well as legislative Trenton chops as the District 33 Senator. The ad-

dition of the HCDO chairmanship would give him bulging biceps at every level of the game. Unlike Sacco, who installed his ward in the seats of power, Stack would take the job himself, intent on adding muscle to his already encumbered personal political frame.

Other chairmanships would live or die come 2018.



But what the ascent of Stack will mean promised the most significant shift. Always close to the South, Stack nonetheless maintains extremely close ties to fellow hometown guy Menendez of Union City. If Menendez involves himself in Bayonne's mayoral election, for example, it's unlikely Stack will surface on the opposing side. Such a development would cause Stack to stay out of it, just as he decided to keep his distance from the chaos of Hoboken. Ultimately, Stack knows he does not now need to compete in those local firefights. Too much is at his back. If Sacco experienced the apex of his political power with the speakership tenure of Prieto, Stack looked at the end of 2017 to be on the threshold of his own hard-fought coronation.



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GOP VISION 2018: AN INSIDERNJ INTERVIEW WITH NEW JERSEY REPUBLICAN COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN DOUG STEINHARDT



After the 2017 General Election and a 14-point loss by GOP nominee Kim Guadagno, wounded Republicans began the arduous process of rebuilding in the aftermath of Governor Chris Christie's controversial two terms. They started by unanimously picking long-serving Warren County Republican Chairman Doug Steinhardt to serve as the new chairman of the state Republican Party.

In the closing days of this extraordinary political year, InsiderNJ caught up with Steinhardt to discuss his designs on re-fashioning a cratered NJGOP.

"My vision for the party is that it's time to rebuild and rebrand," said the new party chairman, a Warren County GOP Chairman and partner at Florio Perrucci Steinhardt and Fader. "For the last eight years we were defined by a singular personality and a singular purpose, and that was Chris Christie. In a little more than a

month we won't have him out front anymore. I'd like to think it starts by reengaging our base. I would like to think where we faltered a little bit is in not reaching broadly to different demographics. We need to expand our footprint. We need to reach out to some demographics around the state that feel like they've been ignored neglected. This is what I've heard and seen as I have crisscrossed the state over the last couple of months.

"We as an organization have failed to respond to certain demographics and we need to deliver on promises, not just pay them lip service," he added.

But Christie did, in fact, excel at attempting to reinvigorate Tom Kean, Sr. voting populations unengaged with the GOP prior to his 2013 reelection campaign, when he won the Hispanic vote, InsiderNJ pointed out.

"I'm a history guy, and there's a lot to be learned about where you've been," said the NJGOP chairman. "I'm acutely aware of the important roadmap the governor laid out for any aspiring leader to go out and embrace diverse communities. But if the NJGOP is to have any standing we need to do a better job giving them a seat at the table, and letting them know they have a voice easy. It's one thing to sit and listen. Implementation is something else."

But won't it be tough with President Donald J. Trump leading the Republican Party, InsiderNJ wanted to know. The President backed failed Alabama Senate candidate Roy Moore, who thought America was a better place with slavery.

"The president has a national agenda," Steinhardt said. "Our agenda is considerably smaller, although there are levels of

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overlap where we have common interests. There is always a divergence of views. There are always going to be diverging views. I don't know that that changes our goal of returning our party to being one of common sense and affordability for all. That's a great platform on which to start."

Considering next year's federal elections and campaigns by incumbents that include U.S. Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen, U.S. Rep. Leonard Lance and U.S. Rep. Tom MacArthur and a U.S. Senate possibility, the new chairman said the party has considerable work to do.

"I am confident from communications with the RNC that they are determined to keep a house majority," Steinhardt said. "The senate race should be competitive. Half of New Jersey thinks Senator Menendez should resign, and more than half don't think he should be elected. He's already fielding challengers in his own party."

As of this writing, no Republican had stepped forward to run against Menendez.

As for CD5, where Republicans – former Bogota Mayor Steve Lonegan and Bergen attorney John McCann among them – want to depose U.S. Rep. Josh Gottheimer (D-5), Steinhardt told InsiderNJ his party has a legitimate shot.

"It's a district that went with President Trump, and we're mindful of that," he said. "I know John McCann personally but not politically, and I know Steve politically but not personally. We'll see what happens. For the time being, it is our intention to allow the primary to play itself out look at CD5 and other races. We haven't approached that one in a vacuum. It will sort itself out in the coming months, and will look to deploy whatever resources we have along with the RNC." With the exception of retiring U.S. Rep.

Frank LoBiondo (R-2), Steinhardt said the Republican Congressional Delegation will be back to attempt to reclaim their seats in the new year.

"I've spoken to all of them, and as we speak they are planning to run," he said.

A graduate of Gettysburg College and Widener University Law School, Steinhardt became mayor of Lopatcong at the age of 29.

"I was interested in finding a seat on the county committee and lo and behold, two or three years later, as a result of someone moving, I was on," he recalled. "I was elected in June, and come January I am chairman of the county committee. For me, politics was borne out of unique and interesting opportunities, and I spent the next 13 years as chairman of the Warren County Republican Organization where we have enjoyed success, none of which I'll claim complete credit for. We are a small county, but we have a model I believe we can replicate on a larger scale.

"I'm not trying to go about this alone, but I am committed to making sure we include people who deserve a seat at the table," Steinhardt added. "I am open-minded and objective. My job is to build a better Republican organization."

Assessing the inevitable collision with Governor-elect Phil Murphy, the NJGOP chairman identified what he sees as several errors of first principal.

"Well, look, his agenda quite candidly is completely out of touch with the health and vitality of the state," Steinhardt said. "I don't think he fully comprehends the tasks he has at hand. Making campaign promises for the sake of his base is one thing but navigating the treacherous waters of Trenton politics is more difficult than running a handful of nifty campaign

ads. I am waiting to see if he has what it takes to ensure the health, safety and welfare of this state."

As for Murphy's proposed millionaire's tax, "Look, taxing people's success has much broader reaching consequences than simply labeling it or putting it in the context of a millionaire's tax," Steinhardt said. "What you're doing is chasing away those who can afford to pay it and replacing them with people who can't."





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ELECTIONS 2018: THE YEAR OF WOMEN IN POLITICS



The winter was coming on and a party player acknowledged his 2018 problem to InsiderNJ. He had Menendez at the top of the ticket. Then he had more males running for freeholder seats. And another brace of men in key local races. He had fat white males coming out of ears, in point of cold fact.

“I need a woman,” he said, in semi-desperation, referring to the congressional contest in his district. He wasn’t being sexist, just pragmatic in an environment saddled by an imploding white male order epitomized by President Donald J. Trump.

White male Democrats could point the finger at the President’s unraveling Twitter

feed, but they also knew his ongoing public seizures had the toxic associative effect of reminding people that something was terribly wrong with the gender that once sat majestically atop a white horse in the public imagination. Complicating matters was the bewildering fact that New Jersey had a lone woman in the congressional delegation.

Just one.

New Jerseyans could run around laughing about Roy Moore and Alabama. But Alabama had *two* women in its delegation. That particular boss’ dilemma had an easy solution. In the pre-primary battles among men and women to take on incumbent congress people, women had a decided edge.

Not in CD2, where state Senator Jeff Van Drew had muscled his way into position to succeed the retiring U.S. Rep. Frank LoBiondo (R-2), and not in CD3, another potential battleground where Andy Kim put his early imprimatur on the district.

But certainly in CD7 and CD11.

In those districts, people like former Assistant Secretary of State Tom Malinowski (7), attorney Goutam Jois (7), social worker Peter Jacob (7) and Passaic County Freeholder John Bartlett (11) had a distinct disadvantage. In this climate, with Moore allegedly hanging out at the malls in pursuit of underage women, Sen-

Continued on Page 29



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ator Al Franken hanging up his spurs amid charges of sexual harassment, men in office everywhere crashing like human bowling pins and the President infuriating and antagonizing, their women rivals possessed a real story to tell.

U.S. Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-11) brightened the old boys network target on his own back when he wrote a note to the head of a bank complaining about a “ring-leader” who worked there organizing protests against him. It came across as whiny privileged weakness. One Democratic Party operative practically salivated at the general election prospect of having Sherrill standing beside that woman, Saily Avelenda, in front of a Swift Boat-style line-up of grimly ramrod women in an ad and saying something along the lines of, “Rodney Frelinghuysen tried to take Saily’s job, and now we’re going to take his job.”

Just as Sherrill looked ready to pull the party together in CD11, with counselor Tamara Harris still showing signs of her own strength, however; a Democratic Party Year of the Woman opportunity appeared late in the year to put Weber on track to challenge U.S. Rep. Leonard Lance in CD7.

An Interview with CD7 candidate Linda Weber



Buoyed by signs of progressive life in Central Jersey, and increasingly disturbed by the course of politics in the

era of President Donald J. Trump, former statistician and 30-year veteran of the banking industry, CD7 Democratic candidate Linda Weber of Berkeley Heights, seeks a showdown with incumbent U.S. Rep. Leonard Lance (R-7).

“I’m very concerned right now about the anti-science movement, and the marketing from the right to equate opinion with fact,” Weber told InsiderNJ in a coffee shop sit-down. “I see the substitution of opinion for data, when we need to use data to govern. In addition, I see our leaders becoming more mean. When did we become so mean?”

Hillary Clinton’s loss to Trump last year staggered the lifelong Democrat, who as a senior vice president at CoreStates Bank routinely herself the only woman seated at the executives’ table, daughter of a father whom she describes as “the first feminist.” A business and technology expert, Weber led CoreStates’ efforts to build a partnership with Microsoft.

“We need more diversity in Congress,” she said with a smile. “There are not a lot of technology experts in Congress right now.”

Weber said she sees Lance as part of the problem, his one-time moderation curtailed in the Obama years with his repeated chastising from the right following his aye vote on cap and trade and subsequent Lonegan-backing over-correction, his fierce, years-long opposition to the Affordable Care Act (ACA), and now tack back to the middle with a nay vote on ACA repeal as Trump appears to unravel.

“His voting record indicates that he has no conviction whatsoever,” said the Democrat. “He votes against the tax bill in the House, and then last night he voted to send the bill to conference committee.”

“He used to be pro-environment, and now [in 2016] he has a 13% rating from the League of Conservation Voters,” Weber added. “80% of New Jersey supports Planned Parenthood.” The organization counts Lance as an antagonist, especially since his town hall remarks on the subject earlier this year. “What I have suggested to Planned Parenthood is that it have two separate organizations: one organization that deals in the services regarding women’s health and another organization that performs the abortion procedure,” Lance said. “I would hope that Planned Parenthood might look at that.”

Citing the aftermath of the Charlottesville killing, Weber said Lance reminded people why he’s a “backbencher, and not a leader,” arguing that the country needed to see some action, “starting with a strengthening of the Voting Rights Act.”

Trying to get out of a packed field of Democratic contenders looking to take on Lance, Weber promises to run a 75-town campaign in the 7th District, and – if she can ice her same-party rivals – anticipates putting together a \$4-7 million financial effort to credibly take on the Republican incumbent. She supports the millionaire’s tax as presented by Governor-elect Phil Murphy, but notes, “Centrist voters in our district want to know their tax dollars are well used.”



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MENENDEZ ATTEMPTS TO BURNISH HIS COMEBACK KID STATUS BY SECURING ANOTHER TERM IN THE U.S. SENATE



Maybe the two are utterly unrelated. God knows, they should be. But U.S. Senator Al Franken's political demise probably makes it less likely that the feds will attempt a second tomahawking of Menendez, who's up for reelection in 2018. The South still hasn't issued an endorsement of the incumbent U.S. Senator, but practically everyone else who counts, including Essex, Hudson, Bergen, Passaic and Middlesex all signaled a collective thumbs-up on the same day that a jury hung itself at Menendez's corruption trial.

Maybe retiring Assemblyman John Wisniewski (D-19) or former federal prosecutor Jim Johnson – each sitting on 100,000

votes apiece from last year's respective failed gubernatorial contest - takes a stab at the seat in the primary.

But what about the Republican Party?

Who will run against Menendez?

It's difficult to see the safety-first Senate Minority Leader Tom Kean, Jr. (R-21) putting himself in harm's way again with Menendez and risk getting lawnmowed out of earshot.

Although he has to examine the poetic justice opportunity of a rematch, Kean certainly appears highly unlikely to run.

Not in this climate.

Short of running for reelection, no patriot in New Jersey would willingly put himself in front of the lurid clown car that is the Trump Presidency. Too much went into the Kean brand to risk a Trump muddying.

What about Assemblyman Jack Ciattarelli (R-16)? Didn't he summon a lot of goodwill in the party this year in battling down cancer and ultimately losing to Kim Guadagno?

Continued on Page 33



GET THE RIGHT PLAYERS ON THE FIELD.

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He did, which is why he won't run.

Ciattarelli's an executive at heart. He won't waste his time with a U.S. Senate run.

Assembly Minority Leader Jon Bramnick (R-21)?

Don't think so.

Bramnick is another pragmatist.

We don't have any hard information on this right now but we're guessing that state Senator Joe Pennacchio (R-26) takes a real hard look at a run. We've seen a lot of activity out of the Morris Senator's office lately, and our guess is he's measuring a

2018 run. Remember, Pennacchio ran before, in 2008, and showed some promise before losing the nomination to former U.S. Rep. Dick Zimmer, who was ultimately defeated by the late U.S. Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ).

Jersey Joe always left the door open for a comeback, and, with Menendez at less than full strength and yet most other Republicans frightened away by Trump torment, this just might be his year.



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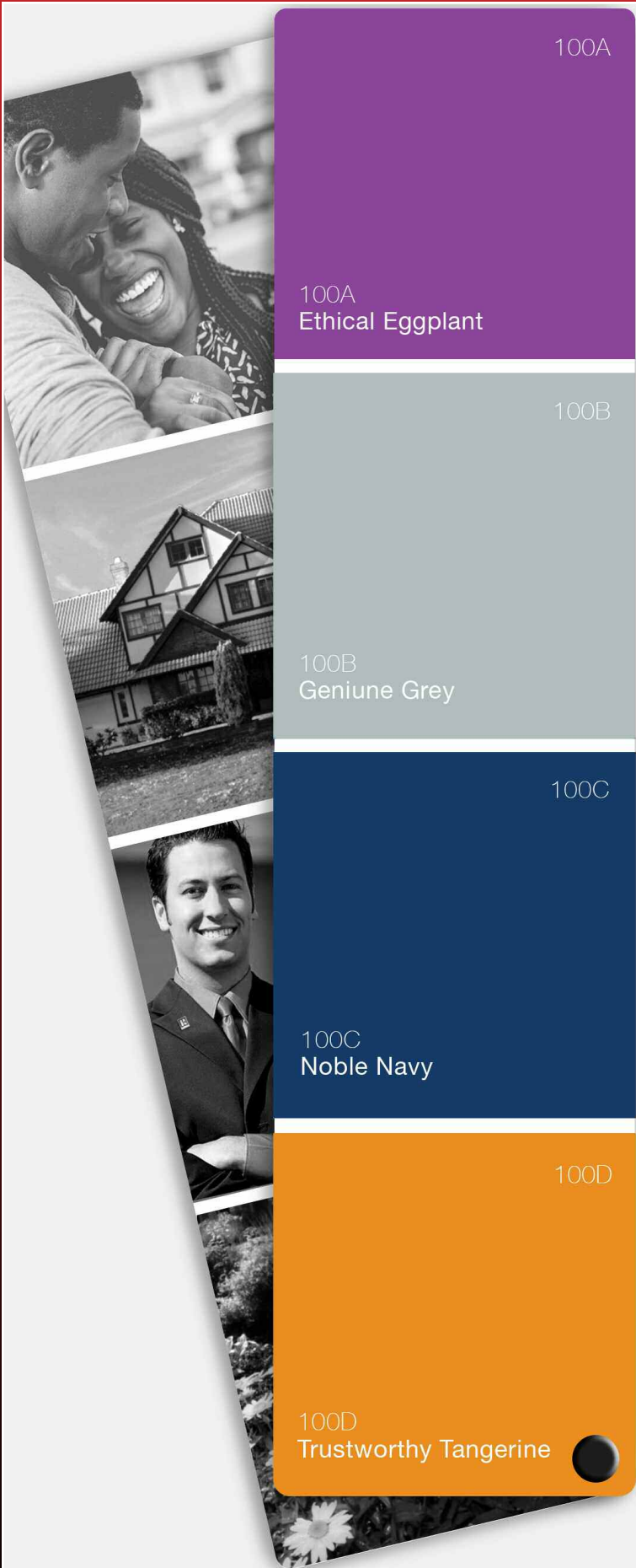
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KEY CONGRESSIONAL CONTESTS



VAN DREW READIES FOR HIS FEDERAL CLOSE-UP IN CD2

U.S. Rep. Frank LoBiondo (R-2) finally tapped out this year, opening up an opportunity for the long-circling state Senator Jeff Van Drew (D-1).

Now Van Drew has a real organization, and a very strong campaign manager in Allison Murphy. But Republicans still figure they have a shot, and will fight to keep the seat.

Some GOP names in the mix early include lame duck Atlantic City Mayor Don Guardian, former Assemblyman Vince Polistina (R-2), and engineer Hirsh Singh.

Van Drew may yet have a primary. Retired teacher Tanzee Youngblood is already an announced candidate for the Democratic nomination.




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KEY CONGRESSIONAL CONTESTS CON'T.**MACARTHUR'S TRUMP TEST IN CD3**

Of all the members of New Jersey's Congressional Delegation, U.S. Rep. Tom MacArthur (R-3) has most consistently sided with President Donald J Trump, significantly on the repeal of the Affordable Care Act and in his support for the President's controversial tax plan.

Andy Kim, a former strategic adviser to Generals David Petraeus and John Allen, announced early and is running a well-funded Democratic Party challenge against him.

This is a race to watch, not only because a Democrat, the late U.S. Rep. John Adler, won in the 3rd in 2008. Of course, it was a different district then, pre 2011 redistricting, with Cherry Hill still in it and Brick out of, but Kim, in this climate, has a shot.

There's the added intrigue of the politically talented MacArthur projecting strongly as a key part of the NJGOP's rebuilding efforts in the aftermath of Christie. If he bucks Kim, particularly with Trump tethered to him, he could scare Democrats like Murphy, especially if Murphy flounders in his first year as governor.

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KEY CONGRESSIONAL CONTESTS CON'T.



NORTH JERSEY STAR GOTTHEIMER GETS THE LONEGAN TREATMENT IN CD5

Aided by Trump and a tax plan that harms New Jersey property owners by nixing state and local tax deductions, U.S. Rep. Josh Gottheimer (D-5) takes nothing for granted as he seeks to protect a seat he jackhammered away from the GOP in 2016.

Perennial movement conservative contender, former Bogota Mayor Steve Lonegan, has run an aggressive campaign early, nailing down the endorsements of key leaders in the district, including state Senator Steve Oroho (R-24) and others, catching Bergen attorney John McCann somewhat flat-footed.

While Lonegan backed Trump's tax plan, McCann ducked the issue.

But a very engaged Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) loves the fact that Lonegan endorsed Trump's tax plan in, of all places, in New Jersey, and Team Gottheimer sees the perfect matchup opportunity with the man who ran to the right of Christie in his failed but always creative and aggressive 2009 gubernatorial bid. Lonegan actually strongly politically resembles Scott Garrett, the Republican Gottheimer iced to win the seat in the first place.



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KEY CONGRESSIONAL CONTESTS CON'T.**CD11: THE SHERRILL'S**

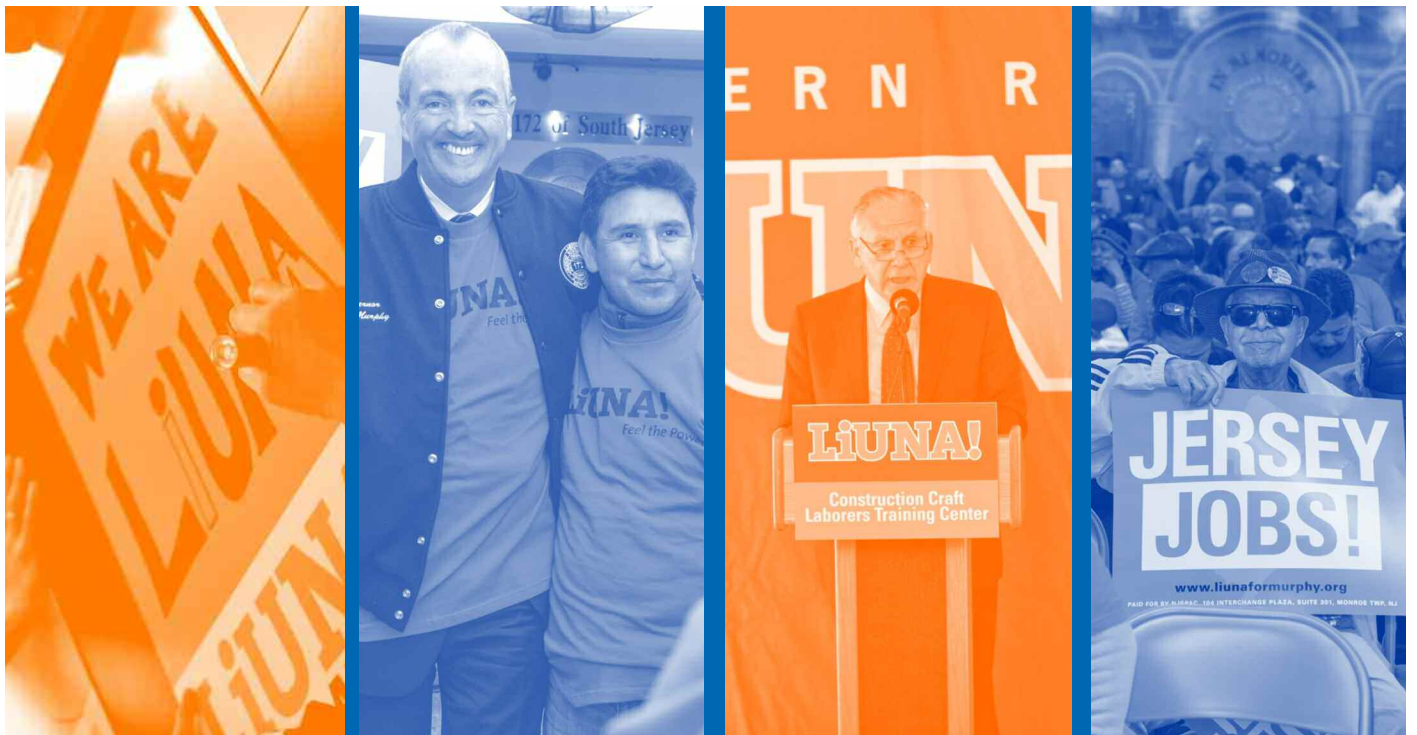
Frelinghuysen looks vulnerable.

That letter he wrote to his banker friend proved it.

A retired Navy helicopter pilot and former prosecutor, Mikie Sherrill (pictured, above, with Woodland Park Mayor Keith Kazmark) of Montclair has run a very good campaign to this point to all but suffocate the chances of other Democratic Primary contenders, among them Passaic County Freeholder John Bartlett and counselor Tamara Harris.

The party establishment appeared ready to endorse her as the year came to a close, and while that excited her allies, insiders noted Frelinghuysen's long-time manhandling of all challengers and the gerrymandered Republican dimensions of the leafy North Jersey district.

Even if Sherrill prevailed in the primary, the general election against a Vietnam veteran powerful incumbent would be an altogether different challenge.



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LOCAL CONTESTS TO WATCH



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We're heading into an Election Year, so everyone's buzzing about subpoenas in Brick City.

It's always like that in the state's biggest city.

We remember when Cory Booker's administration was supposed to be finished in 2010 and then his opponent was the one who ended up getting devoured by an indictment. No one sees much difficulty for Ras Baraka to win reelection. But there are several critical questions. Will everyone around him survive into the next term, or will he lose someone along the way to the feds? Also – will he be able to beat Gayle Chaneyfield Jenkins in the Central Ward, and coattail his entire team to safety?

Questions persist about the political lifespan of longtime East Ward Councilman Augusto Amador, for example. And will the entire at-large slate withstand stiff challenges. Presumably by up-and coming women?

Abandoning her Central Ward seat to run for mayor, Councilwoman Gayle Chaneyfield Jenkins has some old school allies, including former Mayor Sharpe James and perennial operator Calvin West. Not many give her a chance to beat Baraka, particularly after Phil Murphy endorsed the sitting mayor rather than stick with the councilwoman, an early backer of his while Baraka still nursed hopes of Jersey City Mayor Steven Fulop in Drumthwacket. But don't count her out, especially in times like these with women empowered, and men under a glaring societal microscope.

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LOCAL CONTESTS TO WATCH CON'T.



PATERSON: JONATHAN DIENST FOR MAYOR

If you're looking for us next year, you can start in Silk City, because no one really knows who will win the May nonpartisan race for mayor, which makes the contest exciting.

It starts with the fact that Mayor Jose "Joey" Torres – bagged on corruption charges this year following an investigative report by NBC stud Jonathan Dienst and sentenced to five years in prison - leaves behind an empty seat on the second floor of City Hall. A lot of people want to sit on the throne of power, starting with At-Large Councilman Alex Mendez, a vigorous campaigner who enjoys the built-in advantages of an Hispanic city and a growth spurt in Paterson by Dominicans. Mendez is a worker, who earned the most citywide votes in 2010.

Standing in his way is former Deputy Mayor Pedro Rodriguez, regarded as one of the intelligent strategic minds in Paterson, whose fledgling campaign has already taken on the organizational appearance of a significant citywide threat.

Don't forget Ward 6 Councilman Andre Sayegh, who kicked off his campaign last month. Sayegh lost twice in back to back bids for mayor, first in 2010 and again in 2014. But he gave Torres a very tough contest last time in placing second in a large field, and no one will ever outwork him. The trouble is that he probably won't have the depth of institutional support behind him next year that he had in 2014. He has built his own relationships and his own substantive record. But right now, the party apparatus appears more inclined to go elsewhere in its search for the perfect candidate to trip up the rest of the field.

Sources continue to identify Kenyatta Stewart, corporation counsel for the City of Newark, as the surprise, no-nonsense pick. A law and order man who helped discard former Councilman Rigo Rodriguez, Stewart has a bright halo around his head in the eyes of Assemblyman Benjie Wimberly (D-35), himself an always whispered about potential mayoral candidate. By the time he pulls his campaign team together he may have not only Wimberly but U.S. Rep. Bill Pascrell and Passaic County Democratic Committee Chairman John Currie.

Those aren't the only people running.

School Board Member Manny Martinez wants in, and 3rd Ward Councilman Bill McKoy has already formally announced. There may be others. First Ward Councilman Mike Jackson could run, and former Police Director Glenn Brown has been running for at least a year.

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LOCAL CONTESTS TO WATCH CON'T.



BAYONNE BLOODBATH

This will be the bloodiest campaign of all time – or at east of 2018.

We take no joy in writing that sentence. It just happens to be true.

Bayonne once put Chuck Wepner in the ring against Mohammed Ali in a contest that inspired Sly Stallone to write Rocky, which should give you some sense of the underlying fibers of Bayonne, the kind of town that insists on going to war with itself and going out only after getting zipped into a body bag.

Dramatic? Yes, very. It's Bayonne. That's the way it's built.

On the one side you have incumbent Mayor Jimmy Davis, who came up through the ranks of the police department – a salt and pepper haired man's man who has the Hudson County Democratic Organization (HCDO) at his side. Then you have challenger former Assemblyman Jason O'Donnell (D-31), a retired firefighter and consigliere of former Mayor Mark Smith, the man turned out of city hall in 2014 by Davis.

They hate each other, which makes life difficult for the rest of the people in town, who will have to either pick a side or bolt the doors and draw the blinds on their homes for the next five months.

Davis' allies say the mayor has a great record, but he will have to paddle his way through the treacherous waters of sexual harassment allegations as well as the associative irritation wrought by his campaign manager, the Machiavellian Joe DeMarco.

One X factor to consider is the likely amped presence in the contest of U.S. Senator Bob Menendez (D-NJ), who came off the old slab of a corruption trial to stride Broadway now like the ghost of Christmas Past. He didn't like Smith, and to the extent that Menendez wants to remind people of his resurgence, he can engage his lieutenants to make life especially miserable for O'Donnell.

This is a critical cage match... er, race... to watch.

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A FEW OTHERS**ESSEX COUNTY EXECUTIVE**

In charge of a billion dollars' worth of patronage, veteran Executive Joe DiVincenzo – despite getting his wings somewhat clipped by an ELEC investigation – looks to have amassed too much political power to face any problems in a Democratic Primary. We'll see who ends up running against him.

BERGEN COUNTY EXECUTIVE

This looks like a cakewalk for incumbent Executive James "Jimmy" Tedesco. It wasn't clear at the end of the year who would run against him.

At one time, Assemblywoman Holly Schepisi (R-39) looked like a smart bet for a run, but post-Christie era Republicans face real rebuilding challenges in blue state New Jersey.

ROSELLE

This time in his hometown and for council seats, Assemblyman Jamel Holley will face another attempt by Senator-elect Joe Cryan to soften him up as a war paint-wearing Cryan seeks to squeegee out the last vestiges of retiring Senator Ray Lesniak.

**LONG BRANCH**

Veteran Mayor Adam Schneider may face a challenge from the little brother of U.S. Rep. Frank Pallone (D-6): John Pallone.

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PEOPLE TO WATCH**Doug Steinhardt:**

The new Chairman of the New Jersey Republican Party will attempt to fashion a vision out of the ashes of Chris Christie.

**John Currie:**

The veteran Chairman of the New Jersey Democratic Party finds himself in the middle of a dogfight with Senate President Steve Sweeney (D-3) as he advocates for Governor-elect Murphy against, by the looks of it, a mischief-making South.

**Declan O'Scanlon:**

His colleagues on both sides of the aisle consider the Republican Senator-elect from Little Silver one of the state's experts on the budget.

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Best of luck to our friends and colleagues in 2018!

Sean M. Darcy, President

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PEOPLE TO WATCH CON'T.



Troy Singleton:

Watch him. Schooled by former Speaker Joe Roberts, the Democratic Senator-elect from Willingboro will emerge early as one of the senate's most effective players.



Britnee Timberlake:

Look for the President of the Essex County Freeholder Board to move up and snag the LD34 Assembly seat vacated by Lieutenant Governor-elect Sheila Oliver.



Dick Codey:

An early backer of Murphy for Governor, the reenergized former Governor (and 27th District Senator) is said to be walking around the Statehouse in Seven-League boots.

Happy Holidays & Wishing Everyone a Healthy New Year

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PEOPLE TO WATCH CON'T.



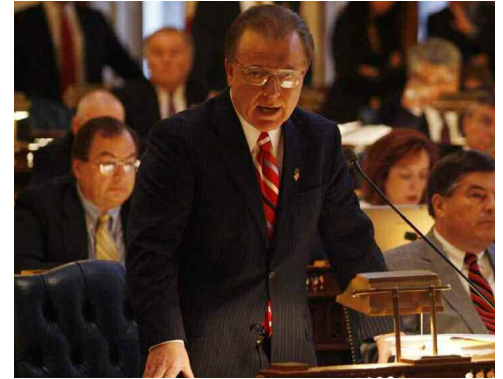
Chris James:

A respected veteran party player and East Orange Councilman, James appears to be in line to grab the freeholder seat Timberlake will vacate when she goes to Trenton.



Joe Cryan:

The Senator-elect from the 20th District could make a play to lead the Union County Democratic Party and succeed Assemblyman Jerry Green (D-22) as early as June of 2018.



Joe Pennacchio:

Will the 26th District Senator finally get his shot at a statewide general election?



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GATEWAY MEDIA

PEOPLE TO WATCH CON'T.**Shelley Brindle:**

The Mayor-elect of Westfield led a people power movement in her hometown, and could prove a difference-maker with a Democratic Primary endorsement in the CD7 tilt.

**Vin Gopal:**

For years one of the state's truest old school relationship and party builders, InsiderNJ Winner of the Year businessman Gopal will assume the oath of office as the senator of the 11th District.

**Jay Webber:**

If Frelinghuysen decides he doesn't want to run, would the gifted LD26 movement conservative Assemblyman finally step up and run for federal office? No one's saying Frelinghuysen isn't running, but if he doesn't, all eyes will be on Webber.

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PEOPLE TO WATCH CON'T.



Nick Scutari:

The 22nd District has close ties to Sweeney but is the senate chamber's main champion of marijuana legalization, a signature Murphy initiative.



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