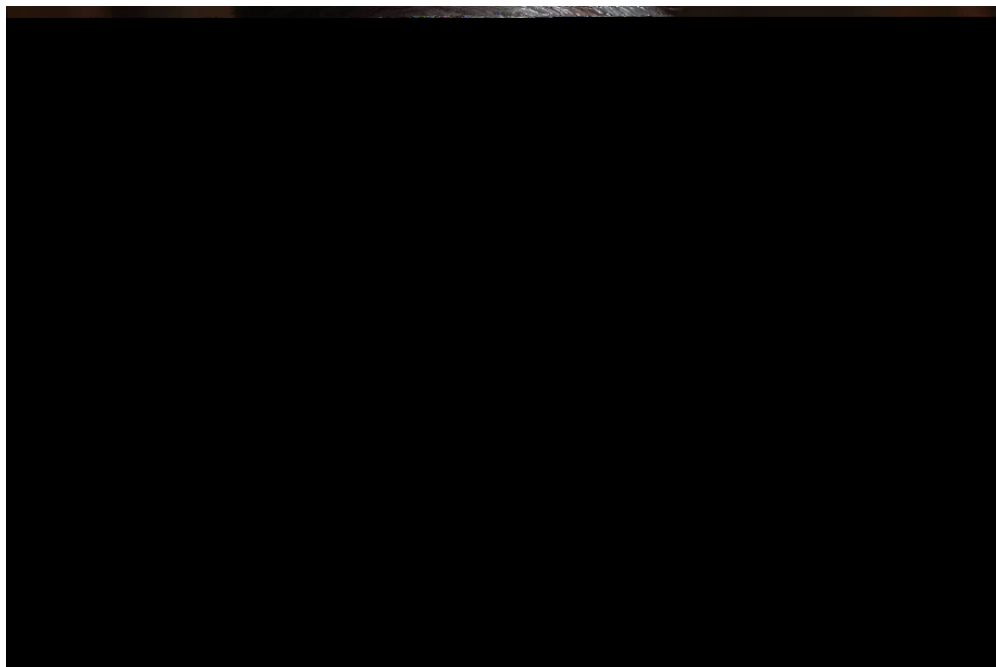


How Bob Menendez's corruption trial is making Democrats nervous about a safe Senate seat

Democratic Sen. Menendez is in a close race in New Jersey. What does that mean for Democrats taking back the Senate?

By Ella Nilsen | ella.nilsen@vox.com | Oct 4, 2018, 11:00am EDT



New Jersey Sen. Bob Menendez speaks to reporters on Capitol Hill. | Getty Images

Senate Democrats' nightmare scenario is one where they do everything right: hold all their tough red states; pick off an important swing state like Nevada, Arizona, or Tennessee; and still fail to take back the Senate when it all comes crumbling down in New Jersey.

Their fate could be tied to the fate of Sen. Bob Menendez, a longtime Democratic incumbent who is in the toughest race of his career. About a year ago, Menendez was embroiled in a corruption trial that **ended in with a hung jury and a mistrial**. There was a lot of speculation about whether Menendez would be expelled from the Senate if he was convicted, but he ran for reelection after the mistrial was declared.

As Democrats ramp up an anti-corruption message in 2018 aimed at stamping out lobbying and money in politics, Menendez's Republican challenger Bob Hugin has spent the summer attacking him as corrupt.

"I don't believe [the Stockton] poll," said Duffy. "I don't think it's that close. Do I think Hugin has done some damage to Menendez? Yes."

Even so, Duffy moved the New Jersey Senate seat from Likely Democrat to Lean Democrat in [NBC's Ratings Show](#) Wednesday.

Democrats are running on anti-corruption, and Menendez is a sore point

As [Vox's Andrew Prokop has detailed](#), in April 2015 the Justice Department brought a corruption case against Menendez, who it accused of using his position as a senator to benefit a Florida eye doctor named Salim Melgen — someone convicted of defrauding Medicare of more than **\$90 million**. Menendez calls Melgen a friend, but vehemently denies committing crimes to help him.

As Prokop [wrote last year](#):

Prosecutors are alleging that Menendez [accused](#)

year he ran. Golden thinks Democrats will have to spend a lot on get-out-the vote efforts this year, something they haven't had to do much of before.

"They have to spend a hell of a lot of money to get their people out to the polls," he said. "I don't think the national Democrats anticipated having to put any money into the New Jersey Senate race."

Of course, Golden, Murray and others in New Jersey caution not to count Menendez out. He's a well-known political entity in the Garden State, and will be spending plenty of money attacking Hugin's pharmaceutical background and campaign contributions to President Donald Trump, who is supremely disliked in the Garden State.

"We have enough voters saying I'm willing to hold my nose and vote for Menendez," Murray said.

Corre^{it}ch