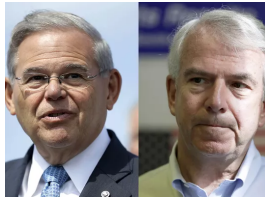




NJ Senate race: Bob Menendez trailing Bob Hugin in South Jersey House district, poll says

Herb Jackson, North Jersey Record | Published 1:37 p.m. ET Sept. 19, 2018 | Updated 6:30 p.m. ET Sept. 19, 2018



(Photo: AP/NorthJersey.com)

Sen. Bob Menendez trails Republican challenger Bob Hugin, 46 percent to 36 percent, in a Republican-held South Jersey Congressional district that otherwise appears to be primed for a Democratic takeover in November, a [poll released Wednesday](https://stockton.edu/news/2018/2nd-district-congressional-poll.html) (<https://stockton.edu/news/2018/2nd-district-congressional-poll.html>) by Stockton University says.

The poll said that while Menendez trailed Hugin in the 2nd District, Democratic House candidate Jeff Van Drew had a 55 percent to 32 percent lead over Republican Seth Grossman in the race to replace 12-term Republican Rep. Frank LoBiondo, who is retiring.

The figures indicate that even if there is a Democratic [wave that turns red House districts blue](https://www.northjersey.com/story/news/politics/elections/2018/09/04/labor-day-update-where-things-stand-nj/1145972002/) ([/story/news/politics/elections/2018/09/04/labor-day-update-where-things-stand-nj/1145972002/](https://www.northjersey.com/story/news/politics/elections/2018/09/04/labor-day-update-where-things-stand-nj/1145972002/)), it is not guaranteed to boost Menendez as he battles for a third Senate term after surviving a corruption trial last year.

When he last ran in 2012, Menendez beat his opponent by 14 percentage points [in the 2nd district](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Jersey%27s_2nd_congressional_district) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Jersey%27s_2nd_congressional_district), which includes all of Atlantic, Cape May and Cumberland and Salem counties and parts of four other counties.

Battlegrounds: [NJ campaigns that could decide control of Congress](https://www.northjersey.com/story/news/politics/elections/2018/09/04/labor-day-update-where-things-stand-nj/1145972002/) ([/story/news/politics/elections/2018/09/04/labor-day-update-where-things-stand-nj/1145972002/](https://www.northjersey.com/story/news/politics/elections/2018/09/04/labor-day-update-where-things-stand-nj/1145972002/)) this year

Dem attack: [What's behind the ads accusing Bob Hugin of 'killing off cancer patients'](https://www.northjersey.com/story/news/politics/elections/2018/08/07/senate-bob-hugin-nj-political-ads/760327002/) ([/story/news/politics/elections/2018/08/07/senate-bob-hugin-nj-political-ads/760327002/](https://www.northjersey.com/story/news/politics/elections/2018/08/07/senate-bob-hugin-nj-political-ads/760327002/))

GOP attack: [Hugin's campaign says Menendez found 'guilty,' but no court said that](https://www.northjersey.com/story/news/politics/elections/2018/09/17/midterm-2018-what-ethics-committee-said-bob-menendez-did-did-not-do/1074646002/) ([/story/news/politics/elections/2018/09/17/midterm-2018-what-ethics-committee-said-bob-menendez-did-did-not-do/1074646002/](https://www.northjersey.com/story/news/politics/elections/2018/09/17/midterm-2018-what-ethics-committee-said-bob-menendez-did-did-not-do/1074646002/))

Democrat Barack Obama, at the top of the ticket in 2012, won the district by 8 points, but voters there supported Donald Trump over Hillary Clinton by 4 points in 2016. At the same time, Clinton carried other parts of the state to rack up a 14-point victory in New Jersey, a model Menendez hopes to replicate.

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The poll found Van Drew's support was 88 percent among Democrats, while Menendez's was 69 percent. Among independents, Van Drew's support was 49 percent, compared with 23 percent for Menendez. The margin of error for the subgroups is much higher than the 4.2 percentage points for the overall poll, but the differences are still significant.

"This poll confirms what Democrats, independents, and Republicans already know: Marine veteran and job creator Bob Hugin is the better Bob in this race," Hugin spokesman Nick Iacovella said. "Menendez, one of the most unethical Senators in the history of our state, remains wildly unpopular among New Jerseyans."

Menendez's campaign saw the poll as evidence of a blue wave coming around the state.

"Senator Menendez is working hard to remind voters that this election matters more," Menendez campaign manager Frank Schultz said. "He has been a champion of expanding healthcare access, equality for women and the LGBTQ community, and has stood up to Donald Trump time and time again."

After an 11-week trial, the jury deadlocked on the Menendez charges. He then was acquitted by the judge on several of the most significant bribery allegations before the Justice Department dropped the rest of the case. Menendez was subsequently [admonished by the Senate's ethics committee \(/story/news/politics/elections/2018/09/17/midterm-2018-what-ethics-committee-said-bob-menendez-did-did-not-do/1074646002/\)](#), which concluded he used his office to benefit the business and personal interests of a contributor.

A [statewide poll by Quinnipiac University \(/story/news/politics/elections/2018/08/22/2018-nj-senate-poll-bob-menendez-has-slim-lead-over-bob-hugin/1054478002/\)](#) in August found Menendez leading 43 percent to 37 percent, down from a 17-point lead in March.

That drop came as Hugin, a former CEO of the pharmaceutical company Celgene Corp., used his personal wealth to fund campaign ads attacking Menendez's ethics and offer himself as a moderate alternative who supports [abortion rights, same sex marriage \(/story/news/new-jersey/2018/06/14/republican-support-abortion-and-gay-marriage-njs-hugin-advertises/701075002/\)](#) and a pathway to [citizenship for undocumented immigrants \(/story/news/politics/elections/2018/08/30/gops-bob-hugin-supports-immigration-and-offers-defense-drug-prices/1134472002/\)](#).

The Stockton poll asked an open-ended question about the most important issue to 2nd District voters, and taxes came out on top with 12 percent, followed by Trump (11 percent), and control of Congress (9 percent). Corruption or restoring integrity ranked eighth, with only 4 percent.

But when asked specifically about corruption, 61 percent of voters said it was "an extremely important factor" and 25 percent said "a significant factor" in their decision how to vote. Another 10 percent said it was a minor factor and 3 percent said it was not a factor at all.

Menendez began responding to Hugin with [his own TV commercials \(/story/news/politics/elections/2018/08/21/nj-elections-2018-ad-bob-hugin-and-bob-menendez-chose-different-paths-union-city-nj/1050306002/\)](#) just before Labor Day. He has attacked Hugin for [profiting from price increases on drugs vital to cancer patients \(/story/news/politics/elections/2018/08/07/senate-bob-hugin-nj-political-ads/760327002/\)](#) while at Celgene. The Democrat also challenges Hugin's claims he was a moderate by pointing to his support for Trump, which included campaign contributions and serving as a Trump delegate at the Republican National Convention in 2016.

The Senate poll found Libertarian Party candidate Murray Sabrin had 3 percent support, while other candidates got 8 percent, and 6 percent were undecided.

Some 29 percent of voters had a favorable opinion of Menendez while 56 percent had an unfavorable opinion. Hugin was better liked by those who know him, with 37 percent favorable and 19 percent unfavorable, but 41 percent were unfamiliar with him.

"This looks like bad news for Senator Menendez and good news for Bob Hugin, but keep in mind that the 2nd District is more rural and more moderate than most of New Jersey," said Michael W. Klein, interim executive director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University.

Asked about Trump's job performance, 49 percent of likely voters in the district said it was poor, while 10 percent said it was fair, 19 percent good, and 22 percent excellent.

Stockton's poll surveyed 535 likely voters in the 2nd District from Sept. 12 to 18, and the results have a margin of error of plus or minus 4.2 percentage points.

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