



NC-Sen: As The GOP Primary Is About To Get Crowded, Kay Hagan (D) Gears Up For 2014

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Figured I'd give you all an update on the upcoming U.S. Senate race in North Carolina. So late last month, Senator Kay Hagan (D) received her first GOP opponent for the 2014 Senate race:

We're still more than a year and a half away from the mid-term elections, but a challenger threw his hat in the ring to run for US Senate.

Wilmington was the first stop on Greg Brannon's campaign tour this morning. The Tea Party conservative wants to unseat Democrat Kay Hagan.

"I was raised by a single mom, I have a younger brother, grew up in a working class neighborhood," Brannon, an obstetrician from Cary, said. "I was the first member of my family to go to college. Fortunately I got a scholarship and was able to become a doctor. It's been the dream of my life, and I had the opportunity to live the american dream."

Now the conservative is calling out supporters in an effort to take over current Sen. Hagan's seat.

"I believe central planning has destroyed individual rights we have to get back to the understanding that when individuals are in charge of their freedom, society is at its best," Brannon said. - Beaufort Observer, 2/28/13

Now who knows how far Brannon will get in the primary, especially since he's not one of Art Pope's preferred candidates. For those of you who don't know who Art Pope is, he's the guy who owns the North Carolina GOP controlled state legislator and governorship:

Mr. McCrory first ran for governor in 2008 but was beaten by Ms. Perdue, then the lieutenant governor, who became the state's first female governor. As a mayor on the moderate side of his party, Mr. McCrory had bipartisan support and was perhaps best known for revitalizing Charlotte with projects like a light-rail system and the Nascar museum.

His large transition team is being studied for signs of whether he will turn more conservative. It is heavy with Republican politicians and business leaders, including former members of President George W. Bush's administration and former governors. The most controversial figures on the team are the billionaire businessman Art Pope and some of his allies who are connected to the John William Pope Foundation. The group, which is dedicated to conservative and free-market ideas, has given millions of dollars to libertarian and conservative groups, including the Cato Institute, the Heritage Foundation and Americans for Prosperity. - New York Times, 12/11/12

But two of Pope's chosen Republican candidates have in their own way indicated that they want to go up against Hagan in 2014. First there's State Senate Leader Phil Berger (R. NC):

As the GOP eyes pathways to a Senate majority in 2014, Phil Berger, the president pro tem of the North Carolina state Senate, says he's been mulling a campaign against Sen. Kay Hagan, who is among a handful of vulnerable Southern Democrats up for reelection.

"I've been approached by a number of folks who've suggested that that's something that I need to consider, or something that they would like for me to consider," said Berger, in an interview Monday with National Journal and Hotline On Call. "I've thought about it some."

"There will be time to make a decision about whether I do that [jump into the Senate race], or I support someone else in that effort as we move forward," Berger added.

Berger is one of several Republicans rumored to be considering a challenge to Hagan next year, including some in the GOP with whom Berger has close ties. Berger works closely with state House Speaker Thom Tillis, and Rep. Virginia Foxx helped recruit Berger to run for the state Senate. - National Journal, 3/4/13

Emphasis mine.

That's right, Virginia "Crazy Like A" Foxx helped recruit a slime bag like Berger to run for State Senate and work his way up to become State Senate Leader. Then again, it should be no surprise, being that Berger is the guy spreading blatant lies to push slashing unemployment benefits in North Carolina on his own website:

attribution: None Specified

Senate President Pro Tem Phil Berger sent an email response to a constituent yesterday on the subject of the proposed legislation to slash unemployment insurance benefits. Sadly, the email is riddled with misinformation to the degree that one wonders whether the senator truly understands what he is doing to the unemployment insurance system. - The Progressive Pulse, 2/12/13

Alexandra Sirota of the NC Budget and Tax Center gives a point by point refutation of Berger's lies that you can read here:

So yeah, that's Phil Berger. Now there's also State House Speaker Thom Tillis (R. NC) that has long been mentioned as a potential Hagan opponent. He made his move in a more subtle way:

Don't look now, but the GOP primary for the 2014 Senate race may have just started.

A 501(c)4 called the North Carolina House Legislative Partners announced Tuesday morning that it's launched a television ad touting the agenda of House leaders.

The ad stars House Speaker Thom Tillis, who's widely rumored to be a likely candidate for the GOP nomination to challenge Democratic U.S. Sen. Kay Hagan.

"We all know that small businesses are the economic engine of North Carolina," Tillis says to the camera, standing in what appears to be an auto parts store. "We need the right priorities to create new jobs and move our economy forward."

"I'm Thom Tillis, speaker of the North Carolina House of Representatives," he says in a close-up shot. "Please join me in helping to set the right priorities for our great state." - WRAL, 3/12/13

The goal for the ad is to get citizens to take the online survey to let the state legislator know what their constituents employees are. One of Tillis' priorities is to push for more voter ID laws to suppress the vote:

attribution: None Specified

RALEIGH — House Republicans announced plans Tuesday to begin moving the politically divisive voter photo ID bill through the legislature, saying they would slow walk it to give all parties the opportunity to comment.

GOP lawmakers, who have enough votes to pass the measure, disclosed a schedule that will begin with a public hearing on March 12 followed by two House committee meetings in which expert testimony will be heard. The bill will likely be introduced in late March and voted on by the House in mid-April.

"We are going to go through a very deliberative, response-full and interactive approach through public hearings so that we arrive at a policy that is fair and that takes into account legitimate reasons why voters may not have an ID and puts into effect a way in which those IDs can be issued," Tillis said at a news conference attended by about 30 GOP House members.

Tillis said the measure – which would require voters to produce a photo identification such as a driver's license when they go to the polls – had the support of nearly three-fourths of Tar Heel voters, according to polls. - Charlotte News Observer, 3/5/13

North Carolina Democratic chairman and Pittsboro mayor, Randy Voller, called the bill "the specter of Jim Crow." So with Brannon announcing his bid as the Tea Party candidate, Berge pushing lies to slash unemployment benefits and Tillis doing what he can to suppress the vote, you'd think these Republicans would be in a three way tie for the nominee. But they aren't:

PPP's monthly look at the North Carolina Senate race once again finds a new leader on the Republican side. Lieutenant Governor Dan Forest, tested for the first time, leads the way among GOP voters at 18%, followed by Virginia Foxx at 13%, Cherie Berry at 12%, Renee Ellmers at 10%, Phil Berger at 8%, Patrick McHenry at 7%, Greg Brannon at 4%, Thom Tillis at 2%, and Terry Emblar at 1%.

Forest, along with Berry, is one of only two of the potential Republican candidates we tested who has over 50% name recognition. 36% of GOP primary voters view him favorably to 18% who have an unfavorable opinion. Forest finds particularly strong support with conservative voters.

One thing that continues to be particularly noteworthy is Tillis' poor showing. Even though he's basically been running for the Senate seat for 2 years he still places 8th in a 9 person field. It will be interesting to see if the new tv ad campaign on his behalf does anything to improve these numbers for next month's poll. - PPP, 3/12/13

This is the fourth poll that shows Tillis and Berger lagging in the GOP primary. Now unlike Brannon, they haven't announced their candidacies yet but both men have long been hyped up as ideal contenders for 2014. They hold powerful positions in the state legislator yet members of

their own party still don't really know who they are. Plus if you've noticed that every time PPP throws a new name into their poll, their the flavor of the month. Last month it was Secretary of Labor Cherie Berry (R). This month it's Lt. Governor Dan Forest (R). And just like the past few polls, Hagan crushes most of them by double digits:

03 Sep 2012, Washington, DC, USA --- March 8, 2012 - Washington, DC, U.S. - Sen. KAY HAGAN, North Carolina Democrat, speaks during a hearing of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions [HELP] Committee. (Credit Image: © Jay Mallin) --- Image by © Jay Mallin/ZUMA Press/Corbis

Kay Hagan continues to have a clear lead over all these potential Republican candidates for the general election. Forest and McHenry come the closest but still trail by 10 points at 50/40 and 49/39 respectively. Berry and Foxx do next best but each face a 12 point deficit at 50/38 and 49/37. After them it's Ellmers who trails by 13 at 49/36, Berger and Tillis who trail by 14 at 51/37 and 50/36 respectively, Brannon who trails by 15 at 51/36, and Emblar who trails by 19 at 52/33. - PPP, 3/12/13

Now PPP notes that many of these GOP candidates are still unknown hence why there are several Republican voters that are undecided. So the race will tighten once the GOP picks a nominee they. However, Hagan's now leads with Independents and she has the large majority of her party's voters locked up. But Hagan knows she's in for a long, expensive and tough fight, hence why she has hired a tough campaign manager who has helped Democrats win in red states:

Gearing up early for the midterms, Sen. Kay Hagan (D-N.C.) will announce Tuesday that she has hired a top-flight campaign manager.

Preston Elliott led Sen. Jon Tester's successful reelection bid in Montana last year. In 2010, he led the field operation and turnout efforts that helped Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid win a tough victory. In 2008, he was deputy political director for the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee.

"He has a proven track record of success, and with his help and the help of North Carolinians of all walks of life, I expect to cross the finish line with a victory in November 2014," Hagan said in a statement shared first with POLITICO.

A key takeaway from last cycle was that Democrats who started earlier fared better. So the incumbents who expect tough races are gearing up, racking up impressive first quarter fundraising hauls to scare potential opponents and building out a grassroots infrastructure for next year.

"There's not a better manager in the country," said DSCC communications director Matt Canter. - Politico, 3/12/13

Here's Elliott's take on the upcoming Senate race before the latest PPP poll was released:

"North Carolina is a dynamic state, and Kay is using her moderate, commonsense approach to stand up every single day for North Carolina values in Washington," Elliott said in a statement (before seeing the poll results). "Kay has never been afraid to do the difficult work of bridging the partisan divide when North Carolina's best interests are on the line. I am excited to join her team as Campaign Manager, and I look forward to working with people across the state to talk

about Kay's strong record of getting results for North Carolina." - Charlotte News Observer, 3/12/13

Hagan's making the right moves in getting ready for a tough race ahead, especially with the Pope Foundation having control over the state legislator. But a crowded GOP primary would also work in her favor:

"Despite the GOP victories in 2012, North Carolina is still a purple state trending blue," said Paul Shumaker, a top North Carolina Republican consultant who helped craft GOP Sen. Richard M. Burr's solid re-election effort in 2010.

One early advantage for Hagan: She's almost certain to avoid a serious primary, leaving her time to stockpile resources for the general election.

Republicans probably won't have that luxury, with a wide bench of credible candidates who could jump into the contest.

"The key to success for Republicans is going to be avoiding a divisive primary," Shumaker said.

Particularly important, Republican insiders said, will be avoiding a nasty, resource-depleting runoff, likely in July 2014, that would limit the amount of time the victor would have to focus on the race against Hagan. - The Hill, 11/13/12

Tea Party radicals and establishment cronies duking it out with each other in a crowded GOP primary would certainly make Hagan's re-election prospects a lot easier. This primary could very well turn out to be like the 2012 Wisconsin GOP primary. The right-wing interest groups, Americans for Prosperity and the Club for Growth had two dogs in that fight but ended up with Tommy Thompson pulling off a slim victory. Thompson ended up being in debt after spending all of his funds in an expensive primary fight and ended up losing to current Senator Tammy Baldwin (D. WI). But we can't rely solely on the GOP tearing itself a part in the primary. If you'd like to get involved with the Hagan campaign, feel free to do so here: