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Why Claire McCaskill is blasting Democrats in bid to win midterm

By Nikki Schwab

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Claire McCaskill/Getty Images

Missouri Sen. Claire McCaskill has used every political trick in the book to win 22 of her 23 races as a Democrat running in GOP country.

This year, she's counting on coming up with one more to repel Republican challenger Josh Hawley in a state that President Trump won by 19 points in 2016.

"This is the most coin-flip race that we have this year," said **Steven Webster**, a political-science researcher at Washington University in St. Louis.

The RealClearPolitics average of public polls shows Hawley ahead 47 to 45 percent, a statistical dead heat.

McCaskill, 65, has shown that she's a master of political gamesmanship.

In 2012, she pulled a stunt that still amazes political insiders by spending \$1.5 million of her own campaign funds to promote one of her two GOP challengers, a hard-line conservative named Todd Akin, figuring he'd be the easier one to beat.

Akin won the primary and McCaskill's strategy paid off.

Akin suggested women wouldn't need abortions if they were victims of "legitimate rape," pretty much killing his chances.

In 2018, McCaskill hasn't been as lucky.

"I don't think Hawley has done anything drastically wrong in this race," Webster said.

So McCaskill has taken a different road as she seeks a third term in the Senate.

As President Trump repeatedly links her to liberals such as Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, McCaskill has taken to running against the "crazies" in her own party.

"The crazy Democrats are people who walk in restaurants and scream at elected officials' faces," McCaskill said Tuesday on Fox News.

"The crazy Democrats are . . . we have a state senator here in Missouri that actually advocated for the assassination of President Trump. That's a crazy Democrat."

She also took swipes at Sens. Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren.

The state senator, Maria Chappell-Nadal, shot back that McCaskill was a "piece of s-t" and "deserves to lose."

But the message got through: McCaskill wants no part of the left wing of her own party.

Trump is making two appearances in five days in Missouri to convince voters otherwise and to portray her as an elitist.

In June, Trump accused McCaskill of "[flying] around in a luxurious private jet during her RV tour of the state. RV's are not for her. People are really upset, so phony!"

McCaskill later confirmed that she had flown for part of the three-day RV trip, although she claimed had spent two days in the vehicle.

While Hawley, the 38-year-old state attorney general, has Trump, McCaskill has a fundraising advantage.

She has pulled in \$30 million to his \$10 million, while outside groups have poured another \$56 million into the race.

She has also collected celebrity donors, such as Meryl Streep, Jack Black, Edward Norton and Danny DeVito.

Hawley got off to a sluggish start, with Republicans complaining when he posted on Instagram photos of himself at the gym.

They feared that he wouldn't be able to keep up with McCaskill, known for sniffing out every last vote, even in places like Jasper County, which Trump won by 51 points.

Webster said the criticism was "probably a little overblown" and claimed Hawley has since righted the ship.

"He's really in the driver's seat here," he said.

But McCaskill's record makes the experts wary of placing any bets on the outcome.

"When it's a close election like this and McCaskill has sort of pulled a rabbit out of a hat so many times, you wouldn't rule her out," Webster said. "This is a race that I absolutely don't want to put money on."