

THE HILL

Democrats in tough races throw their party under the bus

BY [ALEXANDER BOLTON](#) 11/02/18

Democrats in tough Senate races around the country are throwing their party under the bus as they seek to pull out victories in red states won just two years ago by President Trump.

In Missouri, Sen. Claire McCaskill (D) has a radio ad declaring she's "not one of those crazy Democrats." She's in a razor-tight race against Josh Hawley, the state's attorney general.

In Montana, Sen. Jon Tester (D), whose race against Republican Matt Rosendale has tightened considerably, told The Hill that Democrats "botched" the debate over Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh.

He also criticized Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren's (D) use of DNA results to claim Native American heritage, saying it doesn't "pass the test."

In Tennessee and Arizona, former Gov. Phil Bredesen (D) and Rep. Kyrsten Sinema (D), respectively, are telling voters that they will not back Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer (N.Y.) for Senate Democratic leader. Trump won both of those states in 2016, too.

In West Virginia, Sen. Joe Manchin (W.Va.) broke with his party and backed Kavanaugh's confirmation.

In Indiana, Sen. Joe Donnelly (D) has a television ad warning of "socialists" who "want to turn health care over to the government" and of the "radical left" wanting to eliminate U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement.

The efforts by these candidates make sense given the plight that the Senate Democrats have found themselves in.

Republicans have a narrow 51-49 majority, but they have chances across the country to build on it despite a political climate in which Democrats are favored to win back the House majority.

The Senate battle is different from the House largely because of the territory.

McCaskill and Tester are running for reelection in states that Trump won by double digits in the 2016 election against Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton. He won Montana by more than 20 percentage points and Missouri by 18 percentage points.

Heitkamp, like the other Democrats, has sought to separate herself from her party. She slammed Clinton for saying that Democrats can't be civil with Republicans until they are

back in control of Congress. “That’s ridiculous,” Heitkamp responded. “I can’t imagine how you get anything done if you don’t bring civility back into politics.”

The trend is evident even in the few states Trump lost that are home to competitive Senate elections this year.

In Nevada, a state Clinton won in 2016, Rep. Jacky Rosen (D) has an ad touting her clash with House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi (Calif.) to reform the Veterans Affairs Department.

“Jacky stood up to Nancy Pelosi to reform the VA,” a veteran tells viewers.

Rosen is in a tight race against Sen. Dean Heller (R-Nev.).

Democratic strategists say it’s a smart tactic because most of these candidates — with the exception of Rosen — are running in states that Trump overwhelmingly won, and Republicans are doing everything they can to tie them to the most liberal members of their party.

“You’re talking about senators that are running for reelection that [Trump] won their states by double digits. The Republican brand is strong in those states and the fact is that for these moderates to succeed, they need to reach out to not only their base but also to independents and Republicans who will put policy over partisanship,” said Rodell Mollineau, a Democratic strategist.

This is true of Tester, who will need moderate Republicans and independents to win, according to a recent survey by the Montana Television Network and Montana State University that showed Tester with 15 percent support among voters who approve of Trump.

Republicans have also been turning the screws on red-state Democrats.

At rallies in Montana over the weekend, Donald Trump Jr. and his girlfriend, former Fox News host Kimberly Guilfoyle, warned voters that a vote for Tester would be a vote to make Schumer the Senate majority leader and Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) the chairman of the Senate Budget Committee.

Guilfoyle also took a shot at Warren, who has touted DNA results showing she is between 0.1 percent and 1.6 percent Native American.

“I’m actually the real Pocahontas, 6.1 percent Native American,” she said.

Tester is bracing for the president’s trip to Montana Saturday, his fourth, where he will no doubt try to portray the incumbent Democrat as one of Schumer’s loyal soldiers.

“The Democrat Party has gone so far left that no one knows what to do. It’s become radical resistance,” Trump said at a rally in Missoula two weeks ago.

McCaskill distanced herself from liberal activists shortly before Trump was scheduled to visit her state on Thursday.

McCaskill later explained that when she referred to “crazy Democrats” she was thinking of the activists who have confronted Republican colleagues such as Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) at restaurants during the Kavanaugh debate.

She also made a pointed effort to distance herself from Warren and Sanders during a Fox News interview, noting that Warren “sure went after me” after McCaskill proposed rolling back some banking regulations and that “I certainly disagree with Bernie Sanders on a bunch of stuff.”

Steven S. Smith, a professor of political science at Washington University in St. Louis, said Republicans have been working overtime to paint that Democratic Party as a bunch of wild-eyed radicals.

“The Republicans have been working hard to say that the Democrats have become radicalized and revolutionary and socialistic,” he said. “She’s clearly trying to respond to an element of criticism of the Democrats.

“She knows that pivotal voters in Missouri are getting that from the Republican side so she wants to deal with it,” he added of McCaskill. “If she’s worried that some middle-of-the-road voters are thinking that it’s the Democrats who are the radicals, then she needs to distance herself from them.”

Smith said he’s not sure “it’s an effective strategy” before adding that “at this stage of the game it’s not possible for her to do much else.”

In states with strong Democratic bases, especially states with strong labor unions and large blocs of minority voters, appealing to moderates by criticizing liberals is a tricky task.

Even though Donnelly talks like a conservative in some of his ads, blasting “socialists” and the “radical left,” he will attend a rally with former President Obama in Gary, Ind., an old steel town with a history of labor organizing and a large African-American community.

A Democratic strategist argued that Obama can help mobilize the black vote in Gary and noted that he carried the state over the late Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) in the 2008 presidential election.

Donnelly’s Republican opponent, Mike Braun, however, is pouncing on Obama’s visit to go on the attack by linking Donnelly to the former president.

“Joe Donnelly is so desperate for enthusiasm he’s calling in Barack Obama to remind Hoosiers he supports the collapsing Obamacare [and] Obama’s dangerous Iran deal,” said Braun spokesman Josh Kelley.