

# NJ gets bluer: Democrats pick up 3 seats, Menendez holds on

By MIKE CATALINI Associated Press

TRENTON — Democratic-leaning New Jersey turned a deeper shade of blue after Tuesday's election, with Democrats taking at least three House seats from Republican control, and incumbent Sen. Bob Menendez fending off a well-funded GOP challenger.

The Democratic pickups mean the party will control at least 10 of the state's 12 House districts and both Senate seats. Democrats also have a majority in the state Legislature and hold the governorship — both of which were not on the ballot Tuesday.

Nearly all of New Jersey's voters casting midterm election ballots said deciding who controls Congress played a role in their decision, according to a wide-ranging survey of the American electorate.

AP VoteCast found most said that Republican President Donald Trump was a factor in their vote while a majority also said the country is headed in the wrong direction.

AP VoteCast surveyed 3,821 voters and 667 nonvoters in the state of New Jersey and was conducted for The Associated Press by NORC at the University of Chicago.

Menendez's win over former drug company CEO Bob Hugin came despite millions of dollars in negative advertising financed by Hugin's deep pockets.

Menendez fended off Hugin with a huge push from Democrats Gov. Phil Murphy and Sen. Cory Booker, a potential 2020 presidential nominee. Booker on Monday told voters that if they trusted him then they should back Menendez.

A central issue in the race was Menendez's tossed-out federal corruption case, which Hugin capitalized on, casting the incumbent as corrupt. Menendez always denied wrongdoing and instead focused on his record, particularly as a co-author of the Affordable Care Act.

In House races, Democrat Tom Malinowski, a former state department official under President Barack Obama, defeated five-term GOP incumbent Leonard Lance in the 7th District. Malinowski argued that despite Lance casting himself as a moderate, he failed to stop his Republican colleagues from enacting the 2017 tax overhaul.

Mikie Sherrill, a veteran and one-time prosecutor, won in the 12th District over Republican Assemblyman Jay Webber. She focused on rolling back the 2017 federal tax overhaul's cap on state and local tax deductions and stressed her support for health care for everyone.

Democratic state Sen. Jeff Van Drew won in the 2nd District over Trump ally Seth Grossman, after Rep. Frank LoBiondo retired. Van Drew has stressed that he would "work hard" to bring people together in a District Trump carried.

Sherrill's victory, along with Democratic incumbent Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman's win in the 12th District means New Jersey will have two women representing it in the House for the first time since 1982, when Millicent Fenwick and Marge Roukema served briefly together.

Frelinghuysen and LoBiondo are retiring after 12 terms.

Sherrill graduated from the Naval Academy and flew Sea King helicopters in the Navy and later served as a federal prosecutor in New Jersey. She has not held or sought office before.

The district has been a GOP stronghold but just narrowly voted for Trump in 2016.

In the 7th District, Democrat Hillary Clinton narrowly won in 2016 over Trump.

Webber, who had Trump's Twitter endorsement, ran as a conservative backer of the president.

Watson Coleman was elected to her third term over Republican Daryl Kipnis.

The 3rd District was too close to call.

Two-term Republican incumbent Rep. Tom MacArthur is running neck-and-neck in the race against Democrat Andy Kim, a former national security aide to Barack Obama.