



1819 NEWS

Allen Mendenhall: The complacency Alabama Republicans can't afford

[Allen Mendenhall](#) | 08.17.26



(iStock)

Odysseus' crew, having sampled the lotus, forgot home and had to be dragged back to the ships in chains. Alabama Republicans have not yet reached that stage, but the voting turnout figures suggest that a certain narcotic contentment has set in.

Only [11% of the state's 3.8 million](https://apnews.com/article/alabama-special-primaries-house-redistricting-ed5f87aad0922b42d60bdeaaf47e7aa3?utm_source=copy&utm_medium=share) registered voters bothered to show up for May's primary. Last week's special congressional primary, spanning four districts, appears – preliminary numbers being what they are – to have done worse. Four districts do not make a statewide sample, and it would be intellectually reckless to extrapolate a November catastrophe from an August afterthought. But recklessness cuts both ways, and so does complacency.

Complacency is understandable, if not forgivable. Alabama has not sent a Democrat to the governor's mansion since 1998. Tommy Tuberville, the former Auburn coach turned senator turned gubernatorial candidate, enters the fall as the prohibitive favorite against Doug Jones, the man he beat for the Senate in 2020.

Favorites, however, are what complacent electorates produce upset losses for. The case for Republican turnout should not require heroics. It requires only that Republicans recall why they sent Tuberville to Washington in the first place, and what his opponent actually did while he was there.

On the first count, Tuberville's record answers for itself. Heritage Action, which grades on substance rather than sentiment, has scored his Senate tenure at 92% lifetime (<https://heritageaction.com/scorecard/members/T000278>), – not the record of a man triangulating for swing voters, but of one governing as he campaigned.

More telling than any scorecard, though, was his 10-month blockade of military promotions in 2023 (<https://1819news.com/news/item/tuberville-drops-military-holds-when-you-change-the-rules-its-hard-to-beat-somebody>), undertaken to force a floor vote on the Pentagon's policy of reimbursing travel for service members seeking abortions.

The blockade drew fire from precisely the people you would expect a genuine outsider to alienate: Mitch McConnell called it a mistake

(<https://www.yahoo.com/news/mistake-mitch-mcconnell-criticizes-tommy-212709831.html>); Chuck

Schumer called it an abuse (<https://www.npr.org/2023/07/15/1187530846/tuberville-senate-rules-abortion-military>); Joe Biden called it irresponsible

(<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/congress/loyd-austin-says-tommy-tubervilles-holds-military-promotions-national-rcna94034>).

Tuberville held the line anyway, at real political cost, because he judged the principle worth more than the comity. Whatever one thinks of the merits, that is not the behavior of a senator auditioning for the establishment's good opinion.

Jones' record supplies the contrast Republicans need, and it requires no embellishment. He voted against confirming Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court. He voted to convict Donald Trump on both articles of impeachment in 2020, in a state Trump carried by more than 25 points, a decision he defended as a matter of conscience but one that placed him squarely with Schumer's caucus against his own electorate's stated preference.

Jones opposed border wall funding and voted to keep abortion procedures after 20 weeks legal. Jones' defenders will note, accurately, that he also backed a majority of Trump's judicial nominees and supported the First Step Act.

No senator's record is a monolith, and honesty requires saying so. But on the votes that actually separated the parties during his term, Jones sided with progressive orthodoxy over Alabama's conservative values and preferences, which is precisely why Alabamians removed him in 2020 and precisely why nothing in the intervening six years suggests he has moved toward them rather than away.

None of this argues itself into ballots cast. Elections are won by people who show up, and Alabama Republicans, for two consecutive contests now, have shown a disquieting talent for staying home. Tuberville understood, across three decades on the sideline, that a two-touchdown lead can evaporate the moment a team stops playing to win and starts playing not to lose.

Alabama Republicans are ahead in this game, but not ahead by enough to spend October admiring the scoreboard. November is the fourth quarter, and the only sure way to blow a lead is to assume the clock will run out in your favor without anyone bothering to take the field.

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