

In these midterms, 'Comey vote' can't help Republicans

Robert Weiner and Ben Lasky, Another View contributors Published 1:11 p.m. CT May 24, 2018



(Photo: Jack Gruber, USA TODAY)

The “Comey vote” will not be repeated in November’s midterm elections. Those who were undecided or only slightly leaning and then changed in the last weeks of the 2016 election — after FBI Director James Comey announced a renewed Hillary Clinton email investigation, but not the Trump-Russia investigation also underway — will not go Republican this time.

Iowa, where 48 percent of respondents of the [Des Moines Register/Mediacom Iowa Poll](#) ([/story/news/politics/iowa-poll/2018/02/09/iowa-poll-donald-trumps-approval-rating-rises-but-he-remains-underwater/316063002/](#)) in February said they will “definitely” vote for somebody other than Donald Trump in the next election, will be sharply watched as both a national bellwether, and of course as the nation’s first

presidential caucus state.

If there is any doubt that a “blue wave” is coming in the November congressional elections, the lack of the “Comey vote” might be the nail in the coffin.

Comey, whose wife, father-in-law, and brother-in-law are from Iowa, says it’s “painful” to think that his decision to write a letter saying that the FBI was re-opening the Clinton investigation, 11 days before the 2016 presidential election, [might have affected the race](#) (<https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-comey-letter-probably-cost-clinton-the-election/>).

Clinton campaign manager Robby Mook said on “Meet the Press” on Feb. 2, 2017, that the campaign polling showed Clinton ahead by 10 points in Michigan before Comey’s letter, and that the lead evaporated the day after. He used it as an example to show it had a similar impact in other states key to the Electoral College that President Donald Trump won by close votes.

There is no midterm electoral college. Republicans will not be able to bank on a Comey letter to save them, while an uptick in the women, minority and youth vote could make the difference for Democrats.

A [CNN presidential exit poll](#) (<https://www.cnn.com/election/2016/results/exit-polls/national/president>) found that 25 percent of 2016 voters decided who they were voting for in October or in the final week of the campaign, with 48 percent voting for Trump and 40 percent voting for Clinton.

Trump supporters had already been chanting, “Lock her up” throughout the campaign. Those shouts got even louder after the letter. Comey gave those screams validity for voters who were still undecided. By the time Comey sent a second letter (two days before the election) to Congress saying the FBI had “not changed our conclusions” on the Clinton email investigation because the emails were not new and duplicated earlier ones, it was too late. The damage was done.

Democrats have been re-energized since November 2016. There have been 93 seats up for grabs in special elections, both at the state and federal level, since Trump took office. Republicans previously held 65 of those seats. Republicans now hold 47 and the Democrats hold 46.

Even when Democrats have lost special elections, there has been a 15 point swing from 2016. Trump won Arizona’s Eighth Congressional District by over 20 points, whereas Republican Debbie Lesko recently won the seat by 5 points over her Democratic challenger.

Democrats have won in places that voted for Trump by a wide margin. Democrat Conor Lamb won Pennsylvania’s 18th Congressional District, which had favored Trump by 20 points over Clinton.

Legislative seats are flipping. Democrat Philip Spagnuolo won in New Hampshire by seven points in a district that voted for Trump by 12 points.

The playbook from Doug Jones’ U.S. Senate victory over Roy Moore, who was also hampered by accusations of sexual misconduct, is the one Democrats must and likely will use in November: getting people to vote Democratic who went Republican in 2016, and making sure people show up who skipped voting in 2016 altogether.

A January Washington Post-ABC News poll found that 51 percent of Democratic-leaning voters think it's "more important to vote" than in past elections, whereas only 34 percent of Republican-leaning voters feel the same way.

According to Real Clear Politics, Democrats lead Republicans by 6 points on the generic ballot, slightly down from where they were a few months ago. But on the Democratic side, women, African-Americans and young people are energized. "Resistance" support is strong at congressional town halls on health care and in protests like the Women's March and the March for Our Lives.



Robert Weiner was director of youth voter registration for National Young Democrats at the Watergate Democratic National Headquarters during the 1972 presidential campaign and was a top congressional staffer for 16 years and a public affairs director in the Clinton and Bush White Houses. (Photo: Richard A. Bloom/Redux Pictures/Special to the Register)

There is no Comey letter to save Republicans from what is coming if Democrats capitalize on the enthusiasm on their side.

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