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Trump's rally in New Mexico is a bid for an upset next year

Мітинг Трампа в Нью-Мексико - це заявка на засмучення наступного року

Дональд Трамп втратив у Нью-Мексико 8 відсоткових пунктів у 2016 році. Минулого року його партія втратила місце в палаті та особняк губернатора. І все-таки Трамп прямує до Нью-Мексико на акцію передвиборчої кампанії, що змушує деяких політиків почухати голову. Чи грає Нью-Мексико, штат, який не голосував за президента-республіканця після Джорджа Буша у 2004 році? Кампанія Трампа стверджує, що так, і вона поставила його - разом з Невадою, Нью-Гемпширом і Міннесотою - у короткий список штатів, які Трамп програв у 2016 році і в яких планує перемогу в 2020 році. Нью-Мексико - особливо амбітна мета. Це штат, який може зреагувати на силу Трампа в сільській Америці і на його неспроможність перемогти латиноамериканців. Політологи не бачать, що Трамп може отримати політичну підтримку в штаті з найбільшою концентрацією латиноамериканців у США.

<https://www.apnews.com/2a76330724544b439fa7fee2e6745a6f>



In this May 24, 2016 file photo, Republican then-presidential candidate Donald Trump speaks at a campaign event in Albuquerque, N.M. New Mexico law enforcement agencies are prepping for an

upcoming Trump rally in Rio Rancho, N.M. on Monday, Sept. 16, 2019, three years after previous ones turned violent in Albuquerque. (AP Photo/Brennan Linsley, File)

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) — Donald Trump lost New Mexico by 8 percentage points in 2016. Last year, his party lost a House seat and the governor's mansion. Last week, a congressional candidate went viral by taunting the president by name in an ad.

Still, Trump is headed to New Mexico on Monday for a campaign rally that is making some politicians scratch their heads.

Is New Mexico, a state that hasn't voted for a Republican for president since George W. Bush in 2004, in play? The Trump campaign argues yes and has put it — along with Nevada, New Hampshire and Minnesota — on the short list of states that Trump lost in 2016 and is plotting to win in 2020. New Mexico is an especially ambitious goal, one that may ride on Trump's strength in rural America and fall on his failure to win over Hispanics.

"Bush had much higher favorable opinions by Hispanics," said Lonna Atkeson, a political science professor at the University of New Mexico, who noted Bush defeated Sen. John Kerry 15 years ago by winning over large rural swaths of the state. "He was from Texas, not New York, and so he had more regional ties ... Trump paints a very different portrait."

Atkeson doesn't see Trump going far politically in a state with the highest concentration of Latinos in the U.S.

Among those waiting for the president in New Mexico is former CIA operative Valerie Plame, the top contender in a crowded Democratic primary race for New Mexico's northern congressional district. Plame notes she has a "few scores to settle" with the president in a swaggering new video that shows her speeding across the desert in a muscle car — in reverse — before spinning forward in a swirl of dust.

Viewed a million times on YouTube within days, the ad flickers with a newsreel-style montage of Plame's thwarted undercover career at keeping nukes from terrorists — tied quickly to Trump's presidential pardon of the man convicted of lying to investigators about the 2003 leak of Plame's covert identity by an official in the George W. Bush administration. That was apparent retribution for her then-husband Joe Wilson's opposition to the Iraq War.

"I know how Washington works, unfortunately, and I can get to work on day one," Plame told The Associated Press. "I've stopped a long time ago trying to figure him (Trump) out. Who knows?"

Trump used a recent rally in North Carolina to try to stoke Republican's enthusiasm for Dan Bishop, on the eve of the congressional candidate's narrow election victory in a do-over vote after 2018 midterm results were tossed out on fraud concerns.

Trump's plans for Monday are reminiscent of his May 2016 rally at a convention center in Albuquerque that touched off protests and outdoor scenes of burning T-shirts, bottle-throwing and police tear gas. Inside, Trump spoke of local welfare dependency and said better work was needed from then-Gov. Susana Martinez — who skipped the rally and long wavered as a Republican in supporting Trump.

He will arrive this time to a state in the midst of an oil-production boom that has boosted employment and spurred a state government spending spree from first-year Democratic Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham on public education, roadway projects and tax rebates to film productions.

Lujan Grisham has pilloried Trump's border wall while withdrawing most National Guard troops from the border and suing the U.S. Homeland Security Department to recoup spending by local governments to shelter and feed asylum-seeking migrants released into southern New Mexico towns such as Las Cruces and Deming.

The Trump administration has seized on the local oil industry's vigor as a hallmark of America's "energy renaissance" and shown an interest in a congressional candidate, Claire Chase of Roswell, who has professional and family ties to oil producer Mack Energy and the dynasty that runs it. She's one of three Republicans seeking to challenge Rep. Xochitl Torres Small, who narrowly won the state's open southern seat in 2018 on a centrist Democratic platform.

In August, Vice President Mike Pence declared New Mexico was back "in play" politically in a visit to the Permian Basin, a booming petroleum production zone overlapping portions of southern New Mexico and western Texas.

Trump campaign spokesman Tim Murtaugh said he believes the president's standing has improved since 2016. He credited the economy, including the fact that Latino unemployment is at an all-time low, as well as the president's stance on immigration enforcement.

"The most valuable commodity that we have as a campaign is the president's time. And he will not travel all the way to New Mexico for a head fake," Murtaugh said.

But Trump has considerable work cut out for him to gain ground in New Mexico. He captured just 40% of the state vote in 2016. Hillary Clinton also fell short of a majority victory with 48% support in a state she did not visit. That leaves a question mark hovering above 9% of voters who sided with Libertarian former New Mexico Gov. Gary Johnson.

Dennis Roch, a rural school district superintendent who served as a Republican in the state House for a decade before retiring last year, said the state's Republican Party has overcome sizeable voter-registration deficits over the years with anti-crime initiatives, an affinity for the military and an anti-tax fervor for less-restrictive government that appeals to the state's frontier ethos.

"It could go for Trump — there are a lot of people in the east end of the state that are very passionate about Second Amendment rights," said Roch, who noted he's not working with the campaign. "There are people on the southern end that are affected in a real way by border security."

The governor's office has consistently swung back and forth from Democratic to Republican control for decades. In 2014, the GOP won a state House majority for the first time in decades. Republican U.S. Sen. Pete Domenici, now deceased, served six terms before retiring 2007 — though the state's Washington delegation today is entirely Democratic.

The state's urban-rural political divide has been on prominent display as sheriffs in dozens of counties this year threatened not to enforce new gun control measures, including background checks on most private gun sales, from the Democratic-led Legislature that were signed by Lujan Grisham.

In a vast northern congressional district, Plame is vying for the Democratic nomination against 10 other candidates, including 36-year-old District Attorney Marco Serna, who has pursued alternatives to incarceration for nonviolent drug offenders in a region ravaged by heroin and prescription opioids, and social-justice minded attorney Teresa Leger Fernandez. Three Republicans are running in the Democratic stronghold.

The winner in 2020 replaces Rep. Ben Ray Luján, who is running in an open Senate primary to replace retiring Democrat Tom Udall.

Luján emerged as a nemesis to Trump as he led the House Democrats' campaign arm to help recapture a majority of seats in 2018 with an ethnically diverse slate of candidates, including Congress' first-ever female Native American representatives from Albuquerque and Kansas. He's competing against Democratic Secretary of State Maggie Toulouse Oliver, while the Republican Senate primary still lacks a top-tier candidate.

Luján will speak at a counter-rally by Democrats in Albuquerque on Monday, just before Trump takes the stage.

He greeted news of Trump's rally in New Mexico at first with mocking disbelief, and then a series of stern warnings on Twitter: "Rio Rancho is in my district, and anyone who undermines the safety, security, or way of life of our communities, isn't welcome here."