



LIKELY LAKE ENTRY INTO ARIZONA SENATE RACE SETS UP 'SUPER BOWL' OF ELECTIONS - CRONKITE NEWS

Posted on October 11, 2023 by Renee Romo | Cronkite News



Photo: Kari Lake, shown during her 2022 race for Arizona governor as the Republican nominee, is expected to announce Tuesday that she will run next year for the Senate seat currently held by Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, I-Ariz., setting up what could be a brutal GOP primary and a possible three-way general election. (File photo by Grace Edwards/Cronkite News)

Kari Lake's expected entrance Tuesday into the already-crowded field seeking to unseat Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, I-Ariz., sets the stage for what one analyst said has the potential to be "the greatest race in United States Senate history."

Lake, the failed 2022 Republican nominee for governor, has not officially announced her intention to run for Senate, instead promising to make a "huge announcement" at a campaign rally Tuesday. But she filed a statement of candidacy for the Senate race late last week with the Federal Election Commission.

"It's going to be the Grand Slam, the World Cup, the World Series, the Super Bowl of U.S. Senate races with Kari Lake getting into the race," said Jason Rose, an Arizona-based political consultant.

That's because Lake would be entering what was already expected to be one of the most closely watched races in the country, in a year in which Democratic control of the Senate is at stake.

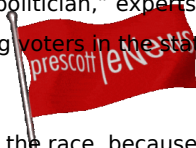
If she enters, Lake would face Pinal County Sheriff Mark Lamb in the Republican primary and she could face Blake Masters, the GOP Senate nominee who lost to Sen. Mark Kelly, D-Ariz., in 2022.

After the primary, there is a potential for a three-way general election race with Sinema - who was elected as a Democrat, but left to become an independent in December - and Rep. Ruben Gallego, D-Phoenix.

Mike Noble, CEO of Phoenix-based Noble Predictive Insights, says that Lake's announcement was expected and is "not a surprise...it was a question of when." He and other analysts said they believe the Republican primary is Lake's to win if she gets in.

"It's essentially knee-capped Sheriff Lamb's Senate hopes, whether or not he knows it yet," Noble said. "Lake is going to be, essentially, the Donald Trump of the Republican Primary for the U.S. Senate race."

Although Lake is what Rose called a “generational retail politician,” experts say her chances in the general election are far less certain. Noble said that even though Lake is “well defined” among voters in the state, by “overall definition, she’s negative-15 points overall in favorability” with the general electorate.



“The GOP is probably stressing (out) that Lake’s entering the race, because Minority Leader Mitch McConnell would love nothing more than to be Majority Leader next year, and Lake could potentially impede that,” Noble said of the race for control of the Senate.

Lake lost the 2022 governor’s race to Democrat Katie Hobbs by 17,117 votes out of more than 2.5 million cast. But, like Trump, she has continued to insist that she actually won and, like Trump, she has repeatedly lost numerous legal challenges in which she alleged election fraud.

“The challenge that she has is that she continues to talk about election fraud and the election being stolen and her fealty to President Trump. All of those do not appeal to the broader electorate,” said Paul Bentz, senior vice president for research and strategy at HighGround Inc.

“If she doesn’t learn from her lessons, and doesn’t attempt to appeal to a broader portion of the electorate, she should expect the same results she got last time,” Bentz said.

But Jessica Taylor, U.S. Senate and governors editor for the Cook Political Report, said that may not be a handicap for Lake in a three-way race with Gallego and Sinema.

“I think she (Lake) has a ceiling, but in a three-way race you don’t need to reach that ceiling,” Taylor said.

Sinema has not officially announced that she is running for reelection, and Taylor said “how this race shapes up depends on what Kyrsten Sinema does. And I think it’s two very different races if she does run and if she doesn’t run.”

But Sinema is raising money for a campaign: The last FEC reports, from June, show she has raised \$15.5 million to Gallego’s \$6.9 million and \$607,722 for Lamb.

And NBC News said it obtained documents from the Sinema campaign detailing her “path to victory as an independent candidate in Arizona,” where registered voters are almost evenly split between Democrats, Republicans and independents. The document said Sinema could win “by attracting 10% to 20% of Democrats, 60% to 70% of independents and 25% to 35% of Republicans.”

Erin Covey, an analyst for Inside Elections, said the Arizona Senate race is currently “rated as toss-up, so honestly, it’s anyone’s game between the three.”

In the event that Sinema chooses not to run, Taylor said the high stakes would remain.

“Even if this were a Lake and Gallego, you know mano-a-mano race, that would still be a very close race just because it’s Arizona,” Taylor said.

And in the general, Rose said, if Lake wins the seat “she’ll capture some gleam,” Gallego would be a “liberal hero” and Sinema would be “historically significant as an Independent winner.”

“Arizona is the beneficiary, because the national stature of any of the three as a result of this race is going to be very very significant,” he said.