

POLITICS

# Trump Rewards Loyalty in Alabama Senate Race by Tweeting Endorsement

By JONATHAN MARTIN AUG. 8, 2017

WASHINGTON — President Trump intervened Tuesday in the special Senate election in Alabama, bestowing a coveted endorsement on Senator Luther Strange a week before a Republican primary that has been fought, in part, over who has been most loyal to the president.

In a surprise move that caught many in the Republican Party off guard, Mr. Trump tweeted that Mr. Strange “has done a great job representing the people of the Great State of Alabama.”



**Donald J. Trump**  
@realDonaldTrump

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Senator Luther Strange has done a great job representing the people of the Great State of Alabama. He has my complete and total endorsement!

9:16 PM - Aug 8, 2017

15,037
12,349
61,069

Mr. Trump's decision to wade into the race to fill the seat left vacant by Attorney General Jeff Sessions will test just how much clout the president enjoys among Republicans in a state where he remains highly popular.

Mr. Strange has been locked in a close race with Representative Mo Brooks and Roy Moore, the controversial former state Supreme Court justice. There are also a number of other, lesser-known Republicans vying for the nomination. If nobody gets over 50 percent in the Aug. 15 vote, the party's nominee will be decided in a September runoff.

Mr. Strange, who heard from the president about his plans earlier Tuesday, had been lobbying for weeks to win Mr. Trump's support, singing the president's praises in TV ads, online and through as many Fox News appearances he could schedule. Mr. Strange and his allies also have made Mr. Brooks's attacks last year on Mr. Trump's presidential campaign a centerpiece of the primary.

Reince Priebus, the former White House chief of staff, had been uneasy about Mr. Trump spending political capital in such a fluid campaign — especially with Mr. Brooks, a member of the House Freedom Caucus, also in the field.

But Mr. Trump threw caution to the wind with his Tuesday night tweet, dealing Mr. Brooks a devastating blow. The endorsement was also sure to delight Senator Mitch McConnell, Republican of Kentucky and the majority leader, for backing the 6-foot-9 lawmaker known to many as Big Luther.

The president may have been fully persuaded late last month, when Mr. Brooks criticized Mr. Trump for what the congressman described as the tweeter-in-chief's "waterboarding" of Mr. Sessions.

Tuesday's prime-time presidential tweet was the best news Mr. Strange had gotten since he was appointed to the Senate seat under a cloud this year by Robert Bentley, then the governor. Mr. Bentley, dogged by questions related to an extramarital affair, resigned not long after tapping Mr. Strange, who at the time was the attorney general.

Questions about the appointment and his cozy connection to the Republican establishment, reinforced by a group allied with Mr. McConnell that is spending millions of dollars on his campaign's behalf, have made it difficult for Mr. Strange to poll anywhere near the majority he needs to avert a runoff. Mr. Moore has appeared to benefit from the sniping between Mr. Strange and Mr. Brooks.

Even with Mr. Trump's backing, Mr. Strange will find it difficult to win the nomination outright on Tuesday. But having the president in his corner would hand him a sizable advantage next month: Mr. Strange's aides said Tuesday that they were eager to find a date to bring Mr. Trump to Alabama before a runoff.

***Correction: August 10, 2017***

An article on Wednesday about President Trump's endorsement of Senator Luther Strange in the special Senate election in Alabama misidentified the position that Mitch McConnell of Kentucky holds in the Senate. He is the majority leader, not the minority leader.

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