

The Anniston Star

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BREAKING TOP STORY

BLUE BLAZES

Jones projected winner in close Alabama Senate race



Doug Jones, flanked by his wife, Louise, prepares to address supporters after winning Alabama's U.S. Senate election. Jones defeated Republican candidate Roy Moore to become the first Democrat to win election to the Senate from Alabama since the 1990s. (Kirsten Fiscus/The Anniston Star)

By Kirsten Fiscus and Tim Lockette, Star Staff Writers 14 hrs ago

BIRMINGHAM — Doug Jones on Tuesday became the first Alabama Democrat elected to the U.S. Senate in a quarter-century, defeating Roy Moore by a narrow margin.

The Associated Press declared Jones the winner just after 9:20 p.m., with other media agencies reporting less than a percentage point between the two candidates.

“This campaign has never been about me, it’s never been about Roy Moore,” Jones said in a victory speech in Birmingham. “It’s been about every one of you.”

Moore, at his election watch party, insisted the vote was close enough to trigger an automatic recount. At the time of Moore’s remarks, the Secretary of State’s office showed to two candidates 0.99 percent apart, with Jones getting 49.7 percent of the vote and Moore getting 48.7 percent. It takes a margin of less than one-half of one percent to trigger a recount.

“We’ve got to wait on God and let this process play out,” Moore said.

Jones, a former federal prosecutor best known for prosecuting a cold case against 1960s Ku Klux Klan bombmakers, rode to victory after a bruising special election that saw his Republican opponent, former judge Roy Moore, facing accusations of sexual misconduct with teen girls decades ago. Moore has denied the allegations.

The Jones victory is nothing short of a political earthquake for Alabama, which has trended ever more strongly toward Republicans since the 1960s, and hasn’t handed any statewide race to a Democrat in more than a decade. No one would have predicted it one year ago.

The Senate seat came open earlier this year, when President Donald Trump appointed his longtime ally, former Sen. Jeff Sessions, as U.S. Attorney General. Among a host of candidates for the seat — 18 in all — was Jones, the Birmingham lawyer who in the 1990s successfully prosecuted some of the men responsible for the 1963 bombing of Birmingham’s Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. In Anniston, he was better known as the special master overseeing the settlement against Monsanto for PCB pollution — but his name was far from a household word statewide at the beginning of 2017.

Moore, meanwhile, was a legend in Alabama politics, the social conservative who again and again defied higher courts orders on topics such as the Ten Commandments in the courtroom and legalization of same-sex marriage.



Roy Moore speaks to supporters during his election night party Tuesday at the RSA Activity Center in Montgomery. (Trent Penny/The Anniston Star)

Moore's reputation as a conservative Christian icon took a hit in November, when The Washington Post published accounts of four women who said Moore had pursued them romantically when he was in his 30s and the women in their teens. Moore denied the allegations, and spent the last month of his campaign largely fighting back against them.

Jones, meanwhile, struggled to make his name known as media outlets pursued Moore for comment. Nationwide Democrats, sensing a possible win, began to pour money into Jones' campaign just as Moore's financial support began to dry up. Democrats launched a get-out-the-vote campaign that included door-to-door canvassing, handwritten postcards to voters and phone-banking.



On the campaign trail, Jones pitched himself as a moderate who could work across party lines to work on "kitchen table" issues such as health care. He also promised not to embarrass the state, a hint at Moore's troubles.

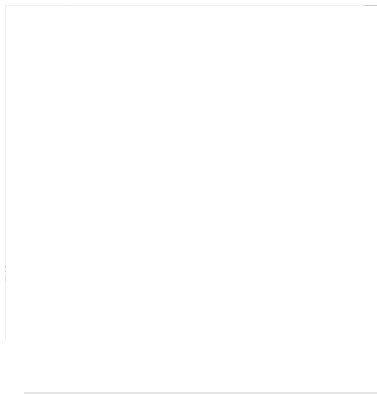
In the Anniston area, voters seemed just as moved by questions of character.

"I voted for Mr. Jones. I feel that he can work with anyone," said Verlily Smith, who voted at the Calhoun County Health Department in Anniston.

Smith said she votes "for the person" and not for a party or policies. She said Jones seemed like an honest person.

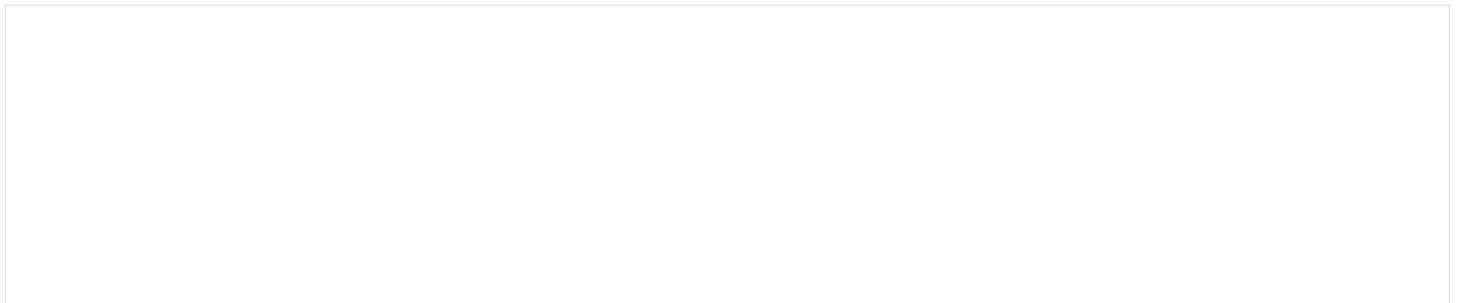
For other Jones voters, the decision was a mix of support for the Democrat and exasperation with Moore, a longtime presence in the right wing of Alabama's GOP.

"I believe in Doug Jones," said John Upchurch, who voted at Jacksonville's West Side Baptist Church. "I believe in his record on civil rights. And there's a lot about Roy Moore that I don't agree with."



Capitol & statewide reporter Tim Lockette: 256-294-4193. On Twitter @TLockette_Star.

MORE INFORMATION





Strong turnout in election that sends Jones to Senate