



10-12-2016

## Commentary: Echoes of '64 Campaign in Toomey-McGinty Race

Michael J. Birkner  
*Gettysburg College*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/histfac>

 Part of the [American Politics Commons](#), [Political History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

**Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.**

---

Birkner, Michael. "Commentary: Echoes of '64 Campaign in Toomey-McGinty Race." Philly.com (October 12, 2016)

This is the publisher's version of the work. This publication appears in Gettysburg College's institutional repository by permission of the copyright owner for personal use, not for redistribution. Cupola permanent link: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/histfac/77>

This open access opinion is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact [cupola@gettysburg.edu](mailto:cupola@gettysburg.edu).

---

## Commentary: Echoes of '64 Campaign in Toomey-McGinty Race

### **Abstract**

With Donald Trump's campaign for president aimed more at solidifying his base rather than reaching out to independents and undecided voters, Republican activists have shifted their focus to holding their Senate majority, which recent polls suggest lie on a knife's edge. The Pennsylvania U.S. Senate race ranks among the major prizes Democrats hope to capture enroute to the magic number 51. [*excerpt*]

### **Keywords**

senate election, pat toomey, katie mcginty, hugh scott, genevieve blatt, pennsylvania politics

### **Disciplines**

American Politics | Political History | United States History

## Commentary: Echoes of '64 campaign in Toomey-McGinty race

Updated: October 12, 2016 — 3:01 AM EDT

By Michael Birkner

With Donald Trump's campaign for president aimed more at solidifying his base rather than reaching out to independents and undecided voters, Republican activists have shifted their focus to holding their Senate majority, which recent polls suggest lie on a knife's edge. The Pennsylvania U.S. Senate race ranks among the major prizes Democrats hope to capture enroute to the magic number 51.



U.S. Sen. Hugh Scott UPI

So what is the Republican incumbent, Pat Toomey, to do? Trump's most fervent supporters in Pennsylvania are all in for him. Damning Trump probably is as bad a strategy for Toomey as embracing him would have been. In a scenario that could portend a blowout victory for Hillary Clinton in Pennsylvania, Toomey may take heart - and some lessons - from Hugh Scott's remarkable reelection campaign in 1964.

A moderate Republican with a pro-civil rights voting record, Scott strongly opposed Barry Goldwater's nomination for president in 1964. When Goldwater became the Republican standard-bearer and named an equally strong conservative, U.S. Rep. William Miller of New York, as his running mate, Scott knew that Pennsylvanians would vote for Lyndon Johnson; the only question was by what margin LBJ would win.

Scott's next moves provide a possible model for Toomey in 2016, and are especially relevant as the presidential race has started to break heavily in Clinton's favor.

First, Scott and his strategists said, stress the man running for the Senate, not the party with which he was identified.

Second, run as independent a campaign as possible.

Third, make clear to audiences at campaign stops and in advertising, the ways in which the senator differed from his party's presidential nominee. In Scott's case, the issue was civil rights. Toomey's independence comes out most clearly in his stance on background checks for the purchase of guns and his response to the lewd comments of the man at the top of the GOP ticket. Trump, Toomey says, "is in a category by himself." "Pennsylvania voters," he insists, "will make a completely separate decision" between the top of the ticket and the Senate campaign this year.

Scott's opponent in 1964, Secretary of Internal Affairs Genevieve Blatt, was handicapped as her 2016 counterpart, Katie McGinty, is not, by internal divisions in the party. Blatt fought and survived a bruising primary campaign against Judge Michael Musmanno, who said he would not support Blatt in November, and kept up a drumbeat of criticism well into the fall, aimed especially at alienating Italian American voters from Blatt. An experienced and hard-working public official, Blatt lacked pizzazz on the stump. Blatt's gender - at a time when women candidates for statewide office were few - also worked against her.

What Blatt had going for her was Scott's line on the ticket just below Goldwater's. She would link the two candidates. On the stump she regularly called Scott's politics "cut-rate Goldwaterism." She also claimed Scott hadn't brought home enough federal funds to Pennsylvania, something she said she could do working with Johnson.

The two candidates debated at Lehigh University in September before an audience of more than 2,000 people. Blatt continued to hammer Scott about his ties with Goldwater, while Scott highlighted his experience and independence. Scott, Blatt responded, was a "straddler," both on issues and the presidential campaign. Scott insisted he was his own man and would "fight" for Pennsylvanians as he had always done.

One thing Scott did not straddle was his connection to the head of his party's ticket. When Goldwater campaigned in Pennsylvania, Scott made it a point to be committed as far as possible in the opposite part of the state.

Scott later recalled that his strategy was "to appeal across party lines, trying to capitalize as much as I could on Pennsylvania's penchant for ticket-splitting, without imperiling my standing as a Republican."

In many respects Scott's campaign serves as a template for Toomey's effort. Both candidates have downplayed partisanship, emphasizing issues where they broke with their party on key issues. Television then, as now, mattered. Scott authorized 20-second ads discouraging straight-ticket voting. "This election, each man has to stand on his own record," a friendly voiced noted. "That's why you want to vote for Senator Hugh Scott first" .

It was a shrewd message. On Election Day, Lyndon Johnson carried Pennsylvania by nearly 1.5 million votes - some 65 percent of the electorate, and twice the victory margin that Franklin Roosevelt had won in his blowout 1936 election against Alfred M. Landon. Yet Scott survived, defeating Blatt by 71,000 votes. It was one of the most remarkable examples of a near-death political experience in American political history.

Toomey has to hope that history can repeat itself. The caveat is that he could "run a perfect campaign," as Amber Phillips recently noted in the Washington Post, and "still get swallowed up by a Democratic tide here."

Michael J. Birkner is professor of history at Gettysburg College and president of the Pennsylvania Historical Association. [mbirkner@gettysburg.edu](mailto:mbirkner@gettysburg.edu)