

DIGITAL  
EXTRA!

Just how honest is Noah Dyer? We test his candor in a rapid-fire video Q&A at [phoenixmag.com/web-extras](http://phoenixmag.com/web-extras)

# F★R★I★N★G★E A★P★P★E★A★L

**Americans love an underdog.**

Our tendency to favor outliers, strivers and misfits was put under stark light in 2016 when a D.C. outsider won the highest seat in the land. Nearly two years after President Donald Trump's dark-horse triumph, more people than ever before are jumping into the political rat race – many with nil political experience, and many shooting for the moon in choice of office.

We profile six Arizona underdog candidates gunning for office this November who refuse to be muzzled by the staid, dusty rules of America's political process.

By

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**ARIZONA CAPITOL MUSEUM**





## Noah Dyer *The TMI-arian*

**“I’ve been totally honest and transparent since day one,”** Noah Dyer told bemused correspondent Desi Lydic in a May 2017 segment on Comedy Central’s *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*.

“When I launched my campaign, I revealed everything I’ve done,” the then-Democratic candidate for Arizona governor continues. “There’s a statement on my website that reveals I’ve had a lot of casual sex and sex with married women.” The Valley-based marketing executive also admitted to group sex, launching a Kickstarter campaign to film his life 24/7 for a year à la *EDtv*, \$100,000 in student loan debt and paying child support with credit card cash advances during the recession. Last February, he auctioned off a truly terrible desert sunset-scape he painted at one of those drink-and-paint places to help fund his campaign.

Looking back nearly a year later on the slew of (international!) coverage that came

from using his dirty laundry to parachute into the popular consciousness, Dyer hesitates before saying he does not necessarily regret it. In fact, he tacitly admits it was all by design. Candidacy as performance art. “I wasn’t trying to engage that conversation – that, to use their language, I was ‘campaigning with my d\*ck’... But if people are talking about you, it’s usually good.”

Standing over 6 feet with unshifting brown eyes, the 37-year-old divorced father of four is hoping to shift the conversation away from his personal life and onto his middle-of-the-road platform. (In addition to bumping up funding for public education by closing tax loopholes, his stated issues include legalizing recreational marijuana to increase

### Independent = Better?

Independents may account for a large chunk of Arizona’s electoral pie, but that doesn’t mean they’re good voters. Former Arizona Secretary of State Ken Bennett said in 2014 that Independent turnout rates in primaries – arguably more impactful than the general – is less than 10 percent. Independent voters can participate in the state primary but must choose a Republican or Democratic ballot.

tax revenue and decreasing abortions by providing free contraceptives.) In late July, he changed his party registration back to Independent after complaining of receiving little to no support from the state’s Democratic top brass, including being snubbed of an invitation to a forum with fellow Dem candidates Steve Farley and David Garcia.

“[But] it’s crazy what it takes to run as an Independent,” he says. Dyer points out that a Republican or Democrat running for statewide office must collect 6,223 and 5,801 signatures, respectively, to appear on the primary ballot while an Independent needs 36,697 – or 3 percent of the total number of registered voters who aren’t members of a recognized political party. (At press time, Dyer said he had about half that.) Independents, meanwhile, will not appear on the August 28 primary ballot but must still turn in their signatures by May 30 like everyone else.

“Fundamentally, I think [being an] Independent leads most people to centrism on most issues,” Dyer says of Arizona’s 1.2 million registered Independents (versus 1.09 million Democrats and 1.25 Republicans).

If anything, Dyer says, he’s become more conservative. “I’ve been feeling a renewed sense of spirituality.”

Raised in a Mormon household, Dyer left the church around the time of his divorce 10 years ago. Ironically, Dyer credits the LDS stance on “the truth” as what gave him the motivation to leave.

Mormonism is “very big on if it’s true, then you gotta do it... They tell a lot of stories where if it would be advantageous to lie or do things outside of church teachings, you should still [stick to the truth]... come what may,” he says.

Ever the truth-teller, Dyer readily admits he’s an underdog in the race against incumbent Doug Ducey and the primary Democratic challengers. “A few months ago, I was speaking incredibly confidently, like ‘We will be on the ballot!’ Now we’re going to be on the wire [for signatures],” he says.

When he declared his candidacy in February 2017, Dyer says, “I didn’t know what it would take to win. I just thought, ‘I’m

a reasonably smart guy, I care about people, I’m honest and transparent, people want that.’ Or at least they say they do.”

He’s eager to see if, like him, people actually say what they mean.

## Deedra Abboud *The Activist*

**O**riginally from Arkansas, with clear blue eyes and a cozy drawl full of clever turns of phrase, Deedra Abboud suggests one of the heroines from *Fried Green Tomatoes*. You can almost imagine her there, trading verbal barbs with her fellow belles from behind a screened-in porch.

Almost, if not for the traditional hijab head covering she wears as a devout Muslim – something the media and legions of Internet trolls can’t seem to notice.

“I was ‘the Muslim candidate’ every time,” the 46-year-old Democrat and civil rights activist says of news reports last year following her declaration to run for Jeff Flake’s U.S. Senate seat this November.

Then again, Abboud’s faith is chiefly what makes her distinctive as a candidate. The Scottsdale resident has never held public office – she’s never even run for office – and is not strongly tied to the Democratic party machine. All of which seem like deal-breakers for a candidate aspiring to Congress’ hallowed upper chamber.

Abboud, a former estate attorney, points out that she’s not exactly a political neophyte. After converting to Islam in 1998, she helped establish the Council on American-Islamic Relations Arizona and married her husband, an Iraqi immigrant, soon after. She also placed herself on the front lines of the culture war in the tumultuous decade that followed.

“I was a civil rights and social justice advocate after 9/11, so this is my second rodeo,” she says. “We’ve always tolerated [the haters], we’ve always made space for them. I do believe in freedom of speech. But they also need to know that they’re not going to intimidate me.”

Abboud says friends and family have long encouraged her to run for public office, but it wasn’t until she felt disenchanted with the venomous rhetoric of the 2016 election season that she considered it. Instead of aiming for a state legislative seat, where legislators typically begin, she chose the U.S. Senate. “I felt it was a race I could compete in,” she says gamely. “I also wanted to do a statewide race where I could go around the state. It’s not that the rural areas [just] feel neglected; they’re actually forgotten.”

Conscious of the theocratic stigma sometimes applied to Islam, Abboud singles out the separation of church and state as one of her top platform bulletpoints, along with establishing a single-payer health care system, and protecting net neutrality and reproductive rights.

Despite her sanguine proclamation that Arizona is “actually purple” due to its large population of registered Independents, Abboud faces a substantial red roadblock on her quest for the Senate. A Democrat has not won the U.S. Senate race in Arizona since moderate Dennis DeConcini prevailed in 1976, swooping in to collect the dust after an explosive GOP primary.

But it’s a big blue roadblock that truly lies in Abboud’s path: three-term U.S. Representative Kyrsten Sinema, who has lavish funding and widespread name recognition as a moderate Democrat, and is the prohibitive favorite to face one of three well-known Republican contenders in the race: former state Senator Kelli Ward, Tucson Congresswoman and Air Force vet Martha McSally and former Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio.

Abboud has choice words for all three of them, but is surprisingly muted in her criticism of her primary opponent, who started her po-

litical life in the liberal, pro-environment Green Party but has moved aggressively to the center in the interim, sometimes drawing criticism from fellow Dems. Abboud demures when pressed on what, specifically, would make her a better choice than Sinema, only saying, “I’m running for what I think is important and I’m hoping at minimum that that will make [Sinema] reflect on what’s important. Because she was a very different candidate, she was a very different politician, four or five years ago than what she is now.”

Despite her long odds, Abboud manages to stay in the media cycle – primarily as the target of hate-speech and anti-Muslim venom. The latest incident occurred when a woman later arrested for live-streaming her vandalization of a Tempe mosque confronted Abboud outside a local Bernie Sanders event in March, screaming “Deedra Abboud supports Muslims who hate America.”

Maybe that will be Abboud’s ultimate value and function in 2018 – simply keeping the dialogue going. Because even many of her allies have a ways to go, she says. “I’ve had people tell me, ‘I love everything about you if you could just take off your scarf.’ And I’m like, ‘So you want to tell me how to dress?’

“I believe the only person who should be telling a woman how to dress is the woman looking back at her in the mirror.”

### The Underdog Effect:

A phenomenon of public opinion, usually documented during elections and athletic competitions, in which people perceive a particular candidate to be the likely winner, or at least dominant, and support an alternative who is expected to lose. It was best evidenced in a 1980 study during the presidential election that showed participants disproportionately rooted for Ronald Reagan when told Jimmy Carter was leading the polls, and vice versa.



# Barry Hess *The Serial Candidate*

**B**arry Hess harkens back to when a local reporter called him “the perennial candidate.” “How big of an idiot can you be?” he recalls thinking. “Perennial means annual.”

It actually means “present at all seasons of the year.” But point taken. Quad-annual, then.

This is Hess’ fifth run for Arizona governor since 2002. He’s also run for U.S. Senate and president. Though he’s been campaigning for nearly two decades, the 61-year-old currency trader and Bitcoin owner from Glendale has never held public office. If you ask him, that’s likely because he’s a Libertarian.

“The biggest problem is people don’t know what a Libertarian is,” he says. “For a long time, Libertarians were [perceived as] camo jacket, AR-15 over shoulder, get up on stage and say outrageous things. That was to

get attention... We’ve gone past that. We’re sort of where the Republicans were in 1859. They were nothing, trying for umpteen years to get someone elected. Next year, they got Lincoln.”

Of course, America is much different today than it was 150 years ago, and third parties historically falter in America’s entrenched two-party system. Libertarian 2016 presidential candidate Gary Johnson won roughly 3 percent of the vote. Perhaps the most popular Libertarian of our time, Ron Paul (a hero of Hess’), declared as Republican in the 2008 and 2012 presidential races.

Raised in a conservative home in New Hampshire, spending summers working the family farm in Ohio, Hess says he always assumed he was a Republican, too. While volunteering for Ronald Reagan’s 1979 presidential campaign, Hess says it was Reagan who taught him the

### Third-Party Who?

America has rarely elected third-party candidates. Since the end of Reconstruction, there have been less than 30 third-party governors. The most recent is Alaska Governor Bill Walker, an Independent. A Libertarian has never won statewide executive or federal office.

“L” word. “He looked at me and said, ‘Barry, you’re not a Republican. You’re a Libertarian... Because you hold government to the same standard of moral accountability as you would an individual.’”

“And the problem is what?” Hess asks about that extremely attractive framing of a party that’s long been stereotyped as a boys’ club filled with nerdy, misogynistic civil engineers on their fifth reading of *Atlas Shrugged*. Though he admits the party was in need of diversification for many years, he says it’s getting new, younger (and female) members all the time.

Plus, he points out, the traditional media – the one that’s long pooh-pooed third-party and other underdog candidates by not giving them the same scope of attention – is no longer seen as unerring. “[The media] go ‘This person just isn’t worth considering,’ either because this person is crazy, but usually because, well, they’re not viable, or they can’t afford to win,” Hess says. “Where were they when Trump won? I mean, come on, everyone thought that the ‘Hilldabeast’ was gonna make it. Didn’t happen. So it just shows the fallibility of their perceptions.”

Long and lean with bright blue eyes and an appetite for friendly debate (he was nicknamed The Rhino during his salesman days, “because I have thick skin and I just keep coming”), Hess says if elected governor he’d tackle two big issues Arizona’s long faced with what he calls the three Rs of Libertarianism: revoke, repeal, rescind. The first would be the education system. “I’d like to open it up and see the state become a testing facility,” he says, claiming up to three-quarters of the state’s public school students could shift to online distance learning, solving the seemingly endless need for more money to operate schools.

Second to go: criminal drug laws. “We have the same addiction rate as we did when Nixon came into it with his drug war... We’ve arrested 50 million Americans, taking the breadwinner out of homes, leaving kids without parents, creating another drain on society,” Hess says.

In all his years running, Hess says, “I knew what I was up against” and was more interested in forging relationships with people all over Arizona rather than digging hard for votes among the political elite in Maricopa County. Before, “I never really asked people for money... this time we are raising money, we are running seriously, we are in it to win it.”

# Scott Menor

## *The Fall Guy*

**S**cott Menor may be too polite to make it in politics. At one point during his interview, he apologizes when a repairman starts drilling to remove the hinges of the coffee shop door. “Sorry about that,” he says over the mildly annoying zip of the power tool, before catching himself. “I have an ‘I’m sorry’ problem.”

Later, when asked about what he brings to the table as a Democrat in Arizona’s ultra conservative Congressional District 5, Menor says, “I feel weird talking about a compliment I get because I have low self-esteem, I guess.” He laughs, aware of how absurd that sounds for a wannabe politician. “I have a little bit of impostor syndrome, which is ridiculous considering my qualifications.”

Admittedly, his résumé is impressive – but it also seems better suited for a career at NASA than the Beltway. Menor, 41, has a bachelor’s degree in mathematics and microbiology from Arizona State University, a master’s degree in microbiology from the University of Hawaii at Manoa, and a Ph.D. in physics from ASU. After working in web development – and getting a divorce from a fellow Ph.D. student (no kids) – he launched Roam Robotics Inc., a personal robotics company that’s in the early research and development phase. “It’s one of those things where it sounds hard if you don’t know about robots,” he says. “But if you do know about it, it sounds insane. It’s that hard.”

Another thing that sounds crazy, especially without any prior experience? Running a political campaign. “But the Constitution doesn’t require that you have prior political experience [to hold office],” Menor says. “Everyone should have the opportunity to run and be in office without being a career politician.”

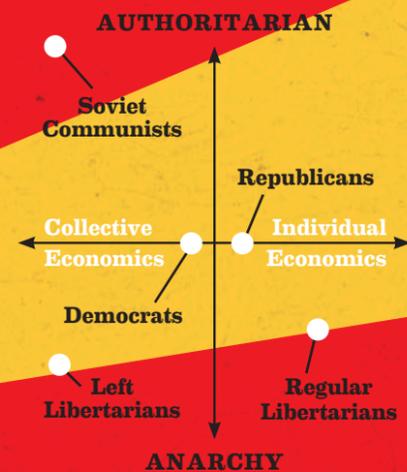
Plus, he does have experience with grassroots campaigning, going door to door in 2016 canvassing for presidential candidate Bernie Sanders. Once Sanders lost the primary, Menor hesitantly picked up the baton for Hillary Clinton, though he wasn’t as enthused by her candidacy. Still, it was better than the alternative. “When Trump won... I was more disappointed in people than anything... Trump has no principles and values – that people would vote for him...” he says, trailing off. “It was a motivator to run.”

After first declaring as an Independent in CD9, he switched to Democrat and focused on CD5, comprising east Mesa, Gilbert and



## Political Spectrum

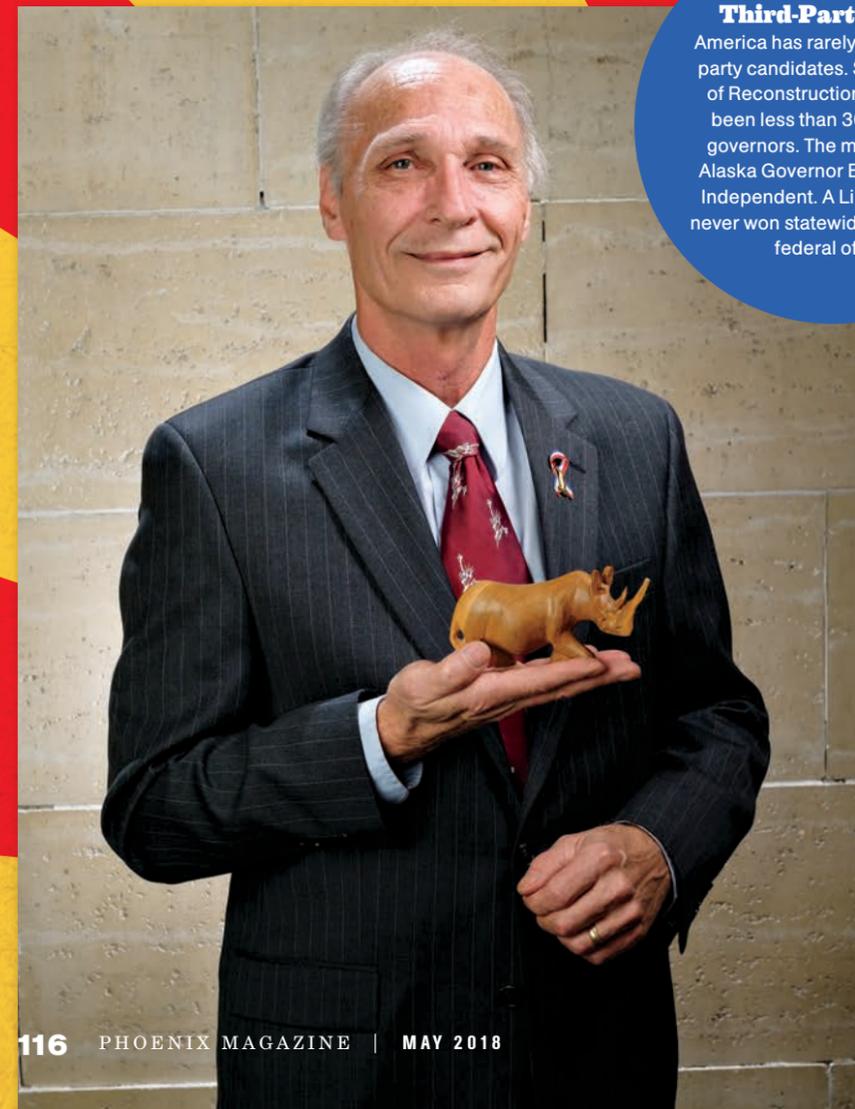
Menor says he identifies “about 98 percent” with Bernie Sanders’ platform, putting himself in the lower left-hand corner of the political spectrum. “I’m very left and very Libertarian.”



Chandler, currently held by former state legislator and staunch conservative Andy Biggs. “He’s the chair of [the Subcommittee on Environment on] the House Science, Space and Technology Committee,” Menor says. “He has no business being on that committee, let alone [being] the chair. He doesn’t believe in anthropogenic [human-made] climate change. I’d say he’s scientifically illiterate.”

The committee position seems to be the primary reason Menor is gunning for Biggs’ seat. He also thinks there are enough registered Independents frustrated with the conservative status quo to put him over the edge. (According to a 2014 Arizona Association of Counties report, Republicans comprise 44 percent of the district, while Democrats have 21 percent and Independents have 34.) But he acknowledges that he, an atheist, faces a steep climb in the heavily Mormon district.

“It’s an experiment,” Menor says of his campaign, which he admits he’d “have to be crazy” to think wasn’t a longshot. “I’ve canvassed in suits, I’ve canvassed in shorts, flip-flops.” The main thing that seems to matter to voters, he says, is that all-important requirement for any scientist worth his salt: “I change my mind if I’m presented with new information that shows I was wrong.”





## Lori Klein Corbin

The Trumpist

**“Fake news.”** Lori Klein Corbin says about the news report she’s perhaps best known for. In a July 2011 article in *The Arizona Republic*, reporter Richard Ruelas wrote that Klein Corbin, then a state senator representing Anthem, pointed her loaded gun at the reporter’s chest while outside the Senate chamber. “I was pointing the [gun’s] laser at the wall for the photographer. [The reporter] walked in front of it, I immediately moved it,” she says. The story became “Senator whips out gun, points it at reporter. They did not say that this was an interview about my carrying... Had his life been in danger, which it was not, I would’ve been in jail.”

Seven years later, Klein Corbin – a Republican now running for Arizona Secretary of State – is still a bit wary of the media, even telling this reporter she hopes the article is fair or else she’d have to reassess any trust

she still has in the press. In pre-Trump days, this picking and choosing of coverage was not an option – candidates needed the media to spread their message. But now, as the president bypasses traditional press avenues to “speak” directly to the people via Twitter and holds his own “fake news awards,” who knows what the future holds for non-traditional political candidates?

Klein Corbin, 63, is attempting one of the trickiest maneuvers in politics: trying to primary, or unseat, a not completely unpopular incumbent in a midterm election. She chose secretary of state because she feels the current officeholder – Michele Reagan – is not doing enough to protect voter integrity. “The attorney general of our state found her to be negligent and incompetent for not sending out 200,000 publicity pamphlets,” Klein Corbin says about Reagan’s office’s gaffe of failing to send information on propositions 123 and 124 to voters in a timely manner during the 2016 special election. “That

doesn’t mean she’s incompetent, but she has an incompetent staff... She has left this office vulnerable to a Democrat challenge.”

To Klein Corbin, a lifelong Republican who won her single term in the Arizona State Senate in 2010 just after the national Tea Party movement gained real traction, the threat of a Democrat in the SOS office is frightening. (She subsequently lost her 2012 race for State House after a redistricting move that would have pitted her against former Senator Steve Pierce.) “I’m afraid No.1 that [Reagan’s] not going to get re-elected if she’s the [Republican] candidate,” she says. “Also, we owe it to the people of Arizona [to] have clean rolls, that everyone who wants to vote, that’s eligible to vote, can vote.”

Voter fraud is also a big concern for her, despite widespread studies and reports showing that voter fraud is rare. Asked about this, Klein Corbin insists ballot tampering is a real problem, as is registering undocumented immigrants. “When you have people that are intent on criminal activity in regard to voter fraud... you have a problem.”

### Fictitious Fraud

In a 2014 investigation published in *The Washington Post*, Loyola Law School (Los Angeles) professor Justin Levitt found only 31 credible incidents of voter fraud out of 1 billion votes cast in 14 years.

Sporting a GOP-approved red Ralph Lauren embossed blazer, bejeweled reading glasses and an impeccable French-tip manicure, Klein Corbin is the model of conservative womanhood. Married to Bob Corbin, former Arizona

attorney general and former president of the National Rifle Association, since 2013 (she has three grown sons from a previous marriage), she currently serves as the Arizona National Committeewoman for the Republican National Committee and was Arizona chair of the Women for Donald Trump.

She also has the expected party-lifer blind spot, blasting outside money from liberal billionaires George Soros and Tom Steyer in Arizona while neglecting to chide GOP donors, like those who long funded Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio’s lengthy reign.

She’s a huge admirer of the president – perhaps recognizing a fellow long-shot candidate – and does not see her association with him (she’s pictured with Trump on her campaign flyer) as a detriment to her campaign. “I personally like the energy he’s bringing to the office,” she says. “I think people are sick of establishment types, anyhow.”

## Talia Fuentes *The Millennial*

**I**t’s hard to find many Phoenixians under the age of 35 without a tattoo these days. It’s a different story in Washington, D.C. Not that 32-year-old Talia Fuentes cares. “Every superhero needs a chest piece,” she says of the winged armor emblazoned on her skin. “I’m fully aware that it is a thing, but it’s a thing that connects with people.”

The single mom to a 12-year-old boy hopes that relatability, youthful enthusiasm and a progressive platform that includes universal Medicare helps her topple the proverbial older, more experienced, infinitely better funded white guy – Phoenix Mayor Greg Stanton – in August’s Democratic primary for Arizona Congressional District 9. Hoping to replace outgoing Rep. Kyrsten Sinema, Fuentes says Stanton is more of the same in Congress: “It’s not women, it’s not people of diversity, it’s the same mold that we’ve always had.”

Fuentes is a bit of a serial-candidate-in-the-making herself. In 2016, she jumped into the CD5 race at the last minute against Republican Andy Biggs, virtually uncontested as the Democratic pick in a heavily red district. “It was the district I grew up in,” she says. “And it was a kick in the stomach that [the Democrats] didn’t have anyone running against [Biggs].” In the end, Fuentes lost with just less than 36 percent of the vote.

She caught the Congressional campaign bug and switched to CD9, which covers her home in Tempe, for 2018 – a safer blue seat, but still a big ask. Questioned why she didn’t set her sights on a more attainable seat in the state House or Senate, she says she has no interest in waiting her turn. “We have a problem here in Arizona of waiting on the bench – we get caught up in climbing the ladder of city council then state legislator... there’s not enough people with talent running at the federal level.”

Fuentes, who identifies as Hispanic, Native American and white, and who’s worked a slew of different jobs over the years, including tattoo shop manager, radio DJ, wildlife conservationist in South Africa and app creator, says she represents a new, more diverse America. She also touts herself as an applied biologist on her website – she earned a de-

gree in biology from ASU in 2017 – and has a pro-science platform, promising to use “the scientific method for the betterment of all society.” Her logo swaps the ‘f’ in her name for a double helix.

She is banking on running a grassroots viral campaign with little funding or backing from the Democratic Party, much like her 2016 presidential pick Bernie Sanders.

“We have a YouTuber on staff,” she says of Echo Gillette, a Phoenix artist with 313,000 YouTube subscribers. “She connected with me because of my Internet presence.”

To Fuentes, that means live-streaming off-the-cuff videos on Twitter and sharing interviews with new media like *The Young Turks* on Facebook.

### Group Think

As of March, more than 2,100 people filed to run for U.S. Congress in the 2018 midterm elections. That’s the highest number of candidates at this point in the cycle since the FEC started keeping track in 1977. Meanwhile, NPR reported in February that more than twice as many women are running in 2018 than in 2016.

“Millennials are now the largest voter bloc, and the Democrats here are not doing anything to connect with them,”

Fuentes says. “What I like to remind people is when our country was founded and when the Constitution was founded, it was written by 18- and 19-year-olds... who knew they could make a difference by organizing.”

Like many politicians, Fuentes has a tendency toward hyperbole. Per *Politifact*, Pew Research predicts it is likely, but not certain, the millennial vote will surpass Gen X in 2020 (Pew made no such predictions for the 2018 midterms) and the youngest to sign the Constitution was Jonathan Dayton, 26.

But sure, the Founding Fathers could reliably be called underdogs, much like Fuentes. “I don’t like [being called an underdog]. Well, no, it depends on the context... I think [the media] takes it [as a negative] without understanding the reality of voters,” she says. “We do have a large amount of Independents, we do have a lot of people that aren’t voting. These underdogs could be the answer. This could be the year of the underdog.”

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