Political Rising Stars roundup -

By Emily Cadei

Why you should care

Because they all won big last night — and could rise even higher.

It couldn't have been an easy call. After midnight, President Obama, with his party in shreds, decided to phone and congratulate the new Senate majority leader, Mitch McConnell. Unfortunately, McConnell was asleep.

With the election results behind us (or nearly so; some ballots are still being tallied, some races have gone to runoffs and some losers have yet to concede), it's time to take out the old crystal ball and see where America — now much more red than blue — is headed. There are no firm answers, of course. But some of OZY's political rising stars (many of whom won last night) might have some idea. They're at least worth pointing out again: For the past eight months we've been finding and profiling politicos who'd been largely overlooked. Until now. Here's how their election nights went.



SOURCE: **MAE GAMMINO**

R.I. Gov.-elect Gina Raimondo

Everybody Loves Raimondo

Gina Raimondo's victory in the Rhode Island governor's race was a ray of light in an otherwise dreary election night for Democrats. The prodigal daughter — Raimondo was a Rhodes scholar, graduated from Harvard College and Yale Law, and was a venture capitalist — had never sought political office until 2010, when she ran for state treasurer. Now she's set to become the first female governor in Rhode Island's history. She'll also be Rhode Island's first Democratic governor since 1992 .The 43-year-old's path to the governor's mansion wasn't an easy one. She had to win a crowded Democratic primary in August and then a three-way contest in the general election,

narrowly defeating Republican Allan Fung and Moderate Party candidate Bob Healey in the open seat race.

OZY profiled her before she'd even launched her campaign for governor last fall, but it was clear even then she was on the rise. As Howard Wolfson, a senior counsel to former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and a top strategist for Hillary Clinton in 2008, said then, "Gina is one of the most impressive public officials in America today in the mayor's opinion. … He really thinks she's a superstar." Now she has to live up to the hype. *Read the full profile here*.

The GOP might want to start asking itself whether Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder's brand of anti-politics might be good politics after all.



SOURCE: JOSHUA LOTT/GETTY

Mich. Gov. Rick Snyder speaks to reporters in Detroit.

The Anti-Politician Trying to Reinvent Michigan

Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder has always been a political dark horse, and his re-election on Tuesday means he will continue to be one as 2016 approaches. Campaigning as "one tough nerd" in the 2010 governor's race, the former tax accountant and Gateway Computers executive came out of nowhere to win the open seat, upsetting several far more established politicians along the way. By 2014, he had more political experience under his belt, but Snyder was but was still as unslick and technocratic as ever — no throwing partisan red meat for this guy. And his stances on labor unions and Detroit's onerous bankruptcy inevitably earned him enemies in this blue state. Michigan's recovery from the depths of economic depression last decade is undeniable, however. And whether or not Snyder deserves credit for that, the GOP might want to start asking itself whether his brand of anti-politics might be good politics after all.

"We've been reinventing Michigan and this is a chance to keep going, and go faster," Snyder told reporters at a press conference in Michigan on Wednesday morning. One of the Republican's first priorities: funding infrastructure improvements, particularly upgrading the state's crumbling roads. He also said Wednesday that he's focused on bringing prosperity to Detroit's neighborhoods, which have suffered the most from the city's bankruptcy and continue to struggle, even as downtown Detroit enjoys something of a renaissance. *Read the full profile here.*



SOURCE: ANDY CROSS/GETTY

Colo. Gov. John Hickenlooper

A Pixie-Dust-Covered Governor

Democrat John Hickenlooper had to wait until Wednesday morning to learn he would, indeed, return for a second term as Colorado's governor. It's been a nerve-wracking campaign for the geologist-turned-brewpub-owner-turned-politician, who found himself in the political fight of his life against former GOP Congressman Bob Beauprez, who, by the time this story was published, had still refused to concede.

Which all goes to show that in politics, there's a fine line between nationwide adulation and loserville.

A lot of that had to do with stances the former mayor of Denver took in his first term, including support for renewable energy requirements, his indefinite delaying of Nathan Dunlap's execution and his landmark gun-control bill (which cost two Dems their seats). Though Hickenlooper has had an uncanny ability to balance interests on the left and the right throughout his career, that string of moves triggered accusations he was too liberal for the state, and his approval ratings dropped. (Hickenlooper, for his part, struck a conciliatory note in a statement today. "Colorado isn't red or blue; it's not about Democrats or Republicans or unaffiliateds or Green Party or tea party; but rather, Colorado is made up of Coloradans," he said.) His ability to pull out the win in this battleground state despite those challenges, and a terrible year for Democrats, should cement his inclusion in the 2016 discussion. Which all goes to show that in politics, there's a fine line between nationwide adulation and loserville. *Read the full profile here.*



SOURCE: JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY

Ark. Sen.-elect Tom Cotton

Another Man From Hope

Two decades ago, a “man from Hope” helped Democrats retake the White House. Today, Republican pundits are looking to another guy who represents Hope, Arkansas, in Congress to lead their party as it emerges from the political wilderness — and one day, they hope, he’ll end up at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. That’s how bright the future seems for Tom Cotton, a 37-year-old Harvard grad and combat veteran who won his first political contest, to represent Arkansas’ 4th District in the U.S. House, last fall. He made the leap to the Senate easily, defeating incumbent Democrat Mark Pryor in one of the most hotly contested Senate races of the election.

That helped Republicans take control of the chamber, and you can bet the new majority will be turning to this freshman next year to lead the way on hot-button security issues like defeating the Islamic State group and negotiating with Iran. It doesn’t hurt that Cotton has demonstrated the rare ability to appeal to both the tea party and establishment wings of the GOP — a less divisive idealist than Ted Cruz with the hawkish credentials of John McCain. How he continues to walk that fine line will go a long way to determining just how effective a senator — and national party leader — he becomes. *Read the full profile here.*

Of course, we don’t have a crystal ball, so not all of our Rising Star politicos ended up winning on Tuesday. Democratic businesswoman Mary Burke lost a hard-fought race in Wisconsin to polarizing Republican Gov. Scott Walker. And even the GOP tide couldn’t lift young conservative Marilinda Garcia over Annie Kuster in New Hampshire’s Democratic-leaning 2nd District. Others, like former fighter pilot Martha McSally in Arizona and Rep. Ami Bera in California, are in nail-biter House races that are still too close to call.

But that’s the nature of politics, and, as we’ve seen many times before, one November loss hardly means the end of a political career. Even the losers are worth watching as the future unfolds.

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