

## Arkansas: Gov. Hutchinson favored; US Rep. Hill in close race

by Hastings Wyman | Jul 2, 2018 | Top Story |



Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson (R), up for reelection in November, is a popular governor; 57% approve of his performance in office, while less than half that number, 25%, disapprove. Moreover, Donald Trump carried the state by 61% to 34% for former Arkansas First Lady Hillary Clinton and is unlikely to be a drag on the ticket this year.

A major reason for Hutchinson's popularity is that he has concentrated on helping the state's economy and has generally avoided public arguments on hot-button social issues. In making the state's economy his Number One priority, Hutchinson has made seven trips to other countries to promote trade deals, deals that have boosted the export of rice and other farm products as well as helped expand or bring new industries and jobs to Arkansas. Hutchinson also helped sell the state's agricultural production to such previously hard-to-penetrate markets as China and Cuba.

According to an estimate by Arkansas economist Mervin Jebaraj, published in Talk Business & Politics, the state has added 3,100 manufacturing jobs in the past year. The state's unemployment rate is 3.8%, among the lowest in the South equal to the national jobless rate, which is at a near-record low.

Given Hutchinson's emphasis on economic deals with foreign countries, he has been concerned about President Trump's imposition of tariffs on steel and aluminum, which are bringing retaliatory tariffs from some of Arkansas's important trading partners, including Mexico, Canada, and countries in Europe and Asia.

Given Trump's popularity here, Hutchinson has been measured in his disagreement with the President. In a statement to Talk Business & Politics, Hutchinson said, "I have consistently cautioned the President to avoid a trade war that would harm Arkansas exports, including our agricultural commodities, that depend on world markets." In May, he discussed trade policy with President Trump at the White House, along with several other governors.

In the primary, Hutchinson had one challenger, Jan Morgan, 54, who owns a gun range that she once dubbed a "Muslim Free Zone." He beat her pretty soundly, 70% to 30%. Her challenge was just "a speed bump" along the way, says one

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Sanders, a former mail carrier who is currently a hair braider. After her defeat, Sanders endorsed Libertarian Mark West, citing his support for the homeless and for decriminalizing marijuana.

Although a newcomer to politics, Henderson has an impressive resume. He is a summa cum laude graduate of the University of Arkansas, where he studied computer science and physics. At Harvard, he earned both an MBA and a master's degree in Public Administration. He formerly worked for NASA and now runs a medical practice with his wife, Dr. Melanie Prince. Henderson is a former executive director of Teach for America, a nonprofit organization based in New York which works to eliminate educational inequality. In that position, he was in charge of 150 employees and 1,500 teachers.

Moneywise, Hutchinson had some \$2 million in his campaign kitty in January. "He's campaigning hard and raising money;" says the observer. "He'll dominate the media with his official schedule and his campaigning."

A poll taken in mid-March by Mason-Dixon showed Hutchinson with 63% to 24% for Henderson.

Sure-things are a rarity in today's volatile politics, but Hutchinson's reelection prospects are about as close as you can get to a lead-pipe cinch.

In the contest for Arkansas's 2nd District, US Rep. French Hill (R) is seeking his third term. He has represented the district since 2015.

Hill is facing a formidable challenger in Democrat Clarke Tucker whose family is prominent in this Little Rock-based district. Tucker is a progressive young Democrat, which appeals to many Little Rock voters. The contest will come down to whether Clarke can carry Little Rock by enough votes to overcome Hill's lead in the surrounding suburban/rural counties.

In the May 22 primaries, Hill was unopposed. Tucker won with 60% in a field of four. He had the backing of most of the Democratic establishment here.

While the district has been regarded as somewhat moderate, Donald Trump carried it by 11 points and remains popular.

As of May 2, in the midst of their primary campaigns, Hill had \$1,630,000 cash-on-hand; Tucker had \$240,000. Hill is already on television and his ads tie Tucker to Hillary Clinton and Nancy Pelosi.

"French Hill is the favorite, but it can't be taken for granted;" says SPR's source (R). "It'll be close." Stay tuned.



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