

# Arizona Eyes on DC



## A window into Washington for business in Arizona

- news, trends, and discussions with thought leaders -

Total Spectrum/Steve Gordon & Associates

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We hope everybody had an enjoyable July. Arizona's Eyes this summer are on politics and the upcoming November election. There are a number of outstanding objective observers of campaigns, and we want to introduce you to one of the best. Nathan Gonzales of the *Rothenberg & Gonzales Political Report* is one you'll hear more and more from this year and for years to come.

Stu Rothenberg and Charlie Cook in the mid-1980's created objective and non-partisan political journalism - or were at least involved in the creation of the field. Charlie founded the *Cook Political Report* and Stu started the *Rothenberg Political Report*. They were good competitors and great friends, and together carved out an industry and set a very high bar.

Nathan Gonzales joined the *Rothenberg Political Report* in 2001, and the national political community was immediately impressed. He is youthful yet very mature, focused, insightful, and perceptive. Nathan took the reins in 2015, and is now the Editor and Publisher of the *Rothenberg & Gonzales Political Report*.

He has appeared on NBC's *Meet the Press* and the *NBC Nightly News*, the *News Hour* on PBS, C-Span's *Washington Journal*, CNN, and the Fox News Channel. He has been quoted in the *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, and the *New York Times*. He is also a contributing writer for *Roll Call* - The Capitol Hill Newspaper, and is the founder of [Politics in Stereo](#), a website featuring state-based political news.

He earned a bachelor's degree from Vanguard University in Costa Mesa, CA, and a master's degree from the George Washington

### About Us

Total Spectrum

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Expertise

### In this Edition

Follow Up: Free Trade Agreements

**2016 and Beyond: A Watershed Election Year?**

University Graduate School of Political Management.

We're very pleased to introduce Nathan Gonzales to Arizona and get his perspective on the ongoing campaigns and upcoming November election.

We welcome your thoughts and feedback on this interview, our writing, and suggestions for future editions!

Thanks for your continued interest. We strive to be your Window on Washington.

Steve Gordon  
Managing Director

Ashley Ragan  
Partner

***On An Earlier Topic...***

**Follow up: Free Trade Agreements**

As a follow up to our interview with Richard Sawaya of the National Foreign Trade Council, we thought this information on the proposed Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) and current U.S. free trade agreements may be of interest.



An Atlas of U.S. Free Trade Agreements

***2016 and Beyond:***

**A Watershed Election Year?**

an interview with  
**Nathan Gonzales**  
*Editor and Publisher*  
*Rothenberg & Gonzales Political Report*



*ARIZONA EYES: Tell us some of the things you look for when you meet with candidates and analyze campaigns.*

NATHAN: The *Rothenberg & Gonzales Political Report* is not only the longest name of a publication in history, but a nonpartisan media outlet - a phrase you don't hear very often anymore. We specialize in House and Senate coverage (including our analysis, candidate interviews, and ratings) but we also cover gubernatorial races and the presidential election. Our goal is to give readers an early look at the races that will decide the majorities and introduce readers to the new Members of Congress who will be making laws in the next Congress.

Candidate interviews are vital to our success. We meet with between 100 and 150 candidates every two-year campaign cycle. Each interview starts like a deposition with basic biographical data, then their professional career, any previous elections they've been involved in and then the current race. These are not gotcha style interviews, but rather they allow us to get to know the candidates, understand their path to victory, and even ask them about attacks that they anticipate will be coming their way in order to see if they are prepared when the race really heats up.

The interviews vary widely in quality. I remember meeting State Senator Barack Obama in September of 2002--- more than two years before his Senate run. He was serious, but impressive. I also remember a California Democrat John Hernandez, who was clearly out of his league and went on to lose a Democratic district in the Northern part of the state.

*ARIZONA EYES: There have been watershed campaign cycles - years that disrupt and change the flow and the current in American politics. Are we in a disruptive campaign cycle, or are we on the rim of one that we'll see full flower in the next few years?*

NATHAN: Sometimes the worst time to evaluate the full historical impact of an election is when you're in the middle of it. But with Donald Trump winning the Republican nomination and Bernie Sanders, who isn't even a Democrat, having waged a tough campaign to the bitter end, we have to call this a disruptive campaign cycle. This cycle is just the beginning of the Democratic infighting between the populist wing and the other wing, which is allegedly too close to Wall Street and "big banks." There is no other reason why Bernie Sanders should have survived in the race except for the popularity of his message. Democrats have enjoyed watching Republicans eat themselves alive in ideological primaries for the Senate and House, but the Democratic establishment will have trouble controlling their party in the next few campaign cycles.

*ARIZONA EYES: Republicans are trying to hold on to their Majority in the Senate and their historic majority in the House of Representatives - and of course, Sen. McCain's reelection campaign is a significant part of that effort. Each candidate stands alone, and each campaign is different, yet national trends often create wave elections. Do you see a wave building, and what should we watch for this summer and fall?*

NATHAN: First, watch a handful of the most vulnerable GOP senators - including Senator Rob Portman (OH), Senator Kelly Ayotte (NH), Senator Pat Toomey (PA), and Senator Marco Rubio (FL). All of them are well prepared for their re-election races and are in tight races today. But if they all start losing ground and Democratic challengers start to take the lead, that's a sign that the GOP majority is in trouble. Then watch Senator John McCain, Senator Richard Burr (NC), and even Senator Roy Blunt (MO). I think Arizona, North Carolina, and Missouri are lower-second tier or even third tier races. But if these incumbents start losing ground and the Democratic challengers start to take the lead in these second and third tier races, then the GOP majority is in REAL trouble. Remember that if Hillary Clinton wins the White House, Republicans have a great opportunity to bounce back in the 2018 midterm elections, and even regain the Senate majority.

*ARIZONA EYES: What are key Republican incumbents up this year doing - or what should they be doing to make sure that if there's a wave they don't get caught up in it?*

NATHAN: For the most part, I think the vulnerable Republican incumbents are doing everything in their power to withstand the possibility of a Trump collapse at the top of the ticket.

Vulnerable incumbents have been stockpiling campaign cash for months (even years) and have sizable campaign war chests. It's easier to defend yourself and define the narrative of the race if you have a cash advantage. But it's also important to remember the race is about getting the

most votes and not raising the most money. I went back and looked at the last few cycles and found that successful challengers only spent about 70 percent of what the incumbents they defeated spent. Democratic challengers don't need to match the incumbents dollar for dollar - they do have to raise enough to be a credible alternative to voters wanting change. The bottom line is that money can't fix all problems... attacking the underlying problem fixes the problem.

Some vulnerable Republicans are largely trying to stay laser-focused on local issues. They are targeting local media with various, relevant messages. Senator Toomey in Pennsylvania is talking about sanctuary cities, Senator Portman in Ohio is talking about coal, and Senator Ayotte in New Hampshire is talking about the opioid crisis. It's the right strategy in this environment. These GOP senators want their reelection to be on local issues. We'll know after the election if this was a successful strategy.

The key to any election is getting your voters to the polls, and I'm always amazed at how just a few thousand voters can completely change a narrative. For example, Democrat Heidi Heitkamp was the Democratic candidate for the U.S. Senate. She was a uniquely strong candidate who started with both high and positive name identification, and she ran a great locally focused campaign against North Dakota's statewide congressman. She won by a few thousand votes - and if those few thousand voters hadn't come out to vote for her, the narrative of the election would be completely different.

One last thought: Don't ignore the polls. Polling gets plenty of criticism (some of it warranted), and some polls are more accurate than others. But polls taken as a picture sometimes show a trend. For example - candidates can get 'stuck' at a certain level in the polls, which can indicate that their ceiling is too low to win.

*ARIZONA EYES: Thank you, Nathan, for your insight, lending a little clarity to an otherwise dizzying election season.*

