

## Candidates Spotlight July 2019

[Tucson City Councilor Regina Romero](#)

[Tami Sawyer](#)

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### Tucson City Councilor Regina Romero Mayoral Race

Primary: August 27<sup>th</sup>, 2019 **WON**

General: November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019 **ELECTED**

**Regina Romero** epitomizes the American Dream in the Southwest. Raised by immigrant farm workers in Somerton, Arizona, **Regina** is the youngest of six children and began breaking barriers early on as the first member of her family to vote and the first to graduate from college. She is a proud graduate of the University of Arizona and holds a post-graduate certificate from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. She is a pro-child, pro-family and pro-choice mother of two bi-lingual, bi-cultural and bi-adorable children, Emiliano and Luciana, and has been married to Ruben Reyes for 15 years. As a six-term City Councilor, she has earned a reputation as a progressive and inclusive policy champion and policy maker.

**On the Issues:** In 2007, Regina became the first Latina elected to the Tucson City Council and the first woman to represent Tucson's Ward 1. While on the Council, she has helped lift Tucson out of the Great Recession to its most prosperous decade in recent history, writing the City's Primary Jobs Incentive program and calling for the Creation of an Economic Initiatives Office – both of which have resulted in thousands of long-term, good-paying jobs. She has championed issues such as equal pay for equal work and spearheaded the effort to pass universal earned sick and parental leave for City of Tucson families. Her vision for Tucson to become a safe, just, and sustainable city with economic opportunity for all. As Mayor she will work on small business development, climate change resiliency planning, delivery of city services, and streetscape improvements. She also wants local government to contribute directly to the Tucson Public Schools.

**Status of Race:** This an open seat since the current Mayor has decided to not run again. Arizona is deep red state but Tucson is deep blue island, the third largest city in Arizona, and one of the Democratic bastions. One of the key areas that helped deliver votes for recent US Senate victory of U.S. Senator Kyrsten Sinema. Sinema has endorsed **Romero's** Mayoral campaign. Tucson would also become the first city in Arizona led by a Mexican American since 1875 (Estevan Ochoa) and she would be the first woman elected Mayor. There are three qualified candidates

including Councilor Romero and there has not been a competitive and open primary for over 20 years. The preliminary is set for Tuesday, August 27th and if a run-off is needed, a General will be scheduled for Tuesday, November 5th. This is also a clean election municipality and **Councilor Romero** is the only candidate participating as a clean election candidate (she receives matching funds of money raised by end of quarter 2).

**Deep Democracy Dynamics of Race:** Heading into the primary, local media coverage and the campaign team have shared that the candidates are very similar on issues; lived experience and professional backgrounds is where the difference lies. Former State Senator and former Gubernatorial Dem primary candidate Steve Farley, Tucson Councilman Paul Durham, and developer Randi Dorman (woman) are the three other Democratic challengers. There are no Republicans that have announced they are running. The key local issues on voter's minds are advocacy for more community schools and increased taxes for street improvements. The local electorate is approximately 41 percent Democratic, over 40 percent Latino, and over two-thirds vote early.

**Campaign Status:** A seasoned campaigner, popular city wide, a professional background as community development project manager and veteran movement activist, **Councilor Romero** has quietly emerged as the front runner status in a tightly watched race. In fact in 2011, she earned more votes citywide than the Democratic incumbent mayor (see candidate memo). She has earned volumes of support from federal, state, and local elected officials, including a deep cross sector and grassroots community of supporters (See List). Despite **Romero** being labeled as the "true progressive" long time insiders still give the edge to Steve Farley ([read more](#)). It's become a race about whether the Latina candidate can attract traditional and higher turnout voters. Her base comes from the more Democratic and Latino part of the city, a weakness according to some since they participate in local elections less than their white Democratic counterparts. Based on first quarter reports, Farley leads the pack with \$129,593 raised. Dorman comes second with \$93,324 in donations and **Romero** comes third at \$76,156 (reminder that she will get a matching public fund so this will look different once quarter 2 numbers are posted). This race will come down to who can ID and turnout their voters, while connecting with each through their lived experiences.

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**Tami Sawyer**  
**Memphis Mayoral Race**  
**Primary and General Election: October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2019**

**Tami Sawyer** is a deeply committed Memphis, advocate, and movement leader. A former US Navy diversity and inclusion specialist, **Tami** is passionate about ensuring people are represented, heard, valued, and included. In each of the roles she's held, she's built coalitions from across communities to challenge systems, propose solutions, and strengthen the bonds between

neighbors. She is a proud graduate of St. Mary's Episcopal and University of Memphis. As the director of diversity and community partnerships for Teach For America she has overhauled the chapter's curriculum to help teachers understand how racism and poverty affect their students and community. Now a first term Shelby County Commissioner, she has become an elected community activist, willing to challenge the status quo across Memphis.

**On the Issues:** **Tami** is running to address the entrenched inequities with a focus on education, economic development, and race. The disparity across the city is outstanding and there's a public silence. Her candidacy addresses the fact that forty-three percent of Memphian workers make less than the living wage and there is a thirty-eight percent unemployment rate for Black residents. Memphis has also become a place for high profile mass deportations by ICE. **Tami** is leveraging her country commissioner position to demonstrate her ability to move change, she currently leads the amendment to allow for \$2.5 million in county funds to be allocated to MATA. ([County Looks to Make First-Ever Investment in Memphis public bus system](#)).

Incumbent Democratic Mayor Jim Strickland is proponent of big box development, and wants to increase the funding and workforce of the police department. Sixty-three percent of the city's budget goes to public safety; More police officers, fewer teachers, incarcerating more people at a time when major metropolitan areas across the country are going in the opposite direction. He's allowed \$65 million in deferred maintenance to city schools. For **Tami**, Memphis promotes itself as the city where MLK was assassinated, which generates revenue, and yet residents do not see the redistribution of funds. Education is the key issue in this race, especially since Memphis city budget does not fund its public schools, the responsibility was transferred to Shelby County as part of an agreement in 2013. Current Mayor Strickland supports status quo while former Mayor Herenton profited directly from opening up networks of for-profit charters, many of which have failed. Candidate **Tami Sawyer** has stopped short of proposing that Memphis contribute to the public schools again, but has launched an equity platform focused on youth programming.

**Status of Race:** Memphis (Shelby County) is a blue island in a deep red state, the state government is disruptive to them as well as Nashville, the other big blue island. **Tami** describes the state government as well as the federal delegation as antagonistic. This is not real representation for Memphians. The Tennessee General Assembly is predominantly Republican and rural/suburban ([article](#)). **Tami** is facing three Democrats for this seat including first-term pro-police Democratic Mayor Jim Strickland, former Mayor Willie Herenton - the city's first elected African-American mayor who served for 17 years before resigning in 2009, and Lemichael Wilson, restaurateur. Political people are nervous, especially those in the black community due to former Mayor Herenton. He is not happy about her candidacy, but local pundits think Herenton's time is gone.

**Dynamics of Race:** She was a known movement leader locally before she ran for County Commissioner in 2018 ([USA Today](#)). **Tami** Led the first Black Lives Matter protest in 2014 and then a campaign to remove Confederate monuments that in

five years took a quick turn from protest to a move into retail politics with a coalition that has retained a good number of those activists who are much more interested in issues than in winning elections. Not Tami, her first run for public office in 2017 was for state representative, where she lost by 650 votes. She ran for County Commissioner in 2018, raised 150k, ran a movement building campaign, and won competitive Democratic preliminary with 50.11% (2249) and won General by a landslide with 81%. Demographics and past turnout are in her favor, but still it's a battle for her to raise the funding to combat deeper pockets of her opponents. If elected she would become the first woman Mayor of Memphis. Memphis Interfaith Coalition for Action and Hope (MICAHA) is really using this election to leverage its 3-year organizing campaign. [MICAHA organizer says quest for equity larger than who wins elections.](#)

**Campaign Status:** The campaign team that ran her successful first time bid for County Commissioner campaign is also running this campaign. In that campaign, they expanded the electorate and ran a robust voter registration for first-time voters. She understands this race is different, she is not considered part of the political establishment and has lost her darling status for “playing above her grade.” **Tami** drew several hundred people for her weekend campaign kicked off in early March, who gathered chanted #WeCan’tWait” in a church that was an organizing hub for the strikers during the Civil Rights era. There is an estimated voter turnout of 130k-138k and they need to capture about forty-five percent of the electorate to win. The message is about equity and opportunity, how will Memphis look like in the 21st century? How do we get ahead of the automation of the economy? “We are here because the racial wealth gap in our city is as wide as \$60,000 in some parts of town”. And the current momentum will only drive that gap forward. She needs to raise about \$500k. Challenges include navigating some tense Black politics due to the re-election campaign of former Mayor Herenton, a generation divide. Many who were with her for Commissioner run have not responded the same. Miska Clay Bibbs is serving her 2nd term on the Shelby County School Board and has endorsed **Sawyer**.