

Booker campaign works to define his US Senate foe

By GEOFF MULVIHILL, Associated Press September 6, 2014

BLACKWOOD, N.J. (AP) — Democratic U.S. Sen. [Cory Booker](#) is in a race to define Republican challenger [Jeff Bell](#) before Bell can do that for himself.

While Bell ran a radio ad for several days, the well-funded Booker opened his campaign with a bang over the past week. He made a public appearance with former U.S. Sen. [Bill Bradley](#), received the endorsements of several environmental groups and held raucous rallies at an official launch.

Booker, a former Newark mayor who was elected last year to complete the Senate term of the late [Frank Lautenberg](#), bills himself as a politician who is willing to work closely with his adversaries, but he's on the attack against Bell's positions.

"He literally wrote the book making the case for polarized politics," Booker said at a rally in Blackwood last week.

Bell's 2012 book is, in fact, called "The Case for Polarized Politics: Why America Needs Social Conservatism."

But Bell said Booker's criticism shows he's concerned. "If his internal polling showed this was a one-sided race," Bell said, "he wouldn't be attacking me out on the stump."

Bell is a major underdog who hasn't been in front of voters for more than 30 years. He won the Republican nomination for [U.S. Senate](#) in 1978 but lost the general election to [Bradley](#). Bell ran again in 1982 but lost in the primary.

Soon after that, he moved to Washington, where he spent three decades as a think-tank official and policy adviser — most notably for President [Ronald Reagan](#).

He moved back to New Jersey to seek the Senate nomination and emerged victorious from a primary field of four low-profile candidates.

After the June primary, his campaign had spent \$46,000 more than it had raised. Booker, meanwhile, had \$3.5 million in his coffers at the end of June.

But Bell has had a boost since then. A [Quinnipiac University](#) poll in August showed him trailing Booker by 10 points, a decisive margin but closer than expected for someone who is little-known, underfunded and battling history. No Republican has been elected to represent New Jersey in the Senate since 1972.

The poll got attention in the political world, including from Republican Gov. [Chris Christie](#), who said he would fundraise for Bell.

"Bell can absolutely win the race," Christie said last month. "I think it's kind of an interesting race to be looking at that it's that small a margin, backed up with the fact that Mayor Booker — Sen. Booker now — won by a smaller-than-expected margin in the special election last October."

Bell has spent some of his campaign money to beat Booker to the airwaves with a radio commercial that started running at the end of August promoting his ties to Reagan and a key part of his platform — returning the U.S. dollar to the gold standard for the first time since 1971.

Bell says the move, while bold, would help spark the economy.

Booker calls it "defunct and debunked," arguing that it would make the economy less stable.

[Ruth Mandel](#), director of the [Eagleton Institute of Politics](#) at [Rutgers University](#), said that issue isn't likely to dominate the

campaign. "Bell might want the race to be about the gold standard, but the question is really how many people will know that the race is happening, much less what it is about," she said.

Mandel and other political scientists expect that Booker's lead in the polls will increase as the election ramps up, saying the likelihood of a Booker victory was a reason that more prominent Republicans didn't enter the race in the first place.

Associated Press writer [Jill Colvin](#) contributed to this report.

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