

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Max Rose Split on Impeach-Trump Stumps

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Photo: Ben Fractenberg/THE CITY

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New York City’s two newest Democratic members of Congress are returning from Washington for town halls this week as calls for an impeachment inquiry mount — but their homecoming receptions are bound to differ.

Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who has long demanded President Donald Trump’s impeachment, will host a Thursday town hall in Queens to discuss her new legislative package addressing income inequality and poverty.

Meanwhile, Rep. Max Rose, the city’s [lone impeachment holdout](#), has a transit-themed town hall scheduled in Staten Island on Wednesday, where activists are saying they’ll ask about impeachment.

“Nothing will distract me from fighting to improve the lives of my constituents,” Rose told THE CITY in a statement Monday. “The focus of the upcoming town halls will be on transit and our commuting nightmares — but I most certainly welcome any questions.”

Ocasio-Cortez, whose spokesperson declined comment, has [drawn attention to](#) Democrats, such as Rose, who’ve refused to back the impeachment inquiry.

The first-term reps’ diverging positions reflect the different stakes they face at the ballot box next year, political observers say.

Rose’s 2018 win — a moderate Democrat taking back a district won by Trump — was emblematic of the so-called Blue Wave that regained the party the House of Representatives.

Now, with a 2020 re-election campaign looming, political observers say that an overzealous anti-Trump stance could easily backfire with Rose potentially battling Republican Assemblymember Nicole Malliotakis.



Max Rose campaigns in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, in 2018. Photo: Ben Fractenberg/THE CITY

“Rose actually has a formidable challenger, while none of Cortez’s opponents have had any real experience mounting campaigns,” said Christina Greer, a professor of political science at Fordham University.

Unlike Ocasio-Cortez, who won her district of swaths of The Bronx and Queens in a general-election landslide after a stunning primary upset against longtime Democratic incumbent Joe Crowley last year, Rose has everything to lose.

Rose eked out a surprise victory last November, marking only the second time a Democratic has won Staten Island’s House seat in three decades. He opposed an impeachment inquiry during his primary campaign when he faced off against five liberals.

Last week, Rose called for the release of the transcript of the Ukraine whistleblower report, saying, “The American people deserve the truth and Congress needs the facts.”

Still, progressive activists in southern Brooklyn and Staten Island expressed anger that the candidate they aggressively canvassed for has yet to support an impeachment inquiry. They also predicted his fence-sitting will reduce the ranks of people who knock on doors for him in 2020.

“If a majority of Democrats believe an impeachment inquiry is necessary at a minimum, then even if a Democrat feels so loyal to knock on doors for him, how are they supposed to excite other Democrats to vote for him?” said Natalie Devito, an activist with Staten Island Women Who March and Fight Back Bay Ridge.

“Are they going to say, ‘Hold your nose and vote for Rose?’” she asked.

Rose had campaigned on local issues and pledged to work with Republicans to deliver results for his constituents. He met with Trump during the government shutdown last winter and pushed for improvements to his district, such as Staten Island’s East Shore seawall.

“I think it’s the number: 16 points Trump on Staten Island,” said Richard Flanagan, a political science professor at the College of Staten Island.

He was referring to the percentage point spread by which Trump beat Hillary Clinton in the borough — although with the sliver of Brooklyn included in Rose’s district it was a 10-point win.

“It’s just not the district where you want to be leading the charge against Trump,’ Flanagan added.

In the 2016 election, Trump took more than 54 percent of the vote in Rose’s district. In Ocasio-Cortez’s 14th Congressional District, Trump garnered about 20 percent of the vote.

Strategists predicted the impeachment issue will be a significant factor in the upcoming 2020 election and beyond.



Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez greeted constituents at the Parkchester station in The Bronx, July 31, 2019. Photo: Ben Fractenberg/THE CITY

“AOC faces no electoral issues in supporting impeachment, but Max Rose definitely does,” said Benjamin Rosenblatt, a Washington-based political consultant.

Throughout her short tenure in Congress, Ocasio-Cortez has made no secret of her opposition to Trump. To change tactics now would be off-brand, said Jeanne Zaino, a political science professor at Iona College.

“It would be so inauthentic,” Zaino added.

Congress is now on a two-week recess, giving members an opportunity to directly solicit feedback from their constituents.

The town halls that many representatives have scheduled during this time could be a factor in swaying undecided opinions, said Gerry Benjamin, a political science professor at SUNY New Paltz.

“It opens the doors to members who are going slow,” he added.

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