

## POLITICO

# Richard Carmona's covert campaign to seize GOP Senate seat



By **SCOTT WONG** | 10/8/12 6:01 PM EDT

TEMPE, Ariz. — At a gritty American Legion post, Army Special Forces veteran Richard Carmona confides to a room full of voters that he's been running a "covert operation" this year: his campaign for U.S. Senate.

Indeed, the Arizona Democrat, who served as George W. Bush's surgeon general, has come out of nowhere to contend for a seat that was practically etched in the GOP column.

Polls show him in a dead heat against Rep. Jeff Flake, a tea party-backed Republican best known for his

crusade against pork-barrel spending in Congress, and millions of dollars in outside money is suddenly flooding into the race.

As recently as the spring, President Barack Obama's campaign talked about this being the year Obama could capitalize on the surge in Hispanic voter registration and flip a state as red as a Sedona sunset. Arizona has seen 160,000 new Hispanics, who lean Democratic, added to its voter rolls since 2008. But Obama never made a play.

Now Carmona, **the Spanish-speaking son of Puerto Rican immigrants**, is in contention

(<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1012/81962.html>) to do what Obama could not in two election cycles.

(Also on POLITICO: Heidi Heitkamp puts North Dakota in play)

(<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1012/82106.html>)

He is harnessing his up-by-his-bootstraps biography: A poor kid from Harlem and high school dropout who became a decorated Vietnam War veteran, SWAT team leader and the nation's 17th U.S. surgeon general. He is capitalizing on Arizona's changing demographics and tapping into anger over the state's anti-immigrant policies.

And Carmona, 62, is appealing to independents like Dick Anderson, who comprise a third of Arizona's electorate and will almost certainly swing the outcome of the Senate contest.

"I'm tired of the vitriol from the far right. They are going to ruin our country," said Anderson, 66, who like Carmona is a former Army medic who served in Vietnam. After hearing the candidate at the Tempe veterans hall, Anderson was certain he'd vote for Carmona, and so would his wife, a registered Republican.

Carmona's "open to ideas. He's willing to listen. He's willing to compromise. He doesn't say 'my way or the highway like Flake."

Yet Carmona is **still the underdog** (<http://www.politico.com/blogs/burns-haberman/2012/10/dscs-arizona-investments-million-137657.html>) in his race to succeed retiring GOP Sen. Jon Kyl. Republicans have a 6-point voter