

## Represent Me AZ presents:

# *The Reporter's Guide to Martha McSally*

Dear 1st Amendment People:

This may be your first time covering Rep. Martha McSally. You may not have heard that much about her, beyond the obvious. She was a pilot in the Air Force. She represents a border district. She was *really* eager to pass the AHCA (“Let’s get this f-ing thing done!”).

Maybe you’re thinking you’ll just do a little research to get up to speed. But here’s the thing. The more you research McSally, the more confused you’re likely to become about where she stands on the issues. That’s by design.

AZ-02 is a competitive district, with roughly even numbers of Republicans and Democrats. McSally figured out long ago her safest bet was to be as nondescript as possible, in terms of political opinions. As [Elle](#) magazine correctly pointed out, “she’s notably reluctant to spell out any concrete policy positions that she hasn’t actually voted for or against on a bill.”

Obviously, she can’t make it through an entire political campaign taking the Fifth. She doesn’t have to. This former pilot has a real talent for evasive maneuvers.

Represent Me AZ has spent the last year researching her record, and learning to recognize the tactics she uses to keep reporters (and constituents) at bay. What follows is our handy guide to some of her favorite strategies:

She ***deflects***. McSally has found a number of creative ways to say, “*What a great question. Go ask someone else.*”

- On Betsy DeVos’s qualifications: “I’m not in the [Senate](#). Thank God.”
- On protections for trans children: “These issues are best managed at the [state level](#).”
- On legal abortion: “legislators are [not really involved](#) in this issue right now.... I’ll be focusing on things that the House of Representatives needs to be doing.”

*(Note: We know for certain that last one was a dodge, because a month later, she gave almost the opposite answer on the same subject to a Young Republicans’ Club. “I believe that life begins at conception and we need to make sure that the sanctity of life is preserved. This is [our responsibility](#) at the federal, the state, and the community level.”)*

She **delays**. “What a great question. I’ll be sure to answer it - some other time.”

- On ENDA (LGBT employment rights): “[I haven’t read the law](#), so I’d have to read it before I make a comment.”
- On defunding Planned Parenthood: “[McSally’s spokesperson] said McSally [hadn’t yet made a decision](#) on that front.”
- On the AHCA: “I’m [not publicly sharing](#) my position.”
- On Dodd-Frank: McSally’s office was telling callers she was “undecided” on repealing the Dodd-Frank regulations, at the same time she was saying this to the Bankers’ Association:

*Within the public, there is often a perception that we had the financial meltdown and then Dodd-Frank was good and it was, you know, saving us from future financial meltdowns. You guys are all experts in the industry and you know that’s not the truth. Really, what Dodd-Frank did, was it provided additional compliance and legislative regulations and [more burdens upon you](#).*

She **dismisses**. “That question’s not worthy of my attention.”

- On her support for a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage: “I’m not going to waste my political capital on [that kind of issue](#).”
- On Donald Trump’s campaign: “McSally said she [hadn’t been paying much attention](#) to his campaign.” “I just don’t have the time.”
- On Donald Trump’s presidency: “[It’s not my job](#) to be a pundit.”

One of her favorite ploys to wave off a question is to come back with, “Well, no matter what I say, 40% of people won’t be happy.” But in many cases, that minimizes the level of opposition:

- [55%](#) of Arizona voters disapprove of Donald Trump.
- [57%](#) of AZ-02 was opposed to the AHCA.
- [60%](#) of Arizonans approve of Planned Parenthood.
- [86%](#) of AZ-02 disagrees with [her position](#) on universal background checks.

She **digresses**. “How about I answer the questions you didn’t ask instead?”

Frequently, when confronted with a question she’d rather not answer, McSally will resort to telling you her life story and/or filibustering. Case in point - at McSally’s [town hall](#), a teacher made a simple request: “I’d like your opinion of Betsy DeVos.” This was McSally’s response:

*As my dad passed when I was twelve, my mom was in her forties and went back to school and back to work as a public school educator, where she worked into her*

seventies before she retired. So thank you for being committed to educating the next generation. I got free college, too, it was called the Air Force Academy. The youngest of five kids, knowing education was the key to our future, I couldn't -- I was looking for options. I couldn't afford college, I didn't want to saddle my mom with debt, and so I realized and I grew up with the values that education was the key to your future, and I benefited from now 3 taxpayer-funded degree, my bachelor's -- (CROWD INTERRUPTS) So I am passionate about education -- (CROWD: "DEVOS! DEVOS!") On higher education -- I want to just do my two cents, since I have the opportunity. It is way too costly right now for our students, that are just going further and further into debt, closing down more opportunities and we're going to figure out how to make this possible -- (CROWD: DEVOS!) In a bipartisan way, and it's not just by saddling them with more debt, right? I'm a strong advocate of Pell Grants -- (CROWD: THE QUESTION!) I'm on some legislation to extend Pell Grants, so that it's much more flexible for people, and look -- (HELPLESS GESTURE) The Senate is in a role of advise and consent of appointees for cabinet officials, right? **The House doesn't have a role in that. So we'll see** what comes out of her department when she's in position. She's been confirmed. When it comes to higher education, if it takes legislation, that's got to get through the House and the Senate. I have been on and supported bipartisan legislation, we've got to work together to bring the cost of education down. We've also passed some bipartisan legislation last year, the Every Student Succeeds Act, which was the first major reform of K-12 education in the last decades. Now that's being implemented right now, so we're staying close to see whether its intended consequences or intended reforms are good for those that are in the classroom teaching. I would hear from my mom all the time about those "unfunded mandates from Washington bureaucrats," right? They're giving you money but they tell you what to do. We passed bipartisan legislation last year to finally free some of that up, so that we can let teachers teach, and put control back to the more state and local level so that money can be used back in the classroom and give opportunities for our students. There's a very narrow federal role, very important federal role but narrow, of K-12 education. Over 90% of funding comes from the state and local level. There's a very small amount, but important, whether it's for students with disabilities, Title I funding, that comes from the federal government and we've got to make sure those dollars get in the classroom for our students and that's my role.

Thankfully, this took place at a town hall, so she got called on her non-responsiveness by the very next questioner:

*I'm a schoolteacher in Tucson. I'd like you to answer the questions. I have students who have parents who ask me questions every day. I don't hide under the table. I answer the question. I look them in the face and I answer the question. You are not answering our questions, and I would like you to answer everybody who has asked a question, to answer the question and not go on some big tirade about something else. Just answer our questions!*

She *deludes*. “Here’s where I stand on that [but not really].”

McSally has a couple of different strategies for leading an audience to believe she strongly favors positions which she actually opposes. Often she relies on her bio, telling stories from her past to imply she’s sympathetic to certain causes:

- In the example from the town hall, she points to her “three taxpayer-funded degrees” as the reason she supposedly wants to make college more affordable for low-income students. If that were a sincerely held position, she wouldn’t be pushing so hard for the Republican tax cut bill, which (if it passes) will lead to [\\$71 billion](#) in new costs for college students over the next decade.
- She announced in 2014 that she’s been [stalked](#) in the past, and that political ads claiming she’d make it easier for stalkers to get guns were “personally offensive.” But currently, she’s co-sponsoring the Concealed Carry Reciprocity Act, which would [override](#) laws in the 28 states which ban convicted stalkers from carrying concealed weapons.
- She frequently cites her experience in the military to claim that “I’ve been fighting my whole life for [women’s rights](#) and equality.” In reality, McSally has voted repeatedly to [block](#) the Paycheck Fairness Act from even coming to the floor of the House for a vote.
- Similarly, she’s used her own career success in the military to try to win the trust of the LGBT community: “Martha has been battling [discrimination](#) and shattering stereotypes her whole life.” But in 2016, she voted to amend the National Defense Authorization Act to allow anti-LGBT discrimination in all federal agencies. [Her spokesman claimed she had only voted for the bill as a whole, but a call to the Human Rights Commission [confirmed](#) that McSally had voted for the amendment specifically.]
- McSally says she was a victim of sexual harassment in the military, which might lead you to expect she’d do what she could to put a stop to it. Yet she [opposes](#) reform efforts to remove military sexual assault cases from the chain of command - even though “[a majority of assaults](#) against service members came from those higher up in the chain of command.”

Sometimes, all it takes to assure an audience she’s in their corner is to declare herself “passionate” on the issues they care about. Blogger Pamela Powers Hannley (now a state representative) caught on to this trick in 2014, noting a McSally ad that claimed she was “passionate” about equal opportunity for women:

*“She’s not saying she’s going to do anything about discrimination against women in hiring, pay, or access to care. There are no action words like “fight”, “work”, or “vote”; she’s just ‘passionate.’ Passion and \$5 will get you a latte at Starbucks.”*

There are multiple examples of this pattern. “Passionate” may be as big a tell for McSally as “believe me” is for Donald Trump, with roughly the same meaning: “just take my word for it.”

- She's "[passionate](#)" about ensuring that low-income women can receive birth control and reproductive health care, but voted to defund Planned Parenthood and repeal the Affordable Care Act.
- She's "[very passionate](#)" about "making sure we have the best military capable," and "intends to be a leader" re: the scourge of sexual assault in the military -- yet she's resistant to current efforts to reform its criminal justice system.
- She's "[very passionate](#)" about making college more affordable, but, as noted above, supports a bill which would put college out of reach for many.

Most telling is this quote from her losing campaign in 2012: "I'm [passionate](#) about education, but *as a conservative*, I think the government needs to stay out of the business of education." [emphasis ours] So McSally's policy positions and her "passions" don't necessarily align... but she sometimes finds it useful to let us assume that they do.

She *disappears*. "You can't ask me if you can't find me."

- In her 3 years in office, McSally has held only one public town hall - and that was a deliberate attempt to [deflect attention](#) from a "with or without her" town hall scheduled for the same evening. She [promised to do more](#) but never followed through. In fact, she has *never* held a traditional town hall in Tucson, the population center of her district; the closest she came was an "open house" at her Broadway Blvd. office shortly after taking office in 2015.
- She has ignored requests from the press and Represent Me AZ to either confirm or moderate her responses to a 2012 [survey](#) from the hard-right Center for Arizona Policy. Her original responses appear to have been deleted from CAP's web site.
- McSally's [district](#) is more than a quarter Hispanic, but unlike other Southern Arizona representatives, she refused to condemn Iowa Rep. Steve King's racist tweet referring to "somebody else's babies." "*Her office [did not respond](#) this week to two requests for comment...*"
- Similarly, she remained silent as white supremacists claimed the lives of victims this year in Oregon, Maryland, New York, Kansas, and California.
- She waited [four days](#) after the violence in Charlottesville to issue a "[restrained](#)" denunciation on Twitter. Only three members of the House Homeland Security Committee held out longer, and they were from solid red districts in the former Confederate South.
- She has likewise been [silent](#) on the subject of Roy Moore, and whether recent allegations of predatory behavior should disqualify him for the U.S. Senate.

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Represent Me AZ would like to thank the media for the attention being paid to this race. We welcome your assistance in bringing Martha McSally's character and track record to light. If there's any doubt in your mind how much your services are needed, watch that town hall footage. Listen to the frustration of the people in the room as McSally ducks and weaves and refuses to give straight answers.

This is a crucial race, with a lot at stake. Arizona voters need and deserve clarity as to where the candidates stand. If there's one thing we've learned about McSally, she'll never provide it voluntarily. She's built her political career on camouflage. Journalists will have to hold her to account, with the same kind of persistence and insistence they're seeing from her constituents:

**You are not answering our questions. Just answer our questions!**