
Congress? Governor? What comes next for Syracuse Mayor Stephanie Miner?



Syracuse Mayor Stephanie Miner holds her first Trump Tuesday rally at Perseverance Park in downtown Syracuse, Tuesday January 31, 2017. (Michael Greenlar / mgreenlar@syracuse.com)



By [Chris Baker | cbaker@syracuse.com](mailto:cbaker@syracuse.com)

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SYRACUSE, N.Y. -- Stephanie Miner is nearing the end of her eight-year tenure as Syracuse mayor. She's got over \$200,000 in her campaign war chest, is the public champion of local Trump protesters, and has an ever-expanding political profile.

So what comes next for the two-term Democratic mayor of Syracuse?

Miner, 47, will leave office as mayor at the end of this year. Once a rising star in the Democratic Party, she's made an outward effort recently to reassert her political status in Central New York and Albany.

Her outspoken style of governance has arguably cost her leadership positions in both the [state](#) and [national](#) party. But she's entrenched herself with a burgeoning grassroots base of political activists and has found [kinship](#) with fiscal conservatives. She's cultivated a reputation as a brash pragmatist eager to take on the un-sexy pieces of policymaking while championing social causes and not hesitating to make political enemies.

What's next?

With a base of financial and political support in the city and in Albany, Miner has several options if (or when) she chooses to run for higher office next year.

The most popular theory regarding Miner's next step is Congress. Many have speculated Miner will take on U.S. Rep. John Katko, a Republican in a swing district facing heavy scrutiny from the same activists Miner has rallied with. Miner opted not to run against Katko in 2016, but said at the time that she had considered the option.

An April story from New York Magazine floated her name as a "strong possibility" to run against Katko. This weekend, a New York Times [report](#) said she has been approached by state and national Democrats about challenging Katko.

Also up for re-election in 2018 is Gov. Andrew Cuomo, a Democrat. When asked by **radio host Susan Arbetter** in 2014 if she was interested in running for governor, Miner didn't rule out a run.

"I will never say never," she said.

Once an ally, Miner has for years chided the governor's policies and motives in very public fashion. In 2013, she wrote an **op-ed for the New York Times** in which she criticized Cuomo for suggesting cities borrow money to address rising state pension costs.

A **story** in the Albany Times-Union last month said Miner might primary state Sen. Dave Valesky, a Democrat representing Central New York's 53rd District. Valesky is part of the Senate's Independent Democratic Conference, which has come under fire from more liberal Democrats.

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Rumors that Miner would challenge Valesky swirled in 2014 as well. She quashed them in a press release stating her support for Valesky.

Miner acknowledged that many people are speculating about what she'll do next. She said she hasn't yet decided, and is focusing on doing the job she has.

"A lot of people have been asking me about my plans," she said. "I'm not going to be commenting on whether I'll be running for statewide or federal office until I make a decision."

Others, too, are in the dark.

Onondaga County Democratic Chairman Mark English said he doesn't know what's next for the mayor. Whether it's state or federal government, though, he said she'd make a good candidate.

"When she's ready she'll let us know what she wants to do," he said. "People have high hopes for her. I can't say I'm sure of anything, but she's a force."

Protester-in-chief

Miner has often used the job of mayor as a bully pulpit, advocating for causes beyond the scope of City Hall. She has frequently lashed out at the president, the governor and state and federal lawmakers. She's been quick to comment when Congress votes on healthcare or immigration bills.

In the months since the election of President Donald Trump, she has positioned herself near the front of an active local resistance. She's spoken regularly against the president's policies and needled Katko.

Miner's office started "**Trump Tuesdays**," a weekly downtown gathering where locals voice concerns over presidential priorities like defunding arts agencies and barring refugees from the U.S. She's also spoken at rallies protesting Trump's immigration orders and the GOP's initial attempt to repeal the Affordable Care Act. She issued a terse response to Trump's first address to Congress, in which she suggested his administration "put the nonsense aside."

"It is incumbent on our leaders in Congress to stand up for cities and against the destructive Trump agenda," she wrote.

She's taken strong, philosophical positions on issues mainly unaffected by her office, such as declaring Syracuse a sanctuary city and supporting driver's licenses for undocumented immigrants. In doing so, she's ingratiated herself with the party's far left and brought increased attention to her causes.

Onondaga County Executive Joanie Mahoney -- a Miner foe and a Republican -- **suggested** that Miner's positions on issues like sanctuary cities are part of a run for higher office.

"This whole topic of sanctuary cities is a hot topic that creates controversy and by virtue of going out and calling us a sanctuary city, the mayor didn't affect anything," Mahoney said.

Miner bristled at that insinuation. For each issue she's taken up, she said, she's articulated an argument for how it impacts the people of her city. Advocacy, she said, is a critical part of leadership.

"It sends a message about whether you decide to stand up for your values or whether you're not," she said. "There's a reason they call us leader. It's to lead."

Intent aside, Miner's vocal stances on issues of national import make for a resume should she seek a seat in Congress.

Last year, Miner hired an \$84,000 per year **Albany insider** to manage her message and handle media, on top of a staff press secretary. That consultant, Sherman Jewett, helped Miner craft messages on national issues, including preparing a "Supreme Court statement" after President Barack Obama nominated Merrick Garland to the Supreme Court last year.

Jewett ended his contract with the city in March. City Hall said his clients posed a conflict of interest, but did not elaborate and Jewett did not respond to a request for comment.

Profile boosting nationwide

During last year's presidential campaign, Miner aligned herself closely with Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton, of whom she and her husband are longtime supporters. Many thought she was seeking a job in a potential Clinton administration.

Prior to Clinton's presidential loss, Miner used a pair of her favorite issues to boost her national profile: Infrastructure and innovation.

A review of the mayor's calendar and travel records for 2016 shows she regularly took trips out of state to address policy, innovation and infrastructure conferences, sometimes at taxpayer expense. She also met occasionally with national media outlets, including the New York Times.

Over about a one-year period, the mayor made 10 trips out of area to speak, present to or attend conferences on infrastructure and innovation. Most of those trips came on weekends or long weekends. Many of those trips were paid for by the groups inviting Miner to speak.

"It's standard practice that the entities inviting me to speak pick up virtually every expense," Miner said.

She attended infrastructure conventions in cities like Miami, New Orleans and Aspen, Colo. She attended a Clinton Global Initiative event in Atlanta last June. In September, she spoke at a Clinton Global Initiative event in New York City - a trip that cost the city \$276.

In January, she spoke at the Winter Innovation Summit in Salt Lake City. She also sent City Hall's innovation team to Flint, Mich. for five days to assist that city with its water woes and share ideas. The costs of the Flint trip were covered by a Bloomberg Philanthropies grant.

In a press release for an infrastructure convention in New Jersey -- at which the mayor was a keynote speaker -- a Miner spokesman described Miner as a "national expert in infrastructure policy."

Correction: An earlier version of this story said taxpayers funded Miner's trips to speak at conference. That was not always the case.



Mayor Miner: Syracuse will remain sanctuary city, won't enforce federal anti-immigrant policies

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