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Roy Moore's secret, powerful constituency

BY REID WILSON - 09/25/17 06:00 AM EDT

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Roy Moore lost his job as chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court twice. But in the process, he gained a fiercely loyal following likely to propel him to a seat in the U.S. Senate.

Polls show Moore leading Sen. Luther Strange (R) in advance of Tuesday's runoff election for the Republican nomination for Strange's seat. That lead has held despite millions in spending by Strange's allies,

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Now, in Alabama, Baptist and evangelical leaders are lining up behind Moore. More than 50 members of the clergy publicly backed Moore in a letter in August, and the campaign has touted endorsements from evangelical leaders like James Dobson, Bob Vander Plaats and Brian Brown, president of the National Organization for Marriage.

Strange is no mealy-mouthed sectarian: He has spoken often on the trail of his Christian faith — he is a member of the Episcopalian Church — and in July he said it was a “biblical miracle” that President Trump won office.

"Luther is the mainstream, pro-business, Wall Street, Mitch McConnell candidate," Flowers said. "If it's a normal election, he probably would win it over Moore."

And Alabama has a higher percentage of Baptists than all but one other state, Tennessee: 31 percent of Alabama residents are members of a Baptist faith tradition, according to the Pew Research Center's 2014 Religious Landscape Study. Just 23 percent of Oklahoma residents are Baptist.

The power of the Baptist vote has been on display for years in Alabama. A 1999 proposal to establish a state lottery to fund state schools was leading the polls by a wide margin, before pastors organized a grass-roots campaign against the ballot measure; it [failed](#), by 8 percentage points.

On Tuesday, those voters have another chance to upend the political order — at the cost of Trump's wishes. It's a matter, Flowers said, of sticking with someone who has been a household name in evangelical circles for so long.

"They've known Moore for 25 years. They've been in the trenches with him. They've known Trump for a couple of years," Flowers said. "There's nothing that the Mitch McConnell establishment super PACs could have done anymore."

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