

The Economist  
Kavanaugh's Sherpa

## Jon Kyl is John McCain's successor in the Senate

*The former senator will help Republicans with their push to confirm Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court*



[Democracy in America](#)

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by J.D. | PHOENIX

WHEN Senator John McCain of Arizona died last month, Doug Ducey, the state's governor, faced a difficult choice. Who would he appoint to replace Mr McCain? And would that replacement be a placeholder who would keep the seat warm until the next special election in 2020, or would it be someone who could hold the seat for the Republican Party? Two days after Mr McCain's burial, the governor opted for the former, though his selection doesn't seem interested in holding the place for long.

On September 4th, Mr Ducey announced his appointment of Jon Kyl, who represented Arizona in the Senate for 18 years, all of them as his state's junior senator. When he decided to not seek a fourth term in 2012, Mr Kyl, who became a close friend of Mr McCain, intended his departure from the Senate to be permanent.

Under Arizona law, the appointee can serve until 2020, when a special election will be held to fill the remaining two years of Mr McCain's term. Though Mr Ducey said he hoped to convince him to stay for longer, Mr Kyl said he wants to ensure that the Senate's

current business is taken care of, and that he doesn't want to make any commitments beyond the end of the second session of the 115th Congress.

The current business includes the confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh, President Trump's nominee to replace Anthony Kennedy on the Supreme Court. In July, the White House tapped Mr Kyl to serve as a "sherpa" who would guide Mr Kavanaugh through the confirmation process. With just 51 Republicans in the Senate, Mr Kyl's vote could be pivotal for the confirmation. In a press conference, the governor repeatedly said he chose Mr Kyl because he was the best person for the job. But he made no secret of the fact that he viewed Mr Kavanaugh's confirmation as paramount among the new senator's duties. In an earlier announcement on Twitter, the governor had included a hashtag, #KavanaughConfirmation.

Mr Ducey is known as a cautious character. In selecting Mr Kyl, he has stayed true to form. The choice is unlikely to stir any controversy, an important factor for a Republican governor in the midst of what could be a tough re-election. With his choice of Mr Kyl Mr Ducey has managed to appease the various factions of the Republican Party. The appointment was almost universally praised by establishment Republicans, along with Mr McCain's widow, Cindy, and daughter, Meghan, while also earning the approval of Mr Trump, who tweeted that Mr Kyl will be an "extraordinary senator."

Asked about his relationship with the president, Mr Kyl said he doesn't really have one. "I've only met him on one occasion, several months ago. But it is my honour to be helping on the Kavanaugh nomination," Mr Kyl said. In February, Mr Kyl told an Arizona radio station that Mr Trump's style was "boorish" and that the president is his own worst enemy. This week Mr Kyl stood by those comments.

He is unlikely, however, to mimic Mr McCain's sharp, public rebukes of the president. Gibson McKay, who worked for Mr Kyl's first Senate campaign in 1994 and for Mr McCain on several occasions, said the two have fundamentally different styles. "I think if Jon Kyl disagreed with the current president, he would let it be known. But probably in a softer, more delicate way than John McCain had done over the years," he said.

Mr Ducey joked that he received a lot of advice, mostly unsolicited, about whom he should appoint to Mr McCain's seat. If he can't convince Mr Kyl to finish the remainder of the term, the advice is likely to start pouring in again. Political observers spent a year trying to work out whom Mr Ducey would appoint; the rumours started up again as soon as Mr Kyl suggested his time in the Senate would be brief.