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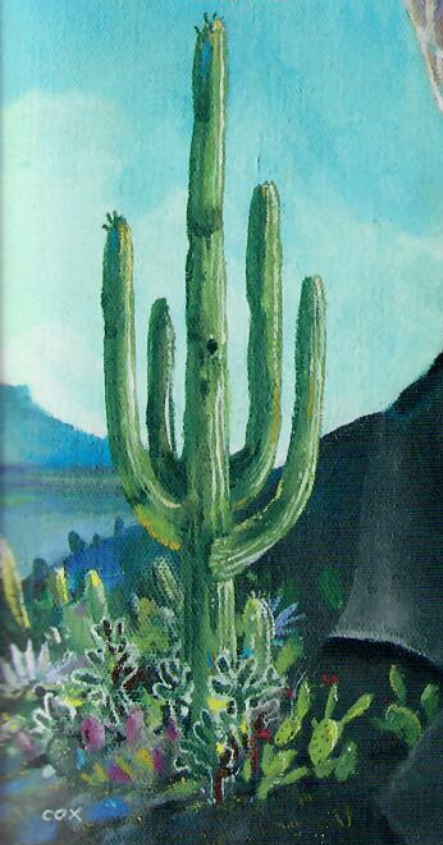
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Dr. Door Knocker

Congressional Democratic hopeful Dr. Hiral Tipirneni managed to close a huge portion of the West Valley's GOP gap in a special election this past April. Will November's rematch against Rep. Debbie Lesko put her over the top?

THERE'S A "NO SOLICITING" sign above the doorbell of this modest tract home in south Peoria. Hiral Tipirneni glances at the handwritten note just above it, stating, "No Mormons or Jehovahs." She hesitates, then wryly proclaims, "Well, we're not either," and rings the bell.

The inner door opens to a chorus of canine cries, and a shadowed male figure appears. Before she can ask whether he's the registered voter on her canvassing list, the man, incredulous, yells, "Don't wake me up! Don't knock on my door!" and slams the door.

Apparently, he should've added "No Congressional hopefuls" to his sign. "He wasn't a happy camper," Tipirneni mutters, marching

onward to the next house. "You gotta have thick skin, or else I'd have given up the first day." The 50-year-old (who pronounces her name "here-all" "tip-er-nen-ee") doesn't let a few negative signs deter her... and there are quiet a few.

This is the Democratic nominee's second electoral go-round, joining the nearly 600 women who have declared federal and executive candidacies across the nation this cycle. Consequently, today is the latest of many Saturdays given up going to door-to-door asking for people's vote this November to represent Arizona's 8th Congressional District in Washington. It's a big ask: CD8 is a large, cumber-

some swatch of land resembling a misshapen seahorse, sweeping west from Glendale beyond Sun City, south around Litchfield Park and north past Anthem.

Its lines were drawn out of the old 2nd District (now in Southern Arizona) in 2012 redistricting. Prior to that, much of its land belonged to CD3, which has gone red in every federal election since late Representative Bob Stump won as a Democrat in 1976, then switched to Republican in 1982.

Tipirneni announced her candidacy last July, before then-U.S. Representative Trent Franks resigned in December over allegations of sexual harassment. Many told her she was

By **LAUREN LOFTUS**
Photography by **JEFF NOBLE**



Dr. Hiral Tipirneni and her family at their home in north Glendale, 2017

a little, well, loco for running as a first-time candidate (she's worked in health care – first as an emergency room doc, then as a cancer research advocate – for more than 20 years), let alone a Democrat and immigrant (Tipirneni and her family emigrated from India to the U.S. when she was 3), in a district that President Donald Trump won by 21 points in 2016.

But then Franks resigned. And Tipirneni won the Democratic primary in the special election for his seat in April and managed to close that gap by 15-some points, ultimately losing to Republican state Senator Debbie Lesko. Could the signs be changing?

"People tell me all the time, 'Why don't you run somewhere else?'" Tipirneni says of her choice to continue campaigning for a Lesko rematch in the general. "But this is my home. If I want to make an impact, this is where I want to do it."

Tipirneni moved to Glendale from Michigan in 1996. She and her husband, Kishore, had both secured jobs in the Valley's booming medical industry – he as an orthopedist and she as an emergency room physician at Good Samaritan, now Banner University Medical Center. They met in medical school at Northeast Ohio Medical University, "literally over a dead body."

One day in cadaver lab, she joined a group being tutored by her future husband, who had the same name as her father, but with an extraneous "e" at the end. "I say to him, 'You know, you spell your name wrong,' and he looks down at his nametag and just sort of shakes it off, like 'Who is this smartass girl?'" But "of course that was the hook, because several months later he asked me out."

Tipirneni says she knew she wanted to be a doctor since she was 9, after a hospital stay for typhoid fever, contracted from a swig

CD8: LESKO'S TO LOSE?

Though Republicans still out-register Democrats in the West Valley district, a *New York Times* infographic on the special election showed a narrowing of margins in nearly every precinct since 2016. Polling data for the November election was not yet available as this issue went to press, but Rep. Debbie Lesko is considered the early favorite, based on her 5-point April victory. What she's done since going to Washington in May:

- ▶ Introduced Make Education Local Act of 2018, which would allow states to submit their own plans for using federal education dollars
- ▶ Passed out of committee H.R. 6400 to require the Department of Homeland Security to review all U.S. ports of entry for security threats
- ▶ Has voted in line with President Donald Trump's positions 94.7 percent of the time, according to FiveThirtyEight
- ▶ Has \$245,180 cash-on-hand (early September) for her reelection campaign; Tipirneni has \$446,191, per *fec.gov*

of sugar cane juice during a trip to India. "The rule was always, 'Don't eat the street food!' Because, you know, we [had] pathetic, Americanized guts and we didn't have the wherewithal to withstand the stuff that everyone else there could handle. I didn't listen to my mom's advice, and I drank it."

Her mother was a social worker in Cleveland and her father was a structural engineer. Though their "typical Midwestern" neighborhood of Brook Park, Ohio, was blue collar and full of other immigrants, Tipirneni says she and her older brother were the only non-white kids in their school. "I didn't think about it very often, quite honestly," she says. There's only one instance of actual bullying she can recall: On the school bus her sophomore year of high school, a senior boy hit her

on the back of the head and yelled, "Refugee, go home!" "It was the first time I was called out as being different," she remembers. "And nobody stepped up and said anything to him, even my friends. And that hurt."

Today, Tipirneni says the "negative stuff" is limited mainly to social media. "They've accused me of being a Muslim operative... [that I want to] take away their guns," she says, flicking her hand as if throwing garbage off the table, adding that she's Hindu and supports the Second Amendment. As a result, she says she's learned to ignore the vitriol: "Don't react, don't engage."

Her youngest child, 17-year-old Jalan (older sisters Mira and Anjali are out of the house), says his mom, instead, prefers to harp on being proactive and never assuming others will do things for you. "Her No. 1 rule is to be conscientious in everything we do and do it to the fullest extent."

Tipirneni says it was her eldest daughter who convinced her to run for office the day after Trump won in 2016. Bemoaning that more women should run for office, "Mira was like, 'Well, Mom, if not you, then who?'" So she enrolled in the Emerge America program that trains Democratic female hopefuls to run for office.

Emerge Arizona director Dr. Sharmin Dharas says when Trump won, talk started about repealing the Affordable Care Act. As a doctor who regularly worked with uninsured patients, Tipirneni believes that would have devastating consequences. Unsurprisingly, health care is her biggest platform issue – specifically increasing options and expanding Medicare. "She's not an old white man, stuffy doctor – she's very approachable," Dharas says. "Even though she's so educated and so brilliant, she doesn't make you feel like you're not. That's huge."

Tipirneni insists she's willing to work with anybody, though she exhibits little patience for political lifers. Congress would benefit from developing a treatment plan for the country like she's done hundreds of times for patients, she says. You ask, "What are the potential side effects, what could go wrong here?... so you can anticipate what's going to happen," she says. "There's none of that going on in D.C. They constantly do things and go, 'Oh, I can't believe [the result] happened.' Well, no shit, Sherlock!"

If, next month, Tipirneni manages to close the remaining 5 points and become Congresswoman Tipirneni, she'll be on her way to the Capitol, treatment plan in hand, she says – whether they ask for one or not.