



# Why is there much ado about Christine O'Donnell?

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Republican Senate hopeful Christine O'Donnell at the University of Delaware.

By David Paul Kuhn

Christine O'Donnell will lose big. She's down about 18 percentage points in the RealClearPolitics average. Her state has less than a million residents. Nothing about O'Donnell should be national news.

But O'Donnell is headline news. She's everywhere. Mocked on *Saturday Night Live*. Analyzed by premiere columnists. [Anderson Cooper](#) is fact-checking her. Her name was mentioned roughly 900 times in the past week's news, based on a Nexis search. That's more than twice the mentions of [Marco Rubio](#).

Think about that. Rubio is ahead by double digits in a three-man race. Like O'Donnell, he's running for the Senate. Florida's population is 18 times Delaware's. Florida is a key swing state. And Rubio is future presidential material. But O'Donnell is far bigger news today.

Politics is becoming reality television. And O'Donnell is the star of the 2010 season. She's the freakshow's freak. Her celebrity is indicative of our time. She's famous not because she's relevant. She's relevant because she's famous. This is why her fame survives her long odds. She's like a character on MTV's *Real World*. Good drama. The media elevates her because she's outlandish, silly and cute, as these things go in politics. Never mind her chances. She's good television.

O'Donnell wins even if she loses. She's been flirting with the spotlight since the 1990s. The social conservative starlet, as featured on MTV and HBO. She will leave this race more famous. And notorious. They're synonymous today. Maybe, like [Sarah Palin](#), she too will earn a reality television show.

O'Donnell accomplished one newsworthy feat. She won the GOP primary more than a month ago.

Congressman [Mike Castle](#) first ran for the Delaware legislature in 1966. He never lost thereafter. Until O'Donnell. But Castle beat himself. He was one of the last liberal Republicans. It was like asking progressives to vote for [Joe Lieberman](#) in 2006 or asking vegetarians to eat steak. The empowered conservative base just couldn't swallow it.

We chew on O'Donnell for other reasons. This is partly a vice of some liberal media outlets. She is of the Tea Party movement. So she is said to be indicative of it. Her bizarre statements are trumpeted. It's an easy blow against the Tea Party. In less than two weeks, Democrats will suffer a historic midterm rout. But O'Donnell provides *schadenfreude*. She's a liberal oasis in otherwise hard landscape. Look, she doesn't know what the First Amendment says about religion!

It's mainly that she clicks, literally online, and with our zeitgeist. O'Donnell's cable news manna. Her stance against

masturbation and lying (even to [Hitler](#)). Her date with a witch at a Satanic alter (no second date, allegedly). The campaign ad to manage the tempest: "I am not a witch." Her assertion on [Fox News](#) three years ago that "American scientific companies are cross-breeding humans and animals and coming up with mice with fully functioning human brains." It's all the news that's fit to print (in the *National Enquirer*).

But it garners [David Letterman](#)'s attention. Network attention. Just not votes. And that says something this year, of all years.

Midterm races are referendums on the president and party in power. We will not see another [Republican](#) year like this for a generation, or more. It began with a Republican winning [Ted Kennedy](#)'s seat in [Massachusetts](#). It will end as dramatically. West Virginia Gov. [Joe Manchin](#) has nearly a 70% approval rating. But he's a [Democrat](#). So even he might lose his Senate bid. Yet in Delaware, the Republican cannot even make it a contest.

She's not boring, though. And most people frankly find midterm politics boring. Six in 10 eligible Americans don't vote in midterms, and that's with high turnout. Only about one-in-10 voters have attended a campaign event this year, according to the Pew Research Center. It's takes only 2 million viewers to make a hit cable political show. We are a country of more than 300 million. You do the math.

But people will pay attention to an O'Donnell. She's artificial sweetener. She adds the empty calories. Makes politics more palatable to the broader public. Skip the vegetables. Here's dessert. Modern media increasingly feeds cravings.

People also see Palin in her. But O'Donnell's not a test case of Palinism simply because she's a perky conservative woman. Nor is she a stand-in for Tea Party appeal. In fact, she was never competitive. She's a sideshow. Brain candy, like gossip magazines. Let's just not call her news.

*David Paul Kuhn is chief political correspondent for RealClearPolitics and the author of The Neglected Voter: White Men and the [Democratic](#) Dilemma.*

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