



Sarah Huckabee's State of the Union response Tuesday night marked the payoff of an extraordinary bet that many Republicans took in 2016 — that they could hitch themselves to Donald Trump, accumulate power in the process and, ultimately, outlive the most unsavory parts of the association.

It hasn't always worked. In competitive states and districts, several of Trump's chosen candidatesopped in the midterms. And there's a whole fraternity of Trump allies — people like Rudy Giuliani, Roger Stone and Steve Bannon — who have found themselves embroiled in legal and political scandal.

But among those who did prosper, Sanders ranks among the richest. The former press secretary is now the governor of Arkansas, having leapfrogged dues-paying politicians who would have, in another era, been frontrunners for the post. And on Tuesday night, she bracketed President Joe Biden on behalf of the Republican Party — a massive responsibility for the most watched political address of the year.

"Most Republicans clearly didn't get hurt by their association with Trump," said Saul Anuzis, a former chair of the Michigan Republican Party. "They probably even benefited from it."

Delivering the State of the Union response is, by most accounts, a dreadful gig, one filled with political tripwire. The most memorable speeches are recalled for all the wrong reasons: a bit of spittle on one's lips, a frantic lurch for a water bottle at the table nearby.

But getting tapped for the response is still an honor. And it does give a snapshot for where the opposition party is trending at that moment in time. When Sanders delivers her address it will provide a healthy reminder that Trump's impact on the GOP is likely to last for generations, even if many Republicans claim they're ready to move on from him.

Kevin McCarthy — "my Kevin," as Trump once called him — was sitting behind Biden during his address. In attendance were members of Congress, including Ryan Zinke of Montana, a Trump-era Interior secretary, and Max Miller of Ohio, a former Trump aide. Ronna McDaniel, who went so far as to jettison the family name — Romney — to remain in Trump's good graces, last month was reelected chair of the Republican National Committee.

Several former Trump administration officials are poised to run for president, including Mike Pence, Mike Pompeo and Nikki Haley.