

National Journal Hotline

November 2025

2026 Midterm Preview

**Has Trump Learned
His Midterm Lesson?**

■ by Erika Filter

**Is Iowa a Field of
Dreams or Nightmares
for Dems?**

■ by Abby Turner & Nicholas Anastacio

**Republicans Bet
on Hispanic Drift**

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Letter from the Editor



We're in one of the most volatile moments in modern politics. The House, Senate, or White House has changed hands in each of the last six election cycles. That's never happened before. Elected officials rotate in and out much quicker, congressional maps seem to change every two years, and candidates in both parties are beholden to the whims of the mercurial president currently in the White House.

All of these developments come as Congress is more divided than ever before, partisanship is on the rise, and the very foundations of federalism are being tested on the streets and in courtrooms across the country.

To take stock of this constant churn of political change, we decided to kick off our midterm coverage in earnest with this special edition of *Hotline*. Within these pages, our correspondents and researchers outline the key storylines and influential figures that will shape one of the most consequential midterm cycles this century.

Hotline started reporting on the machinations of the midterms before the last ballots were counted in 2024, and will continue to cover the day-to-day developments in our newsletters. This edition allows us the space to examine the big questions we hope to answer over the course of the next 12 months:

Will the 2026 midterms see a seventh change election in a row? What forces are influencing the Democratic coalition? Can Republicans count on Latino voters? Has President Trump learned his lessons from past midterms? Which 2028 prospects have the most to gain—or lose—in the midterms? The political landscape will undoubtedly shift again between now and next November.

Change happens quickly, and *Hotline* will endeavor to cut through the noise with rigorous, nonpartisan reporting and deliver the news that matters most. Thank you for reading this special edition, and allow us to help you navigate this sea of change throughout the next year.

— Kirk A. Bado, *Hotline* Editor

National Journal **Hotline**

Numbers to Know

Number of House seats Democrats need to flip. On average, the party in power **loses 28 seats** in the midterms.

3



Number of **Senate seats** Democrats need to flip

4



Number of states with **gubernatorial races** in 2026

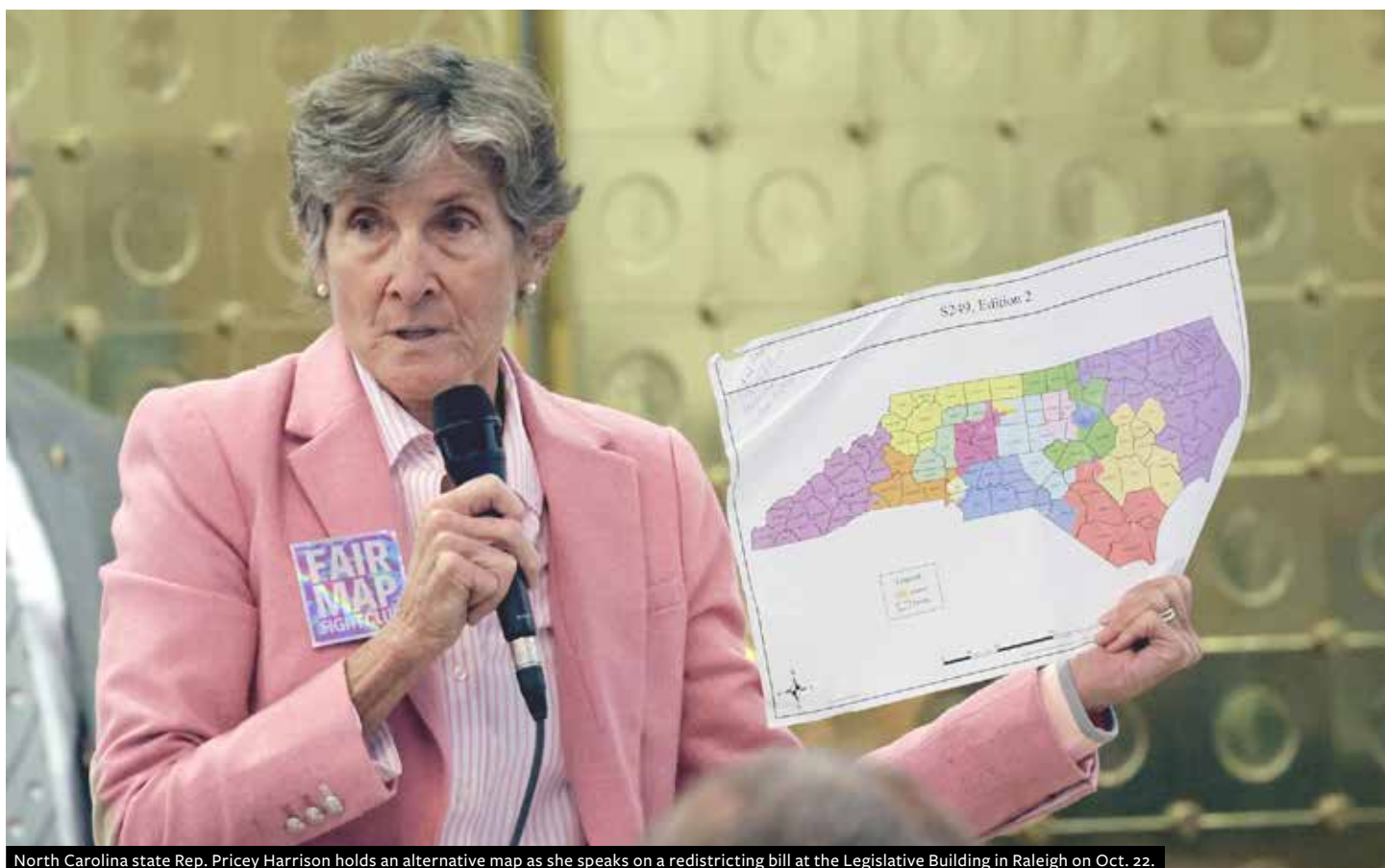
36



Total projected **price tag** on **campaign ads** in the midterms

\$10.8M





North Carolina state Rep. Pricey Harrison holds an alternative map as she speaks on a redistricting bill at the Legislative Building in Raleigh on Oct. 22.

Whose lines are they, anyway?

The redistricting wars could have massive ramifications for years to come.

By James A. Downs

A MIDTERM ELECTION CYCLE that started out like any other was upended this summer when President Trump called on Texas to revisit its congressional lines to net a handful of GOP seats.

That kicked off a rapid race across the country to change district lines in the middle of the decade in an attempt to gain a partisan advantage in a narrowly divided Congress. More than 10 states may have new lines by the time the dust settles.

Mid-cycle redistricting is not an uncommon phenomenon in politics—there have not been consecutive elections with the same nationwide congressional map since 2014, according to John Bisognano, president of the National Democratic Redistricting Committee. But such changes were relatively minor and often came in the form of court-mandated redistricting.

The effects of the current rampant, unprecedented, partisan mid-decade redraws will have ramifications well beyond the midterms.

“This is not good for states. This is not good for governance,” said Abha Khanna, an attorney at left-leaning law firm Elias Law Group, which is involved in a spate of redistricting cases throughout the country. “All this is a constant chasing of power and nothing else. It’s not what democracy was intended to do, and it’s not what government is intended to do.”

Elias Law filed a lawsuit at the end of October challenging a Staten Island district in New York. If successful, it could net Democrats an extra seat.

At present, there does not seem to be an end in sight for this arms race. But it remains to be seen whether this will become the new norm. A few members of Congress who have been affected have introduced legislation to ban mid-decade redistricting, but it’s unlikely the bills will gain much traction at the federal level.

On the other hand, some states, like New York, have begun to look at undoing independent commissions via constitutional amendment to restore map-making power back to state legislatures.

Some remain hopeful this redistricting

arms race ends in disarmament.

"I still believe that this ends with national reform, and that being federal legislation to curb political gerrymandering in some capacity," Bisognano said. "I think that's the only way to end this current spiral that is being forced upon this country."

Supreme Court intervention is unlikely, at least as it's currently constituted. The John Roberts-led Court in 2019 ruled that partisan-gerrymandering claims were beyond the high court's purview, instead kicking it to the states and Congress to curb such matters.

Republicans agree the solution must come from Congress.

"When you get into a nuclear arms race, it takes some pretty big cojones to get out of it," said Mark Meuser, a California-based Republican election lawyer. "At some point in time it's going to take some politicians who are willing to become statesmen and say, 'Congress, we've got to step up and do the right thing.'"

Even if partisans eventually lay down their redistricting arms, a potentially more impactful specter haunts long-term map-drawing processes. The Supreme Court last month reheard arguments in a racial-gerrymandering case concerning the congressional map in Louisiana.

The incredibly shrinking House battlefield

President Nixon might have swept George McGovern in 1972 for one of the largest presidential landslides in history, but that didn't translate into many gains for Republicans down the ballot. Republicans gained only a dozen House seats that year, keeping Democrats in the majority, with 192 crossover districts. That means about 44 percent of the districts in the country voted for one party for president and the other for House—a high-water mark in modern elections. This type of ticket splitting is no longer the norm. For nearly three decades, the number of crossover districts has significantly decreased thanks to several cycles of aggressive gerrymandering and voter self-sorting. At the start of 2025, only 16 House members represented a crossover district, tied for a historic low. The lack of extension into enemy territory means that swings in the House are much smaller. In the last three election cycles, the average net gain for either party was seven seats. No matter how the dust settles next year, it's more likely than not that the House will be divided by a single-digit majority.

—Kirk A. Bado

The justices asked parties to answer whether race-based districts violate the Constitution, a signal to some observers that the Court could be gearing up to gut Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act, which protects minority voting power.

Predicting how the Court might rule is a fool's errand, said Justin Levitt, a former Obama and Biden administration official for voting rights, and it's no guarantee they will

strike down the law.

"I see parallels to the Alabama case two years ago, where the signals all looked like the Supreme Court was getting ready to strike down the Voting Rights Act, and then they turned around and said, 'Nope,'" Levitt said.

The original hearing dissected the tension between race and politics, which are particularly intertwined in the South. Levitt said there's a possibility of a narrow ruling only tailored to the Louisiana map.

"It just doesn't seem to be where they're leaning," he added.

States across the South are readying for the possibility of the end of the Voting Rights Act. Worried Democratic groups warn that as many as 19 seats could be gutted. Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry, who was influential in enacting the current lines, called a special session to push back the state's primary date in case the Supreme Court drops its decision before the end of the year, while South Carolina gubernatorial contenders are advocating to dismantle the lone Black-majority seat in the state.

Most experts agree any landmark ruling won't affect the 2026 midterms, as the process to craft an opinion is often long and new districts would take time to implement.

But, should the ruling come, likely toward the end of the term in June, it promises to significantly shape how districts are drawn after 2030 and beyond.

Elias Law Group's Khanna, who said she is optimistic the Court will uphold the Voting Rights Act, stressed the importance of the case.

"Anytime that the Supreme Court decides to opine on the Voting Rights Act, which is one of the seminal pieces of civil rights legislation in our history, it is consequential," she said.

"And we should all stand up and take notice." □

Who's not returning to Congress

Democrats

NAME	REASON FOR LEAVING
Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL-9)	Retiring
Rep. Dwight Evans (D-PA-3)	Retiring
Rep. Danny Davis (D-IL-7)	Retiring
Rep. Lloyd Doggett (D-TX-37)	Retiring
Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-NY-12)	Retiring
Rep. Jesus "Chuy" Garcia (D-IL-4)	Retiring
Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL)	Retiring
Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH)	Retiring
Sen. Tina Smith (D-MN)	Retiring
Sen. Gary Peters (D-MI)	Retiring
Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-IL-8)	Running for Senate
Rep. Robin Kelly (D-IL-2)	Running for Senate
Rep. Angie Craig (D-MN-2)	Running for Senate
Rep. Haley Stevens (D-MI-11)	Running for Senate
Rep. Chris Pappas (D-NH-1)	Running for Senate
Rep. Josh Gottheimer (D-NJ-5)	Running for Governor
Rep. Mikie Sherrill (D-NJ-11)	Running for Governor
Rep. Seth Moulton (D-MA-6)	Running for Senate
Sen. Michael Bennet (D-CO)	Running for Governor

Republicans

NAME	REASON FOR LEAVING
Rep. Don Bacon (R-NE-2)	Retiring
Rep. Morgan Luttrell (R-TX-8)	Retiring
Rep. Michael McCaul (R-TX-10)	Retiring
Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY)	Retiring
Sen. Thom Tillis (R-NC)	Retiring
Sen. Joni Ernst (R-IA)	Retiring
Rep. Buddy Carter (R-GA-1)	Running for Senate
Rep. Andy Barr (R-KY-6)	Running for Senate
Rep. John James (R-MI-10)	Running for Governor
Rep. John Rose (R-TN-6)	Running for Governor
Rep. Byron Donalds (R-FL-19)	Running for Governor
Rep. Andy Biggs (R-AZ-5)	Running for Governor
Rep. Randy Feenstra (R-IA-4)	Running for Governor
Sen. Tommy Tuberville (R-AL)	Running for Governor
Rep. Nancy Mace (R-SC-1)	Running for Governor
Rep. Ralph Norman (R-SC-5)	Running for Governor
Rep. Dusty Johnson (R-SD-AL)	Running for Governor
Rep. Barry Moore (R-AL-1)	Running for Senate
Rep. Ashley Hinson (R-IA-2)	Running for Senate
Rep. Chip Roy (R-TX-21)	Running for Atty General
Rep. Tom Tiffany (R-WI-7)	Running for Governor
Rep. David Schweikert (R-AZ-1)	Running for Governor
Rep. Wesley Hunt (R-TX-38)	Running for Senate
Sen. Marsha Blackburn (R-TN)	Running for Governor
Rep. Mike Collins (R-GA-10)	Running for Senate



California Gov. Gavin Newsom has a lot riding on his state's redistricting measure.

Which 2028 prospects have the most to lose?

Potential
presidential
candidates will
likely target
battlegrounds
and early states
on the primary
calendar.

By Erika Filter

AS PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFULS face their own reelection campaigns in the 2026 midterms, what may be more important is their ability to campaign on behalf of downballot candidates across the country.

Stumping for congressional and state candidates gives presidential hopefuls a host of benefits—they build support in key states, meet with key donors, and test out their own campaigning and fundraising chops. Likely 2028 candidates have already rolled out some endorsements, but strategists said the majority of surrogate work will come after the midterm primaries, unless two candidates have a preexisting relationship.

The work starts at home, and potential 2028 candidates are likely to get involved in home-state races. So far, Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker has endorsed his lieutenant governor, Juliana Stratton, to replace Sen. Dick Durbin, and Rep. Ro Khanna is promoting Visalia Unified School District trustee Randy Villegas in California's 22nd District and entrepreneur Brandon Riker in the 41st District. California Gov. Gavin Newsom

endorsed his lieutenant governor, Eleni Koumalakis, for state treasurer.

Sen. Ruben Gallego of Arizona endorsed Rep. Angie Craig for Senate in Minnesota, but Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz is said to be unlikely to endorse in that primary, which includes his lieutenant governor, Peggy Flanagan. Walz and Flanagan reportedly had a falling out over preparations to succeed Walz if he won the vice presidency last year.

Many 2028 hopefuls will look to the battleground races in the midterms to prove their chops as surrogates. The Florida, Georgia, Maine, North Carolina, and Texas Senate races will all likely draw support from presidential hopefuls. Khanna has already endorsed Graham Platner for Senate in Maine, instead of outgoing Gov. Janet Mills, the establishment favorite.

Georgia and North Carolina, in particular, serve dual purposes: They're tough races for Democrats in the midterms, and they're likely battleground states in 2028.

"You can check a lot of boxes by spending time in North Carolina right now," longtime Democratic strategist Steve Schale told *National Journal*.

Pritzker and former Transportation Sec-



Pete Buttigieg on the "All-in Podcast"

retary Pete Buttigieg have both visited North Carolina in recent months, with the Illinois governor addressing the state party at its annual dinner and Buttigieg speaking at Duke University.

Schale, who worked on midterm strategy for Joe Biden in 2018, during the lead-up to his 2020 presidential run, said another element of the strategy was looking for opportunities to stump in early states on the presidential-primary calendar.

This is a strategy many presidential hopefuls have pursued in past cycles, starting when Jimmy Carter barnstormed Iowa in 1975 and put its caucuses on the map. The primary calendar may look different in 2028, but many of the traditional early states—Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada, and South Carolina—will likely remain early, even if their order changes, and prospective 2028 candidates are not staying away.

Buttigieg, Walz, Gallego, and former Ambassador to Japan Rahm Emanuel have visited Iowa. Walz, Newsom, Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear, Maryland Gov. Wes Moore, and Khanna have visited South Carolina. Gallego and Beshear have spent time in New Hampshire, and Sens. Chris Murphy and Cory Booker have plans to visit the Granite State on Nov. 12 and 14, respectively.

Aside from the geographical benefits of certain races, 2028 candidates will likely look for midterm candidates who fit their general brand. For instance, Khanna has already endorsed fellow progressives including Platter and Kat Abughazaleh, an influencer running in a safe blue seat in Illinois.

Strategists said many 2028 candidates will hold off on endorsing in primaries to avoid bad blood if their pick is not the eventual nominee. But the return on investment for candidates who do play in primaries may be larger.

"Some of these Democratic candidates are going to take flyers and intervene in primaries because they want to be first on board for potential winners," Democratic strategist

Brad Bannon said. "Because successful candidates remember those things."

Midterm candidates are usually the ones to invite presidential hopefuls to come speak, not the other way around. Their choice of candidates may be an early indicator of who intraparty members think has a good chance of winning. In 2018, Biden and Booker visited 24 states apiece to stump for other candidates, while Sen. Bernie Sanders visited 18. Biden and Sanders were the final two candidates in the 2020 primary, before Biden became the nominee.

But the presence of national Democrats can pose a risk to a candidate in a battleground race trying to separate him- or herself from the establishment wing of the party. Last cycle, Democratic Senate candidates in battleground states distanced themselves from former Vice President Kamala Harris in an attempt to win over Trump voters.

Midterm candidates may also seek the fundraising power that comes with inviting a national figure to speak, especially at a dinner with friendly Democratic donors. This year, the Clintons attended a fundraiser for Virginia gubernatorial candidate Abigail Spanberger.

hear spoke at a Missouri Democratic Party dinner in September. Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer spoke at yet another Florida Democratic Party fundraiser in late October.

This cycle has the unique addition of redistricting battles, which offer 2028 hopefuls—especially Newsom—an opportunity to burnish their partisan credentials. Other potential candidates, such as Pritzker and Moore, have dipped their toes into the redistricting pool.

Pritzker invited Texas Democratic lawmakers to stay in Illinois as they delayed the now-passed Texas gerrymander, and Moore has said "all options are on the table" when it comes to redistricting his state for Democrats' advantage.

Newsom has made Proposition 50, the California measure designed to net Democrats five congressional seats through gerrymandered district lines, a top-priority issue. So while it's likely he would suffer political damage were the measure to fail, other 2028 hopefuls who deal with redistricting as a second- or third-tier priority are less likely to see blowback if their attempts fail.

The 2028 hopeful with arguably the largest



Maryland Gov. Wes Moore made an early visit to South Carolina.

"The Democratic presidential race has already started in earnest, and early presidential campaigns mean big money for midterm Democrats and lots of endorsements," Bannon said.

Many prominent Democrats have already spoken at state-party dinners, a mutually beneficial arrangement allowing state parties to fundraise and candidates to meet with donors in key states.

Walz and Booker spoke at the California Democratic Party's annual convention; Booker and Beshear spoke at the Florida Democratic Party's annual Leadership Blue Gala; and Bes-

hear spoke at the Missouri Democratic Party dinner in September. Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer spoke at yet another Florida Democratic Party fundraiser in late October.

"If Democratic governors have a really good cycle, he's now built a bunch of allies around the country," Schale said.

But the position comes with added risk—the more Beshear ties his fate to the electoral success of Democratic governors across the country, the more he stands to lose if many of those governors don't win. □



Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee Chair Kirsten Gillibrand, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, and Sen. Andy Kim

Senate Democrats' two-cycle math

The GOP won
a four-seat
gain in 2024.
Democrats
want theirs in
2026.

By Nicholas Anastácio

SHORTLY AFTER Senate Republicans gained four seats last November, soon-to-be chair of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee Kirsten Gillibrand predicted her party would need two cycles to reclaim the majority.

"I think it'll take at least two cycles," the junior senator from New York said, "but I'm willing to do the work."

In early summer, anticipating passage of President Trump's One Big Beautiful Bill and a series of Democratic recruitment wins, Gillibrand changed her tune, projecting that her party could achieve a four-seat gain of its own next year.

But history might not be on Gillibrand's side. The GOP expanded its Senate majority during Trump's first midterms in 2018, despite the blue wave in the House, and the map this cycle slightly favors Republicans.

"The math is really, really tough for Democrats," said Carlos Algara, a political science professor who studies Senate elections at Claremont Graduate University. "I never say never in politics, but I would not be optimistic if I was a Democratic strategist this cycle."

Democrats will need to defend all of their must-win purple-state seats—in Georgia, Michigan, Minnesota, and New Hampshire—

while eyeing pickup opportunities in Alaska, Iowa, Maine, North Carolina, Ohio, and Texas.

Party leaders are projecting confidence they can reach 51 seats in 2026, a prospect Democratic strategists acknowledge as difficult. They project that Trump's absence at the top of the ticket, low presidential-approval numbers, and their party's overperformance in this year's special elections all point to a chance for the party to overcome the odds.

"It looks real encouraging," outgoing Sen. Gary Peters of Michigan told *National Journal*. "You have Sherrod Brown running in Ohio. I think that's a big deal. [We have] the former governor of North Carolina. I think we've got some great candidates."

Democrats are basing their ambitious mid-term playbook on candidate quality, pointing to Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer's recruitment of outgoing Maine Gov. Janet Mills, former North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper, and former Sen. Brown of Ohio. Democrats believe these three recruits have built political brands independent of the national Democratic Party, which will allow them to defy the party's high unfavorability rate.

Peters, who chaired the DSCC during the 2022 and 2024 cycles, told *National Journal* the party's recruitment of experienced candidates is an asset, hearkening back to his routine emphasis on candidate quality.



Former Sen. Sherrod Brown of Ohio

However, all three marquee recruits face historical headwinds in their races. Brown, who lost to Republican Sen. Bernie Moreno by less than 4 points last year, is the only 21st-century Democrat to win a Senate race in Ohio, a state that increasingly favors the GOP. Cooper won two terms as governor in 2016 and 2020, but his party hasn't won a Senate seat in North Carolina since 2008. He'll face former Republican National Committee Chairman Michael Whatley in a race to succeed retiring Sen. Thom Tillis.

Maine Democrats are divided on who they want to nominate against GOP Sen. Susan Collins, in a state that hasn't elected a Democratic senator since 1988. (The state's other senator, Angus King, is an independent who caucuses with the Democrats.) Oyster farmer Graham Platner, a 41-year-old populist, could upset the 77-year-old Mills in the primary, despite his recent controversies. The Democratic primary seems likely to serve as a microcosm of the larger debates over age, credentials, and priorities within the party, threatening to upset Washington leadership's plans in a must-win race.

"While Republicans contend with a building midterm backlash, a string of disastrous recruitment failures, messy primaries, and a toxic agenda that have put their majority at risk, Democrats are on offense," DSCC spokesperson Maeve Coyle told *National Journal* in a statement. "We have expanded the battleground map and are in a strong position to flip seats in 2026."

Apart from the above trio of recruits, Schumer is still looking to convince former Rep. Mary Peltola of Alaska to challenge Republican Sen. Dan Sullivan instead of running for governor. When *National Journal* asked Sullivan how he feels about Schumer's attempt to recruit Peltola, the senator simply

grinned and shrugged.

If Peltola passes on a Senate bid, the party could find its fourth target in Iowa or Texas. Sen. Joni Ernst's retirement is an encouraging sign for Democrats in Iowa, a state that values incumbency. Texas Democrats also see an opening amid the GOP primary showdown between Sen. John Cornyn and controversial state Attorney General Ken Paxton. Both races have competitive Democratic primaries.

"When you're talking about a race like the United States Senate, we're talking about being able to fundamentally change our country," Iowa state Rep. Josh Turek, a Democratic Senate contender, told *National Journal*. "That should give a lot of people here in Iowa a lot of hope and a lot of enthusiasm."

Democrats are also keeping their eye on Kansas and Mississippi. Schumer actively

pushed District Attorney Scott Colom to challenge Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith in Mississippi, seeing an opening in the state with the largest percentage of Black residents. In Kansas, Rep. Sharice Davids could be spurred to challenge Sen. Roger Marshall if the state's GOP-controlled legislature redraws her district to favor Republicans.

In the end, if Democrats can't reach their ambitious one-cycle majority goal, the party will have to turn its attention to the 2028 cycle—another potentially difficult environment for red-state Democrats. The party's best pickup opportunities will be in North Carolina and Wisconsin, but at the same time, they will need to defend Arizona, Georgia, Nevada, New Hampshire, and Pennsylvania.

Algara told *National Journal* that Democratic gains in Maine and North Carolina are essential if the party wants to win the majority in either 2026 or 2028. He pointed to GOP Sen. Dave McCormick's seat flip in Pennsylvania last year as a beneficial buffer for the GOP's majority. Republicans lost the four other Senate elections in swing states last year.

"Just looking at the map in 2028, if Democrats pick up no seats in this cycle, I would just find it very improbable that they would even have a path in '28," Algara said.

Unsurprisingly, Republicans dispute their rival party's one-cycle majority chances, plotting an expansion of their own. National Republican Senatorial Committee Chairman Tim Scott aims to increase the party's 53-seat majority to 55.

"Republicans are united behind our incumbents and fantastic recruits like John Sununu, Michael Whatley, Mike Rogers, and Ashley Hinson, while Democrats face historically



Former GOP Sen. John E. Sununu announcing his run for Senate in New Hampshire

low approval ratings, a Sanders vs. Schumer proxy war for control of their Party, and an identity crisis after a decade of standing for nothing except hating President Trump,” NRSC spokesperson Joanna Rodriguez told *National Journal* in a statement.

The GOP sees bright spots in Georgia and Michigan, states that Trump won in both 2016 and 2024. Democratic Sen. Jon Ossoff of Georgia, the most vulnerable Democratic incumbent, is facing his first reelection bid. In Michigan, Peters is retiring after two terms, spurring a contentious Democratic primary to replace him, while the NRSC backs former Rep. Mike Rogers’s comeback bid.

“Republicans are charged-up about getting a change for the first time in 32 years, putting a Republican in the United States Senate representing Michigan and Michigan workers,” Rogers told *National Journal* in September.

With the help of Senate Majority Leader John Thune, Republicans recruited former Sen. John E. Sununu of New Hampshire in the race to replace retiring Democratic Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, who defeated Sununu in 2008. The NRSC-backed Sununu will face former Sen. Scott Brown of Massachusetts

“Just looking at the map in 2028, if Democrats pick up no seats in this cycle, I would just find it very improbable that they would even have a path in ‘28.”

— Carlos Algara, political science professor at Claremont Graduate University

in the primary, before he can take on Democratic Rep. Chris Pappas.

“I think we have a lot to run on, so I think we’ll hopefully pick up seats,” said Sen. Rick Scott, who chaired the NRSC during the 2022 midterms.

Sen. Steve Daines, the NRSC chair for the

2024 cycle, told *National Journal* that he is pleased with the current chair’s work ahead of the midterms, pointing to candidate-recruitment efforts and fundraising. Daines said he is also confident his party can hold Senate control beyond the 2026 election.

“I feel good about it,” he said. “Looking at the map short- and even long-term, I think we are in a strong tradition of older majorities for the foreseeable future.”

Democrats are pitching their midterm strategy as grounded in lessons learned from the 2024 election, with a hyperfocus on the economy and affordability. They also hope to tap back into their 2018 playbook with a focus on health care—from attacking the One Big Beautiful Bill’s reduction in federal Medicaid spending, to staking their shutdown strategy on preventing the Affordable Care Act’s enhanced premium subsidies from expiring at the end of this year.

Sen. Ruben Gallego, a swing-state senator from Arizona, told *National Journal*, “I think if these [Republicans] end up increasing the premiums of 24 million Americans by doubling them, they’re going to end up paying for it at the polling booth.” □

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Trump's midterm meddling has only just begun

Experts warn the president is upending norms and laws, and he may challenge election results he doesn't like.

By Abby Turner

"BIDEN WAS GROSSLY INCOMPETENT, and the 2020 election was a total FRAUD! The evidence is MASSIVE and OVERWHELMING," President Trump said on Truth Social—not back in 2020 or 2021, but this June.

Nearly five years after his loss to Biden, and approaching the one-year anniversary of his own comeback win, the president is trying to use a combination of legal maneuvers and public pressure to instill doubt in elections before the first votes are cast in the upcoming midterms, which historically favor the party out of power.

Since Trump returned to office, the Justice Department has gone after states for failing to turn over voter information and is investigating Democratic donation platform Act-Blue. In a sweeping executive order, Trump tried to bar states from accepting ballots that arrive through the mail after Election Day. He also vowed to ban mail-in voting and electronic voting machines, while floating changes to the U.S. Census to exclude undocumented immigrants.

"This is a very relentless and broad-based push to meddle in elections," said Wendy Weiser, vice president for democracy at the Brennan Center for Justice, who described the president's "unprecedented and false claim of authority over elections" as "very concerning."

Trump's litany of complaints, threats, and directives may seem isolated, but experts say they point to a coordinated strategy to

increase public distrust in elections, expand federal control over the process, and lay the groundwork to possibly contest next year's midterm results.

"It is a multipronged effort, and they all feed in together," Weiser said. "So if you sort of pull them apart and look at each of them in isolation, you're missing the big picture."

In one of the administration's most public pushes, the Justice Department is suing eight states for refusing to turn over information from voter-registration rolls sought by Attorney General Pam Bondi. The department requested detailed voter rolls, including driver's license numbers and partial Social Security numbers, claiming it needs the information to ensure states comply with voter-list maintenance requirements under the Help America Vote Act.

"One of the things that [state] Secretaries find so alarming is, even though they've asked the Department of Justice why they want this information, what they'll use it for, they haven't gotten any answers," a spokesperson for the Democratic Association of Secretaries of State said in a statement.

A March executive order, one of Trump's first election-related moves, requires proof of citizenship for mail-in voter registration, bars states from counting ballots received after Election Day, and compels federal agencies to share data with state officials to purge ineligible voters. The courts have put most of these provisions on hold.

Trump has vowed to ban mail-in voting and get rid of electronic voting machines, though

he has yet to issue a formal order. The power to ban mail-in or absentee ballots is reserved to the states, but both Weiser and Michael Morley, director of Florida State University's Election Law Center, say Trump could withhold federal funding if states don't adopt his preferred policies—a tactic used before.

Despite Trump's sweeping rhetoric, he lacks the legal power to do most of what he has vowed or attempted to do so far.

"He's got zero inherent constitutional power, and Congress hasn't seized it to give him power," said Justin Levitt, who was the White House's first senior policy adviser for Democracy and Voting Rights under President Biden. "And absent that, the power really lives in the states, where he can persuade like-minded states to follow his lead, but he can't really execute much on his own."

When it comes to mail-in voting, Levitt said Trump may try to pressure Republican secretaries of state and other elections officials to restrict or ban it in their states, but they're unlikely to follow suit.

Republicans in 2024 encouraged mail-in voting, which is popular among senior citizens and other key parts of the GOP constituency. Since Trump's rise, the GOP has increasingly performed well with infrequent voters, who would be the most impacted and potentially discouraged by changes to election procedure, Levitt said.

"I think that his own campaign folks are probably telling him, 'Hey, stop it. You're costing us votes every time you do that,'" Levitt said of Trump's claims that mail-in voting is fraudulent.

Even if Trump attempts to ban mail-in ballots, courts will likely block him. But experts say these efforts could still shape public perception of election legitimacy.



A poll worker monitors voting in Arizona in 2024.

"I think many of the election officials I talk to, and I myself, are concerned that this is all an effort to delegitimize elections that the president thinks he might lose," said David Becker, executive director and founder of the nonpartisan, nonprofit Center for Election Innovation and Research.

Weiser and Becker noted the administration is now using the federal government to potentially take action in response to election doubts, not just pressure other actors as Trump did in 2020.

"What's different this time, in 2026, is that it appears the federal government is situating itself to be the primary spreader of disinformation about elections," Becker said, "and so there is great concern about how the federal government—I would go beyond the word 'influence,' I would say how the federal government might interfere."

Experts warn the DOJ's lawsuits could lay the foundation to question midterm results. If states refuse to comply with the administration's orders, Trump could claim their elections

are invalid in order to justify federal interference, according to Jonathan Diaz, the Campaign Legal Center's director of voting advocacy and partnerships.

"Those states' refusal to go along with his illegal orders is going to form the basis for challenges to those results," Diaz predicted.

But Morley said he doesn't see the Trump administration going that far. If officials get the voter rolls and they're clean, he said, "that'll take a lot of steam out of reform efforts" because it would show current safeguards are adequate.

In the next 12 months, the administration's grip on elections may tighten, with Trump potentially deploying federal law enforcement or the military at polling locations. Governors are already sounding the alarm. Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker warned that soldiers could be stationed outside polling places to "intimidate people who are not Republicans."

"I am worried that they're teeing up plans not just to undermine trust, but to justify much more extraordinary and unlawful federal interference in actual elections: collecting, taking control of the data and machinery of elections, floating the ideas of emergency powers," Weiser said.

The DOJ plans to send federal election monitors to counties in New Jersey and California during this year's off-cycle elections, at the request of state GOP officials.

Not only might increased federal oversight impact this year's elections or the coming midterms, it could set the stage for larger federal control in elections to come, Becker said. But once the precedent is set, Republicans who cheer the administration's moves could be sorry the next time a Democrat returns to the White House.

"If the power to basically dictate to states how they run elections is handed over to a White House because you happen to be in the same party as the president at the time, you're going to be very disappointed at how that power is used when the party of the president is different," he said.

Levitt predicted the pressure campaign coming from Trump will set up mental barriers to voting, although he added that the president lacks constitutional power to control elections and it's up to Americans to see past that.

"He doesn't have the lever," Levitt said. "He can't push the button that makes it happen, and that's A), really important for people to understand, but B), can also feel unusual, because he's got the lever, he's got that button in a lot of other places." □

NationalJournalHotline

Battling Boosters

CROSSOVERS	TOTAL INVOLVED	TOTAL WIN	WINNING %	SENATE W-L	HOUSE W-L
EMILYs List	11	5	45.45%	2-0	3-6
League of Conservation Voters	23	11	47.83%	2-3	9-9
AIPAC	21	10	47.62%	0-2	10-9
Club for Growth	14	10	71.43%	3-2	7-2
Fairshake	12	7	58.33%	2-0	5-5

HOUSE TOTALS	TOTAL INVOLVED	W-L
Congressional Leadership Fund	21	11-10
House Majority PAC	22	11-11
Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee	22	11-11
National Republican Congressional Committee	20	9-11

SENATE TOTALS	TOTAL INVOLVED	W-L
Senate Majority PAC	5	2-3
Senate Leadership Fund	5	3-2
Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee	5	2-3
National Republican Senatorial Committee	5	3-2

Is Iowa a field of dreams or nightmares for Dems?



Demonstrator at a No Kings Rally held in Des Moines in June

Democrats have an opportunity in two statewide races for the first time in decades.

By Abby Turner and Nicholas Anastácio

WITH OPEN RACES for governor and Senate in Iowa for the first time in nearly 60 years, Democrats see a rare opening in a state that has been steadily trending red. Renewed Democratic optimism following retirement announcements from Gov. Kim Reynolds and Sen. Joni Ernst, both Republicans, is likely to be matched with larger than usual investment in the Hawkeye State.

Yet enthusiasm and higher investment alone may not overcome the structural headwinds that have plagued Democrats in recent cycles. President Trump carried the state three times, widening his margin in each run.

“Open seats in Iowa tend to be pretty competitive, regardless of where they exist,” University of Northern Iowa political science professor Donna Hoffman said.

Republicans have coalesced around Rep.

Randy Feenstra, who has all but officially announced his run to succeed Reynolds—one of the most unpopular governors in the country. He’s likely to sweep the GOP primary thanks to his congressional district representing around 25 percent of the state.

State Auditor Rob Sand is the likely Democratic nominee, prompting the Iowa GOP to sound the alarm over his candidacy. Sand has centered his campaign on pragmatic governance over partisanship, while breaking from his party on some cultural wedge issues. His entrance to the race prompted *The Cook Political Report* with Amy Walter to shift the contest from solid Republican to lean Republican.

Sand is the only statewide elected Democrat, after the Democratic attorney general and treasurer lost reelection by roughly a percentage point each in 2022. Though running as a Democrat, the former registered independent told *National Journal* he doesn’t shy away from criticizing both sides.

“I don’t think that either political party is



Republican Rep. Ashley Hinson

actually very good at solving the problems that we face,” Sand said.

In the Senate race, Democrats don’t have a Sand. Several contenders are competing in the Democratic primary, all without a prior statewide win or bid. Meanwhile, Republicans are satisfied with Rep. Ashley Hinson taking Ernst’s place on the ticket, welcoming her \$4.1 million war chest.

“Hinson is just already hitting the ground hard out of the gate,” said Tyler Campbell, an Iowa-based GOP strategist. “She’s a prolific fundraiser, she has a great team, and I think she’s going to be a unifying force for Republicans around the state.”

Hinson, a former TV news anchor, has established herself as a rising star in GOP politics beyond the Hawkeye State, hosting national Republican leaders and several 2024 presidential contenders at her annual Hinson’s BBQ Bash fundraiser.

“There is no one better for this fight than Ashley Hinson, a force with a proven record of fighting fiercely for Iowa, the determination to build a winning coalition, and the grit to earn every vote,” National Republican Senatorial Committee spokesperson Joanna Rodriguez told *National Journal* in a statement.

Even against a favorite such as Hinson, and without a strong candidate like Sand, Democrats aren’t counting themselves out of the running just yet.

Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee spokesperson Maeve Coyle told *National Journal* in a statement that “Iowans are feeling the pain of the GOP agenda Ashley Hinson supports as chaotic trade wars threaten Iowa’s economy, and thousands of Iowans risk losing their health care thanks to Republicans’

Medicaid cuts and refusal to take action to stop health care costs from rising.”

State Rep. Josh Turek, a two-time Paralympian from a Trump-won district, has caught the attention of Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and other Washington Democrats. A self-described “common-sense prairie populist,” Turek told *National Journal* his party has a “generational opportunity” to capture both statewide vacancies.

“We’re seeing even more energy and excitement than we even had in 2018 in terms of what we’re seeing for civic engagement,” Turek said. “You can see, particularly in a state like Iowa, we are ready

for change.”

First Turek will have to clear the Democratic primary, facing state Sen. Zach Wahls and former Knoxville Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Nathan Sage.

With two highly competitive races shaping up, strategists and party officials told *National Journal* that both parties will invest significantly more in the state, with Democrats expected to outspend Republicans.

But winning the money race doesn’t guarantee anything. In 2018, when Reynolds was first up for election, Democrats spent around \$12 million backing Fred Hubbell against the Republicans’ \$7 million. During Ernst’s reelection campaign in 2020, Democrats and aligned groups poured \$130 million into the state, over the GOP’s \$90 million. Both Democratic candidates lost.

Strategists from both parties expect next year’s gubernatorial race to exceed state spending records, but they are less inclined to believe the Senate contest will exceed the 2020 race’s \$220 million price tag during a midterm year.

“I think, from talking to Republicans here in the state, they are aware and concerned about Rob Sand,” said Jeff Link, a veteran Democratic strategist from Iowa. “They do not take that race for granted, and because of that, I think they’re going to pour a lot of resources into Feenstra.”

Link estimates the governor’s race could cost between \$60 million and \$75 million, and the Senate race could reach as much as \$100 million. Iowa GOP Chair Jeff Kaufmann expects the Republican National Committee, which didn’t invest last cycle, and the Republican Governors Association to get involved.

Democrats will “have all the resources that

they need,” Republican political strategist David Kochel said. But, he added, “they may not have all the voters they need.”

Republicans hold a nearly 200,000 registered-voter advantage over Democrats, but Hoffman warns against comparing apples to oranges. The law changed in 2021 so anyone who misses one general-election cycle is moved off the active voter rolls. Democrats have particularly struggled to recover in rural Iowa.

While Republicans have a clear advantage in the state, former *Des Moines Register* political reporter David Yepsen believes that, of the two races, Democrats have a stronger chance in the gubernatorial campaign. That race is likely to hinge on hyperlocal issues such as water quality, cancer rates, and a proposed carbon-sequestration pipeline, while the Senate race will be more subject to national headwinds.

Democrats say they feel confident they can play off of consistent GOP control in the state to place blame over one of the most pressing issues in the midterms: a struggling economy and rising costs. The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis ranked Iowa’s economy 49th in the country, and it is the only state, alongside North Dakota, where the economy shrank in 2024. Agriculture, a key economic driver, has also taken a significant hit from Trump’s tariffs against China, which was formerly one of the largest buyers of U.S. soybeans. Amid the trade war, China has begun buying more soy-



Iowa state Rep. Josh Turek (D)



Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds

happy, ain't nobody happy," Yepsen said. "So that's something that's new to the political mix here, and it has encouraged Democrats, who have been very down about things in recent years."

Democrats see parallels with former Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback, whose deep tax cuts drained his state's budget in the 2010s and crippled funding for schools and services. After Brownback left office, the conservative state elected a Democrat as its next governor. Iowa now faces a \$900 million budget deficit, after multiple rounds of tax cuts under Reynolds.

"They supported Kim Reynolds, and they have been supportive of Joni Ernst, and so that is the reality of anybody who runs in their place," Iowa Democratic Party Chair Rita Hart said.

"They are running on that record, and they're complicit in that record. So they're going to have to answer for it."

But Republicans say they aren't worried about any negative impact of Reynolds and Ernst on the GOP field.

"I don't think of [Reynolds] as bringing baggage to other Republicans," Kochel said. "I think if she was in the race, you know, you'd see a different dynamic playing out."

Whether Democrats can capitalize on economic concerns will hinge on the sheer number of voters they can turn out. While Republicans look like they have an advantage, strategists and experts suggest the state is more purple than it may appear.

"Iowans are actually pretty comfortable voting for Democrats," Sand said. "They have not been doing it to the same degree that they were in 2008, but they're not allergic to it." □

Democrats planting seeds to return in 2028?

A successful performance from Democrats in Iowa could put the Hawkeye State back into contention for first-in-the-nation status on the Democratic presidential primary calendar, state-based strategists told *Hotline*. Iowa lost its spot at the top of the Dems' nominating calendar after 2020, when a technical meltdown delayed results and then-South Bend Mayor Pete Buttigieg declared victory—before final results showed him and Sen. Bernie Sanders in a virtual tie. In 2024, then-President Biden moved South Carolina, a state that propelled his 2020 campaign, to the front of the line. Ahead of 2028, the Democratic National Committee is considering a host of options for the new primary calendar, including Michigan, New Hampshire, Nevada, and South Carolina. Republicans, on the other hand, have kept Iowa first on their primary calendar. Iowa Democrats argue the imbalance allows Republicans to capture widespread attention in the state. Iowa Democratic strategist Jeff Link said if state Auditor Rob Sand can win the gubernatorial contest in Iowa despite Democrats' disadvantage in voter registration, "that's kind of a big deal, and if we could win back one or two of those House seats, it would be a huge deal." Iowa faces an uphill battle to regain its status with Democrats, due to the past technical issues, the unwieldy format of its caucuses, and its nearly 90 percent white demographics. But wins for the party in 2026 could give the state positive attention and signal that Dems still have a home in Iowa.

— Erika Filter





Seguin is a south central Texas town that moved into a new congressional district as part of the state's controversial mid-decade redistricting.

Republicans bet on Hispanic drift

President Trump
has driven big
Republican gains,
but will they stick
in downballot
races?

By James A. Downs

ALONG THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY, Texas—Tucked away in the southeast corner of Texas, the Lower Rio Grande Valley is, in many respects, the epicenter of political shifts in the United States. The fast-growing region, anchored by Hidalgo County, has surpassed El Paso as Texas's largest metropolitan area along the border.

The area is staunchly working-class. Small businesses—and their struggles in an uncertain economy—predominate. Faith plays a big role in people's lives. The census doesn't ask for religious affiliation, but it's fair to assume the majority of residents are or were raised Catholic. The region quickly turns rural outside city limits, and residents in some places have to drive long distances to reach necessities like health care. For some, it's cheaper and easier to cross the border to receive medical attention in Mexico.

Hillary Clinton won the region convincingly in 2016, but since then it has seen steady shifts toward the Republican Party, culminating in 2022, when Republicans won congressional seats here for the first time ever. Former Rep. Mayra Flores became the first Republican to represent the region when she

flipped a seat in a special election for the 34th Congressional District. A few months later, Rep. Monica De La Cruz became the first Republican to win in the 15th District.

Flores would lose that same election, as the lines shifted to a more Democratic-leaning district following reapportionment. But the gains for her party were emblematic of political changes in what was traditionally a Democratic stronghold. In 2024, Hispanic voters turned out in historic numbers for President Trump.

Now, emboldened by yet another new congressional map blessed by Trump, Republicans hope to flip the entire valley red. Yet those ambitions rely on continued drift by Hispanic voters toward the GOP.

The Texas redistricting plan revamps five congressional districts across the state, turning three formerly Democratic districts into Republican strongholds or Republican-leaning seats. The map also makes two border districts—already competitive—slightly redder.

The resulting map not only creates confusion for voters and candidates—who don't necessarily know where they'll run, amid a federal trial challenging the lines—but it also banks on the staying power of the Republican Party with Hispanic voters. The data used by Republicans during the redistricting process suggest



Democratic Rep. Henry Cuellar

they're relying on these voters sticking with them, even as opinion polls show Hispanic voters nationwide souring on the president.

Democratic Rep. Henry Cuellar, who represents one of the South Texas districts facing changes, says he is not deterred by the new lines. In an interview with *National Journal* from his hometown of Laredo, Cuellar argued that he stands to benefit from the redistricting. He said the Texas Legislature based the new lines on Trump's 2024 performance in the region, but they may not be able to reach that level again.

"I got 90-95 percent of the area that I currently represent or used to represent two-and-half years ago," said Cuellar, referring to the 2021 post-apportionment map, which Texas recently modified.

Cuellar admitted that "three of [the districts] look tough for Democrats," but the revisions are largely based on Trump's performance in the region, and he believes downballot Democrats remained competitive in 2024.

Democrat Colin Allred would have narrowly lost Cuellar's new district during his 2024 Senate campaign, while Beto O'Rourke would have carried the seat in his campaign for governor in 2022.

"It creates confusion more than anything," Ada Cuellar, a Democrat running for Texas's 15th Congressional District (and no relation to Henry), told *National Journal* from a diner in Weslaco, Texas.

Under the new lines, Weslaco sits in the 15th District, but if the map is struck down by the courts and Texas returns to its current lines, the city remains in the 34th District, held by Democratic Rep. Vicente Gonzalez.

Small details like this add to the confusion brought on by the sudden map changes, but Ada Cuellar said her strategy remains largely the same.

"We're working on whatever map is the current map," she said.

Voters don't seem to have enjoyed the redistricting process. Allred is running for Senate again, and on campaign stops in Brownsville, McAllen, and Edinburg in early October, when he proclaimed his desire to ban gerrymandering nationwide, he was frequently met with a raucous applause.

"I hated it. Period. Flat out," said Linda Yzaguirre, a student at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. "I hate this idea of uncertainty behind our politics and behind the people that get to choose who wins."

Yzaguirre, a social-work student who has worked with some local agencies, says she worries about the needs of the community that could result from the gerrymandered maps.

"A lot of agencies will struggle. They will falter. ... They all rely on the government to be able help fund and support people here," she said.

For now, the new Texas map hangs in lim-

bo, pending a ruling in a federal lawsuit. Arguments took place in El Paso in October.

The plaintiffs contend that racial considerations predominated in the drawing of the map. They point to a Justice Department letter sent to Gov. Greg Abbott outlining a handful of coalition districts—those in which multiple minority groups make up a majority—that needed to be rectified. Coalition districts are not protected by Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act.

Adam Kincaid, president of the National Republican Redistricting Trust and chief architect of the Texas map, testified that he did not consider race but only used political data.

A ruling is expected in time for the 2026 elections.

The region figures to be a central part of the battle for the House majority in the midterms, even if the map does not pass muster in court. Republicans signaled they would target Gonzalez's seat in the Rio Grande Valley, as well as Cuellar's district farther up the road in Laredo.

Democrats hope to find opportunity in the Republican-leaning 15th District, where Ada Cuellar and Tejano-music star Bobby Pulido are vying for the nomination.

Alvaro Corral, a professor of political science at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, says he doesn't think it's a "miscalculation to think voters will stick" with the Republican Party, "at least for the time being."

The areas along the border have received significant attention as immigration has become a political wedge, particularly in the Trump administration. But the Rio Grande doesn't feel like it's under a microscope.

And yet, it just might be the most important political battlefield in 2026 and beyond to test the durability of the GOP's new coalition. □



Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge



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SENATE POWER RANKINGS: OUR TOP 10

SENATE DEMOCRATS have a clearer path to regain the majority in 2026, but they acknowledge it's a difficult lift for the minority party to gain four seats on a map that skews red.

Recruitment wins, open GOP-held seats, and an expensive Texas GOP primary are fueling Democratic hopes that they can regain ground in red states after completely disappearing in 2024. Democrats are also looking to defy historical trends; the last time Senate Democrats returned to power after one cycle was in 1954.

Republicans say they remain confident they can expand their 53-seat majority to 55 seats—a share the party hasn't reached since 2004.

Minority Leader Chuck Schumer scored recruitment coups for his party in Maine, North Carolina, and Ohio. But Democrats face a plethora of competitive primaries that could upend their takeover goal, as Schumer and other Washington Democrats either publicly or privately signal their preferred choices in Iowa, Maine, Michigan, and Minnesota.

Republicans have landed their fair share of recruits on the map as well, including Rep. Ashley Hinson in Iowa, former Sen. John E. Sununu in New Hampshire, and former Republican National Committee Chairman Michael Whatley in North Carolina. The GOP will need to navigate contentious primaries in Georgia and New Hampshire, as well as spirited primary challenges in Louisiana and Texas.

These rankings are based on conversations with operatives, strategists, campaigns, and pollsters in both parties.



Roy Cooper

1 NORTH CAROLINA: OPEN (R)

Former Gov. Roy Cooper's entrance into the open race could help Democrats score their first Senate win in the Tar Heel State since 2008. Cooper has led Whatley in several polls and outraised the Republican, \$10.9 million to \$1.4 million, during the third fundraising quarter.

Democratic strategists view this as their strongest

pickup opportunity on the map, and also as essential for their ambitions to win the state's other Senate seat and presidential electoral votes in 2028.

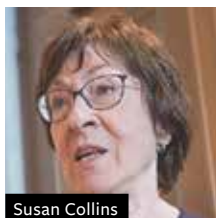
Republicans question Democrats' optimism, expressing confidence that their recent statewide success at the federal level and their gains in voter registration will push Whatley across the finish line. Despite Cooper's decades-long political career and his two gubernatorial wins with President Trump on the ballot, he'll be running in his first federal race. With no electoral experience, Whatley will have to catch up to Cooper's statewide name recognition and compete with a swath of Democratic spending that's expected to flood the state.

2 GEORGIA: SEN. JON OSSOFF (D)

Ossoff is the most vulnerable incumbent on the map, but it could have been worse for him. Term-limited Republican Gov. Brian Kemp passed on a Senate campaign, opting instead to support his friend Derek Dooley in the GOP primary. Kemp staying on the sidelines opened the floodgates for a slew of B-level candidates such as Dooley to duke it out in what's shaping up to be a competitive primary. Still, any of these JV Republicans could beat Ossoff, the youngest member of the Senate. When he was last on the ballot in 2020, Ossoff benefited from Stacey Abrams's massive GOTV effort, the energy of a presidential election—and then Trump depressing GOP turnout during the January runoff with his claims of widespread voter fraud. Next year it's all about Ossoff, but his \$12 million fundraising quarter over the summer means that he'll have plenty of resources to put up a fight.



Jon Ossoff



Susan Collins

3 MAINE: SEN. SUSAN COLLINS (R)

Collins is Democrats' white whale, and this is the year they say they'll finally catch her. But the last remaining Republican senator representing a state that Democrats carried in the last three presidential elections won't go down easy. She's defied political gravity before, most notably during her last reelection in 2020, when she was

heavily outspent by her Democratic opponent. Democratic strategists say her historically low favorability numbers, thanks in part to her lackluster resistance to the Trump administration, will flip the script this time around. But a messy Democratic primary threatens the party's best-laid plans. In one corner is outgoing Gov. Janet Mills—the establishment favorite and a huge recruitment win for Schumer—but she would be 79 years old in January 2027, the oldest freshman senator ever. In the other corner is oyster farmer Graham Platner, a populist darling who has caught the eye of the progressive base, but a series of scandals threaten to derail his campaign. Platner has vowed to stay in the race, and his massive early fundraising edge could make this race go the distance.



Janet Mills

4 MICHIGAN: OPEN (D)

With nearly 10 months to go until the primary, the Democratic contest to replace retiring Sen. Gary Peters isn't getting clearer. Schumer and his allies believe Rep. Haley Stevens has the best chance of holding the state's second Senate seat for Democrats. State Sen. Mallory McMorrow and 2018 gubernatorial candidate



Mike Rogers

Abdul El-Sayed hope to challenge the Washington narrative. Stevens has led in early primary surveys and performed comparatively well in general-election polls, but her opponents argue she's benefitting from higher name ID and could be uniquely vulnerable to anti-establishment sentiment and GOP attacks. Meanwhile, former Rep. Mike Rogers is showing what he learned from his unsuccessful 2024 run, strengthening his fundraising operation and consolidating GOP support early with help from Trump and the National Republican Senatorial Committee. Republicans also view next year's Democratic competition as weaker than Sen. Elissa Slotkin, who held off Rogers last year. Rogers will still need to defy electoral trends to secure his state's first GOP Senate win since 1994, and his allies believe it will be expensive to get him across the finish line. Democrats say Rogers will be a weaker opponent in 2026, expressing doubt about his goal of securing at least 85 percent of his 2024 voters.

5 NEW HAMPSHIRE: OPEN (D)

Republicans couldn't recruit former Gov. Chris Sununu, so they turned to the next best thing: his brother. With help from Majority Leader John Thune, former Sen. John E. Sununu is keeping GOP hopes alive in the Granite State as he runs for the seat he lost to retiring Sen. Jeanne Shaheen in 2008. New Hampshire Democrats have consistently scored federal wins since 2016, but Republicans have held onto the governor's mansion. The NRSC-backed former senator will need to first hold off former Sen. Scott Brown of Massachusetts, who lost to Shaheen in 2014, in a potentially nasty GOP primary. Sununu has been critical of Trump in



Scott Brown



Chris Pappas

the past, supporting his opponents during the 2016 and 2024 primaries and calling him a “loser” in an op-ed last year. But polling, both partisan and nonpartisan, shows Sununu closely behind Rep. Chris Pappas in a margin-of-error contest—a better showing than a Brown-Pappas matchup. If Sununu clears the primary, Pappas and Democrats will have to convince voters to ignore the Republican’s highly recognized last name and focus on his record.



Jon Husted

6 OHIO: SEN. JON HUSTED (R)

One of Schumer’s biggest wins this cycle was convincing former Sen. Sherrod Brown to forgo a gubernatorial bid and take another crack at the Senate. Without Brown, this race would not be on the map, but he will still have a difficult time beating back the partisan tide that swept him away last year. Democrats are bullish that Brown has the

juice to flip this seat, even though it’s not the same Ohio that first elected him in 2006. Trump carried the state three times, with his largest margin coming last year when he romped over former Vice President Kamala Harris by 12 points. The state is also poised to elect Vivek Ramaswamy, the Trump ally and brief co-lead of the administration’s Department of Government Efficiency, to replace term-limited moderate Republican Gov. Mike DeWine.



John Cornyn

7 TEXAS: SEN. JOHN CORNYN (R)

The competitiveness of this race next November will come down to the GOP primary in the spring. If state Attorney General Ken Paxton—the controversial MAGA ally who was nearly impeached by the state legislature—defeats Cornyn for the nomination, Democrats have a puncher’s chance and will invest millions

into finally flipping Texas. But if Cornyn survives the primary, Texas will drop on Democrats’ priority list. Complicating Paxton’s chance is Republican Rep.

Wesley Hunt. The Houston-area congressman launched a challenge to Cornyn in the fall, positioning himself as a “new generation” of MAGA. Hunt threatens to siphon support from both Cornyn and Paxton. If none of the candidates gets a majority in the March primary, the top two advance to a May runoff. Overtime in the primary will have a much larger price tag for Republicans, draining resources that could go to pickup opportunities in Georgia or Michigan. On the Democratic side, former Rep. Colin Allred is back again after losing by about 10 points to Sen. Ted Cruz last year. Allred said he’s retooled his campaign, but he won’t have a glide path to the nomination. State Rep. James Talarico, the plainspoken son of a preacher, has caught the attention of the pundit class and could beat the former congressman in the primary.



Ken Paxton



Wesley Hunt

8 IOWA: OPEN (R)

The retirement of Sen. Joni Ernst is giving both parties optimism. The White House actively pressured Ernst to run for reelection, viewing her incumbency as a strength in the Hawkeye State. But several GOP strategists recognize the baggage the senator could have brought to a reelection bid, pointing to her grim response to a May town hall question about Medicaid cuts. Rep. Ashley Hinson’s Senate ambitions alleviated those concerns. The congresswoman rapidly assembled her Senate campaign team amid the Ernst retirement rumors and quickly coalesced GOP support, including from Trump and the NRSC. Democrats haven’t secured a Senate win in Iowa since 2008, but the party isn’t ignoring the state’s first Senate vacancy since 2014. State Sen. Zach Wahls, state Rep. Josh Turek, and former Knoxville Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Nathan Sage are competing for the Democratic nomination. National Democrats say Turek—who hails from a Trump-won district—has the best chance against Hinson, but some Republican operatives believe Wahls has a stronger chance of



Zach Wahls

Cook Political Report Race Ratings: 2026 SENATE SEATS

THE COOK
POLITICAL
REPORT
WITH AMY WALTER

Solid Democrat	Likely Democrat	Lean Democrat	Toss Up	Lean Republican	Likely Republican	Solid Republican
9 DEM	1 DEM	1 DEM	2 DEM 2 GOP	1 GOP	2 GOP	17 GOP
CO Hickenlooper DE Coons IL Durbin* MA Markey NJ Booker NM Lujan OR Merkley RI Reed VA Warner	MN Smith*	NH Shaheen*	GA Ossoff MI Peters* ME Collins NC Tillis*	OH Husted	IA Ernst* TX Cornyn	AK Sullivan AL Tuberville* AR Cotton FL Moody ID Risch KS Marshall KY McConnell* LA Cassidy MS Hyde-Smith MT Daines NE Ricketts OK Mullin SC Graham SD Rounds TN Hagerty WV Capito WY Lummis
Democratic-held seat	Republican-held seat	Incumbent not seeking reelection*				

clearing the primary. Despite Republicans holding a nearly 200,000-registered-voter advantage in Iowa, Democrats hope recent state-legislative flips and an open governor's race featuring state Auditor Rob Sand could turn the tide in their favor.

9 MINNESOTA: OPEN (D)

Inclusion of this race on the list is a testament to the larger national trends influencing the purple state, but it says much less about how



Royce White



Adam Schwarze

Republicans on the ground are going about the campaign to replace retiring Democratic Sen. Tina Smith. Despite the prospect of an open-seat race a year after the GOP made gains in Minnesota, only two main Republicans have emerged, while the gubernatorial race has garnered much more interest. The two front-runners are former NBA player Royce White, a controversial conspiracy theorist who lost to Democratic Sen. Amy Klobuchar last year, and retired Navy SEAL Adam Schwarze, who has lagged in fundraising. In the Democratic primary, Rep. Angie Craig squares off against Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan. Both women would be formidable candidates to succeed Smith, and either one should have no real challenge if Republicans continue struggling to find more

legitimate alternatives than the current offerings.



Dan Sullivan

10 ALASKA: SEN. DAN SULLIVAN (R)

Former Rep. Mary Peltola has the right of first refusal to either challenge Sullivan or pursue a gubernatorial bid. Similar to Iowa and North Carolina, Alaska hasn't elected a Senate Democrat since 2008, when Mark Begich unseated GOP Sen. Ted Stevens after his conviction on

federal corruption charges. Peltola, the last Alaska Democrat to be elected statewide, may be able to recover from her 2024 loss to win a Senate upgrade. An October Alaska Survey Research poll found Peltola at 48 percent and Sullivan at 46 percent, a 6-point improvement for the Democrat since the summer. But the former congresswoman will need to actually launch a Senate bid in order for Democrats to comfortably put Alaska on the battleground map, especially as backup contenders await her decision. Republicans project confidence in Sullivan's reelection chances, but they aren't ignoring that this is the senator's first election under the state's ranked-choice voting system. The same October poll found 37 percent of Alaska voters viewed Sullivan positively and 50 percent viewed him negatively. The GOP incumbent will be tasked with selling the president's One Big Beautiful Bill in his state and defending its reductions to federal entitlement spending in one of the most Medicaid-dependent states, while touting its Alaska-specific provisions. □



Mary Peltola

Nicholas Anastácio and Kirk A. Bado contributed

HOUSE POWER RANKINGS: OUR TOP 10

AT THIS STAGE IN THE CYCLE, there's more uncertainty than certainty as the White House pushes Republicans to redraw maps and Democrats struggle to respond in kind.

At publication, only Texas and North Carolina have successfully passed new maps. California is currently counting ballots to respond to Texas. If passed, the state could add five new Democratic-leaning seats.

Hotline has opted to leave out a handful of seats that are all but guaranteed to flip and are deemed uncompetitive by campaign committees and super PACs. Two districts in Texas now skew heavily Republican and won't be contested by either party, while a third went to President Trump by about 10 points and could come online as the primaries develop.

Seats in Utah, Missouri, and Indiana all face potential changes, but with judicial and legislative challenges still pending, the final district makeups are not currently clear. Republicans could benefit in up to three seats in Missouri and Indiana, while two GOP-held seats in Utah could become battlegrounds.

The list is based on conversations with strategists, consultants, and campaigns in both parties.



Brinker Harding

1 NEBRASKA 2ND: OPEN (R)

This open seat remains atop the list, and it equally remains a must-win for Democrats in pursuit of the majority. The Omaha seat is just one of three Republican-held districts that former Vice President Kamala Harris won, due in large part to Rep. Don Bacon's crossover appeal. With his retirement at the end of the term, Republicans

have massive shoes to fill. Omaha City Councilman Brinker Harding and former state Sen. Brett Lindstrom are duking it out for the GOP nomination, while

the Democratic field is crowded and largely unsettled. Regardless, whoever emerges on the Left will start with a leg up in the Democratic-leaning seat.

2 TEXAS 34TH: REP. VICENTE GONZALEZ (D)

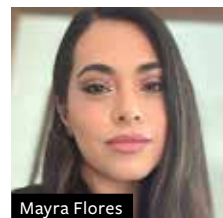
Redistricting did no favors for Gonzalez, whose district shifted 6 points to the right following the state's contentious special session this summer. Gonzalez won reelection last year despite President Trump carrying the Rio Grande Valley seat, but demographics are often destiny, and it may be hard for the congressman to survive this time around. What could help him, however, is a contentious Republican primary between Eric Flores, an Army veteran and former federal prosecutor, and former Rep. Mayra Flores, whom Gonzalez has twice defeated.



Vicente Gonzalez



Eric Flores



Mayra Flores



Don Davis

3 NORTH CAROLINA 1ST: REP. DON DAVIS (D)

Davis is the other Democrat on this list who may fall victim to redistricting. Republicans in the General Assembly passed new lines, shifting the 1st District several points rightward—Trump would have won it by double digits—and effectively eliminating all swing districts in the Tar Heel State.

Davis hasn't made his decision known yet—he's suggested he may run for reelection in the 1st or the 3rd against Republican Rep. Greg Murphy—but this instantly becomes a top opportunity for the GOP. There's little Democrats can do to stop the map: Republicans have a supermajority in both chambers, and congressional maps are not subject to gubernatorial veto. Three local elected officials are duking it out on the Right for the opportunity to take on Davis, if he decides to stand and fight.



Gabe Evans

4 COLORADO'S 8TH: REP. GABE EVANS (R)

Evans hopes to become the first incumbent to win reelection in this district, which was newly drawn following the 2021 apportionment period. He defeated former Rep. Yadira Caraveo, who briefly launched a comeback bid, by a hair last year. With Caraveo out of the picture, state Reps. Manny

Rutinel and Shannon Bird appear to be the front-runners for the Democratic nomination, but the field is crowded and still uncertain. Evans has leaned into crime and immigration in his early days in Congress, issues relevant in the Denver area, but he faces a tough reelection bid in what's expected to be a bluer year than 2024.

5 PENNSYLVANIA'S 7TH: REP. RYAN MACKENZIE (R)

The Democratic field is large, uncertain, and factional, as Mackenzie awaits the winner. Carol Obando-Derstine secured endorsements from EMILYs List and former Rep. Susan Wild, who lost to Mackenzie last year, but firefighter Bob Brooks appears to be a darling of signal-callers in Washington. Former federal prosecutor Ryan Crosswell has raised good money, but Republicans are



Ryan Mackenzie



Carol Obando-Derstine



Bob Brooks

salivating to prosecute carpetbagging allegations against him. Northampton County Executive Lamont McClure has elective experience, but he's struggled to keep pace with fundraising. There's no clear front-runner here, and it could get messy in one of the premier bellwethers across the country.



Jared Golden

6 MAINE 2ND: REP. JARED GOLDEN (D)

Republicans have put Golden on their target list since he first was swept into office in the 2018 blue wave during Trump's first term. Since then, he's carved out a reputation as a committed Blue Dog Democrat, unafraid to buck party leadership, while going on to win again and again as his district gets redder. However, Golden might fall

victim to Democratic infighting after State Auditor Matt Dunlap launched a primary challenge, claiming that Golden is insufficiently progressive. Even if he survives the primary, Golden will face his toughest opponent yet in Republican Paul LePage. The former governor has a clear shot at the nomination and the resources to give whoever emerges from the Democratic primary a difficult race.



Marcy Kaptur

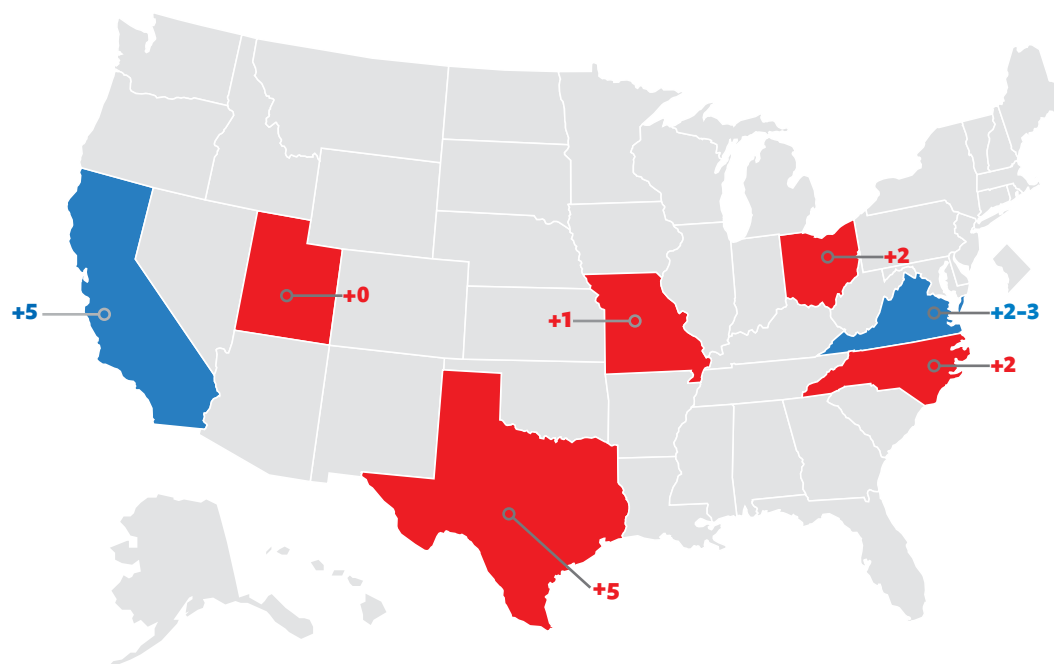
7 OHIO 9TH: REP. MARCY KAPTUR (D)

Kaptur, one of 13 Democrats representing a district Trump carried, overcame the partisan tilt of her northeastern Ohio district twice after GOP lawmakers redrew the map in their party's favor following the 2020 apportionment. But the laws of political gravity might assert themselves on Kaptur this time, as another potential redraw

of the Ohio map could push her Trump-won district into deeper MAGA territory. Even without the redraw, Kaptur will face a difficult race against likely GOP nominee Derek Merrin. The 2024 Republican nominee came within a point of beating Kaptur last year. He's better resourced this time around, has the ability to self-fund, and has consolidated early support. If Republican lawmakers put her seat out of reach, watch for Kaptur, 79, to potentially retire.



Derek Merrin



Redistricting will continue to impact the 2026 elections

Both Democrats and Republicans are still revisiting district lines and maps ahead of the midterms.

Member	Old Margin	New Margin
Al Green (D TX-09)	D+44	R+20
Julie Johnson (D TX-32)	D+24	R+18
Greg Casar (D TX-35)	D+34	R+10
Emanuel Cleaver (D MO-05)	D+23	R+18
Doug LaMalfa (R CA-01)	R+25	D+12
Kevin Kiley (R CA-03)	R+4	D+10
Josh Harder (D CA-09)	R+25	D+12
David Valadao (R CA-22)	R+6	R+2
Ken Calvert (R CA-41)	R+6	D+14
Darrell Issa (R CA-48)	R+15	D+3
Mike Kennedy (R UT-03)	R+19	R+2
Don Davis (D NC-01)	R+4	R+12



Mariannette Miller-Meeks

8 IOWA 2ND: REP. MARIANNETTE MILLER-MEEKS (R)

Miller-Meeks seems to have a knack for winning tight races. Last year she prevailed over Democrat Christina Bohannon by 800 votes out of nearly 413,000 cast, in one of the closest races in the country. That's a landslide compared to 2020, when she beat Rita Hart by just 6 votes. Democrats say

Miller-Meeks's luck will finally run out next year. Bohannon is back and has the primary virtually clear. She outraised Miller-Meeks last quarter and entered October with more than \$1.6 million in her campaign war chest. Miller-Meeks has struggled in past cycles to consolidate the support of her Republican base. A primary challenger, David Pautsch, received 44 percent of the vote last year with very little campaigning—a troubling sign for the incumbent. Republicans are quick to dismiss Bohannon as a perennial candidate (this is her third campaign in as many cycles), but Miller-Meeks unsuccessfully ran for Congress three times before finally winning in her fourth campaign.



Christina Bohannon

9 PENNSYLVANIA 10TH: SCOTT PERRY (R)

Perry and Democrat Janelle Stelson are on a collision course for another high-profile matchup, after last year's election saw Perry escape by just over a point. Stelson picked up where she left off in her first quarter of fundraising, stacking more than \$1 million and outpacing the incumbent, who

does not have a strong history of fundraising. Democratic Gov. Josh Shapiro won this seat by 13 points in 2022, and with the popular governor expected to cruise to reelection, Democrats think he might be able to help Stelson over the edge. That said, Perry has survived over the last few cycles even as the district trends Democratic. There's likely to be fireworks in this one.



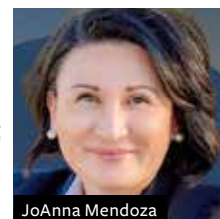
Janelle Stelson

10 ARIZONA'S 6TH: REP. JUAN CISCOMANI (R)

Ciscomani has fought through two close elections now, and that doesn't appear likely to change in 2026. A newcomer, Marine Corps veteran JoAnna Mendoza, entered the Democratic



Juan Ciscomani



JoAnna Mendoza

primary and has raised solid money—she outraised Ciscomani in Q3—effectively clearing the field before it developed. Ciscomani was rumored to be considering a statewide bid this cycle, but he turned it down in favor of reelection—welcome news to Republicans after losing a handful of competitive incumbents to higher office. Ciscomani is an adept fundraiser and a skilled politician, but not having Kamala Harris—who tanked in Arizona in 2024—on the ballot won't do him any favors as he seeks a third term. □

James A. Downs and Kirk A. Bado contributed

Cook Political Report Race Ratings: 2026 HOUSE SEATS

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Likely Democrat	Lean Democrat	Toss Up	Lean Republican	Likely Republican
18 DEM	11 DEM 1 GOP	8 DEM 8 GOP	2 DEM 9 GOP	2 DEM 14 GOP
CA-21 Costa CA-25 Ruiz CA-49 Levin CT-05 Hayes IL-17 Sorensen IN-01 Mrvan MI-03 Scholten MN-02 Craig* NH-01 Pappas* NH-02 Goodlander NV-01 Titus NV-04 Horsford NY-18 Ryan NY-22 Mannion OR-05 Bynum PA-17 Deluzio VA-10 Subramanyam WA-08 Schrier	CA-09 Harder CA-27 Whitesides CA-47 Min FL-23 Moskowitz MI-08 McDonald Rivet NE-02 Bacon* NJ-09 Pou NV-03 Lee NY-03 Suozzi NY-19 Riley OH-13 Sykes VA-07 Vindman	CA-13 Gray CA-45 Tran ME-02 Golden NM-02 Vasquez NY-04 Gillen OH-01 Landsman TX-28 Cuellar WA-03 Perez AZ-01 Schweikert* AZ-06 Ciscomani CO-08 Evans IA-01 Miller-Meeks MI-07 Barrett PA-07 Mackenzie PA-10 Perry WI-03 Van Orden	CA-22 Valadao CA-40 Kim CA-41 Calvert IA-03 Nunn MI-10 James* NJ-07 Kean Jr. NY-17 Lawler OH-09 Kaptur PA-08 Bresnahan TX-34 Gonzalez VA-02 Kiggans	AK-AL Begich III AZ-02 Crane CA-03 Kiley CO-03 Hurd FL-13 Luna IA-02 Hinson* MI-04 Huizenga MT-01 Zinke NC-01 Davis NC-03 Murphy NC-11 Edwards PA-01 Fitzpatrick TX-15 De La Cruz TX-35 Casar* VA-01 Wittman WI-01 Steil

Democratic-held seat Republican-held seat Incumbent not seeking reelection*

GOVERNOR POWER RANKINGS: OUR TOP 10

GOVERNORS ARE ON THE FRONT LINES in President Trump's second term, either aligning with him on issues like mid-decade redistricting or pushing back on increased federal pressure and the deployment of the National Guard.

Next year, 36 states will hold gubernatorial elections in a midterm that is expected to be a referendum on Trump. Democrats have seven open seats to defend compared to Republicans' 10. Conventional wisdom holds that the party out of power does better in the midterms, but Democrats will have to overcome voter fatigue and dissatisfaction with their party.

Here are *Hotline's* initial gubernatorial Power Rankings, which list the top 10 states most likely to flip next fall. The findings are based on interviews with committees and operatives, as well as analysis of fundraising and polling.

1 KANSAS: OPEN (D)

Term-limited Democratic Gov. Laura Kelly is a uniquely popular governor in a red state, but it's unlikely conditions are right for Democrats to repeat her wins. Two cycles ago, Democrats rode voter backlash to former Republican Gov. Sam Brownback's sweeping income-tax cuts, which had drained the state's budget and strained services. Eight years later, any ties Democrats make between the current GOP field and Brownback may fall flat. Still, the GOP field is full of familiar names from that era. The front-runners—former Gov. Jeff Colyer, Secretary of State Scott Schwab, and state Senate President Ty Masterson—either served alongside Brownback or supported his tax cuts in the legislature. Colyer leads with name ID from his brief stint as governor following Brownback's resignation in early 2018, while Masterson has made headlines for his role at the forefront of the state's mid-cycle redistricting push this year. On the Democratic side, Lt. Gov. David Toland, the most talked-about potential contender, passed on a run, leaving state Sen. Ethan Corson as the Democrat hoping to carry on Kelly's moderate legacy. But Corson lacks statewide name recognition. With no fundraising data yet, it's unclear who in either primary has the weight. For Republicans, the job is simple: Don't fumble the race.

2 MICHIGAN: OPEN (D)

The Wolverine State is shaping up to be one of the most competitive open seats thanks to Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan, who is running as an independent. Duggan's entry scrambles both parties' math. Republicans say the former Democrat will siphon voters from the Left, while Democrats see him pulling voters from both sides. With Duggan in the mix, neither party will need to crack 50 percent to succeed term-limited Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, which bodes well for Republicans. Both primary fields are large and won't be settled until August 2026, leaving little time for whoever emerges to run a general-election campaign. Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson is the conventional Democratic front-runner. In the first half of 2025, she led with \$3.2 million raised to Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist's \$750,000. It can be hard to convince voters to continue with same-party leadership for a third term in any state, so Benson will have to prove how she's different from Whitmer. Rep. John James is viewed as the Republican front-runner, but some institutional GOP leaders have soured on him. State Senate Minority Leader Aric Nesbitt outtraised James in the first half of the year.

3 WISCONSIN: OPEN (D)

Both fields in the Badger State are still taking shape after Democratic Gov. Tony Evers announced in July he would not seek a third term. In a race without an independent wild card like Duggan in Michigan, each party must inch towards 50 percent to pick up the governor's seat. Out of all the swing states in 2024, Trump won with his narrowest margin in Wisconsin. While the state historically swings opposite the party in the White House, convincing

voters to extend one-party rule for a third term remains a challenge, just as in Michigan. Rep. Tom Tiffany is the likely GOP front-runner over newcomer Josh Schoemann. Former Navy SEAL Bill Berrien suspended his campaign after reports that he had followed sexually explicit accounts online. With the primary set for late August, Republicans can start mounting a general-election campaign early if Tiffany consolidates support. A crowded field is shaping up on the Democratic side: State Attorney General Josh Kaul's decision not to run cleared the lane for Lt. Gov. Sara Rodriguez as the moderate Democratic choice. Former Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes has a higher name ID thanks to his 2022 challenge to Sen. Ron Johnson, but his anticipated entrance into the race concerns Democrats who don't want a repeat of his narrow loss.



Tom Tiffany

4 GEORGIA: OPEN (R)

This state's governor's seat has been Democrats' white whale, but they see 2026 as their best shot yet. Growing Asian, Hispanic, and Black populations, primarily in the Atlanta metro area, have started to chip away at Republicans' edge in the state. Candidates in the crowded Democratic field are homing in on health care following the cuts to Medicaid funding in the GOP reconciliation bill and the fight over expiring Affordable Care Act tax credits—both of which have particular salience in the Peach State, where the Republican-controlled legislature never expanded Medicaid. Sen. Jon Ossoff's reelection bid, expected to be one of the most expensive races next year, could also boost the eventual Democratic nominee in a coordinated campaign. Still, it's too early to pinpoint a Democratic front-runner. Former Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms, former DeKalb County chief executive Michael Thurmond, and state Sen. Jason Esteves are leading the pack, but there will likely be a runoff next summer. That could bode well for Republicans if they can avoid a messy primary—which is already proving hard. Trump-endorsed Lt. Gov. Burt Jones and state Attorney General Chris Carr have sparred over Jones's fundraising via a leadership PAC, while Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger is emerging as the moderate alternative. Republicans found success in the past with moderate Gov. Brian Kemp, but if Jones wins the GOP nomination, he may struggle to attract independent voters.

5 ARIZONA: GOV. KATIE HOBBS (D)

Hobbs faces the toughest reelection bid for a Democrat in 2026. The Grand Canyon State, where Trump saw his best margins out of any swing state in 2024, remains a top GOP target. Hobbs narrowly beat Kari Lake in 2022, when the Republican ran a flawed campaign centered on election denialism. This time she's likely to face a stronger opponent. The GOP primary has shaped into a three-way race between Rep. Andy Biggs, Rep. David Schweikert, and 2022 candidate Karrin Taylor Robson (who fell to Lake in the primary). Trump originally endorsed Robson in December 2024, but four months later he also endorsed Biggs. Biggs snagged the Turning Point USA endorsement before Charlie Kirk's assassination, which could bode well in the late conservative activist's home state. Meanwhile, Hobbs can mount her general-election bid while the three duke it out in the primary, with voting not taking place until August 2026. The incumbent has already outtraised the Republican field, even as Robson self-funds her campaign. Still, on paper, Arizona seems like a red state. Republicans' key to overcoming Hobbs's incumbency advantage may just be running a normal, well-funded campaign compared to Lake's ill-fated bid.

6 NEVADA: GOV. JOE LOMBARDO (R)

On the other side of the aisle, Lombardo faces the toughest reelection for a Republican governor. After Arizona, Trump saw his second best swing-state performance in Nevada. Lombardo defeated former Gov. Steve Sisolak

after the Democrat shut down the Las Vegas Strip during COVID-19 and hurt the economy. But four years later, similar economic headwinds could unseat Lombardo. Tourism is down 11 percent since last year, amid rising costs and slowing international travel. Economic impacts on the strip ripple throughout the state. If the race hinges on economic concerns once again, Lombardo may take the flack. Still, he's remained relatively popular, faces no primary challengers, and can try to pin blame on the Democratic-controlled state legislature. On the other side, state Attorney General Aaron Ford has secured endorsements from the Nevada congressional delegation and is the likely favorite over Washoe County Commission Chair Alexis Hill. Lombardo raised \$3.2 million in 2024 and had \$5.5 million cash on hand, while Ford has yet to file any campaign finance reports.



Rob Sand

7 IOWA: OPEN (R)

State Auditor Rob Sand might be the strongest Democrat running statewide anywhere in the country this cycle. The plainspoken Sand is running as a crusader against wasteful spending, and without the burden of a voting record from a legislative office, he's able to buck his party on key social issues like transgender policies and gun access. Sand has all but

cleared the primary field, and he's made his campaign a referendum on outgoing Republican Gov. Kim Reynolds's record. Republicans fully acknowledge that Sand is a formidable candidate, but they argue that if a contender like Rep. Randy Feenstra emerges from the GOP primary, they'll be set. Democrats draw parallels between this race and the 2018 contest in Kansas, when Kelly won by attacking the controversial Brownback. Reynolds's deep unpopularity, coupled with the Trump administration's tariffs severely impacting Iowans, are a real concern for Republicans—and Sand might be best positioned to take advantage of favorable political winds.

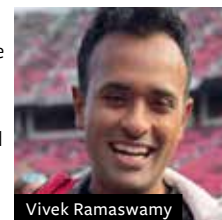
8 MAINE: OPEN (D)

Crowded primaries on both sides of the aisle complicate early analysis of the race to replace term-limited Democratic Gov. Janet Mills. So far, seven Democrats and seven Republicans have formally launched campaigns, with more contemplating bids in the wings. In such a crowded field, familiarity might be the difference between victory and defeat. Thankfully, there are plenty of contenders with names that have been on the ballot dozens of times before. On the Democratic side, there's former clean-energy executive Angus King III, the son of independent Sen. Angus King. There's also Secretary of State

Shenna Bellows and former state House Speaker Hannah Pingree, the daughter of Rep. Chellie Pingree. On the Republican side, businessman Jonathan Bush, nephew of George H.W. Bush and cousin of George W. Bush, is the latest Bush scion to attempt a comeback in the party his family once ran. In a purple state that Democrats have carried in the last three presidential elections, the party expects to hold serve. But with several candidates raising good money and polling mixed, this race will be a slow burn all the way to the primary in June.

9 OHIO: OPEN (R)

Democrats' odds of flipping the open race took a hit when former Sen. Sherrod Brown shocked Buckeye politicians and opted to run against Republican Sen. Jon Husted instead. Now they are pinning their hopes on former Rep. Tim Ryan, who has yet to formally enter the race, but who some view as cut from the same cloth as Brown. The public pining by Democrats for Brown and now Ryan seems like an indictment of the lone Democrat already running: former state Department of Health Director Amy Acton. Strategists worry that her role overseeing the state's response to the COVID-19 pandemic could present too much baggage to overcome in an increasingly Republican-friendly state. On the GOP side, former presidential contender Vivek Ramaswamy has kept all major opponents on the sidelines and earned the endorsement of the state party, despite the wishes of term-limited Gov. Mike DeWine. Ramaswamy will be on a glidepath to replace DeWine if Ryan does not enter the race. Even if Ryan does run, Ramaswamy is still the runaway favorite.



Vivek Ramaswamy

10 ALASKA: OPEN (R)

This race comes down to former Rep. Mary Peltola, the last Democrat to win statewide in Alaska, who is still weighing whether to run to replace term-limited Gov. Mike Dunleavy or to challenge Sen. Dan Sullivan. Peltola has demonstrated a unique crossover appeal, much like her friend, Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski. This record of moderation could give her an advantage in the state's ranked-choice voting system, in which the top four finishers advance from the primary to the general election. With a large field of Republicans vying for the office, including Lt. Gov. Nancy Dahlstrom, Peltola would have a puncher's chance of pulling off another upset. But she'll have to get in the race first. Without another serious Democratic contender, this race all depends on Peltola. □

Abby Turner and Kirk A. Bado contributed

Cook Political Report Race Ratings: 2026 GOVERNOR SEATS

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Solid Democrat	Likely Democrat	Lean Democrat	Toss Up	Lean Republican	Likely Republican	Solid Republican
9 DEM	5 DEM 1 GOP	1 DEM	3 DEM 2 GOP	1 DEM 1 GOP	2 GOP	13 GOP
CA Newsom* CO Polis* CT Lamont HI Green IL Pritzker MA Healey MD Moore OR Kotek RI McKee	ME Mills* MN Walz NM Grisham* NY Hochul PA Shapiro VA Youngkin*	NJ Murphy*	GA Kemp* NV Lombardo AZ Hobbs MI Whitmer* WI Evers*	IA Reynolds* KS Kelly*	NH Ayotte OH DeWine*	AK Dunleavy* AL Ivey* AR Sanders FL DeSantis* ID Little NE Pillen OK Stitt* SC McMaster* SD Rhoden TN Lee* TX Abbott VT Scott WY Gordon*
Democratic-held seat	Republican-held seat	Incumbent not seeking reelection*				

2026 candidate deadlines for federal offices

Candidates for federal office must submit paperwork or filing fees by fixed deadlines. This chart identifies state filing deadlines and, where applicable, when the filing period opens.

STATE	CANDIDATE FILING DEADLINE	STATE	CANDIDATE FILING DEADLINE	STATE	CANDIDATE FILING DEADLINE
Alabama	Open: N/A Close: Jan. 23, 2026, by 5 p.m.	Louisiana	Open: July 15, 2026 Close: July 17, 2026, by 4:30 p.m.	North Dakota	Open: Jan. 2, 2026 Close: April 6, 2026, by 4 p.m.
Alaska	Open: N/A Close: June 1, 2026, by 5 p.m.	Maine	Open: N/A Close: March 15, 2026, by 5 p.m.	Ohio	Open: N/A Close: Feb. 4, 2026, by 4 p.m.
Arizona	Open: March 7, 2026 Close: April 6, 2026, by 5 p.m.	Maryland	Open: N/A Close: Feb. 24, 2026, by 9 p.m.	Oklahoma	Open: April 1, 2026, at 8 a.m. Close: April 3, 2026, by 5 p.m.
Arkansas	Open: Nov. 3, 2025, at 12 p.m. Close: Nov. 11, 2025, by 12 p.m.	Massachusetts	Open: N/A Close: May 26, 2026, for state legislature/Aug. 25, 2026, for federal and statewide	Oregon	Open: Sept. 11, 2025 Close: March 10, 2026
California	Open: Feb. 9, 2026 Close: March 6, 2026, by 5 p.m.	Michigan	Open: N/A Close: April 21, 2026, by 4 p.m.	Pennsylvania	Open: N/A Close: March 10, 2026, by 5 p.m.
Colorado	Open: Jan. 2, 2026 Close: March 17, 2026, by COB	Minnesota	Open: May 19, 2026 Close: June 2, 2026	Rhode Island	Open: June 22, 2026 Close: June 24, 2026, by 4 p.m.
Connecticut	Open: N/A Close: June 9, 2026, by 4 p.m.	Mississippi	Open: Dec. 1, 2025, Close: Dec. 25, 2025,	South Carolina	Open: March 16, 2026, at 12 p.m. Close: March 30, 2026, by 12 p.m.
Delaware	Open: N/A Close: July 14, 2026	Missouri	Open: Feb. 24, 2026, at 8 a.m. Close: March 31, 2026, by 5 p.m.	South Dakota	Open: Jan. 1, 2026 Close: March 31, 2026, by 5 p.m.
Florida	Open: April 20, 2026 Close: April 24, 2026	Montana	Open: Jan. 8, 2026 Close: March 9, 2026, by 5 p.m.	Tennessee	Open: N/A Close: March 10, 2026, by 12 p.m.
Georgia	Open: March 2, 2026, at 9 a.m. Close: March 6, 2026, by 12:00 p.m.	Nebraska	Open: Jan. 5, 2026 Close: March 1, 2026	Texas	Open: Nov. 8, 2025 Close: Dec. 8, 2025, by 6 p.m.
Hawaii	Open: Feb. 2, 2026 Close: June 2, 2026, by 4:30 p.m.	Nevada	Open: March 2, 2026 Close: March 13, 2026, by 5 p.m.	Utah	Open: Jan. 2, 2026, by 8 a.m. Close: Jan. 8, 2026, by 5 p.m.
Idaho	Open: Feb. 23, 2026, at 8 a.m. Close: March 6, 2026, by 5 p.m.	New Hampshire	Open: June 3, 2026 Close: June 12, 2026	Vermont	Open: April 27, 2026 Close: May 28, 2026, by 5 p.m.
Illinois	Open: Oct. 27, 2025 Close: Nov. 3, 2025	New Jersey	Open: N/A Close: March 23, 2026, by 4 p.m.	Virginia	Open: March 16, 2026, at 12 p.m. Close: April 2, 2026, by 5 p.m.
Indiana	Open: Jan. 7, 2026 Close: Feb. 6, 2026	New Mexico	Open: Feb. 3, 2026, at 9 a.m. Close: Feb. 3, 2026, by 5 p.m.	Washington	Open: May 4, 2026, at 8 a.m. Close: May 8, 2026, by 5 p.m.
Iowa	Open: Feb. 23, 2026 Close: March 13, 2026	New York	Open: March 30, 2026 Close: April 2, 2026	West Virginia	Open: Jan. 12, 2026 Close: Jan. 31, 2026, by 11:59 p.m.
Kansas	Open: N/A Close: June 1, 2026, by 12 p.m.	North Carolina	Open: Dec. 1, 2025, at 12 p.m. Close: Dec. 19, 2025, by 12 p.m.	Wisconsin	Open: April 15, 2026 Close: June 1, 2026, by 5 p.m.
Kentucky	Open: Nov. 5, 2025 Close: Jan. 9, 2026, by 4 p.m.			Wyoming	Open: May 14, 2026 Close: May 29, 2026

2026 primaries, by state and date

State primaries will be held for Senate, House, and gubernatorial races. Some states require a runoff for an election to be decided, while Maine uses ranked-choice voting.

STATE	PRIMARY DATE/RUNOFF	STATE	PRIMARY DATE/RUNOFF	STATE	PRIMARY DATE/RUNOFF	STATE	PRIMARY DATE/RUNOFF
Arkansas	March 3/ March 31	Oregon	May 19	South Carolina	June 9/June 23	Tennessee	Aug. 6
North Carolina	March 3/ May 12	Pennsylvania	May 19	Oklahoma	June 16	Hawaii	Aug. 8
Texas	March 3/ May 26	Alabama	May 19/June 16	Virginia	June 16	Connecticut	Aug. 11
Mississippi	March 10/ April 7	California	June 2	New York	June 23	Minnesota	Aug. 11
Illinois	March 17	Iowa	June 2	Utah	June 23	Vermont	Aug. 11
Indiana	May 5	Montana	June 2	Maryland	June 23	Wisconsin	Aug. 11
Ohio	May 5	New Jersey	June 2	Colorado	June 30	Alaska	Aug. 18
Nebraska	May 12	New Mexico	June 2	Arizona	Aug. 4	Florida	Aug. 18
West Virginia	May 12	South Dakota	June 2/July 28	Kansas	Aug. 4	Wyoming	Aug. 18
Georgia	May 19	Maine	June 9	Michigan	Aug. 4	Massachusetts	Sept. 1
Idaho	May 19	Nevada	June 9	Missouri	Aug. 4	New Hampshire	Sept. 8
Kentucky	May 19	North Dakota	June 9	Washington	Aug. 4	Rhode Island	Sept. 8
						Delaware	Sept. 15

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Almanac of American Politics Profiles

Below, you'll find brief profiles of some of the top players in next year's election cycle, from the speaker of the House to the heads of party committees. To see the full profiles, and those of every other national officeholder in the country, visit www.nationaljournal.com/almanacplus.

Brian Kemp



Chair of Republican
Governors Association
Governor of Georgia (R)

LIFE IN BRIEF

Political Party: Republican Party
Birthdate: November 2, 1963
Religion: Episcopalian
Ethnicity: White
Marital Status: Married
Family: 3 children

Work History:

- Governor of Georgia, 2019-Present
- Secretary of State of Georgia, 2010-2018
- Owner, Kemp Properties, Residential and Commercial Construction
- Co-Owner, Specialty Stone Supply

Education:

- BS, Agriculture, University of Georgia

QUICK SUMMARY

Entrepreneur and native Georgian who led state efforts to cut government spending and support small business; combines two decades of experience in state politics with anti-establishment message

- Started first business, Kemp Development and Construction, with just a pickup truck and a shovel; later, Kemp Properties held investments in banking, farming, timber, manufacturing, and real estate; cited frustrations with state zoning laws as his push to go into state politics
- Served in state Senate, 2003-2007; ran for state agriculture commissioner in 2006 but lost in the GOP primary
- Appointed Georgia Secretary of State by Gov. Sonny Perdue in 2010; introduced controversial voter ID laws, but rejected offers of support from Homeland Security Department to secure Georgia's election systems amid concerns of Russians election interference
- In 2018, defeated Democrat Stacey Abrams in a tight gubernatorial race; accused by Democrats of voter suppression; secured key votes from rural and business communities
- Opposed the Affordable Care Act but proposed a limited Medicaid expansion, which was rejected in 2021 by the Biden administration
- Resisted President Trump's efforts to overturn Georgia's 2020 election results; later defeated Trump-backed David Perdue in 2022 primary and Abrams again in the general election
- 2025 priorities include workforce and economic development; now chairs the Republican Governors Association, aiming to expand GOP governorships

Hakeem Jeffries



Representative for New
York's 8th District, House
Minority Leader

LIFE IN BRIEF

Political Party: Democratic Party
Birthdate: August 4, 1970
Religion: Baptist
Ethnicity: Black
Marital Status: Married
Family: Two children

Work History:

- Representative for New York's 8th District, 2013-Present
- Minority Leader of the House of Representatives, 2023-Present
- State Assemblymember for New York's 57th District, 2007-2012
- Attorney, Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison, 1999-2003

Education:

- State University of New York, Binghamton, BA, 1992
- Georgetown University (DC), MPP, 1994
- New York University Law School, JD, 1997

QUICK SUMMARY

Charismatic legislator passionate about social and economic justice; known for his speaking skills and pragmatism that renders him a key House team builder

- Born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, in an area where crime was a frequent experience; the 1992 acquittal of the police officers who beat Rodney King inspired Jeffries to go to law school and he hoped to use his legal skills to provide representation to his community
- As a private practice lawyer, he worked in the litigation department at of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison, and as litigation counsel at Viacom and CBS
- Policy priorities include criminal justice reform and affordable housing; considers the bipartisan First Step Act to be his biggest accomplishment
- Has emerged as a key Democrat in recent years due to his former position as Democratic Caucus Chair, leadership in the Congressional Black Caucus, and participation as a manager during President Trump's first impeachment
- Becoming the first Black American to hold the position, Jeffries was unanimously elected in November 2022 to serve as House Minority Leader and was reelected in 2024

Joe Gruters



Chair of Republican
National Committee

LIFE IN BRIEF

Political Party: Republican Party
Ethnicity: White
Marital Status: Married
Family: 3 children

Work History:

- State Senator, State of Florida, 2018-Present
- State Representative, State of Florida, 2016-2018
- CPA, Robinson, Gruters & Roberts, Certified Public Accountants, 2015-Present
- Owner, Gruters CPA, 2015-Present
- CPA, Tax Manager, Shinn & Company LLC, 2010-2015

Education:

- MBA, University of South Florida, 2002
- BS, Finance, Real Estate & Multi National Business Operations, Florida State University, 1999

QUICK SUMMARY

Longtime Republican ally in the Tampa Bay area, Gruters was President Trump's preferred pick to become chair of the Republican National Committee

- Native of Tampa Bay, Florida, Gruters attended Florida State University to study finance and real estate, graduating in 1999; earned his masters from the University of South Florida in 2002
- Gruters is a partner with Robinson, Gruters and Roberts, a public accounting firm in Sarasota County
- Long history with the Republican Party in Florida, served as chair of the Republican Party in Sarasota for 14 years; chaired the Florida GOP from 2019 to 2023, a time where Republicans built a considerable advantage in the state with high GOP voter registration rates
- Has represented Florida's 22nd Senate district since 2022, currently chairing the Regulated Industries Committee and the Joint Committee on Public Counsel Oversight
- Unanimously selected to replace Michael Whatley, who is running for Senate in North Carolina, as chair of the Republican National Committee in August 2025; served as the treasurer of the RNC before taking over as chair
- President Trump endorsed Gruters for the position, clearing the field and allowing Gruters to run unopposed for the position

Almanac of American Politics Profiles

Mike Johnson



Chair of Republican National Committee

LIFE IN BRIEF

Political Party: Republican Party
Birthdate: January 30, 1972
Religion: Southern Baptist
Ethnicity: White
Marital Status: Married
Family: Four children

Work History:

- State Senator, State of Florida, 2018-Present
- State Representative, State of Florida, 2016-2018
- CPA, Robinson, Gruters & Roberts, Certified Public Accountants, 2015-Present
- Owner, Gruters CPA, 2015-Present
- CPA, Tax Manager, Shinn & Company LLC, 2010-2015

Education:

- MBA, University of South Florida, 2002
- BS, Finance, Real Estate & Multi National Business Operations, Florida State University, 1999

QUICK SUMMARY

A constitutional lawyer turned politician, Johnson quickly rose to Republican leadership in the House as a staunch advocate of religious freedoms and deregulation

- Elected to the Louisiana State House in 2015, developing a reputation as a dependable social and economic conservative; helped pass the Unborn Child Protection from Dismemberment Abortion Act which limited abortion access in Louisiana and sponsored the Marriage and Conscience Act, which sought to prohibit the state from punishing individuals for their religious beliefs towards same-sex marriage
- Easily won Louisiana's fourth congressional seat in 2016 and has continued to promote religious liberty and free-market ideals in Congress; in 2019, he sponsored the History and Tradition Protection Act to protect religious liberties and expression
- After serving as chair of the Republican Study Committee in the 116th Congress, Johnson was the ranking member of the Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties; House Republicans also elected Johnson as vice chair of the House Republican Conference in 2020, vowing to take a bold stance in advancing conservative policies
- After more than three weeks without a House Speaker, Johnson was elected as the chamber's new leader on October 25, 2023, by consolidating House Republican support as the fourth nominee since Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-CA-20) was ousted from the position

Ken Martin



Chair of Democratic National Committee

LIFE IN BRIEF

Political Party: Democratic Party
Ethnicity: White
Marital Status: Married
Family: 2 children

Work History:

- Chair, Minnesota Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party, 2011-2025
- Chair, WIN Minnesota PAC, 2010
- Campaign coordinator, John Kerry's presidential campaign, 2004
- Campaign manager, Campaign of Buck Humphrey for Minnesota Secretary of State, 2002
- Deputy State Director in Minnesota, Al Gore's presidential campaign, 2000
- State Field Director, Minnesota Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party, 1997-1999

Education:

- BA, Political Science, History, University of Kansas, 1996

QUICK SUMMARY

Chair of Minnesota's DFL Party for over a decade, Martin's record in the state earned him the chair of the Democratic National Committee

- First political experience came on Sen. Paul Wellstone's Senate campaign in 1990; supported Bill Clinton's campaign as a campus organizer while attending the University of Kansas, and worked as a field director for the Kansas Democratic Party
- Chaired the WIN Minnesota PAC in 2010; selected as chair of the Minnesota DFL Party in 2011, a role he would hold until 2025; throughout his tenure as chair, the DFL did not lose a single statewide race in Minnesota
- Boasted a strong fundraising tenure with the DFL, becoming chair while the party was in debt in 2011, the party now posts strong fundraising numbers in each election cycle
- Succeeded Jaime Harrison as chair of the Democratic National Committee in February 2025, overcoming a challenge from Ben Wikler, the chair of the Democratic Party of Wisconsin
- Taking over as chair following the sweeping Democratic losses in the 2024 election cycle, Martin aims to broaden the appeal of Democrats nationwide, and prioritizes connecting with working-class voters

Kirsten Gillibrand



Chair of Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee
 Senator for New York

LIFE IN BRIEF

Political Party: Democratic Party
Birthdate: December 9, 1966
Religion: Roman Catholic
Ethnicity: White
Marital Status: Married
Family: Jonathan Gillibrand; 2 children

Work History:

- Senator for NY, U.S. Senate, 2009-Present
- New York 20th District Representative, U.S. House of Representatives, 2006-2008
- Employee, Boies Schiller Flexner Limited Liability Partnership, 2001-2005
- Former Employee, Hillary Clinton Campaign for Senate, 2000
- Special Counsel, Office of the Secretary, United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2000
- Associate Attorney, Davis Polk & Wardwell, 1991-2000
- Former Law Clerk, Judge Roger Miner, Second Circuit Court of Appeals

Education:

- JD, University of California at Los Angeles, 1991
- BA, Asian Studies, Dartmouth College, 1988

QUICK SUMMARY

Raised in moderate upstate New York, Gillibrand rose to national prominence in the Senate as an advocate for women, military reform, and food safety

- Born into a civically active family — grandmother worked in the NY state legislature; father was a public defender
- Earned JD from UCLA; worked at Davis Polk & Wardwell and served as special counsel at HUD
- Entered politics through Hillary Clinton's 2000 Senate campaign; defeated GOP Rep. John Sweeney in 2006 as a Blue Dog Democrat
- Appointed to Hillary Clinton's vacated Senate seat in 2009; shifted leftward to reflect statewide views
- Re-elected in 2010, 2012, and 2018; key in repealing "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" and co-authoring the STOCK Act
- Ran for president in 2019 on a women's equality platform; exited race in August
- Led 2022 passage of the Ending Forced Arbitration of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Act; pushed for gun reform and veterans' benefits
- Re-elected in 2024; outspoken against Trump's federal firings; became DSCC chair in 2025

Almanac of American Politics Profiles

Laura Kelly



Chair of Democratic
Governors Association
Governor of Kansas (D)

LIFE IN BRIEF

Political Party: Democratic Party
Birthdate: January 24, 1950
Religion: Catholic
Ethnicity: White
Marital Status: Married
Family: 2 children

Work History:

- Governor of Kansas, 2019-Present
- State Senator for Kansas' 18th District, 2005-2019
- Executive Director, Kansas Recreation and Park Association, 1988-2004
- Director of Recreation Therapy and Physical Education, National Jewish Hospital for Respiration and Immune Diseases
- Recreation Therapist, Rockland Children's Psychiatric Center

Education:

- MS, Indiana University Bloomington
- BS, Bradley University

QUICK SUMMARY

Works to compromise with majority GOP legislature, drawing on her long career as a public servant

- Born into a military family; grew up moving frequently; father was a Purple Heart recipient
- Earned a psychology degree from Bradley University; began career in recreation therapy before leading the Kansas Recreation and Park Association
- Entered politics with support from Gov. Kathleen Sebelius; elected to the Kansas Senate in 2004 and rose to minority leadership roles
- Elected governor in 2018 after defeating Kris Kobach; focused on reversing fiscal damage from Gov. Brownback's tax cuts
- As governor, prioritizes Medicaid expansion, education funding, infrastructure investment, and reproductive rights despite GOP opposition
- Re-elected and continued as chair of the Democratic Governors Association in 2024, credited with maintaining Democratic governorships
- 2025 agenda centers on improving water access, education, and child care

Richard Hudson



Chair of National
Republican Congressional
Committee
Rep. for North Carolina's
9th District (R)

LIFE IN BRIEF

Political Party: Republican Party
Birthdate: November 4, 1971
Religion: Methodist
Ethnicity: White
Marital Status: Married
Family: 1 child

Work History:

- Representative for North Carolina, 2013-Present
 - 9th District, 2023-Present
 - 8th District, 2013-2023
- Owner, Cabarrus Marketing Group, 2011-2013
- Chief of Staff, Office of Rep. K. Michael Conaway (R-TX11), 2009-2011
- Chief of Staff, Office of Rep. John R. Carter (R-TX31), 2006-2009
- Chief of Staff, Office of Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-NC5), 2005-2006
- District Director, Office of Rep. Robin Hayes (R-NC8), 1999-2005

Education:

- BA, Political Science, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 1996

QUICK SUMMARY

Chairman of National Republican Congressional Committee, drawing on his longtime political experience as a congressional staffer

- Became politically active early, helping his grandfather successfully run for the Roanoke Rapids City Council; was student body president in college and president of College Republicans at UNC
- Campaigned for politicians such as Sen. Jesse Helms; served as district director for then-Rep. Robin Hayes; served as communications director for the North Carolina Republican party
- Rose through congressional staff ranks to become chief of staff for multiple House members; later founded Cabarrus Marketing Group, a communications consulting firm
- Elected to Congress in 2012 on a platform of transparency and fiscal conservatism; chaired the Transportation Security Subcommittee and sponsored airport security legislation after the 2013 LAX shooting
- Made veteran affairs a top priority, advocating for expanded health care benefits and increased support for families and caregivers of military families
- Served as deputy Republican whip (2013) and House GOP conference secretary (2021)
- Became NRCC chair in 2023, aiming to expand the GOP majority

Suzan DelBene



Chair of Democratic
Congressional
Campaign Committee
Rep. for Washington's
1st District (D)

LIFE IN BRIEF

Political Party: Democratic Party
Birthdate: February 17, 1962
Religion: Episcopalian
Ethnicity: White
Marital Status: Married
Family: 2 children

Work History:

- Representative for Washington's 1st District, 2012-Present
- Director, Washington State Department of Revenue, 2010-2012
- Management Consultant and Strategic Advisor, Global Partnerships, 2008-2009
- Corporate Vice President of the Mobile Communications Business, Microsoft, 2004-2007
- President and Chief Executive Officer, Nimble Technology, 2000-2003
- Co-Founder and Vice President, drugstore.com, 1998-2000
- Director of Marketing and Business Development, Interactive Media Group, Microsoft, 1989-1998

Education:

- MBA, University of Washington, 1990
- BA, Reed College, 1983

QUICK SUMMARY

Former Microsoft executive who gained Democratic Party backing while running for a competitive congressional seat; focuses on fiscal responsibility and health care reform

- Spent 12 years at Microsoft, rising from intern to senior vice president; later helped develop startups (including drugstore.com), served as CEO of Nimble Technology, and advised nonprofit Global Partnerships
- Lost her first congressional race but was appointed state Department of Revenue director; implemented a tax amnesty program that raised \$34 million while supporting small businesses
- Elected to Congress in 2012 with strong party support; serves on the Ways and Means Committee as vice chair, advocating for Medicare and Medicaid reforms, tax modernization, and retirement security
- Leads the Women's High-Tech Coalition and New Democrat Coalition; champions expanding the Child Tax Credit and preventing tariff abuse
- Became Chair of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee in 2022; announced plans to target 35 GOP-held seats ahead of the 2026 midterms

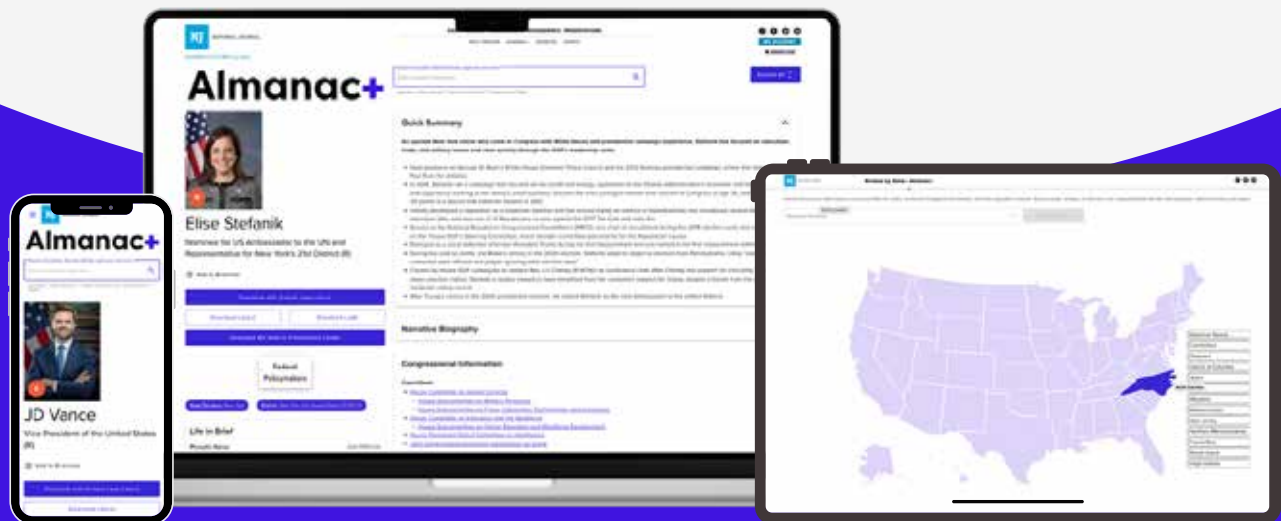
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Abby Turner
States Correspondent



Republican gains with Latino voters will hold, and that will ultimately deliver them an even **narrower majority in the House.**



Kirk Bado
Hotline Editor

None of the primary challengers to incumbent Democrats will win their seats.



Erika Filter
National Correspondent

Following his neighbor to the southwest Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly (D), **Iowa Auditor Rob Sand (D) will ride the wave** of an unpopular Republican governor and a struggling state economy to the governor's mansion.

Former Rep. **Mary Peltola (D-AK) will challenge Sen. Dan Sullivan (R-AK)** next year, performing better than former Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) in Ohio's Senate race.

Republicans hold on to the open seat in **Arizona's 1st Congressional District.** In Texas, embattled Rep. **Henry Cuellar (D-TX 28)** holds on for reelection but Rep. **Vicente Gonzalez (D-TX 34)** loses.



James A. Downs
House Correspondent



Nicholas Anastácio
Senate Correspondent

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