

Inside Elections

with

Nathan L. Gonzales

Nonpartisan Analysis

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Democrats Post Key Victories in 2023 Races

By Nathan Gonzales, Jacob Rubashkin & Erin Covey

Democrats put up big wins across the country last week, proving that abortion access is still a salient message a year and a half after the *Dobbs* decision, and demonstrating that while voters may be dissatisfied with the direction of the country and its Democratic leader, they're still hesitant to put Republicans in charge instead.

From winning the marquee race for governor in Kentucky and a key ballot measure in Ohio, to securing majorities in Virginia's state legislature, Democrats prevailed, even in the face of President Joe Biden's slumping polling numbers.

The lessons about messaging, particularly on abortion, will reverberate longer than the 2023 results themselves. Democrats will be emboldened to run on access to abortion in contests around the country in 2024, while Republicans are still searching for ways to answer concerns that they would ban all access to legal abortion, or to change the subject altogether.

The good news for Republicans is that most of the 2023 races had little to do with Biden, who is still an unpopular incumbent running for re-election and will be a focal point in 2024. For now, Republicans are left wondering how to move on from a big night for Democrats.

Kentucky

Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear defied political gravity by winning re-election 52.5-47.5 percent despite every other Democrat on the ticket losing by double-digits. Beshear's focus on local issues and disaster relief helped him amass a high approval rating, and GOP ads that attacked him on transgender issues and linked him to Biden were unsuccessful in disqualifying him in the deeply Republican state. Beshear also went on offense on abortion with a powerful ad featuring a teenage rape victim.

It's not surprising that Kentucky elected a Democrat since the commonwealth has had a Democratic governor for all but eight of the last 51 years. But Republican efforts to drag Beshear down with Biden didn't work, nor did their efforts to pull Cameron up with former President Donald Trump.

Beshear's victory is a piece of good news for Democratic senators,

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2024 House Ratings

Toss-Up (5D, 7R)

CA 13 (Duarte, R)	NY 3 (Santos, R)
CA 27 (Garcia, R)	NY 4 (D'Esposito, R)
CO 8 (Caraveo, D)	NY 17 (Lawler, R)
MI 7 (Open; Slotkin, D)	NY 22 (Williams, R)
NM 2 (Vasquez, D)	OR 5 (DeRemer, R)
NC 1 (Davis, D)	WA 3 (Perez, D)

Tilt Democratic (5D)

CA 47 (Open; Porter, D)
OH 13 (Sykes, D)
PA 7 (Wild, D)
PA 8 (Cartwright, D)
VA 7 (Open; Spanberger, D)

Tilt Republican (9R)

AZ 1 (Schweikert, R)	MI 10 (James, R)
AZ 6 (Ciscomani, R)	NJ 7 (Kean Jr., R)
CA 22 (Valadao, R)	NY 19 (Molinaro, R)
CO 3 (Boebert, R)	VA 2 (Kiggans, R)
IA 3 (Nunn, R)	

Lean Democratic (13D)

AK AL (Peltola, D)
CT 5 (Hayes, D)
IL 17 (Sorensen, D)
ME 2 (Golden, D)
MI 3 (Scholten, D)
MN 2 (Craig, DFL)
NV 3 (Lee, D)
NH 1 (Pappas, D)
NY 18 (Ryan, D)
OH 1 (Landsman, D)
OH 9 (Kaptur, D)
OR 6 (Salinas, D)
PA 17 (Deluzio, D)

Lean Republican (6R)

CA 41 (Calvert, R)
CA 45 (Steel, R)
IA 1 (Miller-Meeks, R)
MT 1 (Zinke, R)
NE 2 (Bacon, R)
NY 1 (LaLota, R)
TX 15 (De La Cruz, R)

	GOP	DEM
Solid	188	174
Likely/Lean/Tilt	29	32
Total	217	206
Toss-up	12	
Needed for majority	218	

Likely Democratic (13D, 1R)

AL 2 (Moore, R)	NV 1 (Titus, D)
CA 49 (Levin, D)	NV 4 (Horsford, D)
FL 9 (Soto, D)	NH 2 (Kuster, D)
IN 1 (Mrvan, D)	OR 4 (Hoyle, D)
KS 3 (Davids, D)	TX 34 (Gonzalez, D)
MD 6 (Open; Trone, D)	VA 10 (Open; Wexton, D)
MI 8 (Kildee, D)	WA 8 (Schrier, D)

Likely Republican (10R, 3D)

CA 3 (Kiley, R)	NC 14 (Open; Jackson, D)
CA 40 (Kim, R)	PA 1 (Fitzpatrick, R)
FL 13 (Luna, R)	PA 10 (Perry, R)
FL 27 (Salazar, R)	SC 1 (Mace, R)
IA 2 (Hinson, R)	WI 1 (Steil, R)
NC 6 (Manning, D)	WI 3 (Van Orden, R)
NC 13 (Nickel, D)	

*Takeovers in Italics. # moved benefiting Democrats. * moved benefiting Republicans*

Inside Elections Podcast

Check out the *Inside Elections Podcast* on all major podcast platforms and on YouTube. Listen to Nathan, Jacob, and Erin talk about the latest election news in a nonpartisan, data-driven, and accessible way.

West Virginia Senate: Manchin's Exit Pushes Seat to Solid GOP

By Jacob Rubashkin

Sen. Joe Manchin's decision to forgo a tough re-election campaign next year removes any real chance of Democrats holding a Senate seat in West Virginia, and deals a blow to his party's odds of maintaining their narrow majority in the upper chamber.

We're changing our rating of the West Virginia Senate race from Tilt Republican to Solid Republican.

The cantankerous Manchin was the last remaining statewide Democratic officeholder in West Virginia, which was once a stronghold for the party but over the past two decades has shifted rapidly to become one of the most Republican states in the nation. In 2020, President Donald Trump carried the Mountain State by 39 points, his second-largest margin of victory anywhere.

Despite his previous victories, Manchin would have been an underdog for re-election. But without him on the ticket, Republicans are virtually guaranteed to flip the seat. The GOP only needed a net gain of two seats to win Senate control next year (or one seat plus winning the White House), and Manchin's retirement puts them closer to that goal. In order to maintain control, Democrats will have to bring back all of their remaining incumbents (plus hold Michigan and Arizona) *and* win the presidential election, or find a way to defeat either Ted Cruz of Texas or Rick Scott of Florida.

The Mountain State's GOP primary currently features two candidates: Gov. Jim Justice and Rep. Alex Mooney. Justice is the early favorite and has a substantial lead in polling, and also has backing from Senate leaders in Washington, D.C., including Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and the National Republican Senatorial Committee, as well as Trump.

Mooney's allies believe that Manchin dropping out could help change the congressman's fortunes. Much of Justice's support from GOP leaders has been premised on the popular governor being a far stronger general election candidate against Manchin than Mooney would be. Mooney, a relatively recent transplant to West Virginia, is unknown in the southern part of the state and has some lingering ethics issues; Manchin often led head-to-head polling against Mooney even as he trailed Justice.

But with Manchin out of the race and Republicans likely to flip the seat regardless of their nominee, GOP power brokers may be less inclined to spend money helping Justice in the primary when they have races more crucial to building a majority in Ohio, Montana, and elsewhere. If the Club for Growth follows through with its pledge to spend \$15 million in support of Mooney in the primary, but the outside

2024 Senate Ratings

Toss-Up (3)

Brown (D-Ohio) Tester (D-Mont.)
Sinema (I-Ariz.)

Tilt Democratic (2)

Casey (D-Penn.)
Rosen (D-Nev.)

Tilt Republican

Lean Democratic (2)

MI Open (Stabenow, D)
Baldwin (D-Wis.)

Lean Republican

Likely Democratic (1)

Menendez (D-N.J.)

Likely Republican (1)

Cruz (R-Texas)

Solid Democratic (14)

CA Open (Butler, D)
DE Open (Carper, D)
MD Open (Cardin, D)
Cantwell (D-Wash.)
Gillibrand (D-N.Y.)
Heinrich (D-N.M.)
Hirono (D-Hawaii)
Kaine (D-Va.)
King (I-Maine)
Klobuchar (D-Minn.)
Murphy (D-Conn.)
Sander (I-Vt.)
Warren (D-Mass.)
Whitehouse (D-R.I.)

Solid Republican (11)

IN Open (Braun, R)
UT Open (Romney, R)
*WV Open (Manchin, D)**
Barrasso (R-Wyo.)
Blackburn (R-Tenn.)
Cramer (R-N.D.)
Fischer (R-Neb.)
Hawley (R-Mo.)
Ricketts (R-Neb.)
Scott (R-Fla.)
Wicker (R-Miss.)

*Takeovers in Italics, # moved benefiting Democrats, * moved benefiting Republicans*

money doesn't materialize for Justice, things could get interesting between the firebrand Freedom Caucus member and the governor, a former Democrat with some financial and ethical baggage of his own.

In the face of a difficult re-election bid, Manchin's decision is not surprising. But hearing and seeing him make his intentions official is striking and crystalizes Democrats' difficult path to maintaining control of the Senate.



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Arizona 8: Phoenix Free-for-all

By Erin Covey

Republican Rep. Debbie Lesko's retirement may have sparked this cycle's messiest Republican primary — two 2022 statewide nominees, the Arizona state House speaker, and Lesko's scandal-ridden predecessor are all vying for a chance to succeed the outgoing congresswoman.

Within 24 hours of Lesko's announcement, 2022 attorney general nominee Abe Hamadeh announced he was running, and quickly secured the endorsement of 2022 gubernatorial nominee / 2024 Senate candidate Kari Lake.

A few days later, 2022 Senate nominee Blake Masters jumped in (though this Phoenix-based district is hours away from his home in Tucson).

Meanwhile, Lesko endorsed state House Speaker Ben Toma, who represents nearly

a third of the 8th in the state legislature. State Sen. Anthony Kern, who acted as an alternative elector in a scheme to overturn the state's 2020 presidential results, also entered the race.

And then former Rep. Trent Franks announced his comeback bid. Franks had represented this district for nearly 15 years before resigning in 2017 after he was accused of asking two staffers to bear his child. The staffers were concerned that Franks was making sexual advances, and one staffer said Franks had offered her \$5 million to act as a surrogate.

The latest candidate to enter this race is Jacob Chansley, better known as the "QAnon Shaman," who stormed the Capitol on Jan. 6 wearing a horned headdress. Chansley, who's running as a Libertarian, was sentenced to 41 months in prison and served 27 months before he was transferred to a halfway house in Phoenix.

Though Masters' high-profile Senate campaign against Democratic Sen. Mark Kelly gives him an early advantage in name ID, the race for the Republican nomination is wide open.

Whoever wins the Republican primary would be the heavy favorite to succeed Lesko; Donald Trump won the 8th by double-digits in 2020, and last cycle, all GOP statewide candidates carried this district (to varying degrees). Republicans have a 57-42 percent advantage in district, according to *Inside Elections'* Baseline.

Masters won the 8th District by 7 points in his Senate campaign. The venture capitalist had initially considered running for Senate again in 2024, but, facing the prospect of a vicious primary fight against Lake, decided to run for the 8th instead.

But Masters will face competition in the MAGA lane of this GOP primary.

Hamadeh, a former Maricopa County prosecutor and U.S. Army reservist, has the backing of Lake and state Sen. Wendy Rogers, an Oath Keepers member with ties to white nationalist groups. The former attorney general candidate has kept his name in the news by waging a legal challenge to the results of the 2022 election, which he lost by 280 votes.

Although he lost statewide, Hamadeh won the 8th District by 12

points in 2022. Hamadeh, like Masters, lives outside the district, though his home in Scottsdale is much closer to the 8th than Tucson. (Members are not required to live in the district they represent.)

Kern, though much less well-known than Masters or Hamadeh, could draw some support from both candidates, which could make a difference in a crowded primary.

Franks has been out of office for nearly six years, and the circumstances of his exit are guaranteed to come up in the primary. But one Arizona Republican strategist warned that he shouldn't be dismissed, noting that he could draw some significant support from the district's older, conservative residents. The former congressman had a reputation as a staunch social conservative.

Toma, meanwhile, will have an uphill battle against three better-known Arizona Republicans. But with the MAGA lane of the primary divided between Masters, Hamadeh, and Kern, he has a better chance to break through — and Arizona's August primary gives him a longer runway to raise his name ID.

According to *Daily Kos*, Toma's state legislative district includes 30 percent of the 8th. Over his seven-year career in the state House, he's successfully advocated for a flat income tax (implemented at the beginning of this year) and a voucher program creating education savings accounts for Arizona families.

Early polls show Masters or Hamadeh leading the field, an expected result for two recent statewide candidates. But those surveys were taken before Franks' campaign launch.

This is one race where conservative outside groups could play, though

the expensive Phoenix media might be a hurdle. The Club for Growth, which spent \$8 million supporting Masters in the 2022 Senate race, reportedly encouraged him to run for the 8th. At the beginning of the year, the Congressional Leadership Fund

agreed not to play in primaries for safe GOP districts as part of a deal to elect Kevin McCarthy speaker, and that deal still remains in place despite the change in speakership.

And since both Masters and Hamadeh have relationships with Trump, there's a chance the former president could take sides in this race. Former U.S. Ambassador to Germany Ric Grenell, a Trump ally, has backed Hamadeh.

Former Pentagon staffer Greg Whitten is running for the Democratic nomination, and depending on who wins the GOP primary, there's a chance the general election could become more competitive. In 2018, Lesko won the special election against Democrat Hiral Tipirneni by just 5 points, though in the regular election, Lesko defeated Tipirneni by 10 (both races took place under the old, slightly more Republican lines). But unless there's a dramatic shift in the national political environment, Republicans should be strongly favored to hold this seat next November.



Abe Hamadeh

Courtesy Hamadeh Campaign



Blake Masters

Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call

Virginia 2: Battle at the Beach

By Jacob Rubashkin

Virginia Republican Jen Kiggans has worn a lot of hats in her lifetime, but next year she's putting on an unfamiliar one: endangered incumbent.

Kiggans is a former Navy aviator, nurse practitioner, and state senator, but she's never had to run for re-election before. Now the Republican congresswoman is a top target for Democrats looking to reclaim the House majority, and she'll have to hold onto an evenly-divided district that has a tendency to oust incumbent members of Congress with regularity.

The 2nd District isn't a must-win for Democrats, but it's the type of district Republicans could lose if they are struggling at the top of the ticket. And the recent state legislative elections in Virginia were a small preview of the competitive fight to come.

The Lay of the Land

Virginia's 2nd District sits at the commonwealth's southeast corner, at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay. Anchored by Virginia Beach, the district includes Virginia's portion of the Delmarva Peninsula, and extends west along the North Carolina border to Southampton County.

A majority of the district's votes come from Virginia Beach (one of the commonwealth's independent cities separate from its counties) — 55 percent in 2022 and 56 percent in 2020.

The district has a significant military presence. It is home to several U.S. military bases and also abuts a massive naval installation in Norfolk, and counts among its residents more veterans than all but one other congressional district in the country, according to American Community Survey data. Federal employees make up 9.4 percent of the workforce, the ninth-most of any district in the country.

By population, the 2nd is 59 percent White and 25 percent Black. Asian and Latino residents make up 7.5 percent of the district each, and 36.5 percent of residents hold a bachelor's degree or higher — slightly greater than the national average.

Politically, the district is volatile. Since 1998, Virginia Beach has been represented by seven different members of Congress — five Republicans and two Democrats. In 2016, it would have voted for Donald Trump by 6 points, 50-44 percent, but in 2020, Joe Biden would have carried it by 2 points, 50-48 percent.

In 2018 and 2020 the Democratic nominees for Senate would have carried the 2nd by 7 and 4 points, respectively.

But in 2021, the district broke hard for Republicans: Glenn Youngkin carried it 55-44 percent en route to his gubernatorial win, and the nominees for lieutenant governor and attorney general won double-digit victories as well. According to *Inside Elections'* Baseline, Republicans have a narrow 51.1 to 47.8-point advantage in the 2nd.

The Republican Incumbent

Kiggans, 52, is in her first term in Congress, and previously represented the 7th state Senate district for one term from 2020 to 2022.

Born in Tampa, Kiggans graduated from Boston University in 1993 and spent 10 years in the Navy. Kiggans became an aviator in 1995 and flew helicopters on two deployments to the Persian Gulf.

In 2009, after six years as a stay-at-home mom, Kiggans went back to school, first for a BSN from Old Dominion University (2011) and then for

a masters in nursing from Vanderbilt (2012). She has since worked as a geriatric nurse practitioner.

Kiggans made her first run for office in 2019, when she ran for state Senate. She narrowly won the GOP primary, 52-48 percent, over a school board member backed by the local political machine, and then won an even closer general election fight against state Del. Cheryl Turpin, 50.4-49.5 percent, despite being outspent by \$900,000.

In 2022, Kiggans was a prized recruit for national Republicans against



Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

Jen Kiggans

Democratic Rep. Elaine Luria, a retired Navy commander who had wrested the seat from GOP hands in 2018 and was at the forefront of national news as a member of the Jan. 6 committee. First, Kiggans had to get through a primary against Jarome Bell, a Navy veteran with backing from Trump-aligned conservatives, including Virginia Rep. Bob Good and retired Gen. Michael Flynn. She won, 56-27 percent.

Republicans were bullish on defeating Luria from the beginning of the cycle, but public and private polling showed a stubbornly tight race. Luria was a prodigious fundraiser and outspent Kiggans 3-to-1. But heavy spending from the Congressional Leadership Fund, which poured \$4.5 million into the district, proved enough to get Kiggans over the finish line, 52-48 percent.

In Congress, Kiggans sits on the Armed Services, Veterans' Affairs, and Natural Resources committees, and is a member of the Republican Main Street Partnership.

The Kiggans campaign team includes general consultant Danny Laub of Poolhouse, which is also doing her TV ads, and WPAi for polling. Chris Grant of Big Dog Strategies is doing the direct mail.

On Sept. 30, Kiggans reported \$1.5 million in her campaign account.

The Democratic Challenger

Missy Cotter Smasal, 45, has never held elected office before but is no stranger to competitive Virginia elections. The Pennsylvania-born former surface warfare officer in the U.S. Navy was the Democratic nominee for a state Senate seat in 2019, losing to incumbent Bill DeSteph, 52-48 percent, in a district that voted for Trump in 2016 and narrowly for Biden in 2020.

The 2000 Villanova graduate was stationed in Hampton Roads, and served on the U.S.S. Trenton during Operation Enduring Freedom. Following active duty service she received a masters in sports management from Old Dominion University, where she also taught as an adjunct. Cotter Smasal owned a Rita's Italian Ice that employed more than 100 people for a decade prior to her run for state Senate, and also served as the executive director of Valor Run, a nonprofit that honors women who died while serving in uniform after 9/11.

Cotter Smasal, who competes in triathlons and leads a Girl Scouts

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troop, also serves as Virginia's citizen representative on the Chesapeake Bay Commission, a tri-state body that advises federal and state governments on policy.

In 2018, Cotter Smasal got involved in politics by petitioning Virginia Beach public schools to lock their doors during the school day — a change effected over a year later — and in 2019, when Cotter Smasal ran for state Senate in Virginia Beach, gun issues took center stage after a gunman killed 12 people in a municipal office building. Some Democrats had encouraged Cotter Smasal to run in the neighboring district ultimately won by Kiggans, which was more favorable politically, but Cotter Smasal did not want to move (in Virginia lawmakers must live in their district).

Cotter Smasal's team includes Max Bergman of AL Media, Fred Yang of Garin-Hart-Yang for polling, and Ed Peavy of Mission Control for direct mail.

Many national Democratic strategists had hoped Luria would seek a rematch against Kiggans — “that would have been amazing, but I don't think that was ever a realistic scenario,” said one national Democratic operative. That left Cotter Smasal, whose profile resembles Luria's, as the top Democratic recruitment target, especially with many of the other obvious potential contenders, such as state Sen. Aaron Rouse, locked in competitive local elections until recently.

While Cotter Smasal won't raise the money or attract the attention Luria did, one longtime Virginia Democratic consultant said they think “it's okay to have someone new.”

“Missy is a little warmer than Luria in some ways. She has more of a businessperson story, small kids, and there's a value in having a fresh voice,” they told *Inside Elections*.

Local Election Results

Virginia voters took to the polls last week to elect new members of their legislature, and several of the commonwealth's hottest races overlapped with the 2nd District. Ultimately, the results were a mixed bag for both parties, with each claiming contested races.

Ahead of the local elections, a veteran Virginia Democratic strategist pointed to the 97th state House district — which sits entirely within the 2nd District — as “the race to watch” for the swing voters who could vote for Biden and then Kiggans. Democrats hammered GOP state Del. Karen Greenhalgh on abortion, while the Republican ran ads against Democrat Michael Feggans focusing on transgender issues. (Feggans' most-aired ad also featured Luria speaking directly to camera about his support for veterans.) Feggans won, 54-46 percent, a slightly better performance than Luria posted in the district in 2022, when she carried it 53-47 percent.

In the 17th state Senate District, which covers 19 percent of the 2nd District including Suffolk, Isle of Wight, and Franklin, Republicans focused their advertising on Democrat Clint Jenkins' past domestic violence arrests, while Jenkins and his allies hit Republican Emily Brewer

on voting against Obamacare. Brewer won, 53-47 percent.

Across the Norfolk media market, Youngkin's own political operation ran ads pushing back on the contention that Virginia Republicans support an abortion ban, instead arguing the GOP offered a “reasonable 15-week limit with exceptions for rape, incest, and the life of the mother.”

How It Plays Out

Democratic strategists working on the race are clear-eyed about the challenge that Kiggans presents, as a savvy political operator in a swing district.

“The real challenge is that Jen Kiggans is a really good candidate,” said one Cotter Smasal ally. “This idea that Democrats underestimate Jen Kiggans is a real thing. And the reason why is [that] she comes across really strong on TV and has a health care background, and she just doesn't look as extreme as her record is.”

Kiggans' allies will highlight the congresswoman's sponsorship of bipartisan legislation, including bills that would provide for servicemembers to receive pay in the event of a shutdown and improve mental healthcare for seniors on Medicare, and also point to her refusal to vote for firebrand Ohio Rep. Jim Jordan for speaker. But GOP operatives are primarily confident in Kiggans' ability to differentiate herself from national Republicans because of her biography. “There's something about Jen's background both being a nurse practitioner, a helicopter pilot, and obviously a mom,” said one GOP strategist. “That has really served her well and sets her up for re-election.”

The challenge for Democrats will be to “pierce” that perception, said one Democratic operative following the race. “You have to acknowledge that she is not MAGA Trump. That's just not gonna fly with people, because she presents far too moderate to just say she's like that. You're gonna have to do some type of acknowledgement: ‘While she says this, here's what she's really doing.’”

Democrats are already hitting Kiggans on the vote she took earlier this year for the GOP's initial debt ceiling plan, which would have slashed government spending by 22 percent — the VA and Department of Labor both said the bill would cost veteran support jobs and delay benefits. Kiggans maintains that the bill was never meant to become law, saying that it was “literally a tool that we are using to get President Biden to now come to the negotiating table.” But that won't stop Democrats from putting it in attack ads.

And in the event of a government shutdown — a funding deadline looms large this month — Democrats will look to blame Kiggans, as a member of the majority party, for the dysfunction that hampered Congress's ability to pass a spending bill and potentially furloughs many district residents.

While abortion will still be a part of Democratic messaging, the party's victory in the state legislative elections could dampen the salience of the issue, because Youngkin and his allies will not be able to pass a more restrictive abortion law next year, as they had planned to do.

“If Republicans have a good night and a law got put in place, it makes the issue much more clarifying at the congressional level for 2024,” said one Democratic strategist, who said that “it'll be an issue regardless, but it's obviously much more clear to voters when you live in a state that has a crazy restriction in place.”

“As a health care provider and a woman she has an interesting way to talk about it in a reasonable way,” said one Kiggans ally, who noted that Democrats had targeted Kiggans on abortion extensively in 2022 (per

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Missy Cotter Smasal

Courtesy Cotter Smasal Campaign

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AdImpact, Democrats spent \$2 million on TV ads mentioning abortion, typically hitting Kiggans for her support of the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*).

Democrats are still figuring out how to link some of new Speaker Mike Johnson's more unpopular positions on gay marriage and other social issues to the representatives, like Kiggans, who voted to install him. There's "probably a 0 percent chance" Johnson's name appears in paid media, said one national Democratic strategist, contrasting it to the GOP's use of former Speaker Nancy Pelosi in ads for decades. "It's more about elevating the issues," said the strategist, "and when Jen Kiggans voted for Johnson, she voted to elevate issues like cutting Social Security, election denial, and a nationwide abortion ban."

Though the district was very close at the presidential level in 2020, party operatives on both sides of the aisle believe Biden will carry it again. One longtime Virginia GOP strategist said that if Trump is the Republican nominee, "I suspect that Joe Biden will win the district. ... That means Kiggans is going to have to peel off some magnitude, probably 10,000 or less, maybe 5,000 to 7,000 folks who are Biden voters." In 2020, Biden would have carried the 2nd District by 7,723 votes. According to *Inside Elections'* Vote Above Replacement, Kiggans overperformed the average Republican candidate in the district by 0.5 percent in 2022.

The strategist specifically pointed to three buckets of voters that Kiggans should target — Republicans who turned away from Trump in Virginia Beach suburbs, veterans who reacted negatively to the Jan. 6 insurrection, and independents who regularly split their tickets — and predicted that Kiggans would win Virginia Beach, which she lost to Luria narrowly last year.

Democratic strategists agree that a strong performance in Virginia Beach is crucial to Cotter Smasal's victory, and believe that her profile as an "everymom" who ran a well-regarded local business will help her do so.

For Cotter Smasal, extending her support inland beyond Virginia Beach is also a necessity, especially among Black voters. Democrats were disappointed with the level of Black turnout in 2022 and believe that contributed to Luria's loss. Luria's most significant underperformances came in areas with higher Black populations: Franklin City, Southampton, and Suffolk.

"Who are the people who shape the electorate such that it looks different from 2024 than 2022?" asked one Virginia Democratic operative. "That's where Black turnout is such a huge deal." Narrow losses for Democratic candidates in the 17th Senate District and 89th state House districts, and a narrower-than-expected win in the 84th House district, all seats with large Black populations in South Hampton Roads, were "a concern worth looking at," said the operative, who also noted that turning out rural Black voters in non-federal elections not a new challenge.

But Democrats are hopeful that a presidential year will see higher Black turnout, and that Cotter Smasal's early entrance into the race, and support from local Black political leaders (such as Reps. Jennifer McClellan and Bobby Scott, state Senate President Pro Temp Louise Lucas, and state Del. Clint Jenkins and his wife, Suffolk school board member Karen Jenkins) will help.

The high concentration of active duty and retired military residents in the district means that defense spending and veterans' issues will be front and center throughout the campaign. "In this district when you talk about national security, it's also the economic security of the region," said one Democratic operative.

The Money Picture

Party strategists on both sides of the aisle say that the race will pick up now that the state legislative elections have concluded. "In Virginia, you have so many donors, so many people sitting on the sidelines, until after the off-year because there's just a belief that you can't step on someone's toes," one national Democratic strategist said.

Unlike in 2022, when Luria outspent her by \$7 million, Kiggans will likely have a fundraising advantage over Cotter Smasal, who raised just \$68,000 in her first month as a candidate. "Kiggans knows how to fundraise," said one national Democratic operative, who warned that "Cotter Smasal has to pick it up on the fundraising end."

In her 2019 election, Cotter Smasal raised \$2.1 million, but state-level candidates in Virginia can accept unlimited contributions, while federal candidates are capped at \$3,300 per election. Republicans, who are confident coming off beating Luria despite the spending disparity, see Cotter Smasal's light first month as a sign of weakness.

Cotter Smasal's allies agree that her initial fundraising was on the weaker side but argue that was an intentional tradeoff the Democrat made to lock up political support by jumping in the race when she did. "There was a conscious choice," said one longtime Virginia Democratic strategist. "It's really hard to raise money in the midst of a general assembly election where every dollar is being squeezed into all these local races. So there was a calculation that the fundraising was probably not going to be great right out of the gate. But if you look at the politics that was done to avoid a primary, a serious primary in this district, it was worth basically the idea that maybe the first month or three weeks wasn't the best finance number."

Kiggans' allies expect the congresswoman to raise \$5 million for her campaign, significantly more than the \$3.4 million she raised in 2022 (\$1.1 million of which she spent on her primary). That will allow the incumbent to "professionalize" her operation by hiring more campaign staffers, such as a dedicated communications person, that the campaign lacked last year.

Cotter Smasal's allies believe the Democrat will need to raise \$6 to \$8 million for the general election.

And strategists from both parties anticipate that outside money will flow freely in this race, given that the entire district is covered by the inexpensive and uncrowded Norfolk media market. In 2022, the four main outside groups spent a combined \$8.3 million on TV ads in the district.

Democrats are hopeful that Cotter Smasal will receive a boost from the concurrent re-election campaign of Sen. Tim Kaine, who is seeking a third term. Without a competitive presidential election in Virginia, Kaine's efforts and his contributions to the coordinated campaign could provide infrastructure and manpower for Cotter Smasal that is unlikely to be matched on the GOP side regardless of who their nominee is for Senate.

The Bottom Line

The path back to the majority for Democrats doesn't necessarily run through Virginia's 2nd District, and party strategists prioritize races in New York and California. But it has all of the ingredients for a competitive contest: evenly divided partisanship, a history of tossing incumbents, a cheap media market, and no primaries on either side.

It's also one of the first districts we will get results from on election night in 2024, with polls closing at 7 p.m. Eastern. A quick call for Kiggans could indicate Republicans will hold the majority, while a drawn-on tabulation might augur well for Democrats.

Ohio 9: Congress' Longest-Serving Woman Fights for Another Term

By Erin Covey

At the beginning of the 2022 cycle, Rep. Marcy Kaptur appeared to be one of the most endangered House Democrats in the country.

Redistricting had transformed Kaptur's comfortably blue district into a Republican-leaning seat that was now a top target for the GOP. But in a stroke of luck, Republican primary voters nominated one of the most flawed congressional candidates in the country, and the congresswoman won re-election to her 21st term by 13 points.

Kaptur has served in Congress longer than any other woman, breaking the record previously held by former Maryland Sen. Barbara Mikulski at the beginning of the year. The 77-year-old has faced few serious opponents over the past four decades — before 2022, her most recent competitive race was a 2012 primary battle against then-Rep. Dennis Kucinich.

In 2024, she'll need to overperform the partisan lean of her district yet again, with Joe Biden, who lost the district by 3 points in 2020, likely to lose in 2024.

2022 nominee J.R. Majewski is back in the GOP primary race, but he won't be able to slip through the primary like he did last time, when the two frontrunners for the GOP nomination battled each other. House Republican leaders have consolidated around the 2022 primary's second-place finisher, former state Rep. Craig Riedel, who should be better positioned to win next year.

But if Majewski wins the primary again, Republicans' odds of flipping this seat will plummet.

The Lay of the Land

Ohio's 9th District runs along the northwestern edge of the state, stretching from the shores of Lake Erie into the eastern portion of the "Corn Belt." Its population is largely white and blue-collar; white voters make up 81 percent of the 9th's citizen voting-age population, and 26 percent of adults have a bachelor's degree or higher.

Unlike some parts of the state, Ohio's 9th District isn't rapidly moving away from Democrats. But they have lost ground here — Donald Trump would have won this district by 3 points in 2020 after winning it by 1 point in 2016. Tim Ryan, who lost last year's Senate race by 6 points statewide, barely won this district.

Lucas County, which encompasses Toledo and the surrounding suburbs, is by far the largest county in the district. Kaptur won the county by 32 points in 2022, and Biden won it by 17 points two years prior. Last week, Issue 1, a ballot amendment enshrining abortion access protections in the state's constitution, won the county by 28 points.

The portion of Wood County in the district (directly south of Toledo) also supported Kaptur by 14 points, after Trump won it by 5.

The automaking industry is crucial to Toledo, and the city's Jeep plant was among the first auto plants to go on strike this summer. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, 15 percent of Toledo's employment works in manufacturing (compared to 8 percent of total U.S. employment).

Further east, the counties that border Lake Erie (Erie, Sandusky, and Ottawa counties) are more conservative. Erie County, home to the city of Sandusky, swung 18 points in Democrats' direction between 2020 and 2022 — Kaptur won Erie County by 6 points, while Trump won it by 12. Majewski won Sandusky and Ottawa by 10 and 3 points, respectively, underperforming Trump's 2020 margin in those counties by double digits.

Though Erie, Ottawa, and Wood counties backed Trump in 2020, voters there also supported Issue 1 last week.

The western portion of the district, which is much more rural, is reliably Republican. Majewski won Fulton, Defiance, and Williams counties by double digits, underperforming Trump by 19 points on average across the three counties.

Overall, the average Republican has a 3.6 percentage point advantage in the 9th, according to *Inside Elections'* Baseline.

The GOP Primary

Republicans' ability to unseat Kaptur largely depends on who emerges from the March 19 primary contest. Right now, three candidates are on the ballot: Majewski, Riedel, and former Napoleon Mayor Steve Lankenau.

Though Kaptur's margin of victory last November was higher than many expected, her advantage in the general election was clear once reports came out that Majewski had misrepresented his military service record and professional career. Republican outside groups stopped spending in this race, and Democrats hammered Majewski relentlessly in TV ads.

Majewski, 43, snuck through the 2022 primary as Riedel and Republican state Sen. Theresa Gavarone, the two presumptive frontrunners, focused their attacks on each other.

The Ottawa County native had a local reputation for his devotion



J.R. Majewski

to Trump — in 2020, he painted a 19,000 square-foot Trump flag on his front lawn, catching the attention of some national media. One "Let's Go Brandon" song (one of several with that title) also featured Majewski rapping a verse.

Majewski was one of several congressional candidates at the "Stop the Steal" rally on Jan. 6, 2021; while Majewski says he didn't break any police barriers, Media Matters publicized a clip of Majewski saying he made it to the base of the Capitol. And though Majewski disavowed QAnon during his campaign, his internet presence told a different story.

In the 2022 primary, Majewski received some outside help from the Drain the DC Swamp PAC, which spent about \$200,000 boosting Majewski and another \$170,000 attacking Riedel and Gavarone. (The PAC was largely funded by a reclusive Colorado industrial heir.)

He won the primary with 36 percent of the vote, largely drawing support from Lucas, Erie, Ottawa, and Sandusky counties. Riedel came in second with 31 percent, and Gavarone came in third with 29 percent.

After the primary, the AP reported that Majewski had misrepresented multiple aspects of his military career. Majewski, who called himself a combat veteran and said he had deployed to Afghanistan, actually deployed to Qatar (a U.S. ally), according to military records. The records also showed that Majewski had been demoted during his four-year

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stint and was not allowed to re-enlist. Though his campaign blamed a “brawl” for the demotion, further reporting from the AP uncovered that Majewski had been demoted for drunk driving.

At the end of August, the *Toledo Blade* reported that the Air Force had retroactively added the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal to Majewski’s record. The medal is awarded to service members who deployed as a part of Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom for at least 30 consecutive days, or 60 nonconsecutive days.

Majewski’s post-military career was also called into question. He claimed to work as an executive at a nuclear energy company, though his campaign later said that he had been on conference calls with executives. Bankruptcy records also contradict Majewski’s resume on LinkedIn.

Majewski initially announced his 2024 campaign at the beginning of April, then dropped out of the race a month later, citing his mother’s health. But at the beginning of October, Majewski jumped back in the race. As of the end of September, Majewski had raised \$48,000.

Riedel, 57, has become the preferred candidate of Republican leaders. He’s picked up endorsements from Majority Leader Steve Scalise, Majority Whip Tom Emmer, Conference Chair Elise Stefanik, and Ohio Rep. Jim Jordan. The Charles Koch-affiliated American for Prosperity Action also started door-knocking for Riedel this month.

A civil engineer by trade, Riedel worked for Nucor Vulcraft Group for 27 years before retiring in 2015. He unseated then-GOP state Rep. Tony Burkley in the 2016 primary, and won

the general election unopposed. For three terms, Riedel represented the northwestern corner of the state. His state legislative district included Defiance County, where Riedel resides, and other counties outside of the 9th.

The staunch conservative was backed by Jordan (whose district is a little further south) in the 2022 primary, and he pledged to join the Freedom Caucus if he was elected to Congress.

Riedel has built up a significant fundraising lead over his primary opponents. He raised \$500,000 in the second quarter and \$200,000 in the third quarter, and he ended September with half a million dollars in his campaign account.

Lankenau, 60, is running a credible campaign, but so far hasn’t been able to raise much money. He raised \$68,000 in the second quarter and just \$5,000 in the third quarter.

From 1988 to 1993, Lankenau served as mayor of Napoleon (pop. 8,794), which is just outside of the 9th. Since then, he’s worked as a real estate broker in the region, and he currently lives in Defiance.

Lankenau has taken a more moderate approach to his campaign, focusing on economic issues and pushing back on Trump’s claims of election fraud. During the UAW strike, Lankenau went to the picket line and released a statement supporting the workers on strike.

Despite his baggage, Majewski could make this a competitive primary — particularly if Trump, who backed Majewski in 2022, gets involved. Trump gave Majewski a shout-out at an Ohio rally about a week before

the primary, and then officially endorsed him in June.

“There’s a lot of folks who still believe J.R. has the inside track,” one Republican strategist from northwest Ohio told *Inside Elections*.

And if Lankenau picks up steam, he could pull support from Riedel and lower the ceiling Majewski would need to win the primary. But right now, Riedel’s allies are confident that he’s well-positioned to win the nomination, and see it as a two-race between Riedel and Majewski.

“Majewski caught lightning in a bottle once,” one Riedel ally said. “It’s a lot harder to do when everyone is watching you and it’s a one-on-one race.”

If the primary looks competitive, Republicans in D.C. are prepared to get involved, and outside groups like the Congressional Leadership Fund could go on offense against Majewski.

At the same time, there’s a chance Democratic outside groups could meddle in this primary too; in 2022, the DCCC, House Majority PAC, and other Democratic groups aired ads boosting Trump-aligned candidates in competitive races, in hopes that their nominees would have a better shot at winning against them.

Democrats who spoke with *Inside Elections* acknowledged that was a possibility in 2024, though they disagreed about the merits of playing in the GOP primary.

Democrats “should not be bashful” about boosting Majewski, one Democratic strategist in Ohio said, arguing it might be the only way to hold this district.

“I don’t think Republicans are going to give us a free pass this time around, so I’m not sure it’s worth playing in,” another Democratic strategist said, saying that they expect outside Republican groups to invest in this race regardless of who becomes the nominee (unlike in 2022).

The Incumbent

Kaptur, called “the mayor of northwest Ohio” by some Democratic operatives, has represented this region in Congress for more than half of her lifetime.

After working in President Jimmy Carter’s administration as an urban policy adviser, she was recruited to challenge then-Rep. Ed Weber, who was elected in the red wave of the 1980 cycle. The Republican congressman spent twice as much as Kaptur, who held a bake sale to raise funds for her campaign and won the support of local unions. Kaptur ultimately won by 19 points, in “what represented one of the most striking labor victories anywhere in the nation,” according to the 1984 edition of *CQ’s Politics in America*.

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, she faced minimal opposition for re-election. Redistricting in 2012 forced her to run against fellow Democrat Dennis Kucinich, but she represented a significantly larger portion of the district than Kucinich and won the primary by 16 points.

Her Toledo-based district remained solidly blue until Ohio’s latest redistricting cycle. Under the new congressional map, she lost the Democratic suburbs of Cleveland and gained bright red counties in the northwestern corner of the state.

As the daughter of a UAW organizer, Kaptur has deep roots with unions in Toledo, where she was born and raised. She was a longtime critic of the North American Free Trade Act, and fellow critic Ross Perot asked her to join his presidential ticket in 1996 (she declined). More recently, she’s criticized Biden for promoting policies that could hurt local manufacturing.

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Craig Riedel

Courtesy Riedel Campaign

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Kaptur is a member of the powerful House Appropriations Committee, and is the ranking member of its Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development. As the committee's most senior Democrat, Kaptur ran to chair the full committee in 2020 but ultimately threw her support behind Rep. Rosa DeLauro (she also vied for the top Democratic spot on the committee in 2012, losing to then-Rep. Nita Lowey).



Marcy Kaptur

Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call

One Ohio Democrat who was otherwise pessimistic about Kaptur's chances in 2024 noted that her office's well-regarded constituency services could help her. "Her constituency service is really, really good, and it's a known thing throughout the state," they told *Inside Elections*.

Kaptur's age has naturally sparked questions about her eventual retirement. But Democrats close to Kaptur are confident that she'll run for re-election in 2024 — though she's never been a strong fundraiser, she had \$1 million in her campaign account at the end of September, a clear sign that she's running for her 22nd term.

At the beginning of the year, after setting the record for the longest-serving woman in Congress, she quipped, "I gotta stay as long as Mitch McConnell."

Kaptur's campaign team includes pollsters Zac McCrary and Brian Stryker of Impact Research, and media consultant David Heller of Main Street Communications.

How It Plays Out

Until Republicans have a nominee, it's difficult to tell how vulnerable Kaptur will be in 2024. Unless Majewski wins again, Republicans are almost guaranteed to invest heavily in this race, which they see as one of their best pick-up opportunities in the country.

Though Democrats acknowledge they got lucky in 2022, they're also confident in the congresswoman's brand — especially after she had the opportunity to blanket the airwaves with positive ads in 2022, without facing attacks from Republicans.

"Before last cycle, she was reasonably well known but not well defined," one Kaptur ally said. "I think the 2022 campaign applied a lot of teflon." Kaptur spent \$2.7 million on TV ads in 2022, according to AdImpact, and Toledo's cheap media market gave her campaign the ability to stretch those dollars across 18 different TV ads.

That investment paid dividends. At the end of the 2022 cycle, Republican polling showed Kaptur's image was positive by more than 10 points, while Majewski's image was nearly 25 points underwater.

Her 2022 message was largely focused on economic issues, touting her work for the auto industry and veterans' health care, and cultural issues, highlighting her support for law enforcement and standing for the national anthem. Multiple ads featured endorsements from local sheriffs.

Her staunch support for the UAW strike helps burnish her labor credentials, though the strike itself isn't likely to be a top issue in 2024.

Those issues will be front and center of the campaign again, though this time, she'll likely be forced to defend her 40-year record.

Republicans have started criticizing Kaptur for her effectiveness as a lawmaker, hitting her for only sponsoring five bills that became law across her congressional career. And in a district that leans slightly Republican, she could face criticism for voting against GOP bills on border security and education that largely passed on party lines.

"I don't think it takes much to break the 'Toledo's grandma image,'" one Republican operative told *Inside Elections*.

Unlike in most other competitive House races last cycle, the issue of abortion was largely on the back burner in 2022 — Democrats had plenty of other ammo to attack Majewski. House Majority PAC spent nearly \$2 million going after Majewski for misrepresenting his military service and joining protesters at the Capitol on Jan. 6.

But the issue could be more salient in 2024, especially if Majewski isn't the nominee. Three counties in the district that Trump won in 2020 — Erie, Ottawa, and Wood — voted in support of Issue 1 last week. Overall, Issue 1 won in the district by low double digits, affirming that running on abortion rights is an effective message for Democrats in the 9th.

Kaptur, who is Catholic, has taken some pro-life stances in the past — in 2012, it cost her the top spot on the Appropriations Committee. But since then, she's consistently supported pro-choice policies.

Riedel has a staunch pro-life record. Last year, he co-sponsored a bill that bans abortion at the point of conception, with an exception only for protecting the life of the mother.

The Top of the Ticket

Kaptur's greatest vulnerability in 2024 is out of her control — she's on a ticket with an unpopular incumbent president who is expected to lose this district again. Both Democratic and Republican strategists expect the Republican presidential nominee, likely Trump, to win this district by at least a few points.

Though Kaptur dramatically overperformed Biden's 2020 margin, that'll be a more difficult task in 2024, with the president at the top of the ticket. Kaptur was one of the first House Democrats to break with Biden in campaign ads last cycle, and she'll need to create that distance again.

Though it won't have nearly as much of an impact as the presidential race, the U.S. Senate race could give Kaptur a bit of a boost. Democratic Sen. Sherrod Brown has a history of overperforming in northwest Ohio — he would have won the 9th by 17 points in 2018.

Outperforming the top of the ticket is becoming increasingly difficult for House members. In 2020, only 16 congressional districts voted for one party at the presidential level while sending a member of the opposing party to Congress.

One Ohio Democratic strategist expected that Kaptur would need to run about 5 points ahead of the president to win in 2024. "There are far and few between who can do that," he warned.

The Bottom Line

Throughout her long congressional career, Kaptur has proven to be a hard worker, and she's had a few opportunities to outperform expectations on the campaign trail. Though Majewski's nomination gave her an enormous advantage in 2022, she also has a known brand in northwest Ohio that makes her uniquely well-positioned to win this district, which is slipping away from Democrats.

"I think this is a seat that is probably gone once Kaptur retires," one Democratic operative admitted to *Inside Elections*. But if a mainstream Republican candidate wins the GOP primary in 2024, her long tenure may come to an end regardless.

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particularly Jon Tester of Montana and Sherrod Brown of Ohio, who are facing re-election in hostile partisan environments next year. Beshear, the son of former Democratic Gov. Steve Beshear, showed it's possible to cultivate a political brand that transcends partisanship, and his fundraising advantage gave him the ability to cement that brand.

Overall, Democrats outspent Republicans \$48 million to \$29 million on television ads, including Beshear's sizable advantage over Cameron. As in key 2022 Senate races, the



Andy Beshear

Courtesy Office of Andy Beshear

same dynamic could take place in key 2024 Senate races, in spite of GOP efforts to fix the problem of underfunded challengers from last cycle by recruiting self-funders in several key states.

Even though Kentucky is far from a presidential battleground, it has been a decent bellwether. The last five races for governor in the Bluegrass State have lined up with the following year's presidential winner going back to GOP Rep. Ernie Fletcher's win in 2003. Steve Beshear's victories in 2007 and 2011 preceded both of Barack Obama's wins. Republican Matt Bevin's 2015 victory preceded Trump's rise. And Andy Beshear's defeat of Bevin in 2019 came ahead of Biden's defeat of Trump.

Beshear's victory also has potential implications for the U.S. Senate, specifically if Sen. Mitch McConnell resigns before his term ends. Republican state legislators passed a law requiring the governor to make an appointment from a list of three potential successors of the same party as the outgoing senator. But Beshear has said he believes the law is unconstitutional, and so there is risk of McConnell being replaced by a Democrat and affecting the balance of power in the Senate.

Mississippi

Democrats fell short in Mississippi, where the party had high hopes for Public Service Commissioner Brandon Presley in his race against Republican Gov. Tate Reeves, who has been dealing with the lingering effects of a welfare scandal and the closure of rural hospitals. Reeves clinched a victory, 52-47 percent, a slightly narrower margin than he won by in 2019.

Turnout was down significantly from that year, and Presley wasn't able to juice Black voter participation as he had hoped. Unlike other races around the country on Tuesday, Reeves' underperformance had more to do with his own scandals, rather than access to abortion, Biden, or Trump.

Ohio

Issue 1, which enshrines reproductive rights in the state constitution, passed by a wide margin, 57 percent to 43 percent, in a resounding victory for Democrats and the abortion rights movement. On the heels of previous victories on abortion rights referenda in Kansas and Michigan, the Ohio result will embolden Democrats to continue to run on the issue into the 2024 elections.

Democrats even used the abortion issue against Cameron in Kentucky's gubernatorial race. It's impossible to isolate a single issue in a complex campaign, but there's no evidence it hindered Beshear winning reelection and may have helped him.

Virginia

Races in Virginia tend to get a disproportionate amount of attention because national political reporters see ads for the Virginia races in the Washington, D.C. media market. Recent weekends watching football have been filled with political attack ads.

This year's races gained even more attention because GOP Gov. Glenn Youngkin's efforts to control the state Assembly kindled talk of a presidential run. Talk about that long-shot bid likely died when Republicans failed to take state Senate control and lost their majority in the state House. And Youngkin's attempt to soften the GOP's image on abortion by publicly supporting a 15-week ban, as opposed to something stricter, fell flat as well.

Democrats are projected to hold the state Senate and take over the state House. Coming into Election Day, Republicans had a 52-48 advantage in the state House and Democrats had a 22-18 advantage in the state Senate. Even though his name wasn't on the ballot, Youngkin went all in and was defeated.

Rhode Island

Former Biden administration official Gabe Amo won Rhode Island's 1st District special election to replace former Democratic Rep. David



Gabe Amo

Daniela Altamirano/CQ Roll Call

Cicilline, 65-35 percent, to become the newest member of Congress. Amo already did the hard work in the election by winning the crowded Democratic primary on Sept. 5 with 32 percent. Last week's general election was more of a formality.

After Amo is sworn in, the lone vacancy will be in Utah's 2nd District. That is likely to be filled by Republican Celeste Maloy after the special general election on Nov. 21.

Mayoral Races

In Texas, Democratic Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee is headed for a Dec. 9 runoff for the Houston mayoral race, where she'll face Democratic state Sen. John Whitmire. Whitmire finished first in the field of 18 candidates Tuesday, with 43 percent to Jackson Lee's 37 percent.

In Colorado, Aurora Mayor / former GOP Rep. Mike Coffman won his race for re-election, 54 percent to 39 percent. Coffman was defeated by Democrat Jason Crow by more than 10 points in the 6th District in 2018 and was elected mayor of Aurora in 2019.

New Jersey

Even though there was some buzz about Republicans making gains in New Jersey's Democratic-controlled state legislature, Democrats are on track to pick up five seats in the state Assembly and hold their majority margin in the state Senate.

Pennsylvania

Democrats retained their 5-2 advantage on the Pennsylvania Supreme Court with Democrat Daniel McCaffrey's 53 percent to 47 percent win over Republican Carolyn Carluccio. The court's makeup could matter for future litigation about abortion and election laws.



Report Shorts

Arizona's 6th District. Kathleen Winn, who came in third place in the 2022 GOP primary this seat, is challenging first-term Rep. Juan Ciscomani. Winn, a former community outreach director for the Arizona Attorney General's Office, is running to Ciscomani's right in the August 6 primary, and could weaken the incumbent ahead of a competitive general election. Former state Sen. Kirsten Engel is the likely Democratic nominee in this Tuscon-based district. Tilt Republican.

Colorado's 4th District. GOP Rep. Ken Buck is headed for the exits. The five-term congressman from the rural Eastern Colorado district was at the center of some of the biggest fights this Congress, voting to oust Speaker Kevin McCarthy but then refusing to back Ohio Rep. Jim Jordan for the job either, on account of his refusal to accept the validity of the 2020 election. Buck has come a long way from his fiery conservative campaign for Senate in 2010, which likely cost the GOP a seat in the upper chamber. The field vying to replace him is big and getting bigger: radio host/2022 Senate candidate Deborah Flora, state Rep. Richard Holtorf, and Weld County Councilor Trent Leisy are all in, and a dozen other current and former officeholders will take a look at the race. Solid Republican.



Deborah Flora

Courtesy Flora Campaign

Florida's 27th District. Miami-Dade County School Board Member Lucia Báez-Geller launched her campaign last week, giving Democrats a credible challenger. GOP Rep. Maria Elvira Salazar, who's carved out a more moderate brand in the conference, remains favored to win re-election in this South Florida seat. Likely Republican.

Iowa's 3rd District. Democrat Lanon Baccam entered the race against first-term GOP Rep. Zach Nunn in this southwest Iowa district. Baccam is a former Department of Agriculture official and an Army veteran who also worked on Biden's 2020 campaign in Iowa. Mental health counselors Melissa Vine and Tracy Limon are also in the race. Baccam has endorsements from Secretary of Agriculture/former Iowa Gov. Tom Vilsack and state Auditor Rob Sand, the last remaining statewide Democrat. Tilt Republican.

Maryland's 6th District. Commerce Department official April McClain-Delaney jumped into the race for the Democratic nomination in this open Western Maryland seat. The wife of former 6th District Rep. John Delaney could spend significant personal resources on her bid and joins a crowded Democratic field that is growing by the week and still lacks a frontrunner. Former state Del. Dan Cox filed to run as a Republican. Cox, who organized buses to the rally on the National Mall that precipitated the Jan. 6 riots at the Capitol, was the GOP's 2022 nominee for governor; in that race he lost this district by 8 points, 52-44 percent. He joins Navy veteran Tom Royals, Air Force veteran Mariela Roca, and former state Del. Brenda Thiam in the primary. Likely Democratic.

2024 House Open Seats

District	Outgoing Member	2022 Result	2020 Presidential Result	Rating
AL-02	Barry Moore (R)	New	Biden 56%	Likely Democratic
AZ-03	Ruben Gallego (D)	77%	Biden 75%	Solid Democratic
AZ-08	Debbie Lesko (R)	96%	Trump 56%	Solid Republican
CA-12	Barbara Lee (D)	91%	Biden 89%	Solid Democratic
CA-30	Adam Schiff (D)	71%	Biden 72%	Solid Democratic
CA-31	Grace Napolitano (D)	60%	Biden 65%	Solid Democratic
CA-47	Katie Porter (D)	52%	Biden 55%	Tilt Democratic
CO-04	Ken Buck (R)	61%	Trump 58%	Solid Republican
DE-AL	Lisa Blunt Rochester (D)	56%	Biden 59%	Solid Democratic
IN-03	Jim Banks (R)	65%	Trump 64%	Solid Republican
IN-05	Victoria Spartz (R)	61%	Trump 57%	Solid Republican
MD-03	John Sarbanes (D)	60%	Biden 62%	Solid Democratic
MD-06	David Trone (D)	55%	Biden 54%	Likely Democratic
MI-07	Elissa Slotkin (D)	52%	Biden 49.4%	Toss-up
MN-03	Dean Phillips (DFL)	60%	Biden 60%	Solid Democratic
NC-08	Dan Bishop (R)	New	Trump 58%	Solid Republican
NC-14	Jeff Jackson (D)	New	Trump 57%	Likely Republican
NJ-03	Andy Kim (D)	56%	Biden 56%	Solid Democratic
NY-26	Brian Higgins (D)*	64%	Biden 61%	Solid Democratic
OH-02	Brad Wenstrup (R)	75%	Trump 72%	Solid Republican
OR-03	Earl Blumenauer (D)	70%	Biden 73%	Solid Democratic
TX-12	Kay Granger (R)	64%	Trump 58%	Solid Republican
TX-32	Colin Allred (D)	65%	Biden 66%	Solid Democratic
VA-07	Abigail Spanberger (D)	52%	Biden 53%	Tilt Democratic
VA-10	Jennifer Wexton (D)	53%	Biden 58%	Likely Democratic
WA-06	Derek Kilmer (D)	60%	Biden 57%	Solid Democratic
WV-02	Alex Mooney (R)	66%	Trump 68%	Solid Republican

*Feb. 2024 resignation followed by special election
New = Newly-drawn district

Minnesota's 3rd District. While DFL Rep. Dean Phillips is challenging President Joe Biden in the Democratic primary, DFL state Sen. Kelly Morrison announced her campaign for Phillips' 3rd District seat in the Twin Cities suburbs. The filing deadline to run for Congress in Minnesota is not until June 4, but this could be a sign that Phillips is not planning to run for re-election as a fall-back plan. Solid Democratic.

New York's 16th District. Westchester County Executive George Latimer is expected to challenge Rep. Jamaal Bowman in the Democratic primary, as the congressman has faced criticism from some of his Jewish constituents over his position on the Israel-Hamas war, and also lingering embarrassment from his fire-alarm stunt at the Capitol complex from last month, for which he pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor. Latimer would be a far more serious opponent than the two county legislators who held Bowman to just 54 percent in his primary last year, especially if the state's

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congressional maps aren't redrawn and the district remains dominated by Westchester without a significant Bronx contingent. Solid Democratic.

New York's 26th District. Democrat Brian Higgins, who has represented Buffalo for 10 terms in Congress, will resign in February to take a job as the president of a performing arts venue. When Higgins leaves office, Democratic Gov. Kathy Hochul will call a special election to fill the seat within 70 to 80 days. Each party's nominee will be selected by the party leaders in the district's two counties, Erie and Niagara, rather than traditional primaries. The district will remain in Democratic hands — it voted for Biden by 24 points in 2020. Solid Democratic.

Ohio's 2nd District. Longtime GOP Rep. Brad Wenstrup is headed for the exits. Donald Trump won this deep red, Cincinnati-based district by 45 points in 2020, and the race will likely feature a crowded GOP primary next year that will effectively pick the next member of Congress. Solid Republican.

Texas' 12th District. GOP Rep. Kay Granger, the dean of Texas' congressional delegation and chair of the House Appropriations Committee, announced she was retiring. Multiple Republicans have announced campaigns for this seat, which is anchored in Fort Worth. State House Republican Caucus Chair Craig Goldman announced a campaign. He'll face competition from construction company owner John O'Shea, who was already primarying Granger and is endorsed by indicted Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton. The filing deadline for candidates is Dec. 11. Solid Republican.

Virginia's 7th District. As expected, Rep. Abigail Spanberger announced she would not seek re-election to focus instead on a 2025 campaign for governor. In the short-term, that's a blow to Democrats, as Spanberger was one of the party's strongest fundraisers. But the partisan lean of the seat still favors her party, which will now have to contend with a large primary field that could include state Del. Elizabeth Guzman, 2023 state senate nominee Joel Griffin, Prince William school board chair Babur Lateef, state Sen-elect. Jennifer Carroll Foy, former state Del. Hala Ayala, and more. On the GOP side, retired Green Beret and attorney Derrick Anderson is the establishment favorite — he placed second in the primary for this seat last cycle. But there are several other Republicans running. Tilt Democratic.

Virginia's 10th District. State Sen. Jennifer Boysko is running for the Democratic nomination to succeed retiring Rep. Jennifer Wexton, joining former state House Speaker Eileen Filler-Corn in what will be a crowded primary in this Northern Virginia district. State Del. Michelle Maldonado is expected to enter the race soon, and state Del. Dan Helmer may also run. Helmer finished fourth with 13 percent in the 2018 Democratic primary won by Wexton. On the GOP side, the only candidate so far is Mike Clancy, an attorney who came in fourth place in the 2022 GOP primary for the seat. Likely Democratic.

Washington's 6th District. Democratic Rep. Derek Kilmer, who represents the Olympic Peninsula, announced he was exiting Congress after a decade of service. The 49-year-old's announcement came as a surprise to Democrats in the Evergreen State. The race is looking like a contest between state Commissioner of Public Lands Hilary Franz, who ended her gubernatorial campaign to run for the 6th, and state Sen. Emily Randall, who's preparing a congressional campaign. Solid Democratic.



2024 Presidential Ratings (Electoral Votes)

Toss-Up (56)			
Arizona (11)	Georgia (16)	Pennsylvania (19)	Wisconsin (10)
Tilt Democratic (21)		Tilt Republican (16)	
Michigan (15)		North Carolina (16)	
Nevada (6)			
Lean Democratic (15)		Lean Republican (31)	
Minnesota (10)	Nebraska 2nd (1)	Florida (30)	
New Hampshire (4)		Maine 2nd (1)	
Likely Democratic (15)		Likely Republican (63)	
Maine Statewide (2)		Iowa (6)	Texas (40)
Virginia (13)		Ohio (17)	
Solid Democratic (196)		Solid Republican (125)	
California (54)	New York (28)	Alabama (9)	Nebraska 1st (1)
Colorado (10)	Oregon (8)	Alaska (3)	Nebraska 3rd (1)
Connecticut (7)	Rhode Island (4)	Arkansas (6)	North Dakota (3)
Delaware (3)	Vermont (3)	Idaho (4)	Oklahoma (7)
District of Columbia (3)	Washington (12)	Indiana (11)	South Carolina (9)
Hawaii (4)		Kansas (6)	South Dakota (3)
Illinois (19)		Kentucky (8)	Tennessee (11)
Maine 1st (1)		Louisiana (8)	Utah (6)
Maryland (10)		Mississippi (6)	West Virginia (4)
Massachusetts (11)		Missouri (10)	Wyoming (3)
New Jersey (14)		Montana (4)	
New Mexico (5)		Nebraska Statewide (2)	
		GOP	DEM
		2020 Results	232 306
		2024 Ratings	235 247
		Toss-up	56
		Needed to Win	270

2024 Gubernatorial Ratings

Toss-up (2)	
NC Open (Cooper, D)	NH Open (Sununu, R)
Tilt Democratic	Tilt Republican
Lean Democratic	Lean Republican
Likely Democratic (1)	Likely Republican
WA Open (Inslie, D)	
Solid Democratic (1)	Solid Republican (7)
DE Open (Carney, D)	IN Open (Holcomb, R)
	MO Open (Parson, R)
	WV Open (Justice, R)
	Burgum, R (N.D.)
	Cox, R (Utah)
	Gianforte, R (Mont.)
	Scott, R (Vt.)

Takeovers in italics, # moved benefiting Democrats, * moved benefiting Republicans