

Inside Elections

with
Nathan L. Gonzales
Nonpartisan Analysis

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Colorado 8: Toss-up Tussle

By Jacob Rubashkin

On a good night for Democrats across the country last November, Colorado stood out as a particularly bright spot. Nowhere was that more clear than in Colorado's 8th District, a newly created seat outside Denver that both Republicans and Democrats anticipated would go Republican in the midterm elections.

In a minor upset, Democrat Yadira Caraveo won the seat, becoming the Centennial State's first Latina congresswoman and establishing the district's identity as a Democratic seat — at least for now.

But Caraveo also has the distinction of winning her 2022 election with a lower percentage of the vote — 48.38 percent — than any other sitting member of the House. And at 1,632 votes, her margin of victory was far less than the total number of votes won by the Libertarian candidate.

That makes her a top target of House Republicans — who view the 8th District as the one that got away — this cycle. While this race is not at the very top of the GOP priority list, which is occupied by a handful of open seats and Democratic incumbents in Trump districts, it has the potential to be among the closest races in the nation next fall, with implications for both parties' path to the majority, and for the future of a beleaguered Colorado Republican Party.

The Lay of the Land

A brand-new seat drawn just two years ago, Colorado's 8th District is perched directly north of the state capital, Denver. The 8th begins at the city's border and extends north through western Adams County and into Weld County, and has a mix of suburban and more rural communities.

Roughly 62 percent of the district's votes are cast by Adams County, with 34 percent coming out of Weld County and the balance from Larimer County.

The district gets more Republican as it goes north: Biden carried the Adams County portion by 16 points in 2020 but lost Weld and Larimer by a combined 15 points. Adams County is also trending toward Democrats faster. Hillary Clinton won Adams by just 8 points in 2016, meaning the county moved 8 points leftward in 2020. But Trump had won Weld and Larimer by 18 points in 2016; that portion of the district

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2024 House Ratings

Toss-Up (5D, 7R)

CA 13 (Duarte, R)	NY 3 (Vacant, 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 (6D)

CA 47 (Open; Porter, D)
MI 8 (Open; Kildee, 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)	NJ 7 (Kean Jr., R)
AZ 6 (Ciscomani, R)	NY 19 (Molinaro, R)
CA 22 (Valadao, R)	VA 2 (Kiggans, R)
CO 3 (Boebert, R)	
IA 3 (Nunn, R)	
MI 10 (James, 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 (7R)

CA 41 (Calvert, R)
CA 45 (Steel, R)
IA 1 (Miller-Meeke, 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 (12D, 1R)

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

CALENDAR

Dec. 25	Christmas Day
Jan. 8	College Football National Championship
Jan. 15	Iowa GOP Presidential Caucuses
Jan. 23	New Hampshire GOP Primary

Report Shorts

Alaska's At-Large District. Republican Lt. Gov. Nancy Dahlstrom announced her campaign against Democratic Rep. Mary Peltola. Republicans are optimistic that Dahlstrom can pull together various wings of the state Republican Party, but the race is complicated by Alaska's ranked-choice voting system and 2022 GOP candidate Nick Begich's campaign. Lean Democratic.

California Senate. HR company executive Lexi Reese was struggling to gain traction in the Democratic race against Reps. Adam Schiff, Katie Porter and Barbara Lee and finally dropped out of the race. Those remaining Democrats might be battling for one of the top two spots in the March 5 primary if former Major League Baseball player Steve Garvey can consolidate Republican voters. Solid Democratic.

Florida's 27th District. Miami-Dade County School Board Member Lucia Báez-Geller launched her campaign, 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.

Michigan Senate. State Board of Education President Pamela Pugh dropped out of the Senate race and will run for the open 8th District seat instead. That makes the path to the Democratic Senate nomination clearer for Rep. Elissa Slotkin, who still must get by actor Hill Harper. Meanwhile, the Republican primary is getting more crowded, now that 2018 Senate candidate Sandy Pensler has entered the race. Lean Democratic.

Minnesota's 3rd District. DFL Rep. Dean Phillips, who is running for president in the Democratic primary against President Joe Biden, announced he will not seek re-election. Biden won his suburban Twin Cities district with 60 percent in 2020, so the open seat should stay in Democratic hands except in a great Republican year. Solid Democratic.

New Mexico's 2nd District. Republican legal efforts to change the Democratic gerrymander were unsuccessful as the state supreme court upheld the current map. Democratic Rep. Gabe Vasquez remains vulnerable, but the district could have been redrawn to be more Republican. Former Rep. Yvette Herrell is running again on the Republican side. Toss-up.

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*

New York's 3rd District. The House of Representatives expelled GOP Rep. George Santos, setting up a competitive special election in a district Biden carried in 2020. Former Democratic Rep. Tom Suozzi was already running for the regular election. The special will take place in three months; the nominees are chosen by party leaders. Toss-up.

Utah's 2nd District. Republican Celeste Maloy won the special election to replace her former boss, Rep. Chris Stewart. While there was some buzz that the race might be closer than usual because of recent Democratic success in other elections around the country, she won by about the same margin as Stewart did in 2022. Solid Republican. **IE**

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Washington 6: Democrats Face a Fork in the Road

By Erin Covey

After serving in Congress for the past decade, Democratic Rep. Derek Kilmer is headed for the exits. The 49-year-old congressman spent much of his congressional career focused on attempting to make the institution more functional, and was a leader of the New Democrat Coalition, a caucus of more moderate House Democrats.

A competitive primary is now shaping up in Washington 6th's District — for the first time in almost 50 years. Former Democratic Rep. Norm Dicks held this seat for 36 years before retiring and clearing the field for Kilmer to succeed him in 2012. Kilmer easily won that general election, and faced minimal opposition in the next five election cycles.

All candidates will run on the same primary ballot next August under Washington's top-two primary system, and the most likely outcome is a Republican and a Democrat coming in first and second place. The Democratic nominee would be the heavy favorite in the general election for this blue district.

The Lay of the Land

Washington's 6th District encompasses most of Tacoma, Washington's third-largest city, along the Kitsap Peninsula and the Olympic Peninsula. Though more rural parts of the district have trended in favor of Republicans in the Trump era, the Seattle suburbs and Tacoma have moved to the left, keeping the district solidly blue.

Joe Biden won the district by 17 points in 2020, and Kilmer won re-election by 20 points in 2022. According to *Inside Elections'* Baseline metric, Democrats have a 10-point advantage in the 6th.

The forested Olympic Peninsula is sparsely populated — Olympic National Park, which is nearly a million square acres, stretches across the region.

Grays Harbor County and Mason County, working class counties in the southern portion of the peninsula dominated by the logging industry, historically supported Democrats but have leaned more Republican in recent years. When Donald Trump narrowly won Grays Harbor in 2016, he was the first Republican presidential candidate to do so since Herbert Hoover.

Trump won Grays Harbor by 7 points in 2020 — though Kilmer's 2022 opponent, Republican Elizabeth Kreiselmaier, only won it by 0.18 points. And Kreiselmaier won Mason County by just 0.42 points, after Trump won it by 4.

Clallam County, on the northern tip of the peninsula, is a rare bellwether — it's the only county in the country that's voted for the presidential winner in every election cycle since 1980 (Biden won it by 3 points in 2020, and Trump won it by 3 points in 2016). Kilmer, a Clallam County native, won it by 9 points last November.

Jefferson County, just south of Clallam, has one incorporated town — Port Townsend, a seaport on the Puget Sound that's home to mostly wealthy, liberal-leaning retirees. Kilmer easily won it by a 45-point margin in 2022.

Kitsap County, which includes the Kitsap Peninsula and Bainbridge Island on Puget Sound, leans Democratic — Biden won it by 18 points in 2020 and Kilmer won it by 22 points in 2022. It includes the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard and Naval Base Kitsap, which gives Washington's 6th District the eleventh-largest veteran population of any district in the country.

The rest of the district is in Pierce County, which includes Tacoma and the surrounding suburbs. Biden and Kilmer both carried the portion of Pierce in the district by 29 points.

The Potential Field

Within 24 hours of Kilmer's announcement, state Commissioner of Public Lands Hilary Franz announced she was ending her gubernatorial campaign to run for the open congressional seat. Franz quickly secured endorsements from Kilmer and Dicks, the former congressman.

For the past several months, Franz had struggled to gain traction in the governor's race. Attorney General Bob Ferguson was always the heavy favorite to win, and won the support of retiring Gov. Jay Inslee in September.

Franz, 53, was first elected to her statewide position in 2016, defeating her Republican opponent by 6 points (she carried the 6th District by 4 points). She'd previously worked as an environmental lawyer and led the nonprofit Futurewise, which advocates for sustainable land-use policies in Washington.

Originally from Portland, Franz moved to Bainbridge Island in the

early aughts, and was a member of the Bainbridge Island City Council from 2008 to 2011. Currently Franz lives in Grays Harbor, though she also owns a home in Seattle.

In 2020, Franz won re-election by 14 points, carrying the 6th by 12 points.



Courtesy Randall Campaign

Emily Randall

State Sen. Emily Randall, a Kitsap County native, was the second Democrat to launch a campaign for this seat. Randall represents parts of Kitsap and Pierce counties, about one-fifth of the 6th's population.

Randall worked for Planned Parenthood as a philanthropy officer before running for the state legislature in 2018 (winning the same seat that Kilmer held from 2007 to 2012). She represents one of three competitive legislative districts in Washington — she won her 2018 race by 0.2 points and won re-election by 1.7 points in 2022.

Randall, the state Senate's deputy majority leader, has focused on health care and education issues during her tenure and chairs the higher education and workforce development committee. She's backed by more than two dozen members of the state legislature, along with Washington Secretary of State Steve Hobbs.

Randall would be the first openly gay member of Congress from Washington, and has the support of LGBTQ+ Victory Fund, LPAC, and Equality PAC — national outside groups that could spend in the primary.

A few other Democrats are still weighing bids as well.

Jefferson County Councilmember Kate Dean confirmed to *Inside Elections* that she's "seriously considering" running for the 6th. Dean, who's served on the county council since 2017, co-founded a local cidery and creamery.

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One Democratic strategist in Washington said that Fawn Sharp, president of the National Congress of American Indians, could run. Sharp is the former president of Quinault Indian Nation, which is in Grays Harbor County and Jefferson County and counts around 2,500 enrolled members.

Though Tacoma makes up a large portion of the district, no one from the city has expressed interest in running.

Several other local politicians from Tacoma who were floated as potential candidates — Tacoma Mayor Victoria Woodards, Pierce County Councilmember Ryan Mello, and

Kitsap County Commissioner Christine Rolfes — have endorsed Franz. House Speaker Laurie Jinkins, who represents Tacoma in the legislature, isn't expected to run either.

State Sen. Drew MacEwan is the lone Republican who's likely to run at the moment. MacEwan, who formed an exploratory committee earlier this month, represents Mason County and part of Kitsap (altogether, 12 percent of the congressional district).

If MacEwan is able to consolidate the bulk of the Republican vote, he should have no trouble getting into the general election. But unless there's a dramatic shift in the national political environment, it won't be competitive, and the Democratic nominee should sail to victory.

Washington's primary is fairly late, Aug. 6, so potential candidates have until the May 17 filing deadline to make a final decision.

How It Plays Out

Right now, the race to succeed Kilmer looks like a two-way contest between Franz and Randall.

On paper, Franz should be the favorite. Kilmer's endorsement is significant, and she'll have some name ID from her previous two statewide campaigns (she spent \$257,000 on TV ads in 2020).

"Kilmer's the biggest Democratic name in the district," one Washington Democrat said. Strategists who spoke with *Inside Elections* agreed that the congressman's endorsement would be significant, particularly if Kilmer actively campaigns with Franz. But the same source cautioned that "Kilmer's endorsement could overstate [Franz's] strength."

Washington Democrats who spoke with *Inside Elections* noted that Randall's experience running competitive races puts her in a stronger position than most state legislators running for Congress — she raised over a million dollars for the 2022 race, one of Washington's most expensive state legislative races last cycle (it also drew about \$4 million in outside spending).

"People feel affinity [toward Randall] since she has the big swing seat," one Democratic strategist said.

This primary doesn't appear to be developing into a battle between the progressive and moderate wings of the party, as many Democratic primaries in open blue seats do.

But there's still potential for national outside groups to take sides in the race. Along with the LGBTQ Victory Fund, the Hispanic Caucus' political arm, BOLD PAC, could support Randall, who is Hispanic.

EMILY's List is less likely to get involved in a primary with multiple pro-choice women — particularly when they'll likely need resources to defend Washington Democrats Marie Gluesenkamp Perez and Kim Schrier, who are running for re-election in purple seats. **IE**

Texas 12 & 26: Pair of Bright Red Open Seats

By Erin Covey

Two longtime Republican members of Congress in North Texas are headed to the exits — Kay Granger, who represents Fort Worth and its western suburbs, and Michael Burgess, who represents the suburbs and exurbs north of Cowtown.

Granger, the dean of Texas' 38-member congressional delegation, is one of Congress' most senior members — she chairs the powerful Appropriations Committee, and now in her 14th term, is the sixth most senior Republican in the House. Burgess, who practiced obstetrics before he was elected in 2002, is in his 11th term.

Both North Texas districts are reliably Republican — Donald Trump won the 12th by 18 points and the 26th by 17 points in 2020 — so the next member in both districts will be decided in the GOP primary, set for March 5. If no candidate wins 50 percent of the primary vote, the top two candidates will face each other in a May 28 runoff.

With the Dec. 11 filing deadline rapidly approaching, multiple Republicans have jumped in the race to succeed Burgess in the past few days. The race to succeed Granger, who announced her retirement at the end of October, is less crowded, and most Republicans have consolidated around one state legislator.

The Lay of the Land

Like much of Texas' suburbs, these neighboring districts have changed dramatically since Granger and Burgess were first elected to

Congress more than two decades ago.

In the past two decades, Tarrant County (in the 12th) grew more than any other Texas county except Harris County (Houston), adding 700,000 new residents between 2002 and 2022. Denton County (in the 26th) added more than 500,000 new residents in that same time period.

The two districts are both fairly wealthy. The median household income of the 12th is \$79,000, and the median household income of the 26th is \$105,000.

The 12th District is the more compact of the two, and includes the western half of Tarrant County, dominated by Fort Worth, and a large portion of Parker County.

Tarrant County as a whole has become more Democratic in recent years — Joe Biden won it by a fifth of a point in 2020 — but the portion of it in the 12th still leans Republican; Granger won it by 18 points in 2022, and Trump won it by 8 points two years earlier.

Parker County, west of Tarrant, is a deeper shade of red. Granger won the part of it in the district by 71 points last cycle.

The 26th District is anchored in Denton County but stretches north to the Texas-Oklahoma state line.

Rapidly-growing Denton County, one of the 25 fastest growing counties in the U.S., is home to the vast majority of the 12th's District's population. As of June, more than 1 million Texans live in the county.

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It's become less Republican over the past two decades, particularly at the presidential level — Trump won the portion of Denton in the district by 13 points in 2020. Burgess, however, won it by 34 points in 2022.

Burgess dominated in the more rural counties on the outskirts of his district. He won Cooke County, to the north, by 77 points, and Wise County, to the west, by 74 points.

The 12th District Candidates

Since 1919, only five members of Congress have represented this district. Granger, who was the first Republican woman from Texas elected to Congress, has held the seat for the past two-and-a-half decades, and the 80-year-old's retirement could have sparked a crowded primary.

But at this point, most Republicans in the district have consolidated around state Rep. Craig Goldman, who says he's already raised \$500,000 for his campaign.

Goldman, first elected to the state legislature in 2012, represents the suburbs of Fort Worth in the southwestern portion of Tarrant County.

As chair of the Texas House Republican Caucus, he's managed to lock up support from a host of local officials, including Fort Worth Mayor Mattie Parker and Tarrant County state Reps. Stephanie Klick, Davis Cook, Giovanni Capriglione, and Charlie Geren. Tarrant County Commissioner Manny Ramirez, who had considered running for his seat, also backed Goldman.

But Goldman doesn't have a clear path to the GOP nomination. Local construction company owner John O'Shea, who launched a primary challenge to Granger back in April, is still running, and has the backing of indicted Attorney General Ken Paxton.

Republican strategists who spoke with *Inside Elections* believe Goldman is the clear frontrunner, but as one strategist said, he's "not a shoo-in."

The 26th District Candidates

Burgess' retirement has set off a primary that includes former Rep. Dick Arme's son (who lost to Burgess in a primary 20 years ago), conservative commentator Dinesh D'Souza's son-in-law, and several other Republican candidates.

Dick Arme represented this area from 1985 to 2003, becoming House Majority Leader after the Republican Revolution of 1994. At the time, *Texas Monthly* called him "the most conservative person to rise to the top echelon of American politics since the coming of the New Deal."

When Arme retired, his son Scott Arme was seen as the frontrunner to succeed him. But the younger Arme, then a 33-year-old Denton County judge, ultimately lost to Burgess in the primary runoff by 10 points.

After losing to Burgess, Arme took a job in the Bush administration as a regional administrator of the General Services Administration. He's worked as a private wealth adviser since then, and told the *Dallas Morning News* he had not considered running for Congress again until a few weeks ago.

Brandon Gill, who's married to D'Souza's daughter, is running in the MAGA lane of the primary — he's picked up endorsements from Texas Rep. Troy Nehls and Colorado Rep. Lauren Boebert.

Gill, who's Twitter profile picture features Trump, echoes the former president's conspiracies about the 2020 election. It's not clear if the former president will endorse someone — he's been less involved with

primaries this cycle as he has his own race to run.

The 29-year-old grew up on a cattle ranch outside of Abilene, and worked on Wall Street after graduating from Dartmouth College. In 2022, Gill started the DC Enquirer, a media outlet that describes itself as having an "unabashedly conservative, America First outlook." He moved to the district a year ago.

Gill has loaned his campaign \$250,000, though it's not clear what his capacity to self-fund is.

Luisa del Rosal, a Texas Republican operative and small business owner, is also vying for this seat. Del Rosal served as Rep. Tony Gonzales' chief of staff in 2022, and the West Texas congressman is "working to get other members to back her," according to the *Texas Tribune*.

Del Rosal immigrated to the U.S. from Mexico as a 17-year-old. The SMU graduate has worked in several roles at her alma mater, including leading the school's John G. Tower Center. She currently owns a line striping business in Fort Worth.

Del Rosal ran for a competitive state House seat in 2020, and lost to the Democratic incumbent by 7 points. She currently lives in Dallas, outside of the district, but she's moving to Denton, according to her campaign.

Clint Burgess, who was a Tarrant County Constable for 15 years before losing the 2020 general election to a Democrat, is also running. He has no relation to the congressman, and isn't seen as a top-tier candidate, but his last name could help him in a crowded race.

And on Thursday, Southlake Mayor John Huffman announced that he's running.

Huffman, who owns a home remodeling company, was first elected to mayor in 2021 after serving on the city council for six years. The affluent city (population 31,000) is at the edge of Tarrant County and stretches into Denton.

Corporate securities lawyer Vladimir de Franceschi and Burt Thakur, who ran in California's 25th District in 2022, are running for the Republican nomination as well, though they're viewed as lower-tier contenders right now.

And former state Rep. Ron Simmons, who currently works for the Texas Public Policy Foundation, is also still mulling a bid. He authored the state's controversial bathroom bill in 2017, and lost his Carrollton-based seat the following year. Simmons' daughter, Allie Beth Stuckey, is a conservative influencer.

In such a crowded primary, it doesn't seem likely that one candidate will secure the 50 percent of the primary vote necessary to avoid a runoff.

Right now, the strongest candidates appear to be Arme, del Rosal, and Gill. One Texas Republican strategist estimated that a competitive candidate would need to raise \$2 million; another Texas Republican strategist said a candidate would need \$1 million to make the runoff.

National outside Republican groups like the Club for Growth have yet to take sides. But Dallas' expensive media market could be a barrier to entry — and the Club has had a mixed record in recent Texas House races. The Congressional Leadership Fund was a major player in the competitive GOP primary for Texas' 8th District last cycle, but the group won't play in safe GOP districts in 2024.

The rapid growth in the North Texas suburbs makes this primary particularly volatile. Though the Arme last name was well known 20 years ago, it's unclear how much clout it has 2024, and a little-known outsider like Burgess in 2002 could break through again.

California 31: San Gabriel Showdown

By Jacob Rubashkin

At 86 years old, Grace Napolitano must have outlived some potential successors. But now the oldest member of the House of Representatives has decided to retire.

The San Gabriel Valley Democrat has served 13 terms in Congress, and has often sat at the top of retirement watch lists, especially after suffering a stroke in 2016 in the middle of an endorsement interview with a local group (she still clinched the nod).

While Napolitano did not step aside then, instead defeating a scandal-plagued fellow Democrat by double digits in the general election, she will not run for re-election in 2024.

That opens up the first highly competitive race for this Southern California seat since 1988, when she won her primary by 618 votes.

The Lay of the Land

The 31st District sits squarely within Los Angeles County's San Gabriel Valley, bordering Pasadena to the west, Pomona to the east, and the Angeles National Forest to the north.

Its three biggest cities are West Covina, El Monte, and Baldwin Park, which make up 15 percent, 14 percent, and 10 percent of the district, respectively. The bulk of the district regularly votes for Democrats, but there are high concentrations of Republicans in the eastern part of the seat, in San Dimas, Glendora, and La Verne (Napolitano lost all three cities in 2022).

The citizen voting-age population of the 31st is majority Hispanic (55 percent). White voters (21 percent) and Asian voters (20 percent) make up the bulk of the balance, along with a small number of Black voters (4 percent).

Overall, the 31st is solidly Democratic. Joe Biden would have carried it by 32 points in 2020, 65-33 percent, though Democrats do not always win it by such smashing margins. In 2022, Sen. Alex Padilla led the ticket with a 21-point win in the district, but Gov. Gavin Newsom only eked out a 16-point victory — diminished from his 28-point win in the recall election a year earlier.

The Democratic Candidates

Six candidates have thrown their hats in the ring to replace Napolitano, but Democratic strategists watching the race say the contest may boil down to two: state Sen. Susan Rubio, and former Rep. Gil Cisneros. Also in the mix are state Sen. Bob Archuleta, former Monrovia Mayor Mary Ann Lutz and lawyer Gregory Hafif.

With a looming Dec. 13 filing deadline, it's unlikely that any others join their ranks.

Rubio, 52, represents the 22nd state Senate district in Sacramento, which includes 71 percent of the 31st Congressional District. A schoolteacher, Rubio served on the Baldwin Park City Council from 2009 to 2017. In 2018, she won an upset victory, 52-48 percent, over former state Assemblyman Mike Eng (a Democrat and the husband of Rep. Judy Chu) for a state Senate seat that attracted millions of dollars in outside spending, with Eng backed by organized labor and Rubio by business interests.

Rubio's campaign team for this race includes Derek Humphrey of Overland Strategies (who previously worked for Napolitano) for direct mail and digital and FM3 for polling.

Cisneros, 52, spent one term in Congress representing pieces of Los Angeles, San Bernardino, and Orange counties (his district did not overlap with the new 31st), and most recently served as Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness in the Biden administration. A Navy veteran and former Frito-Lay manager who won a \$266 million lottery jackpot in 2010, Cisneros became a philanthropist and was a top



Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

Gil Cisneros

DCCC recruit in 2018 in the 39th District, where GOP Rep. Ed Royce was retiring. Cisneros spent \$5.7 million of his own fortune in the primary, helping Democrats avoid a lockout in the all-party race, before defeating Republican Young Kim 52-48

percent in the general election. Two years later, Kim sought a rematch and won, 51-49 percent, even as Biden carried the district 54-44 percent. Cisneros only spent \$525,000 of his own money on that contest.

Cisneros' campaign team includes media consultant Orrin Evans of Left Hook Media, pollster Ben Tulchin, and direct mail consultant Achim Bergmann of Bergmann Zwerdling.

At 78, Archuleta would be the oldest freshman member of Congress in history if elected. After serving as mayor of Pico Rivera, Archuleta in 2018 won a state Senate primary that may have hinged on the order of the candidates on the ballot. His state Senate district overlaps with roughly 18 percent of the 31st District. Napolitano has endorsed Archuleta in this primary.

Lutz is a former Napolitano staffer who has held various public posts over the last two decades, including six years on the Monrovia City Council and another six as mayor. She is currently the chair of the board of trustees of Citrus College, a local community college, and owns a court reporting consultancy.

Hafif is a wild card. This is the first foray into politics for the Claremont trial attorney, whose father Herb Hafif was also a prominent lawyer and philanthropist who ran for governor in 1974. The younger Hafif has made headlines for his legal work over the past three decades, most notably representing the estate of Nicole Simpson Brown. Hafif describes himself as a "moderate Democrat" and is self-funding his bid.

Baldwin Park Planning Commissioner Ricardo Vazques is also running but not expected to be a factor.

The Democratic Primary

The primary, in which candidates from all parties will appear on the same ballot and the top two vote-getters will advance to the general election, will take place on March 5 of next year. That's earlier than California used to hold its primary, and coincides with the state's presidential nominating contests (and Super Tuesday nationwide).

At the California Democratic Party's November endorsement convention, delegates split between Rubio, who won 43 percent, and

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Cisneros, who won 24 percent, with the balance scattering to Lutz and Archuleta, resulting in no endorsement. As an elected official, Archuleta appointed six delegates to the convention but only received 3 votes — an embarrassing showing and one that local sources say points to his organizational weakness.

The Rubio campaign released a likely voter poll from FM3, fielded Oct. 17-22, showing a high number of undecided voters (40 percent) but Rubio leading the pack with 18 percent, followed by Republican Daniel Martinez (16 percent) and then Cisneros (6 percent), Republican Elvira Moreno (6 percent), and Lutz (4 percent). The poll was conducted before Hafif entered the race.

While Cisneros' allies dispute that his support is that low, Democrats generally acknowledge that Rubio begins the primary with the largest base of support given her time representing most of the district (along with her sister Blanca Rubio, who serves in the state Assembly).

For the moment, Cisneros is focusing on a positive message introducing himself to the district, with ads highlighting his philanthropic efforts to send low-income students to college. But at some point he will have to go negative against Rubio. His allies see multiple opportunities to attack her from the left and work to consolidate progressive voters, especially on environmental and labor issues, where Rubio has received low scores from activist groups such as the Sierra Club and Courage California; one Cisneros ally reeled off a list of the interests that have backed Rubio in past elections that Democratic primary voters might balk at, including pharmaceutical and private prison companies.

In turn, Rubio's allies will look to localize the race and draw attention to Cisneros' lack of familiarity with the district, where he does not live and never represented. "She's spent her whole life in the district, as a teacher, city clerk, as a council member and a senator, so we've got a 40-something year lead on him," said one Rubio ally, who noted that Rubio had represented 13 of the district's 15 cities, which they called "unique political ecosystems," and said that Cisneros "doesn't have the nitty gritty stuff, the parks and infrastructure" that she can point to. Rubio, who was a victim of domestic violence at the hands of her then-husband, state Assemblyman Ed Hernandez (the Democrat Napolitano beat in 2016), also will point to the passage of her bill that extended the statute of limitations for those types of crimes.

Summing up Rubio's current position in the race, one Democratic operative not supporting any candidate said that "while 'comfortable' is too strong of a word, she's got a good strong base and a solid core to work from."

It's unlikely this safe Democratic seat will see much outside spending. EMILY's List has remained on the sidelines, and while the Congressional Hispanic Caucus's BOLD PAC has endorsed Cisneros, the odds that it spends money in an expensive race contested by two Hispanic candidates are low.

Money Matters

The biggest "x factor" in the race may be how much money Cisneros is willing to put into his bid. While four of the five candidates are spending their own money to some degree — Archuleta loaned his campaign \$225,000, Lutz put in \$505,000, and Hafif loaned \$700,000 — Cisneros' wealth outstrips all of the candidates' money, and he alone has the capacity to outspend the field. One strategist watching the race but not involved said they spent "more brain cells thinking about Gil's net worth than any candidate's current standing."

Cisneros has already chipped in \$502,000, but it's not obvious how much more he will spend. One ally of the former congressman said it could be as much as \$7 million but also cautioned that Cisneros — who declined to put his own money into his most competitive race in 2020 — is more "financially disciplined" than other self-funders.

Cisneros is the only candidate advertising on TV, with \$75,000 in ads in November. The Los Angeles TV market is prohibitively expensive, so while Cisneros might have company on cable, he will likely be the only candidate with the resources to go on broadcast TV. That means the other candidates will have to rely on robust direct mail and organizing efforts.

Rubio has raised more money excluding personal funds than any other candidate — \$320,000 from July through September — but as the only contender not tapping her personal wealth she also had the lowest cash-on-hand at the beginning of October. While her allies acknowledge she will be significantly outspent, she will likely need to raise more than that over the last three months of the year to have the necessary firepower to win the primary.

One ticket or two?

One unknown and potentially determinative factor is how many Republican candidates will appear on the primary ballot. While a Republican has little chance of winning the district in November, they



Courtesy Rubio Campaign

Susan Rubio

could keep a second Democrat out of the general election, effectively ensuring that the race is decided in the primary.

The district is not so Democratic that a Republican has no shot of getting into the general election.

Across the eight statewide primaries that took place in 2022, the GOP share of the vote in the 31st District averaged 36 percent. The political environment may be slightly better for Democrats than in 2022, but a potentially competitive GOP presidential primary could boost Republican turnout as well.

If only one Republican makes the ballot, they are almost assured a spot in the general election even if they do not run a substantive campaign, meaning that only one Democrat will make it to November. If two Republicans appear on the ballot, it may depend on how many Democrats ultimately appear on the ballot and if the Democratic vote splits evenly or if two candidates largely consolidate it. And if three or more Republican candidates appear on the ballot, it is unlikely any of them place within the top two.

Two Republicans have filed with the FEC as candidates: attorney Daniel Martinez, and former Maywood City Councilwoman Elvira Moreno. Martinez was the GOP nominee for the seat in 2022, losing to Napolitano, 60-40 percent.

The Bottom Line

While the 31st District won't have any impact on the majority math for either party, it's a prime example of how solid seats can still affect the direction of each party's caucus. The various Democrats in the race represent different ideological spaces and would have different legislative approaches if elected to Congress.

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moved just three points leftward in 2020.

While the 8th District has a majority-white population (52 percent), it was drawn with Hispanic voters in mind; 39 percent of residents are non-white Hispanic, the highest proportion of any district in Colorado. About two-thirds of the district's Hispanic population lives in Adams County. White voters, however, are overrepresented in the electorate, making up 65 percent of the citizen voting-age population compared to 28 percent who are Hispanic.

The 8th, which has a prominent natural resource extraction industry, has a blue collar streak. It has a high concentration of workers in "natural resources, construction, and maintenance," ranking among the top 30 congressional districts nationwide by this measure, and the bachelor's degree attainment is below the national average at 29.8 percent, per the Census Bureau. Weld County produces almost 90 percent of Colorado's oil.

The district, which casts the fewest votes of any in Colorado, is also one of the most politically competitive.

Overall, Trump would have carried the 8th in 2016 by 2 points, even as it also voted for Democratic Sen. Michael Bennet by 2 points. In 2018, it narrowly voted for Democratic gubernatorial nominee Jared Polis by 2 points.

By 2020, the area had soured on Trump, who would have lost the 8th by 4 points to Biden, 50-46 percent. GOP Sen. Cory Gardner did not fare much better, losing it by 2 points.

And in 2022, as Democrats romped through the Centennial State, Polis carried the 8th by 9 points, and Bennet carried it by 5 points.

But down ballot, Caraveo won by less than 2,000 votes, a margin of less than one percentage point.

The GOP Candidates

Three Republicans have announced campaigns so far, though GOP strategists say that the top two contenders are Weld County Commissioner Scott James and state Rep. Gabe Evans. Also running is Joe Andujo, a health insurance consultant and Air Force veteran.

James, 61, has served as a county commissioner since 2018. Before that, the Denver-born, La Salle-raised James was a local elected official in Johnstown (pop. 17,000) which sits on the border of Weld and Larimer counties.

James recently retired from a 33-year career in radio broadcasting, most recently hosting a morning country music show for iHeartMedia. He holds associates degrees from Northeastern Junior College (1984) and Aims Community College (1999) and a bachelors from Colorado State (2002).

Originally a member of the Johnstown Planning Commission, James was elected to the town council in 2002 and served until 2016 when he was elected mayor. In 2018, he won his seat on the Weld County commission, 65-35 percent (commissioners are elected by district but represent the county at-large). He was re-elected in 2022 without opposition.

James' campaign team includes general consultant Tim Saler of Grassroots Targeting, media consultant Casey Philips of the Hereford Agency, and pollster Dave Sackett of the Tarrance Group. Chris Grant and Conor McGuiness of Big Dog Strategies are doing the direct mail.

Evans, 37, is relatively new to Colorado politics. Born in Aurora, Colorado, Evans graduated from Patrick Henry College in 2009, where he joined ROTC and the Virginia National Guard. After graduation,

Evans joined the Colorado Army National Guard, becoming a Black Hawk pilot and serving in combat in the Middle East. He joined the police force in Arvada, which sits on the border of Adams and Jefferson counties, while also working search and rescue and firefighting missions for the National Guard. He left the Army in 2019 and the police force in 2022.

That year, Evans ran for the state Assembly in an open seat split between Adams and Weld counties — Evans lives in Weld but a slight majority of the seat's votes are cast in Adams. He won the primary 70-30 percent and the general election 63-34 percent.

Evans' campaign team includes general consultant Alan Philp of Patriot Pathways, which is also handling the direct mail. OnMessage Inc. is doing the media, and Public Opinion Strategies is the pollster.

Andujo, the insurance consultant from Berthoud, does not live in the district but has said he is looking to move in. This is his first run for elected office, but he was previously involved in politics as a member of the Northern Colorado Hispanic Republicans. Andujo previously worked as a medical practice manager and financial analyst, and served in the Air Force from 2001 to 2009.

The Andujo campaign is managed by CJ Garbo, who previously was the deputy campaign manager for 2022 gubernatorial candidate Greg Lopez.

The GOP Primary

James and Evans present markedly different versions of the Republican Party. James, who is white and in his sixties, is a familiar figure who worked his way up through local politics and media for two decades before running for Congress. Evans, by contrast, is Hispanic, a veteran, and would be among the youngest members of Congress.



Courtesy Gabe Evans

Gabe Evans

Both lean into their backgrounds. James is running as an experienced, known quantity. He highlights his record as a local elected official and years of philanthropic efforts on his radio show, and is prone to referencing the

men and women he meets at gas stations heading to work early in the morning. (The 24-year officeholder does, however, maintain that he's "not a politician.")

Evans, meanwhile, acknowledges that not as many people know him politically, but talks extensively about his time as a local police officer and is knowledgeable when speaking about his interactions with the state legislature, before he was a lawmaker, as it altered Colorado's criminal code.

Despite their different profiles, there isn't much ideological daylight between the two, and it's unlikely that ideological issues will take center stage in a primary when both candidates — who say they're on good terms — are content to make the race about biography. One issue that may come up is property taxes, a hot-button in the expensive Denver area in the wake of the failure of Proposition HH, a Democrat-backed ballot measure that would have overhauled the state's taxation scheme.

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Evans' allies point to James' vote for a request "to retain about \$80 million of property tax revenue in excess of the amount allowed by the Weld County Home Rule Charter."

The primary will likely break down by geography, with the Weld/Adams border forming the main fault line. James should run stronger in the northern part of the district, where he has been an official for decades, while Evans will look to shore up support in the more suburban areas of Adams County that he represents and neighboring communities to where he worked as a police officer.

One Evans ally acknowledged that "if the election were held today James would probably have higher name ID and he would probably win," but argued that the state representative's profile will allow him to outpace James in fundraising and appeal to voters as a fresh face ahead of the June 25 primary.

The National Perspective

National GOP strategists would be comfortable with either James or Evans as their nominee, though some prefer Evans because of his law enforcement background and Hispanic heritage.

Some Republican operatives are itching at the chance to make crime in Denver an issue in the general election, and "Evans' bio speaks a little more to that than James' does," said one national strategist.

"There's no clear cut answer, but on bio and on paper he definitely seems better," said another national GOP operative of Evans, but also said that "if James wins I don't think this is going to be the end of the world."

At a time when Republicans are looking to shed their image as the party of older white men, Evans has attracted a number of endorsements, mainly from veterans in Congress, including Sen. Tom Cotton of Arkansas and Reps. John James of Michigan, August Pfluger of Texas, Jack Bergman of Michigan, and Brian Mast and Mario Diaz-Balart of Florida.

But what James may lack in Congressional endorsements, his allies hope he makes up with local support, including from the mayors of some of the district's largest cities such as Thornton and Greeley.

For now, national GOP operatives are watching to see if either James or Evans can step up their fundraising capabilities. Neither of them are "lighting the world on fire," said one GOP strategist, after both candidates raised just over \$100,000 by the end of September (though James was in the race for two more months than Evans).

Democratic strategists are also content to run against either contender. That's a change from 2022, when Democratic outside groups intervened in the primary to boost Weld County Commissioner Lori Saine, who they viewed as an easier opponent (Saine came in third). It's unlikely Democrats attempt another such effort in this district.

In 2022, support from the Charles Koch-funded Americans for Prosperity was a significant factor in state Sen. Barb Kirkmeyer's victory in a crowded primary field. While the group, which spent \$1 million to support Kirkmeyer, has not endorsed in this race, Evans' allies are hopeful that they will ultimately back him.

The Democratic Incumbent

Caraveo, 42, is a pediatrician from Thornton. A Denver-area native, Caraveo previously served two terms in the Colorado state House representing a Thornton district.

The child of previously undocumented immigrants from Mexico,

Caraveo graduated from Regis University in Denver in 2003 before receiving her MD from University of Colorado in 2009 and completing her residency at the University of New Mexico in 2012.

Her first bid for office came in 2018. Caraveo, who was involved with the Adams County Democrats, ran unopposed for the nomination for a state House seat and won the general election, 55-39 percent. In 2020, she ran unopposed in both the primary and general elections.

Caraveo launched her U.S. House campaign in 2021, before Colorado's maps were finalized, with the expectation that the new district would include the suburbs north of Denver. She initially faced a primary challenge from Adams County Commissioner Chaz Tedesco, but at Colorado's pre-primary nominating convention, Tedesco failed to secure enough support to earn a spot on the ballot.

Caraveo faced Kirkmeyer in the general election for one of the most



Courtesy, James Campaign

Scott James

closely watched districts of the cycle. Private polling from both parties showed the race close but usually had Kirkmeyer ahead by a few points. Ultimately, strong performances from Polis and Bennet at the top of the ticket,

and the presence of Libertarian candidate Richard Ward on the ballot, helped Caraveo edge past Kirkmeyer, 48.4-47.7 percent, with the Libertarian taking 4 percent.

In Congress, Caraveo serves on the Agriculture and Science, Space and Technology committees.

Her campaign team includes media consultant Lucinda Guinn of Ralston Lapp Guinn and pollster Andrew Baumann of Global Strategy Group.

The General Election

Republicans are optimistic about beating Caraveo given her narrow victory in 2022 (which many GOP operatives still blame on the Libertarian candidate).

In particular, there's a sense among Republicans that 2022 was a low water mark for Colorado Republicans, and that the top of the ticket (likely helmed by Trump) will be slightly more beneficial in this district than the Heidi Ganahl/Joe O'Dea combination that fell flat last year.

"I would argue that Trump doesn't have to win it but it does have to be close," said one GOP operative watching the race, who said that as long as Biden only wins the district by 2 or 3 points a Republican could flip it.

In particular, said the operative, there's a belief among some Republicans that the presidential election, especially one featuring Trump, will bring out greater numbers of "blue collar, lower income, less educated" voters that may be more favorable to the eventual GOP nominee.

Democrats argue the exact opposite, pointing to the larger drop in turnout in more Democratic Adams County relative to Weld County from 2020 to 2022.

"I'm not going to say that Caraveo is anything but a toss-up," said

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one longtime Colorado Democratic operative, but “she gets a little bump from the presidential contours of the district.”

As it was in 2022, Adams County will be crucial to Caraveo’s re-election efforts. The fast-growing Denver suburbs are the engine of Democratic performance in the district, and Caraveo’s ability to hew close to Biden’s margin there is the reason she won her race even as Kirkmeyer overperformed in Weld County.

But an equally important geographic distinction may be east-west, with two parallel highways dividing the battlefield between blue collar areas to the east and wealthier, higher-

educated areas to the west. One GOP strategist said Republicans need to do increasingly well in the eastern US 85 corridor — which runs from Commerce City north to Greeley — to offset losses in the I-25 corridor, where “some of those western communities are going to continue to slide away from Republicans: Berthoud, Johnstown, Frederick, Firesburg.”

In particular, the GOP operative pointed to Kirkmeyer’s strong performance among blue-collar Hispanics in the US 85 corridor, and the near-upset by a Hispanic GOP state House candidate in Greeley in 2022, in a Democratic-leaning district.

The district’s large Hispanic population is likely to get significant attention from both parties in the run-up to Election Day. A post-election survey from BSP Research of Hispanic Coloradans found that Caraveo, a fluent Spanish speaker, won a higher share of Hispanic voters than either Polis or Bennet within the 8th District. Evans, who is Hispanic, is not a fluent Spanish speaker — but both Democrats and Republicans say that Hispanic voters who speak English at home are more attractive targets for a Republican candidate.



Yadira Caraveo

Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call

On the Issues

Republicans will look to tie Caraveo to the Biden administration and the economic dissatisfaction most voters still feel toward the president. And they’ll zero in on rising crime rates in Denver to paint Caraveo as a soft-on-crime liberal who voted to decrease penalties for fentanyl in the state legislature (she later voted to toughen the law again, and her first bill passed in Congress targeted a fentanyl-like substance). Crime will take on an especially central role if Evans is the nominee; he spent much of his introductory video on the issue.

And energy policy may also be an important component of GOP efforts here, given the prominence of the oil industry in the district. Caraveo voted against HR 1, the Republican energy bill, along with all but four other Democrats.

Republican strategists acknowledge that they’re in a tough spot in this district when it comes to abortion. “Where we made a huge mistake last time was how much of a motivator the abortion issue was,” said one national GOP strategist, who noted how stridently pro-life Kirkmeyer was (as well as favoring minimal exceptions, she also voted to ban Plan B, the emergency contraceptive).

Democrats in the district are already pointing to 16-year-old comments James made on his radio show in which he said abortion was responsible in part for “the rapid decline of civilization,” and his introduction of a “Sanctity of Life Day” resolution on the Weld County Commission. Evans, too, indicated he supported “prohibiting abortion except when necessary to save the mother’s life” on an issue group survey in 2022; in person with *Inside Elections*, Evans steered a conversation about abortion to his own experience working on domestic violence and rape cases as a police officer and his own family’s experience with several miscarriages.

And as a woman and a pediatrician, Caraveo is a particularly effective messenger for Democratic messaging on abortion as well as other health care issues. “People typically love their pediatrician,” said one GOP operative approvingly.

In 2022, the district was a top target for outside groups; in total, the NRCC, DCCC, Congressional Leadership Fund and House Majority PAC spent \$14.5 million on the 8th, making it the 12th-most expensive House race in the country.

If neither Evans nor James prove strong fundraisers, they will need whatever outside help they can get. Caraveo reported \$910,000 in the bank on Sept. 30, more than 10 times what either potential opponent reported; she raised \$3.5 million last cycle and should raise more as an incumbent this time around.

Outside GOP groups may also have to temper their support for the eventual GOP nominee if 3rd District Rep. Lauren Boebert’s position grows more precarious. The embattled firebrand won the narrowest race of 2022 and is facing a Democratic opponent flush with cash; groups such as the NRCC and CLF may be faced with a decision about how to allocate their spending in the Denver media market, which serves both districts, later in the cycle.

The Bottom Line

It’s unwise to declare any single House district as a bellwether, but the result of Colorado’s 8th District could be a sign of the cycle. Democrats likely have to hold on to this type of seat in order to have a chance to reclaim control. But if Republicans defeat the congresswoman, they are likely to hold, and even expand their majority. **IE**



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