

# Inside Elections

with

Nathan L. Gonzales

Nonpartisan Analysis

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## Virginia 7: Another House Democrat Eyes the Exits

By Erin Covey

Abigail Spanberger's name has long been at the top of the list of Democrats who could run to succeed term-limited Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin in 2025. But *Politico's* report that the congresswoman won't run for re-election in 2024 as she prepares a gubernatorial campaign complicates Democrats' ability to hold this battleground seat.

Without Spanberger on the ballot, Republicans would have an unquestionably better chance at picking up this seat.

Joe Biden won this seat by 7 points in 2020, but Youngkin carried it by 5 points one year later. The district swung back toward Democrats' in 2022, when Spanberger defeated Prince William County Supervisor Yesli Vega by 5 points (after the Republican made national news for her comments on abortion).

Even with Spanberger on the ballot, the 2024 race was expected to be fairly competitive, though Republicans who spoke with *Inside Elections* acknowledged that this race wouldn't have been a priority.

But Democratic operatives remain cautiously optimistic that they can hold this seat, which still favors them slightly. The 7th leans Democratic by 2.8 points (50.8 to 48.1 percent) according to *Inside Elections'* Baseline metric, which measures the political lean of a district based on the past four election cycles. And Democrats would prefer an open seat in a presidential year to a special election in an off-year.

Spanberger would be the third Democratic member this year to leave their competitive House seat in a bid for higher office, joining Reps. Elissa Slotkin and Katie Porter. Both congresswomen are running for the Senate this year, bolstering Republicans' chances of flipping the two seats.

Like Slotkin and Porter, Spanberger is known for her fundraising prowess. Her massive war chest, coupled with her moderate credentials, has made her a difficult opponent over the past two election cycles. Last cycle, she raised more than \$9 million while Vega raised \$3.7 million.

For the next three months, Virginia politics will be consumed by the fight for control of the General Assembly (Democrats narrowly control the state Senate while Republicans have a slim majority in the state House), which is

*Continued on page 10*

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### 2024 House Ratings

#### Toss-Up (4D, 8R)

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)
NJ 7 (Kean Jr., R)	OR 5 (DeRemer, R)
NM 2 (Vasquez, D)	WA 3 (Perez, D)

#### Tilt Democratic (3D)

CA 47 (Open; Porter, D)
PA 7 (Wild, D)
PA 8 (Cartwright, D)

#### Tilt Republican (7R)

AZ 1 (Schweikert, R)
AZ 6 (Ciscomani, R)
CA 22 (Valadao, R)
IA 3 (Nunn, R)
MI 10 (James, R)
NY 19 (Molinaro, R)
VA 2 (Kiggans, R)

#### Lean Democratic (14D)

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 1 (Titus, D)
NV 3 (Lee, D)
NH 1 (Pappas, D)
NY 18 (Ryan, D)
OR 6 (Salinas, D)
PA 17 (Deluzio, D)
VA 7 (Spanberger, D)
WA 8 (Schrier, D)

#### Lean Republican (6R)

CA 41 (Calvert, R)
CA 45 (Steel, R)
CO 3 (Boebert, R)
NE 2 (Bacon, R)
NY 1 (LaLota, R)
TX 15 (De La Cruz, R)

	GOP	DEM
Solid	172	168
Likely/Lean/Tilt	25	29
Total	197	197
Toss-up		12
Ohio/North Carolina		29
Needed for majority		218

#### Likely Democratic (12D)

CA 49 (Levin, D)
FL 9 (Soto, D)
FL 23 (Moskowitz, D)
IN 1 (Mrvan, D)
KS 3 (Davids, D)
MD 6 (Open; Trone, D)
MI 8 (Kildee, D)
NV 4 (Horsford, D)
NH 2 (Kuster, D)
TX 28 (Cuellar, D)
TX 34 (Gonzalez, D)
VA 10 (Wexton, D)

#### Likely Republican (12R)

CA 3 (Kiley, R)
CA 40 (Kim, R)
FL 13 (Luna, R)
FL 27 (Salazar, R)
IA 1 (Miller-Meeks, R)
IA 2 (Hinson, R)
MT 1 (Zinke, R)
PA 1 (Fitzpatrick, R)
PA 10 (Perry, R)
SC 1 (Mace, R)
WI 1 (Steil, R)
WI 3 (Van Orden, R)

*Ohio and North Carolina ratings are being withheld pending new maps.*

# Report Shorts


**California's 13th District.** Former state Assemblyman Adam Gray is running against freshman Republican John Duarte in this Central Valley district Democrats need to win to retake the majority. In 2022, Duarte beat Gray by 564 votes in the second-closest House race in the country. Toss-up.

**Iowa's 1st District.** Former state Rep. Christina Bohannon is angling for a rematch against GOP Rep. Marianne Miller-Meeks in southeast Iowa. Bohannon lost to Miller-Meeks by 7 points in 2022 in a race that received little attention from Democratic outside groups but could be more attractive in a presidential cycle. Bohannon reported raising \$276,000 in the first day of her 2024 campaign. Likely Republican.

**New Jersey's 7th District.** Former State Department official Jason Blazakis threw his hat into the ring for the Democratic nomination to take on freshman Republican Tom Kean, Jr. Blazakis was most recently a professor at Middlebury College in Vermont but grew up in the district. He joins former NJ Working Families Alliance director Sue Altman and Roselle Park Mayor Joe Signorello in the primary. Toss-up.

**New York's 1st District.** Former state Sen. Jim Gaughran launched a bid against GOP Rep. Nick LaLota in this Suffolk County seat. Gaughran left the state Senate in 2022 after a court-ordered redistricting dissolved his seat, and redistricting could play a role again if Democrats are able to redraw New York's congressional map and make this seat more favorable to Democratic candidates. But if that happens, this primary could get more crowded. Lean Republican.

**Oregon's 6th District.** Former state legislator Denyc Boles announced her candidacy for the mid-Willamette Valley seat. She'll need to get by 2022 GOP nominee Mike Erickson in the primary. The winner will take on Democratic Rep. Andrea Salinas in what should be a competitive general election. Lean Democratic.

**Utah Senate.** A July 7-18 poll from Noble Predictive Insights underscored the challenge Sen. Mitt Romney faces if he seeks re-election. Romney's image is underwater among Republicans, at 43 percent favorable/54 percent unfavorable, and in a six candidate ballot test he captures just 30 percent of the vote, with state Attorney General Sean Reyes (who is contemplating a bid) in second with 13 percent. Solid Republican. 

## 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)		Florida (30)	
Nebraska 2nd (1)		Maine 2nd (1)	
New Hampshire (4)			
Likely Democratic (15)		Likely Republican (63)	
Maine Statewide (2)		Iowa (6)	
Virginia (13)		Texas (40)	
		Ohio (17)	
Solid Democratic (196)		Solid Republican (125)	
California (54)		Alabama (9)	
New York (28)		Nebraska 1st (1)	
Colorado (10)		Nebraska 3rd (1)	
Oregon (8)		North Dakota (3)	
Rhode Island (4)		Oklahoma (7)	
Arkansas (6)		South Carolina (9)	
Idaho (4)		South Dakota (3)	
Vermont (3)		Tennessee (11)	
Washington (12)		Utah (6)	
Indiana (11)		West Virginia (4)	
Kentucky (8)		Wyoming (3)	
Louisiana (8)			
Mississippi (6)			
Missouri (10)			
Montana (4)			
Nebraska Statewide (2)			
New Jersey (14)			
New Mexico (5)			
		GOP	DEM
		232	306
		2024 Ratings	247
		235	
		Toss-up 56	
		Needed to Win 270	

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# Setting the Stage for the GOP Debates

By Jacob Rubashkin

The 2024 GOP presidential primary will enter a new phase on Tuesday, when the leading contenders meet for the first time on the debate stage in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Or at least that's what the Republican party leadership hopes will happen.

Former president and current frontrunner Donald Trump may have other plans. For months he has openly contemplated skipping the debate entirely, which could diminish interest in the forum and scramble the plans of lower-tier candidates looking to make a splash.

Trump has a commanding lead in the GOP primary. In the latest *FiveThirtyEight* polling average, he has the support of 53.8 percent of primary voters, placing him nearly 40 points ahead of the second-place candidate, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who clocks in at 15 percent. Trailing DeSantis are biotech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy (7.4 percent), former Vice President Mike Pence (5.5 percent), former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley (3.7 percent), former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie (2.8 percent), and South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott (2.5 percent). North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum, former Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson, former Texas Rep. Will Hurd, and Miami Mayor Francis Suarez all average less than 1 percent.

The former president would not be the first frontrunner to skip the first debate of the campaign. In 1980, California Gov. Ronald Reagan made the same calculation, citing his large polling lead as a reason for skipping the first GOP debate of the cycle. Reagan's decision did come back to bite him when he lost Iowa to George H.W. Bush, and he participated in subsequent forums. But his lead was also half as large as Trump's.

Trump has led the field since he announced his bid nearly a year ago, but his standing has not always been so secure. In mid-February, Trump led DeSantis by just 2 points nationally, 40.8 percent to 38.8 percent. That turned out to be the Florida governor's high watermark, and his support has been steadily declining ever since. Trump, meanwhile, crossed the 50 percent threshold in early April and has remained steady there since.

The other GOP candidates have all struggled to break out of the low-to-mid single digits, with little success. The only one of the bunch who has arguably improved their standing nationally is Ramaswamy, who was polling at just 1 percent in March.

In the early states it is a slightly more nuanced picture. Scott has focused much of his time and money on Iowa, and has climbed into double digits and a clear third place there. In New Hampshire, where Christie is focusing his explicitly anti-Trump campaign, the former governor is polling around 10 percent and is in a virtual tie for second place.

And in South Carolina, both Scott and Haley poll better due to their home state advantages.

But in all those states, and nationally, the dominant figure continues to be Trump.

## Debate Stage Invites

The Iowa Caucuses are still five months away. But early polling plays a large part in shaping the direction of the primary and determines which candidates get a chance to make their case to voters from the debate stage.

Several months ago the Republican National Committee — perhaps anticipating a massive primary field — published a set of criteria intended to limit the number of participants in the party's debates. The main RNC criteria were polling and campaign finance thresholds (each candidate must have at least 40,000 unique donors, with 200 from 20 different states).

By most estimates, just eight candidates have qualified for the first debate: Trump, DeSantis, Ramaswamy, Pence, Haley, Christie, Scott, and Burgum. Left out in the cold are Hutchinson (who lacks enough donors), Hurd, Suarez (who lacks enough support in polls), radio host Larry Elder, and businessman Perry Johnson (who also says he has the donors). The RNC hasn't actually said yet who gets to show up, despite the debate being just four days away.

The RNC is also insisting that candidates sign a "loyalty pledge" committing their support to the eventual GOP nominee before debating. Trump has refused to sign the (unenforceable) pledge, which gives him an easy excuse to skip not just the first but all of the debates, and also puts the ostensibly neutral RNC in an awkward position if he does show up to debate without signing.

Seven or eight candidates makes for a small first debate stage on the historical spectrum.

In the 2016 cycle, 17 Republicans faced off in the first debate (seven in an undercard and 10 on the main stage). In 2012, the early debates featured eight candidates. In 2008, the earliest clashes counted 10 participants, even also-rans like Reps. Duncan Hunter and Tom Tancredo.

In the 2000 cycle, candidates had already started dropping out by the time the debates began in October. The largest, in December, featured seven contenders.

During the 1996 campaign, 10 candidates battled it out in the first debate, which included not just venerable Sens. Bob Dole, Dick Lugar, and Phil Gramm, but also longshots including former UN Ambassador Alan Keyes and manufacturer Morry Taylor.

## The Criteria

In the past, the debate hosts — usually media organizations — have determined which candidates to invite, and what, if any, criteria to use when making those decisions. Even in 2016, when the crowded GOP primary necessitated two separate debates, it fell to the network sponsors to determine the lineups. It is a recent phenomenon for the national parties to take over that responsibility, and the shift hasn't come without some difficulties.

In 2019, the Democratic National Committee put in place polling and donor thresholds to corral the 29-candidate field, but their implementation faced blowback from candidates ranging from underdog Andrew Yang to party stalwart Sen. Cory Booker of New Jersey.

At issue both in 2019 and 2023 are which polls count as helping candidates qualify. In 2019, the DNC released a whitelist of 18 nonpartisan pollsters (affiliated with media outlets or colleges) whose surveys they would accept.

The RNC took a different route, instead requiring candidates to hit "at least 1% in three national polls OR 1% in two national polls and 1% in one early state poll from two separate 'carve out' states (Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada, South Carolina)," provided the surveys met certain methodological criteria:

"Sample at least 800 registered likely Republican voters through a mix of live calls, integrated voice response, online panels, and/or text message.

Ask the question on presidential preference prior to any question which may allow potential bias.

*Continued on page 4*



*Continued from page 3*

Not be conducted by a polling company affiliated with a candidate or candidate committee.”

By instituting a high sample size threshold — 800 likely voters — the RNC severely restricted the number of polls that counted, as Nathaniel Rakich of *FiveThirtyEight* has pointed out. Applying the 800 LV screen to the 17 polls used to determine the lineup of the first Democratic debate in 2019 would have eliminated all but two surveys.

The RNC’s criteria have also privileged polls that rely on newer (and cheaper) ways of reaching voters, including web panels and other online methods, over more traditional (and expensive) live-caller and mixed-mode surveys. (A higher sample size decreases a poll’s margin of error but is just one of several factors that should be used to evaluate a survey.)

Just three polls that met the RNC criteria were conducted by nonpartisan pollsters using live-caller methods: two state-level surveys from Fox Business, and one national survey from the *New York Times*. One other nonpartisan survey, from Fairleigh Dickinson University, used a mix of live-caller and text-to-web methods. Every other poll is either from a partisan sponsor, conducted online-only, or both.

As a result of the criteria, one pollster has dominated the qualification process: Morning Consult, which runs a rolling average tracking poll of the primary. The Morning Consult poll is done via an online panel, and captures thousands of likely GOP voters. Of the 15 polls considered by *Politico*’s Zach Montellaro to count toward the debate (12 national, three state-level), Morning Consult has conducted six.

Of the six non-Morning Consult national polls, just two — *New York Times* and Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. — are from transparent, nonpartisan pollsters. The other four surveys are from GOP firms: JMC Analytics, Kaplan Strategies, and Trafalgar Group, which have released varying levels of information about their polls.

Morning Consult’s inclusion was not a foregone conclusion, since it is a rolling average that combines responses from a broad swath of online panel participants, rather than a single poll fielded within certain dates with a static sample. Morning Consult does publish a weekly “update” of the primary — that’s the number *Politico* counts as a qualifying poll — but you can also see the rolling average for every single day going back nine months. It is not obvious whether only the weekly updates count, or if any three-day average qualifies as a unique “poll.”

And in the past, the business intelligence firm’s political data has drawn skepticism from political professionals. Just a few months ago, top GOP pollster Brenda Gianiny of Axis Research specifically called out the firm, telling reporters at a conference at University of Chicago, “please be extremely cautious with that data.”

The rule requiring that polls “not be conducted by a polling company affiliated with a candidate or candidate committee” is also a source for confusion.

For instance, what to do with *co/efficient*’s Aug. 5-7 poll of New Hampshire? The poll meets the methodological criteria, but while this specific survey was commissioned by conservative newsletter *NH Journal*, *co/efficient* has also polled for the Trump campaign.

Or how about *Cygnal*’s Aug. 7-9 national poll, which notably showed DeSantis slipping to third place behind Ramaswamy? While *Cygnal* says that survey was independently commissioned, the firm’s top pollster is also working for the Ramaswamy campaign.

An even trickier case might be National Public Affairs, which is one of the few organizations regularly polling South Carolina and whose Aug. 7-9 poll could be crucial in getting Hutchinson on the debate stage. While NPA

isn’t working for any candidate, the firm is run by three former Trump 2020 advisers: campaign manager Bill Stepien, communications director Tim Murtaugh, and senior counsel Justin Clark. Does that rise to affiliation?

And there are lingering questions about the inclusion of Trafalgar Group and Kaplan Strategies, which did not disclose if it had a client in the race and released very little methodological information. Pollster Chris Wilson, who is working for the DeSantis-aligned Never Back Down super PAC, ran through his reasonable concerns with the Kaplan poll on Twitter.

With the RNC remaining tight-lipped about what polls qualify and which candidates are debate-eligible, it has fallen to the candidates themselves to claim their own successes, often with little regard for the actual rules.

As early as the first week of July, Haley announced she had made the debate stage — despite there being no qualifying polls released at that time. More recently, the super PAC supporting Suarez has claimed the Miami mayor has met the criteria, based on polls that the RNC may not accept, and Michigan businessman Perry Johnson publicly maintains that several polls with sample sizes smaller than 800 count for him.

## The Second Debate

The second debate will not be for another month, when the candidates meet again on Sept. 27 at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, California.

*Politico* reports that the RNC will raise the polling threshold to “at least 3 percent in two national polls, or 3 percent in one national poll and 3 percent in two polls conducted from separate early nominating states.”

The RNC will also reportedly raise the donor threshold to 50,000 unique donors, up from 40,000. Trump, DeSantis, Scott, Haley, Christie, Burgum, Scott, Ramaswamy, and Johnson (the Michigan businessman) all say they have met that threshold.

The report did not specify a time frame for qualifying polls, but for the first debate the RNC accepted anything taken up to 53 days before the debate. That same window would allow polls beginning August 5.

In addition to the daily Morning Consult tracker, only four polls have been released since then with large enough samples, all from GOP firms: Kaplan Strategies, JMC Analytics, Victory Insights, and Trafalgar Group, which has faced criticism for its unorthodox methods and lack of transparency. The RNC has not said if any of those pollsters meet their standards.

Several nonpartisan pollsters have released surveys of the primary as well — Fox News, YouGov for the *Economist*, and Quinnipiac University — but none polled enough respondents to be included.

The new rules could spell trouble not only for the longest shots like Suarez, Hurd, and Hutchinson, but also for several of the candidates who will be at the first debate. Christie, Scott, and Burgum all average less than 3 percent in national polls. While all are polling higher in Iowa, New Hampshire, or South Carolina, it’s not obvious how many polls from those states will qualify. In the period before the first debate, just one poll from each of those states made the cut.

If Trump skips the second debate as well, that could result in a debate stage not only missing the prohibitive frontrunner but also featuring as few as three contenders, none of whom poll higher than 15 percent.

The RNC’s efforts were intended to standardize the debate process and minimize the craziness of a crowded stage. But the specifics have caused a bit of confusion, and the loyalty pledge could ultimately keep the likeliest nominee off the stage entirely, which could make this debate season the least relevant in decades.

# Nevada Senate: Silver State Slugfest

By Erin Covey

In 2018, then-Rep. Jacky Rosen defeated Republican Sen. Dean Heller by 5 points — a landslide victory by Nevada standards that was propelled by a nationwide “Blue Wave.”

Her 2024 re-election campaign is likely to be closer.

Republicans have struggled to win federal races in Nevada over the past decade. They haven’t won a Senate race since 2012, when Heller won a full term, and the last Republican presidential nominee to win the state was George W. Bush, in 2004.



Jacky Rosen

Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call

But Nevada remains a battleground state — the 2022 Senate race was the closest in the country,

and Democratic Gov. Steve Sisolak lost a close re-election campaign, providing Republicans with a path to winning statewide.

Rosen has a few clear advantages going into 2024. Nevada Democrats tend to perform better in presidential cycles than in midterms, and the party’s organizing operation powered by the “Reid Machine” (so named for the late Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid) remains strong. There’s also a chance that Republicans will have a contentious primary on their hands that hampers the eventual nominee.

Republican leaders in D.C. have made a concerted effort to prevent messy primary races across Senate races. So far, those efforts have been met with mixed success — and the Silver State’s GOP primary is getting crowded.

Former state Assemblyman Jim Marchant, the GOP nominee for secretary of state in 2022 who is known for spreading 2020 election conspiracy theories, was the first to launch a campaign in May. Two months later, 2022 underdog candidate Sam Brown launched his campaign with the support of the Republican establishment.

But in the weeks following Brown’s campaign, two other Republicans — 2022 lieutenant governor candidate Tony Grady and former U.S. Ambassador to Iceland Jeffrey Gunter — have launched campaigns, signs that some Nevada Republicans aren’t content with D.C.’s pick. As the primary heats up, this race could feature one of the more fractious Senate GOP primary battles in 2024.

## The Lay of the Land

Despite the state’s transient nature, Nevada has remained reliably purple. Since 1912, Nevada has picked the winner in every presidential election but the 1976 and 2016 races.

Though Democrats have maintained a persistent edge in federal statewide races over the past several years, Republicans have been more successful in gubernatorial contests.

With the state’s tourism-dependent economy still reeling from pandemic-induced shutdowns, Republicans saw an opportunity to unseat Sisolak, U.S. Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto, and the state’s three Democratic members of Congress in 2022. But the GOP was

only partially successful, flipping the governor’s seat (along with the lieutenant governor and state comptroller offices), while losing the Senate race and the three competitive House races.

Cortez Masto won the hard-fought race against Republican nominee Adam Laxalt by less than 1 point, while Republican gubernatorial nominee Joe Lombardo won by 1.5 points.

Two years prior, Joe Biden carried the state by 2.39 points, a slightly smaller margin of victory than Hillary Clinton’s 2.42 point victory in 2016.

Clark County, the 11th most populous county in the country and home to nearly three-quarters of the state’s population, has long been the blue bastion in the state. The powerful Culinary Union has been a key factor in turning out working-class voters of color who work in Las Vegas’ massive service industry.

But Democrats’ advantage in Clark has faded a bit over the past few election cycles. In 2016, Clinton won the county by 11 points, while Biden won it by 9 points four years later. Cortez Masto then won it by 8 points in 2022.

Those losses in Clark have been offset by the party’s gains in Washoe County, a battleground that has continued to trend in Democrats’

*Continued on page 6*

## 2024 Senate Ratings

Toss-Up	
Brown (D-Ohio)	Tester (D-Mont.)
Sinema (I-Ariz.)	
Tilt Democratic	Tilt Republican
Casey (D-Penn.)	<i>Manchin (D-W.V.)</i>
Rosen (D-Nev.)	
Lean Democratic	Lean Republican
MI Open (Stabenow, D)	
Baldwin (D-Wis.)	
Likely Democratic	Likely Republican
	Cruz (R-Texas)
Solid Democratic	Solid Republican
CA Open (Feinstein, D)	IN Open (Braun, R)
DE Open (Carper, D)	Barrasso (R-Wyo.)
MD Open (Cardin, D)	Blackburn (R-Tenn.)
Cantwell (D-Wash.)	Cramer (R-N.D.)
Gillibrand (D-N.Y.)	Fischer (R-Neb.)
Heinrich (D-N.M.)	Hawley (R-Mo.)
Hirono (D-Hawaii)	Ricketts (R-Neb.)
Kaine (D-Va.)	Romney (R-Utah)
King (I-Maine)	Scott (R-Fla.)
Klobuchar (D, Minn.)	Wicker (R-Miss.)
Menendez (D-N.J.)	
Murphy (D-Conn.)	
Sander (I-Vt.)	
Warren (D-Mass.)	
Whitehouse (D-R.I.)	

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

Continued from page 5

direction. Biden won it by 5 points in 2020 after Clinton won Washoe by 1 point in 2016, and Cortez Masto won it by 4 points last November after losing it narrowly in her first Senate race in 2016.

Republicans dominate the rest of the state, which is largely rural and sparsely populated, sometimes referred to as the “cow counties.”

Though Republicans have made gains with Latino voters in certain regions of the country, 2022 election results showed little evidence that Nevada Democrats have lost the support of Latino voters since 2020. Post-2022 data from the Democratic firm Catalist showed that 61 percent of Latino voters in Nevada backed Cortez Masto last cycle, after 60 percent of Latino voters in the state backed Biden in 2020.

But there was a clear dropoff between 2020 and 2016, when 69 percent of Latino voters voted for Clinton. And reaching out to these voters will be a necessary component of Democratic and Republican campaigns in a state that is 30 percent Latino.

### The Republican Primary Field

Republicans’ bench in Nevada is slim: Rep. Mark Amodei is the state’s lone GOP member of Congress, and Lombardo, Lt. Gov. Stavros Anthony, and Controller Andy Matthews are just months into their first terms.

Republicans have attempted to recruit former Gov. Brian Sandoval to run for Senate for multiple cycles, but the moderate former governor appears to have no interest in going to Washington.

Despite its small pool of credible candidates, Nevada currently features the most crowded GOP primary of any 2024 Senate race. Eight Republicans have filed to run against Rosen, though only four have put together credible campaigns.

In terms of fundraising and support from national Republican leaders, Brown is the clear frontrunner. “To me this is Sam Brown’s race to lose,” said one Republican strategist in Nevada not involved in the Senate race.

Along with having the support of the NRSC, Brown has also picked up endorsements from Sens. John Barrasso, Marsha Blackburn, and Tom Cotton, and the Koch-affiliated Americans for Prosperity PAC.

Brown, an Army veteran and Purple Heart recipient, has a compelling story. While he was deployed to Afghanistan in 2008, he survived severe burns from an improvised explosive device. His long recovery process, which included experimental pain treatments through video games, was featured in a 2012 *GQ* profile.

His story, along with his ability to fundraise (his campaign touted a \$400,000 haul in his first week in the race), makes him an attractive Senate candidate. Brown’s extended family is also wealthy: his great-uncle Mike Brown owns the NFL’s Cincinnati Bengals, and his great-grandfather Paul Brown was the founder and namesake of the Cleveland Browns.

The NRSC has been in the process of recruiting him since the beginning of the cycle. But some Republicans remain skeptical of Brown, who is politically untested and has only recently put down roots in the state.

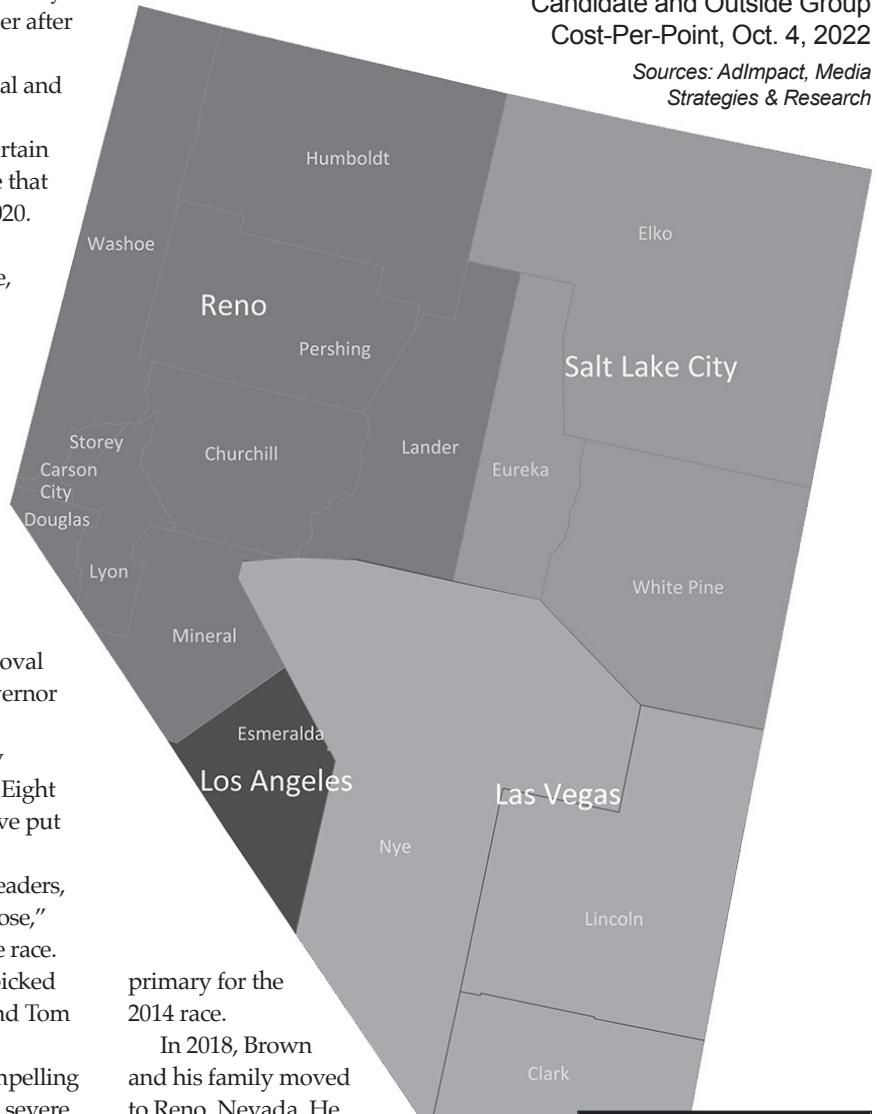
After returning home from Afghanistan, Brown was transferred to Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, where he met his wife Amy, a first lieutenant who worked at the hospital while Brown was in recovery. Brown, an Arkansas native, lived in Texas for the next several years, and started a business that provides medicine to Veterans Affairs hospitals.

He ran unsuccessfully for a state House seat in 2014, telling Glenn Beck during his campaign that “[i]t will literally take an act of God to get me out of Texas.” (That interview was then featured in a Club for Growth ad attacking Brown in 2022). Brown came in third place in the GOP

## Nevada Media Markets

Candidate and Outside Group Cost-Per-Point, Oct. 4, 2022

Sources: AdImpact, Media Strategies & Research



primary for the 2014 race.

In 2018, Brown and his family moved to Reno, Nevada. He launched his Senate campaign in the summer of 2021, shortly before former Nevada Attorney General Adam Laxalt entered the race. Laxalt had the support of both Trump and GOP Senate leaders, giving him a clear advantage in the Republican primary. But Brown was backed by the state party and posted strong fundraising numbers, impressing Republicans in D.C.

Though Laxalt organized multiple legal challenges to Nevada’s 2020 election results as a co-chair of the Trump campaign, Brown criticized him for not pushing hard enough on “election integrity” issues. Laxalt ultimately defeated Brown by 21 points.

After his unsuccessful Senate campaign, Brown became the chair of the Nevada Faith & Freedom Coalition (affiliated with conservative evangelical political strategist Ralph Reed). He also started a PAC to support Republican candidates — though according to a CNN report, the vast majority of the funds raised by this PAC were used to pay off

<b>Las Vegas</b>
Candidate Rate \$159/pp
Non-Candidate Rate \$319/pp
<b>Reno</b>
Candidate Rate \$63/pp
Non-Candidate Rate \$125/pp

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campaign debt from 2022.

Brown's campaign team includes Convergence Media for media and digital consulting and general consultant Katie Walsh Shields.

The NRSC made a strong effort to discourage other Republican candidates from jumping in the primary, according to multiple Republicans who spoke with *Inside Elections*. "I think they were kidding themselves a little bit when they thought they could clear the field," one Republican strategist told *Inside Elections*.

Despite the committee's efforts, two candidates announced campaigns in the weeks following Brown's July launch.

Gunter is a wealthy dermatologist who owns practices in California, Nevada, Texas, and Arizona. Though this is his first political campaign, he's been a longtime Republican donor and donated thousands of dollars to Trump's presidential campaigns. Gunter was appointed by Trump to be U.S. Ambassador to Iceland in 2019, and he calls himself an "America First diplomat" on his campaign's website.

But Gunter's stint in the Trump administration was marred by a series of controversies. CBS News reported that Gunter had wanted to carry a gun while in Iceland, and had attempted to carry out his duties from California in 2020 until he was personally asked by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to return to his post. More details about Gunter's tenure were revealed this week, after *Politico* publicized an Office of the Inspector General report that alleged Gunter had created a "threatening and intimidating environment" at the embassy.

Gunter has also faced criticism from being registered as a Democrat in California since 2000. (He claims that his voter registration was altered without his knowledge.) He's been registered as a Republican in Nevada since 2021.

But Gunter, who has donated to Republican campaigns since 2003 according to FEC reports, could have the ability to compete with Brown financially. He's also picked up an endorsement from Lee Zeldin, the Republican nominee for New York governor in 2022.

Grady, an Air Force veteran and former FedEx pilot, was the second Republican candidate to announce a campaign in August. Last cycle, Grady came in second place in the GOP primary for lieutenant governor with 25 percent of the vote, carrying 13 rural counties. He also backed Brown's Senate campaign in 2022.



Sam Brown

Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call

But Grady is relatively untested, and it's not clear if he'll be able to raise the funds necessary to compete seriously in the primary. Grady's campaign team includes general consultant David Watts, Meeting Street Insights for polling, and The Hereford Agency for media consulting.

Unlike his Republican opponents, Marchant has held elected office (he served in the general assembly for one term from 2016 to 2018) and has won a statewide primary. The 66-year-old Florida native was also the GOP nominee for Nevada's 4th District in 2020, losing to Democratic Rep. Steven Horsford by 5 points.

Marchant's blatant election denialism clearly hurt him in the secretary of state race, which he lost 49-47 percent to Democratic nominee Cisco

Aguilar. Marchant has said that he believes a global "cabal" is rigging U.S. elections, and he pushed Nevada counties to get rid of their electronic voting machines.

Though Marchant's previous campaigns makes him one of the highest-profile candidates in the race, his fundraising has so far been dismal. Between his campaign launch on May 2 and the end of the second fundraising quarter, he raised just \$112,000.

Gunter and Marchant are both running in the unabashedly pro-Trump lane of the GOP, and Brown has already faced attacks from both candidates for his establishment ties. Brown has said that he won't endorse a candidate in the GOP presidential primary, and Grady has also indicated that he won't take sides.

As the presidential GOP primary escalates, Republican Senate candidates will be forced to reckon with Trump, who's more popular with Nevada Republicans than he is with Iowa and New Hampshire Republicans. That could be a challenge for candidates like Brown and Grady. The Senate primary won't be until June 11, at which point the Republican presidential nominee will probably be clear.

And if the former president decides to get involved in the race, that could significantly change the primary dynamics. At this point, Trump hasn't endorsed any Republican Senate candidates aside from Jim Banks in Indiana.

## The Democratic Incumbent

The rapid rise of Rosen's political career has been propelled by Reid, the former Senate Majority Leader.

In 2016, Reid recruited her to run for Nevada's 3rd District, a swing district left open when GOP Rep. Joe Heck decided to run for Senate. Rosen, a computer programmer and consultant, had never held political office but had been deeply involved in her community as president of a synagogue in Henderson.

After serving in Congress for less than one year, Rosen was handpicked by Reid to run for the Senate (passing over fellow Rep. Dina Titus). Heller was the most vulnerable Republican senator up for re-election in 2018, and Rosen hammered him for his ties to Trump and for voting to repeal Obamacare in 2017. Republicans criticized Rosen for her limited political experience, and accused her of inflating her work as a self-employed consultant.

Rosen defeated Heller by 5 points, after both parties had expected a closer race.

Over the past five years, Rosen has kept a low-profile in the Senate, establishing a reputation as a moderate Democrat who says she "prefer[s] to work behind the scenes." She was reluctant to support eliminating the filibuster, eventually saying she would support eliminating it to protect voting rights.

As chair of the Senate Commerce Committee's tourism subcommittee since 2021, she's worked on legislation to revitalize Nevada's tourism-dependent economy, which was devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic. She also sits on the committees for Armed Services, Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, and Small Business and Entrepreneurship.

Rosen will need to work to introduce herself to Nevada voters — a challenge for senators on the ballot every six years in such a transient state. There are roughly 300,000 Nevadans registered to vote who were not registered in 2018. Cortez Masto faced the same challenge in 2022, though she was slightly better known among Nevada voters from an earlier statewide run and had a larger national profile as the first Latina elected to the U.S. Senate.

"Cortez Masto is perceived among Nevadans as a little stronger than

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Rosen,” nonpartisan pollster Mike Noble told *Inside Elections*. Noble’s latest poll of registered voters in the state from April found Rosen’s favorability at 42 percent, and Cortez Masto’s favorability at 48 percent. More recently, a *Morning Consult* survey showed Rosen’s approval rating at 44 percent.

The senator’s early fundraising numbers have been strong. She raised \$2.7 million in the second quarter and had \$7.5 million in her campaign account.

### How it Plays Out

Ultimately, the Republican primary outcome should have a significant impact on how competitive this race is. If Marchant becomes the Republican nominee, Republicans’ odds of flipping this seat will shrink, and it’s hard to imagine Republican outside groups spending to support Marchant when they have three better opportunities in West Virginia, Ohio, and Montana.

“There’s not a chance in France” that Marchant could win a general election, according to one Nevada Republican strategist. Another GOP operative acknowledged that the national party’s investment in the race would be “very candidate dependent.”

“Rosen better be hoping, praying that Jim Marchant comes out of that primary,” Noble told *Inside Elections*.

Both Biden and Trump remain unpopular in the state, and both parties expect the presidential contest to be just as competitive as 2016 and 2020. Unlike her Democratic colleagues in states that Trump won, Rosen probably won’t need to overperform Biden. But her prospects are heavily dependent on Biden’s ability to keep the presidential race close.

The two issues that dominated 2022 Senate races — abortion and the economy — should remain in the spotlight in 2024.

Nationwide economic issues are amplified in the Silver State, which has the highest unemployment rate in the country at 5 percent, and some of the highest gas prices across the U.S. But Democrats are cautiously optimistic the economic climate will be better in 2024 than it was in 2022.

“Economic conditions in 2022 were pretty darn bad and we were still

able to win,” one Nevada Democrat told *Inside Elections*.

Democrats will continue to make abortion the focal point of their attacks on Republican candidates in the state. Compared to other purple states, Nevada has long been more pro-choice — in 1990, two-thirds of Nevada voters supported a ballot amendment codifying abortion rights for the first 24 weeks of pregnancy. In May of this year, Lombardo signed a bill protecting abortion rights for out-of-state residents.

“A lot of conservative women are O.K. with abortion, especially early on,” one Republican operative who has worked on campaigns in the state told *Inside Elections*.



Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call

Jim Marchant

While the four Republican candidates all identify as pro-life, they’ve avoided taking concrete positions on the issue so far. In 2022, Brown had said he would consider supporting a national ban on

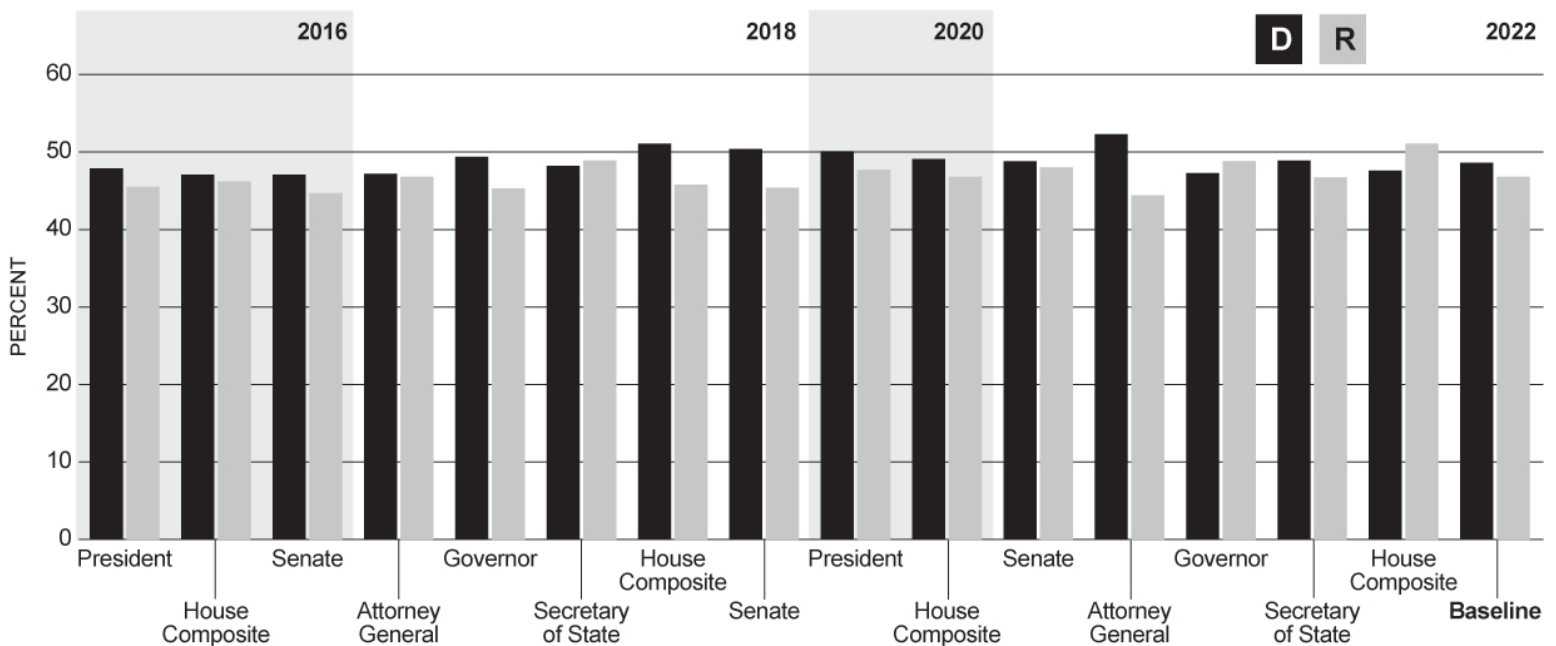
abortion, but after he announced his 2024 campaign, he declined to say if he’d support a national ban.

Once again, winning Nevada’s independent voters will be crucial. In 2022, both Cortez Masto and Lombardo won independents by 3 points. And the number of voters registered as nonpartisan has continued to grow (partially due to Nevada’s recently-implemented automatic voter registration). Nonpartisan voters outnumber both registered Democrats and registered Republicans, as of last month.

The 20-year-old Reid Machine has remained strong, giving Democrats a slight but persistent advantage. But with the right candidate, Republicans have an opportunity to win a Senate race for the first time in over a decade.

IE

## Statewide Election Results for Nevada





# North Carolina 8: Bishop's Move Opens Seat

By Erin Covey

Nearly five years ago, a rare case of verified election fraud paved the path for Republican Dan Bishop's election to Congress. Bishop is now leaving Washington to run for the state's attorney general office — and the candidate at the center of the election fraud scandal is mulling a comeback.

Baptist pastor and 2018 congressional candidate Mark Harris is seriously considering running to succeed Bishop in North Carolina's 8th District and will make a decision by the end of August, according to a Republican close to his campaign.

In 2018, Harris' apparent defeat of Democrat Dan McCready was called into question after the state Board of Elections found evidence that a political operative who worked for Harris had tampered with enough absentee ballots to change the outcome of the race. Following a monthslong investigation, the board voted to re-do the election, and Harris decided not to run again. Republicans nominated Bishop, then a state senator, who went on to win the competitive race.

But Harris isn't the only Republican eyeing the open seat, and another round of redistricting ahead of 2024 throws a wrinkle into the race. Both state Rep. Dean Arp and Republican activist Dan Barry are considering running, according to multiple Republican sources, and a host of other candidates could jump in the race depending on how the new district lines are drawn.

Bishop's seat, based in the southern Piedmont region, is one of the most conservative congressional districts in the Old North State. The congressman won his 2022 re-election bid by nearly 40 points, and Donald Trump would have won the district by 34 points in 2020. Though the district lines will change before next November, operatives on both sides of the aisle expect the 8th to remain solidly Republican.

## The Potential Republican Candidates

Since his 2018 campaign, Harris has remained active in conservative politics as a vice president for the Family Research Council, a conservative Christian organization run by Tony Perkins. Earlier this year, Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson spoke at Harris's church (and made headlines for criticizing churches that display Pride flags).

Harris, 57, first ran for federal office in 2014 as a candidate in the GOP primary to challenge then-Democratic Sen. Kay Hagan. He came in third place in the primary with 18 percent. In 2016, he challenged 9th District Rep. Robert Pittenger in the GOP primary, losing to the incumbent by 134 votes; two years later, he ran against Pittenger again, this time winning the primary by a few hundred votes.

The investigation into the race between Harris and McCready eventually led to the indictment of McCrae Dowless, the Harris campaign operative. Though Harris was not personally charged, his son John Harris testified that he had warned his father about Dowless' shady history before his father hired him.

Harris, the former pastor of First Baptist Church in Charlotte and the former president of the North Carolina Baptist Convention, is a staunch social conservative and led a ballot initiative in 2012 that banned gay marriage in North Carolina. Since 2020, Harris has served as the senior pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Mooresville (which is outside the current district).

Though Harris told the *Carolina Journal* that he is "not here to relitigate the 2018 election," his role in the scandal would almost certainly come up in the GOP primary, and could hurt his fundraising prospects.

Arp, 57, has served in the state legislature for over a decade,

representing a portion of Union County. He owns a structural engineering business in Monroe and served on the Union County Board of Education for 12 years before running for the state House in 2012. For the past six years, Arp has chaired the House Appropriations Committee.

Barry, an insurance executive, is the former chairman of the Union County GOP and was a Republican elector in 2020. He ran for a previous version of this congressional seat in 2012 and came in 5th place in the crowded Republican primary. More recently, he was a fellow for the Club for Growth in 2020 — a class that included freshman GOP Reps. Eric Burlison of Missouri, Josh Brecheen of Oklahoma, and Andy Ogles of Tennessee.

Other potential candidates include former Union County Commissioner Allan Baucom and Rep. David Willis, who also represents Union County. State Sen. Todd Johnson has ruled out a congressional campaign and announced he's running for re-election.

And Harris isn't the only former candidate with a controversial reputation in North Carolina Republican circles who could run in the 8th. One Republican operative told *Inside Elections* that Bo Hines, the 2022 GOP nominee in the Raleigh-based 13th District, is hoping to run for a safe GOP seat in the state. Hines, who's originally from Charlotte, had initially planned to challenge Rep. Virginia Foxx in 2022, and then moved to an open Greensboro-based district, before ultimately deciding to run in the 13th, where he lost to Democrat Wiley Nickel.

The primary could draw attention from Republican outside groups, and Barry's connection to the Club for Growth could be advantageous. But the Congressional Leadership Fund, the McCarthy-affiliated super PAC, isn't likely to get involved, after striking a deal with the Club that it wouldn't spend in primaries for safe Republican seats.

A crowded primary could lead to a runoff, if none of the candidates are able to win more than 30 percent of the vote.

## Redistricting Questions

Republicans now control the state Legislature and the state Supreme Court, giving them wide latitude over the redistricting process ahead of 2024. Currently, the 8th is anchored in suburban Union County, one of the fastest growing counties in the state. The district also encompasses several more rural counties: Anson, Richmond, Montgomery, Davidson, Rowan, Stanly, and part of Cabarrus County.

North Carolina Republicans who spoke with *Inside Elections* said that they expect the open seat will remain based in Union County — but what the rest of the district includes is an open question. The northern part of the district touches the Triad region (Greensboro, High Point, and Winston-Salem), which is currently represented by Democratic Rep. Kathy Manning. And the western side of the district borders the Charlotte-based 12th and 14th Districts, held by Democratic Reps. Alma Adams and Jeff Jackson, respectively. Republicans might turn Jackson and Manning's districts into pickup opportunities, potentially making the current 8th District less Republican.

The eastern part of the 8th borders the 9th District, held by Rep. Richard Hudson, chairman of the NRCC. Before 2022, Hudson's district stretched further west and included counties closer to his hometown of Charlotte. One Republican strategist speculated that the new version of Hudson's district might look more similar to the previous map, which would also impact the shape of the new 8th. These questions won't be answered until the fall, when the state legislature is expected to convene for a redistricting session. **IE**

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why Spanberger isn't expected to announce her 2024 plans until after Nov. 7.

At this point, the congresswoman hasn't confirmed or denied the news; her spokesperson told *Politico* that "Abigail is squarely focused on the 2023 General Assembly races."

### Potential Democratic Field

Democratic operatives who spoke with *Inside Elections* expect a crowded primary. The party has a deep bench in the suburbs of Northern Virginia filled with politicians eager to travel the short distance across the Potomac. But until the congresswoman announces her 2024 plans, any primary machinations will happen behind the scenes. And several potential candidates are currently busy running for General Assembly seats.

The most obvious potential candidates would be former state Dels. Jennifer Carroll Foy and Hala Ayala — who just ran against each other in a bitter primary for an open state Senate seat based in Prince William County. Carroll Foy, who was backed by more than a dozen labor unions, emerged victorious, defeating Ayala by 26 points. Ayala had the backing of former Govs. Terry McAuliffe and Ralph Northam.

Carroll Foy and Ayala were part of a class of Democrats who flipped more than a dozen state House seats in 2017. Both women also ran for statewide office in 2021. Carroll Foy came in second place in the Democratic primary for governor, winning nearly 20 percent of the vote. Ayala won the Democratic nomination for lieutenant governor and went on to lose to Republican Winsome Sears by 2 points.

Prince William County is chock-full of other Democrats who could run for the 7th, though none have experience running in federal or statewide races. One potential candidate is state Sen. Jeremy McPike, who has represented Prince William County in the state Senate since 2016 and just won a competitive primary for the new version of his seat. McPike's primary opponent, progressive state Del. Elizabeth Guzman, could also run — she lost to McPike by just 50 votes in June.

Candi King, Michelle Maldonado, Briana Sewell, and Danica Roem all represent parts of Prince William County in the state House. Roem, who's currently running for a state Senate seat, told *Inside Elections* that she was "not running and won't be running for VA-07 under any

circumstance." Another potential candidate would be Prince William County Supervisor Margaret Angela Franklin.

There's fewer options in Stafford County, which is at the edge of Northern Virginia and has turned purple in recent years. Former state Del. Joshua G. Cole, who's running for a competitive House district, and Marine veteran Joel Griffin, who's running for a competitive Senate seat, could jump in the congressional race.

Cameron Webb would be another potential candidate. Though he was the Democratic nominee in Virginia's 5th District in 2020, he's originally from Spotsylvania County, which is in the 7th. Webb, a physician and assistant professor at the University of Virginia, is currently a Covid-19 policy adviser at the White House.

Whoever Democrats' nominate will need to ramp up their fundraising quickly because of the condensed timeline. The vast majority of the district is within the expensive Washington D.C. media market.

### Potential Republican Field

Four Republicans have filed to run in the 7th. The field includes three veterans: retired Navy SEAL Cameron Hamilton, Marine veteran Jon Myers, and Army veteran Shaliek Tarpley.

Hamilton, a defense contractor, is close to state Del. Nick Freitas, who lost to Spanberger by 2 points in 2020. According to Myers' website, he worked in the State Department after serving in the Marine Corps for 26 years.

Tarpley has yet to file any fundraising reports with the FEC. though he filed a statement of candidacy last December. The fourth candidate, Intensity Analytics chief marketing officer Bill Moher, has raised less than \$10,000 (he also loaned himself \$340,000).

Republican operatives in D.C. are hoping that Derrick Anderson, a retired Green Beret who ran in the GOP primary for the 7th last cycle, will run again. The Spotsylvania County native came in second place in the crowded primary with 24 percent (Vega won the nomination with just 29 percent).

One other potential candidate is retired U.S. Army General Tim Kadavy, who served as the former director of the Army National Guard.

As for Vega herself, she's running for re-election to her county board of supervisors seat in 2023, and she hasn't commented publicly on whether she'd run for Congress again in 2024.



## Statewide Election Results for Virginia's 7th District

