Inside Elections

with Nathan L. Gonzales

Nonpartisan Analysis

2024 Senate Ratings

Toss-Up (3)

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

Tilt Democratic (2)   Tilt Republican

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

Lean Democratic (2)   Lean Republican

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

Likely Democratic (1)   Likely Republican (1)

Menendez (D-N.J.)   Cruz (R-Texas)

Solid Democratic (14)   Solid Republican (11)

CA Open (Butler, D)   IN Open (Braun, R)
DE Open (Carper, D)   UT Open (Romney, R)
MD Open (Cardin, D)   *WV Open (Manchin, D)*
Cantwell (D-Wash.)   Barrasso (R-Wyo.)
Gillibrand (D-N.Y.)   Blackburn (R-Tenn.)
Heinrich (D-N.M.)   Cramer (R-N.D.)
Hirono (D-Hawaii)   Fischer (R-Neb.)
Kaine (D-Va.)   Hawley (R-Mo.)
King (I-Maine)   Ricketts (R-Neb.)
Klobuchar (D-Minn.)   Scott (R-Fla.)
Murphy (D-Conn.)   Wicker (R-Miss.)
Sander (I-Vt.)
Warren (D-Mass.)
Whitehouse (D-R.I.)

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

CALENDAR

Feb. 11	Super Bowl LVIII
Feb. 13	New York's 3rd District Special Election
Feb. 24	South Carolina GOP Presidential Primary
Feb. 27	Michigan Presidential Primaries
March 4	Trump federal trial about Jan. 6 begins
March 5	Super Tuesday

Michigan Senate: Primary Focus

By Jacob Rubashkin

Longtime Democratic Sen. Debbie Stabenow's decision not to seek a fifth term makes Michigan an intriguing pickup opportunity for Senate Republicans this fall, albeit one that is not nearly as ripe as the party's top priorities.

Despite success at most other levels of electoral politics, Michigan Republicans have struggled to win either of the state's Senate seats for a half-century, with their one victory since 1972 coming in 1994.

That's not to say they haven't had close calls — just look at Democratic Sen. Gary Peters' 1.6-point squeaker in 2020 — and the GOP has reason to be optimistic about the long term political trends in a Rust Belt state Donald Trump carried narrowly in 2016 and lost narrowly in 2020.

But a messy primary that won't conclude until August 6, a formidable opponent on the horizon, and more pressing races elsewhere conspired to make this year's Senate race another uphill climb for the GOP. If Republicans pull off a victory in Michigan, however, they are likely adding to their new Senate majority.

The Democrats

On the Democratic side, Rep. Elissa Slotkin is the clear frontrunner for her party's nomination over actor Hill Harper.

The 47-year-old third-term representative from Central Michigan has been an up-and-comer since flipping a historically GOP district in the 2018 midterm election by ousting GOP Rep. Mike Bishop by 4 points. Since then, she has ground out two tough re-elections in a district that is among the most evenly divided in the country, including running ahead of Joe Biden by several points in 2020, when Trump carried her district narrowly.

Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

Elissa Slotkin

The Cornell and Columbia graduate has leveraged her career as a Central Intelligence Agency analyst and later Obama administration Defense Department official to burnish her nonpartisan and national security bona fides, and has emerged as one of her party's top fundraisers in the country. She raised more than all but 11 members of Congress last cycle, and reported $5.1 million in the bank on September

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Report Shorts

Louisiana's 6th District. A redrawn congressional map is the result of a legal challenge under Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act and is poised to deliver an additional seat to Democrats. The Supreme Court's ruling in a similar case in Alabama last year set off a domino effect throughout the South, where states' Black representation in Congress is often significantly out of proportion with their Black populations.

Louisiana's overall population is one-third Black, but currently, just one of the state's six congressional districts is majority-Black: the 2nd District, represented by Democrat Troy Carter, which includes New Orleans and parts of Baton Rouge.

The new 6th District would encompass all of West Baton Rouge and much of the western half of East Baton Rouge, and extends northwest across the state all the way to Shreveport, near the Texas border. By voting age population, the new 6th is 54 percent Black and just 39 percent white, and Joe Biden would have easily carried it in the 2020 election, 59-39 percent. That makes it virtually impossible for GOP Rep. Garret Graves to win it this fall.

Graves has not divulged his plans moving forward but did suggest he may contest the new map's legality — and indeed, the map bears a striking resemblance to the "backslash" district drawn by Louisiana in the 1990s that was struck down by the Supreme Court as an unconstitutional racial gerrymander.

But for the time being, he faces a steep path to return to Congress. If he does not run in the new 6th District, he may challenge fellow GOP Rep. Julia Letlow in the neighboring 5th District, which would be an uphill battle given she already represents more of the newly-drawn seat.

The bottom line is that Graves' district moves from Solid Republican to Likely Democratic, and Democrats, who need a net gain of just five seats to reclaim the majority, can add another seat to their column nine months before Election Day.

Nevada's 3rd District. GOP state Assemblywoman Heidi Kasama entered the race in August as a highly-touted recruit and dropped out of the race at the beginning of the year. Fundraising was more difficult than expected and the campaign against Democratic Rep. Susie Lee never caught fire. Republicans are left with a handful of lower-tier candidates and a March 15 filing deadline to find someone better to run in a Clark County-based district where Democrats have a 7-point Baseline advantage. Lean Democratic.

North Dakota Governor. After an unsuccessful run for the GOP presidential nomination, GOP Gov. Doug Burgum announced that he won't seek re-election. At-Large Rep. Kelly Armstrong is the initial frontrunner in the June 11 Republican primary considering he already represents the entire state. But former state Sen. Tom Campbell (who ran for the open House seat in 2018 and dropped out before Armstrong won that primary) is running as well. With a Baseline of R+30.4,, the most important race is the primary. Solid Republican.

Ohio's 7th District. Former Democratic Rep. Dennis Kucinich announced his bid as an independent against GOP Rep. Max Miller. Kucinich, 77, was first elected to Congress in 1996, ran unsuccessfully for president in 2004 and 2008 and lost re-election in 2012 to fellow Democrat Marcy Kaptur in the primary after redistricting pitted the two members against each other. Kucinich also lost in the 2018 Democratic primary governor, lost a 2021 race for mayor of Cleveland (a position he held in the late 1970s), and was Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s presidential campaign manager until Oct. 2023, when RFK Jr. switched from that Democratic primary to run as an independent. Republicans have an 11-point Baseline advantage in the district and the race is rated Solid Republican.

Ohio's 9th District. Republican efforts to prevent J.R. Majewski from winning the GOP nomination again and to defeat Democratic Rep. Marcy Kaptur were complicated when their preferred candidate, former state Rep. Craig Riedel, criticized former President Donald Trump. House Leadership including Speaker Mike Johnson and Elise Stefanik switched their support to state Rep. Derrick Merrin, who got into the race just before the filing deadline. But a crowded field could help Majewski prevail after all. The Toledo-based, northwest Ohio district has a 3.6-point Baseline advantage for Republicans, so not being able to defeat Kapture is a black mark for the GOP. Lean Democratic.

South Carolina's 3rd District. GOP Rep. Jeff Duncan announced he will not seek re-election in the district that covers the northwest corner of the state. Republicans have a 39-point Baseline advantage so the key race will be the June 11 GOP primary. The filing deadline is April 1. Solid Republican.

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Iowa 3: Des Moines Melee

By Jacob Rubashkin

The presidential circus left town, but the most consequential political fight in Des Moines is just getting started.

Iowa's 3rd District is one of the most evenly divided seats in the country, and has been for the better part of two decades. The Des Moines-based district has switched hands repeatedly over the last decade, and 2024 is likely to feature another close, competitive race, with implications for both Iowa Democrats and the House majority.

Incumbent Republican Zach Nunn won the eighth-closest race of the 2022 cycle, but he can't rest on his laurels just yet. Democrats have made him a top target and see this race as the most winnable of Iowa's four congressional districts. And unlike in 2022, when Nunn was able to run on the same ticket as popular Gov. Kim Reynolds and Sen. Chuck Grassley, he'll have to share billing this year with former President Donald Trump.

The Lay of the Land

The 3rd is anchored by Polk County (Des Moines) and also includes 20 more rural counties to the west and south along the Missouri border, stretching east to Ottumwa.

Roughly 62 percent of the district resides in Polk, and another 13 percent lives in neighboring Dallas County, home to Waukee and part of West Des Moines.

Polk County is also the bedrock of the district's Democratic voter base. In 2022, it was the only county Rep. Cindy Axne carried in her unsuccessful re-election bid, and it supplied 70 percent of her votes.

The citizen voting-age population of the district is 88.5 percent white, 4.2 percent Black, 4 percent Hispanic, and 2.5 percent Asian. The district boasts a slightly above-average college education rate at 35 percent, and a median household income of $70,794, which ranks 188th of 435 congressional districts.

Politically, the district is split down the middle. In 2020, President Trump carried it by 0.4 points, 49.2 percent to 48.8 percent, a slightly narrower margin than his 48-45 percent victory in 2016. Barack Obama would have won the district as it is currently drawn by larger margins in 2012 (by 6 points) and 2008 (10 points), but in 2004 and 2000 the current 3rd would have been a nailbiter, with George W. Bush winning it by 0.6 points in 2004 and losing it to Al Gore by 0.4 points in 2000.

A district in Republican hands that has a slight Democratic advantage (49-48.7 percent, according to Baseline) is an attractive target for ambitious Democrats.

The Democratic Challengers

Lanon Baccam, 42, is the son of two Tai Dam refugees who settled in Mount Pleasant, Iowa following the Vietnam War — Gov. Robert Ray, a Republican, invited thousands of members of the ethnic minority to the state in the 1970s.

At 17, Baccam enlisted in the Army National Guard and deployed to Kandahar, Afghanistan as a combat engineer from 2004 to 2005. Following eight years in the Army, Baccam attended Drake University in Des Moines, graduating in 2011.

Baccam worked for US Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack (who previously served eight years as Iowa's governor and was mayor of Mount Pleasant) in various positions from 2011 to 2016, as an advance staffer, executive assistant, and eventually as deputy under secretary for farm and foreign agricultural services and military veterans agricultural liaison from 2015-2016.

In 2020, Baccam worked on the Biden campaign as the deputy state director in Iowa, and following Biden's victory he returned to the Agriculture Department to work as director of advance and then deputy chief of staff to Vilsack, who is once again serving as secretary.

Baccam's campaign team for his own race includes media consultant Travis Lowe of Three Point Media, pollster Anna Greenberg of GQR, and

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 (7D)

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

Lean Democratic (12D)

- 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 (8R)

CA 41 (Calvert, R)	PA 10 (Perry, R)
CA 45 (Steel, R)	TX 15 (De La Cruz, R)
IA 1 (Miller-Meeks, R)	
MT 1 (Zinke, R)	
NE 2 (Bacon, R)	
NY 1 (LaLota, R)	

	GOP	DEM
Solid	187	174
Likely/Lean/Tilt	29	33
Total	216	207
Toss-up		12
Needed for majority		218

Likely Democratic (12D, 2R)

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

Likely Republican (9R, 3D)

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

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

direct mail consultant Emily Parcell of Agency Strategies.

Melissa Vine, 41, runs a non-profit in Des Moines that aids women recovering from trauma. A licensed mental health counselor, Vine is a 2002 graduate of Iowa State and received a Masters in counseling from Liberty University in 2014. She is currently working toward a law degree at Drake University, and will graduate this May. This is her first run for office.

Vine's campaign team includes media consultant Whitney Larsen of Thematic Campaigns, pollster Melissa Bell of GSG and direct mail consultant Peter Giangreco of the Strategy Group.

The Democratic Primary

Both candidates begin the race largely unknown within the district, but Baccam begins with some real advantages ahead of the June 4 primary, according to Democratic strategists.

He has significant establishment support both in Iowa, where he boasts endorsements from state Auditor Rob Sand (the last remaining statewide elected Democrat), and Vilsack, and in Washington, DC, where he's the favored candidate of national strategists. And the connections he has made as a Biden administration official and campaign staffer allowed him to raise money quickly; Baccam said he raised more than $500,000 in the last seven weeks of 2023. Fundraising reports are due at the end of the month.

Vine has a compelling background and has made abortion rights — a major motivator for Democratic voters — the centerpiece of her campaign. But as a political newcomer she may struggle to raise the money she needs to get her message out, especially with the party's power players lining up behind Baccam. And outside groups such as EMILY's List, which supports pro-choice women, do not look likely to get involved here financially.

While Vine's allies acknowledge her steep fundraising disadvantage, they are confident she will be able to raise the resources to compete by airing a month's worth of television in the inexpensive Des

Courtesy Baccam Campaign

Lanon Baccam

Moines media market. Vine has not yet announced her fundraising for the first six weeks of the race.

Beyond that, Vine's campaign hopes to leverage grassroots support and backing from the district's more progressive voters to sneak up on Baccam.

The Republican Incumbent

Nunn, 44, is in his first term representing the 3rd District. He previously served four years in the state House followed by four more in the state Senate, and before that was an Air Force airborne intelligence officer. He still serves in the Air National Guard.

A native of central Iowa, Nunn is a graduate of Drake University (2002) and also has degrees from Air University in Alabama (2004), and a master's in international relations and national security from Cambridge University (2007).

In 2014, Nunn ousted a Democratic incumbent from his state House

district east of Des Moines, 56-42 percent, and defeated him again two years later by a wider margin. In 2018, Nunn took advantage of the surprise retirement of popular Democratic state Sen. Chaz Allen to run for a seat that included much of Polk County east of Des Moines

Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

Zach Nunn

as well as Jasper County, and defeated a weak Democratic replacement candidate, 56-44 percent (GOP Gov. Kim Reynolds won that seat by a narrower 50-47 percent margin).

In 2022, Nunn ran against Axne in one of the top-targeted races for national Republicans. After winning an expensive but ultimately uncompetitive primary with 66 percent, Nunn narrowly defeated Axne, 50.2-49.6 percent. With a margin of 2,145 votes, it was the eighth-closest House race in the country.

In Congress, Nunn sits on the Agriculture and Financial Services committees.

Nunn's campaign team includes media consultant Annie Kelly Kuhle of FP1 Strategies, pollster Erik Iverson of Moore Information Group, Redwave Communications for direct mail, and Targeted Victory for digital.

How It Plays Out

In such an evenly divided district, strategists from both parties expect a hard-fought and close race from start to finish, with the final result ultimately tracking closely to the presidential outcome.

For the Democratic nominee, a big showing in Polk County is crucial to success. Several Democratic strategists pointed to a drop in turnout among Polk County Democrats as the reason for Axne's narrow loss in 2022. Axne won 108,401 votes in Polk in 2022 compared to 141,567 in 2020, a difference of 33,166, while Nunn won 20,417 fewer votes in Polk than GOP nominee David Young did in 2020.

In 2020, turnout among Polk County Republicans was 2.5 points higher than turnout among Polk County Democrats. But in 2022, even as overall turnout dropped, the GOP's turnout advantage grew to 4.4 points. In a close race, that small slip in Democratic turnout proved fatal to Axne, who lost by 2,145 votes. Had the turnout dynamic more closely reflected 2020, Axne could have netted around 2,600 additional Democratic votes.

Whoever the Democratic nominee is will likely focus their firepower on Polk especially among women, who saw a greater drop in participation than their male counterparts between 2020 and 2022.

Neighboring Dallas County may also emerge as the bellwether for the district, especially with Trump at the top of the ticket for Republicans. It's the fastest-growing county in the state and the fourth-fastest in the nation, and Democrats are coming closer than ever to winning as the Des Moines suburbs continue to shift leftward. In 2020, Biden lost Dallas by just 2 points while Axne lost it by 4.5 points. Two years later, Axne improved her margin there by 1 point even as she lost district-wide. While the Democratic congressional nominee probably doesn't have to win Dallas to win overall, they will have to fight it close to a tie.

Democrats' focus on turnout and the suburbs is part of why abortion

will remain front-and-center in their messaging this cycle. There is potentially damaging video footage of Nunn raising his hand in support of a complete ban on abortion with no exceptions during a 2022 primary debate that Democrats made extensive use of in advertising last cycle and will use again this year. Nunn later walked back that position during the general election and said he supported exceptions for rape, incest, and the health of the mother.

Republicans note that Nunn was able to deflect those attacks last cycle even as he was significantly outspent on the airwaves, and believe that they can redirect the conversation to Democrats' lack of support for any restrictions on abortion. And some national GOP strategists still hold out hope that abortion will not be as massive a motivator as it was in 2022, in the immediate wake of the Dobbs decision — though the party also misjudged the impact of Dobbs last cycle too.

Democrats are hopeful that the six-week abortion ban that Iowa passed last summer will make the issue even more salient for voters than it was in 2022.

Courtesy Vine Campaign

Melissa Vine

Abortion is also likely to be Democrats main hit because Nunn has otherwise avoided significant missteps. He is far from the flashiest member of the House Republican caucus, and he's steered clear of embarrassing headlines in Washington, which makes him a more elusive target.

"He's been very uncontroversial, to his credit," said one national Democratic strategist.

Nunn's vote for the first Republican debt ceiling bill, which would have slashed federal spending by one-third, is sure to appear in Democratic ads. And Democrats may also target Nunn on education issues, especially after progressive candidates defeated several candidates in Des Moines-area board of education races backed by conservative group Moms for Liberty.

Summing up Nunn's path to victory, one longtime Iowa GOP strategist said, "Don't lose Polk County by too much, do your best in Dallas County, and over-perform as much as humanly possible in the rural parts of the district."

If Baccam is ultimately the Democratic nominee, party strategists believe his agricultural and military experience and his family's only-in-America story of fleeing the Vietnam War to resettle in rural Iowa will negate some of Nunn's heartland appeal and veteran story, and may even help him keep down margins in the rural parts of the district. And Baccam's allies are skeptical that potential GOP (and Democratic) attacks focusing on his time away from the state will land, given the nature of his service first in the military and then in the Department of Agriculture under Vilsack.

That's not to say Republicans won't try. The NRCC welcomed him to the race by calling him a "DC insider," though that's a line that is more likely to come from national Republicans in DC than Iowa Republicans. One Iowa GOP strategist's assessment of Baccam was more complimentary: "Democrats did a good job with their recruit, he's very impressive."

The Money Picture

Iowa is no longer a presidential battleground, and no constitutional offices are up this year. That effectively makes this race the only game in town in the Des Moines media market (Democrats hope to make a race out of the neighboring 1st District, which touches Des Moines but is more heavily concentrated in the Cedar Rapids and Davenport markets), which keeps TV costs low in an already-cheap market and will incentivize outside investment.

Last cycle, Republican outside groups invested heavily in this race, with the NRCC spending $2.4 million and CLF spending $1.6 million, compared to Democrats' more modest investment of $914,000 from the DCCC and $903,000 from HMP.

This cycle, however, the reverse could be true. As a challenger, Nunn was vastly outspent by Axne, who outraised him by $4.6 million and outspent him on advertising by a factor of five-to-one, so the outside support was integral to his win (even with the cavalry, Republicans aired just over half of the gross ratings points that Democrats did in the race, because Axne's candidate dollars went much further on TV).

While Nunn raised just $2.6 million overall last cycle — $600,000 of which he spent in his primary — he had already raised $2 million by September of last year, and will have much more money at his disposal.

Nunn's allies plan to use those additional funds to air more positive advertisements hammering home Nunn's "Iowa values," including spots focusing on the congressman's recent adoption of his two foster daughters.

"We have to continue to show that Zach is a force for common sense," said an Iowa GOP consultant, who also said that in order for Nunn to hold his own in the suburbs, Republicans must "create a brand for Zach that is separate from any political party and separate from any presidential candidate."

The Bottom Line

Whether it's with Baccam or Vine, this is the type of seat Democrats should be winning if they are going to reclaim the House majority. And it's the type of district that could give clues as to who is winning the race for the White House. ∎

Statewide Election Results for Iowa's 3rd District
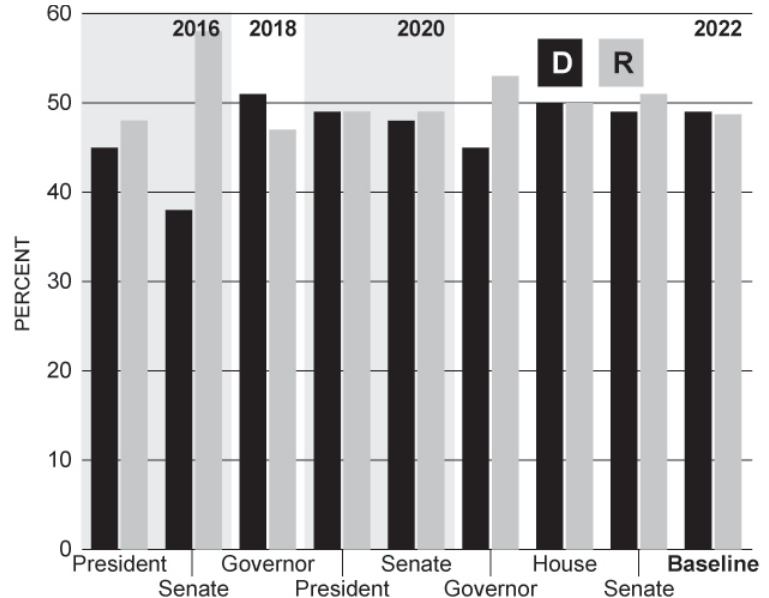
2022 VAR: House Challengers Running Again in 2024

By Bradley Wascher

There's no shame in finishing second, because Congress is filled with losers.

In 2020, Republican Air Force veteran Anna Paulina Luna failed to unseat Democratic then-Rep. Charlie Crist in Florida's 13th District. Two years later, Luna, now without worry of Crist, who was running for governor, found herself in a redistricted version of the 13th that was much more favorable for Republicans. Riding high off endorsements from former President Donald Trump and other national MAGA figures, Luna was elected to Congress — on her second try — by a breezy 8 points.

Every year there are candidates who run again after losing, and 2024 will be no different. Across the 74 House seats currently rated as competitive by *Inside Elections* (i.e. those rated as Toss-up, Tilt, Lean, or Likely in favor of either party), the losing candidate in the 2022 general election is running again in 28 districts. In 21 of those races, the incumbent is also seeking re-election this November — setting the stage for many potential rematches.

But who among these back-to-backers overperformed despite their loss and has the best chance of winning this time around? To assess candidate quality ahead of 2024 for those who also ran in 2022, we can use Vote Above Replacement, or VAR. VAR measures the strength of a congressional candidate relative to a typical candidate from their party within the same district. That initial benchmark is derived using *Inside Elections'* Baseline, which captures a congressional district's political performance by combining all federal and state election results over the past four election cycles into a single score. VAR is simply the difference between a candidate's share of the vote and their party's Baseline. A higher VAR indicates a strong performance relative to expectations.

Across the 28 House nominees who lost a battleground race in 2022 and are running again in 2024, the average candidate finished with a -1 VAR. It makes sense that their overall performance was negative;

VAR for 2022 Unsuccessful Dem Nominees Running Again in 2024

CD	Candidate	Percent Earned	Party Baseline	Vote Above Replacement
CO-03	Adam Frisch	49.9	45.7	4.2
CA-41	Will Rollins	47.7	46.5	1.2
OR-05	Jamie McLeod-Skinner	48.8	48.2	0.6
AZ-06	Kirsten Engel	49.3	49.1	0.2
MT-01	Monica Tranel	46.5	46.4	0.1
NE-02	Tony Vargas	48.7	49.2	-0.5
CA-13	Adam Gray	49.8	50.4	-0.6
IA-01	Christina Bohannan	46.6	47.7	-1.1
NY-19	Josh Riley	48.9	50.7	-1.8
CA-22	Rudy Salas	48.4	51.8	-3.5
MI-10	Carl Marlinga	48.3	52.4	-4.1
PA-01	Ashley Ehasz	45.1	50.5	-5.4
TX-15	Michelle Vallejo	44.8	50.8	-6.0
NY-04	Laura Gillen	48.2	55.4	-7.2

VAR for 2022 Unsuccessful GOP Nominees Running Again in 2024

CD	Candidate	Percent Earned	Party Baseline	Vote Above Replacement
TX-34	Mayra Flores	44.2	37.9	6.3
NM-02	Yvette Herrell	49.6	46.1	3.6
NV-01	Mark Robertson	46.0	43.5	2.4
CT-05	George Logan	49.6	47.3	2.3
NC-01	Sandy Smith	47.6	45.6	2.1
MI-07	Tom Barrett	46.3	46.2	0.1
CA-47	Scott Baugh	48.3	48.7	-0.4
MD-06	Neil Parrott	45.2	45.8	-0.6
MI-08	Paul Junge	42.8	44.2	-1.4
WA-03	Joe Kent	49.3	53.7	-4.4
OH-09	J.R. Majewski	43.5	50.9	-7.5

these candidates did lose, after all. But maybe more surprising is that the returners' average VAR is no better than that of the non-returners (average VAR: -0.8).

This can be explained intuitively by each district's competitiveness. In the 12 races currently rated as Toss-ups, seven losers from 2022 are returning in 2024 (average VAR: -0.8). By contrast, the five 2022 losers who are not running again underperformed to a much larger extent (average VAR: -3.5). In these hotly contested races, it makes sense for a party to retain strong candidates and prune weak ones: a few narrow losers might have actually won in a more favorable environment, plus in some districts it can be hard to find a replacement candidate of similar caliber.

But some are returning with a chip on their shoulder. In two potential House rematches this November, the challenger is a former member who lost their seat and is looking to take it back. Former Republican Reps. Yvette Herrell (VAR: 3.6) and Mayra Flores (VAR: 6.3) are running in New Mexico's 2nd District and Texas' 34th District, respectively. But their paths back to the House look very different. Herrell, who is no stranger to close races, will face Democratic Rep. Gabe Vazquez (VAR: -1.6) after losing to him in 2022 by less than a point; this race is rated as a Toss-up. Meanwhile Flores, despite boasting the highest VAR of any repeat challenger in 2024, would be up against Rep. Vicente Gonzalez, who finished with a -6.6 VAR and still won by 9 points in this Likely Democratic seat that was shored up for Democrats in redistricting.

Flores is one of only six losers in a Likely Democratic or Likely Republican district (out of 25 total) running again this year. That's a far cry from the 7-in-12 candidates who are trying again in Toss-up races — although it's hard to blame someone who doesn't want to run it back after losing by double digits.

But for others, persistence is ironic. Educator Phyllis Harvey-Hall was the Democratic nominee for Alabama's 2nd District in 2020 and 2022, losing in the general election both times by over 30 points against GOP Rep. Barry Moore. Now, following court-ordered redistricting, the

2nd has been made over to favor Democrats, pushing Moore (VAR: 4.2) to a precarious primary in the neighboring 1st District. Yet the patient Harvey-Hall (VAR: -5.4) is unlikely to earn her party's nomination a third time: the 2nd is set to host a crowded Democratic primary in March, with the winner well-positioned for Congress.

Additional clues about each party's strengths and weaknesses can be found in the Tilt and Lean districts, where 11 Democrats and four Republicans are shooting their shots again in 2024.

Across the 16 seats in our Tilt Democratic and Tilt Republican columns, the 2022 loser is running again in seven races this year. Among this failed cohort, both parties fared about equally: the five Democratic returners recorded an average -1 VAR, compared to the average -0.9 VAR logged by the two unsuccessful GOP nominees. The only two losers to finish in the green here — Adam Frisch in Colorado's 3rd District (VAR: 4.2) and Kirsten Engel in Arizona's 6th District (VAR:

0.2) — were both Democrats.

The picture was similarly hazy in our 20 Lean races, where eight 2022 challengers are running again. The winners in this group include formidable members like Republican Rep. Don Bacon of Nebraska's 2nd District (VAR: 2.5), whose 2022 challenger, state Sen. Tony Vargas, earned a -0.5 VAR. Vargas is trying again in 2024, alongside five other Democratic losers (average VAR: -1.1).

But the biggest underperformer of all is also in this bucket. J.R. Majewski, the 2022 Republican nominee in Ohio's 9th District, finished with a -7.5 VAR, the lowest score of any challenger seeking another chance in 2024. Last cycle Majewski, who was at the Capitol on Jan. 6 and had promoted QAnon conspiracy theories, was all but abandoned by outside Republicans after news broke that he had misrepresented his military service — alley-ooping a 21st term to Democratic Rep. Marcy Kaptur (VAR: 9.2). Suffice to say, in any potential 2024 rematch Majewski will have to overcome a lot more than just his opponent's juggernaut status. **IE**

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30. (Updated reports are due on Jan. 31 of this year.)

Her early entrance into the Senate race effectively froze the field of most opponents, such as Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist, Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson, Attorney General Dana Nessel, and Reps. Haley Stevens and Hillary Scholten.

Her campaign team includes media consultants David Dixon and Rich Davis of Dixon Davis media, pollsters Mollie Murphy and Brian Stryker of Impact Research, and mail consultant Terry Walsh of the Strategy Group.

Harper, 57, has a compelling backstory and is running to Slotkin's left, especially on Israel-related issues. But so far he's struggled to develop the political relationships in the state and the fundraising chops he'll need to take the fight to Slotkin.

On the one hand, Harper's impeccable educational pedigree — an undergraduate degree from Brown University and an MPA and law degree from Harvard, where he befriended Barack Obama — and his extensive career in Hollywood, including main roles in *CSI:NY* and *The Good Doctor*, make him worthy of attention.

He's also assembled a credible team: media consultants Rebecca Pearcy and Garrett Arwa of Bryson Gillete, pollsters Celinda Lake and David Mermin of Lake Research, and

Courtesy Harper Campaign

Hill Harper

Nadia Garnett and Justin Myers of Deliver Strategies for direct mail.

But while Harper's path to victory might look clear on paper — cobble together a coalition of Black voters, Arab American voters, and super progressives — he faces serious hurdles. He only settled in Michigan relatively recently; he bought a house in the state in 2017 but a July 2023 *Daily Beast* report raised questions about how much time he's actually spent there.

And despite his efforts to engage a grassroots movement, he's struggled to raise money, pulling in $558,691 and reporting just $417,000 in the bank on September 30. In his first months in the race, Harper

raised $560,000 and contributed another $461,000 himself, but spent $608,000, including on a splashy campaign launch event. At that pace, he may be severely outgunned by Slotkin in a state where candidates have to advertise in three media markets.

Courtesy Meijer Campaign

Peter Meijer

Two recent polls found Slotkin with a commanding lead. A Target Insyght poll for the Michigan Information and Research Service fielded from Jan. 4-10 found Slotkin ahead, 65-7 percent. And a Public Policy Polling survey for the Voter Protection Project (which appears to support Slotkin) fielded from Dec. 28-29 found Slokin ahead of Hill, 56-14 percent.

The Republicans

The Republican field is far less settled, and the final roster might not be known until the candidate filing deadline on April 23.

So far four candidates have thrown their hat in the ring. Former Rep. Mike Rogers, who served as the chairman of the House Intelligence Committee during his 14 years in Congress, is the preferred candidate of Senate leadership including the National Republican Senatorial Committee. He's joined by former Rep. Peter Meijer, former Detroit police chief James Craig, and investor/2018 Senate candidate Sandy Pensler.

Former Rep. Justin Amash is also publicly flirting with a bid.

Rogers, 60, has the most conventional background of the bunch, and national Republicans see him as their best bet in the general election. An Army veteran, former FBI agent and state legislator, Rogers represented central Michigan in Congress from 2001 to 2015 and still has strong connections in Republican politics. After leaving the House, he produced and starred in a CNN series about spies, and was a paid contributor to the network.

Meijer, 36, once looked like the future of the Republican Party in Michigan. The scion of one of the state's wealthiest families, famous for

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their eponymous grocery stores, the telegenic Meijer has degrees from Columbia and New York University and deployed to Iraq as a member of

the Army Reserve. But after winning a tough open seat race in West Michigan in 2020, he voted to impeach Trump following the Jan. 6 insurrection and alienated himself from much of the GOP voter base. Further votes to establish an independent Jan. 6

Mike Rogers
Courtesy Rogers Campaign

commission, codify the legality of gay marriage, and implement moderate restrictions on gun ownership did little to help him among his party's rank and file. While he still had support from the West Michigan business community, Meijer narrowly lost his primary in 2022 to Trump-endorsed John Gibbs, a flawed candidate who benefitted from Trump's support and a controversial ad campaign by the DCCC to raise his profile.

The NRSC has gone out of its way to chastise Meijer, with Chairman Sen. Steve Daines making clear that the committee does not see Meijer as a viable option in the race.

Craig, 68, is probably the best-known candidate, due to the high-profile job he held in the state's biggest city from 2013 to 2021 and the media attention he has received as a conservative Black cop. A career police officer and Detroit native who also headed up departments in Portland, Maine and Cincinnati, Craig was an initial frontrunner for the GOP nomination to take on Gov. Gretchen Whitmer in 2022. But he was disqualified from the primary after failing to submit enough signatures due to a fraudulent petition ring that prematurely ended several campaigns that year.

Pensler, 67, is a Yale and Harvard-educated lawyer who has managed a venture capital firm in Grosse Pointe for decades. He previously ran

for the 8th District (the same one held by Stabenow, Rogers, and Slotkin) in 1992. Pensler was the initial favorite in the 2018 GOP primary to take on Stabenow, before now-Rep. John James burst on the scene and secured Trump's endorsement. James

James Craig
Courtesy James Craig

narrowly won the primary and went on to lose to Stabenow by a closer-than-expected margin.

Pensler is running the most aggressive campaign — which Michigan GOP strategists say align with his personality — and wants to position himself as the most stridently pro-Trump candidate in the race. He's already gone after Rogers for comments he made about Trump as a CNN contributor in a small TV buy.

The truth is, while Pensler, Rogers, and even Meijer have more or less come around to Trump — Meijer says he'll support him as the nominee, and filed an amicus brief in supporting of keeping him on the ballot in Colorado — they also have their fair share of Trump-related baggage. In 2018, Pensler

was pummeled by James in TV ads that used clips of him ribbing Trump for not knowing right from wrong and speaking "at 4th grade level."

Early polling shows Craig to be the initial frontrunner. Target Insyght's Jan. 4-10 poll for MIRS put his support at 33 percent, followed by Rogers at 20 percent and Meijer at 11 percent. Pensler trailed with 2 percent.

But the perception of Craig in Washington, DC is that he is a paper tiger. Most Republican strategists see Craig as a non-starter in the general election given the difficulties he's had running his campaigns and other potential personal baggage. If Craig is the nominee, this race likely falls even further down on GOP priority lists.

Many (including Rogers) are skeptical he will even make it on the primary ballot following last cycle's debacle. Craig has struggled to maintain a professionally managed, well-staffed campaign — his gubernatorial bid cycled through several campaign managers and his Senate campaign is already on his second, and in one recent embarrassing incident, his website went offline in the midst of a pay dispute with a pair of former aides.

But there's some worry that in a crowded field, if Craig does make it on

Sandy Pensler
Courtesy Pensler Campaign

the ballot, he could shoot the gap between Meijer and Rogers by running an explicitly pro-Trump campaign and relying on his name ID advantage. Craig is a frequent guest on MAGA-aligned shows such as Steve Bannon's War Room.

While the primary is still seven months away, Rogers' allies aren't wasting any time getting him in front of voters. A pro-Rogers Super PAC, which won't have to disclose its donors until mid-April, has already begun a $1.2 million TV ad buy across all five of Michigan's media markets.

Rogers is the only candidate who entered the race early enough to file a third-quarter fundraising report, which showed he had $793,000 in the bank on Sept. 30.

The rest of the candidates will file their first reports at the end of January. Pensler has already indicated he will at least partially self-fund his campaign. He primarily self-funded in 2018 with a $5 million loan, but will also look to raise money this time.

The billion dollar question may be the extent to which Meijer self-funds his bid. In his two runs for Congress he did not dip into his deep pockets, but a statewide bid for office takes more money. Meijer faces perhaps the biggest hurdles of any candidate in the race, given the continued dominance of Trump in the Republican Party, and Trump himself may intervene in this race to prevent a Meijer victory, given his animosity toward the former congressman.

The Bottom Line

Considering competitive primaries have produced flawed nominees in important races around the country the last few cycles, Republicans committed themselves to changing that trend. But they were unable to avoid a primary in Michigan.

The good news for Republicans is that they probably don't need to win Michigan to gain control of the Senate. And, if Biden falters at the top of the ticket, it could compensate for an imperfect GOP Senate nominee. **IE**

California Senate: Only the Top Two Survive

By Jacob Rubashkin

One of the most hard-fought and expensive Senate races this cycle has absolutely nothing to do with who controls the majority in the upper chamber.

The race to succeed the late Sen. Dianne Feinstein in California features three sitting members of Congress, a former MLB all-star, a half-dozen media markets and two separate ballots.

Feinstein, who died at 90 last September, held this seat for 31 years. (Her successor, Sen. Laphonza Butler, is not seeking a full term herself.)

Feinstein's longtime seatmate, Barbara Boxer, served 24 years. And as California has shifted from Republican stronghold to swing state to Democratic domain, the next senator, who will be a Democrat, could conceivably hold this seat for several decades.

The Democratic Candidates

Three Democratic members of Congress are competing for the open seat: Rep. Adam Schiff of Burbank, Rep. Katie Porter of Irvine, and Rep. Barbara Lee of Oakland.

Schiff, 63, has represented a ritzy Los Angeles district for 24 years but burst onto the national scene in 2019 as the face of Democrats' first impeachment of Donald Trump over his phone call to the Ukrainian president. A former prosecutor, Schiff became a ubiquitous presence on cable news as a chief Trump antagonist, and repeated his role as an impeachment manager during the 2021 proceedings following the January 6 insurrection. Then, when Republicans took over the House, he got another boost among the party rank and file when the GOP censured him for his role investigating Trump.

A one-time member of the Blue Dog Caucus who has since reinvented himself as a progressive, Schiff is a close ally of former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who has endorsed him in this contest, and he has used his five years in the spotlight to develop one of the best fundraising lists of any politician in the country.

Schiff's campaign team includes media consultant Larry Grisolano of Thematic Campaigns. The pollster is Breakthrough Campaigns.

Porter, 50, flipped a historically Republican Orange County district in the 2018 midterm elections and quickly established herself as an adept interrogator of hearing witnesses on Capitol Hill, often generating viral moments with her pointed questions. A progressive law professor who is a protege of Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren (who has endorsed her in this race), Porter has won three tough elections and is a top fundraiser within her party; during the 2022 cycle she was the top-raising House Democrat, with a $26 million haul.

Porter was the first candidate to announce her bid for this seat. She did not wait for Feinstein to announce her retirement, a decision that rubbed some California Democrats the wrong way and underscored the tension between Porter and much of the state's establishment. (A glance at the paucity of her in-state endorsements from elected officials confirms.)

Porter's campaign team includes media consultant Rich Davis of Dixon Davis and pollster David Binder. Ed Peavy of Mission Control is doing the direct mail.

Lee, 77, has represented Oakland in Congress since 1998. A former chairwoman of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, Lee is best known for her anti-war advocacy. Her opposition to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (she was the only member of Congress to vote against the latter) were highly controversial at the time and resulted in death threats, but have elevated her stature among progressive Democrats in the two decades since as public opinion turned against both conflicts.

Lee's hard-scrapple upbringing — she had a back alley abortion at 15 and was homeless for a time — has played a central role in her messaging during her campaign, as has her trailblazing work as a political staffer and then as a state legislator and congresswoman.

Lee's campaign team includes media consultant Orrin Evans of Left Hook and pollsters Dave Metz and Lucia Del Puppo of FM3 Research.

Former KTLA anchor Christia Pascucci is also running but has failed to gain much traction.

The Republican Candidate

The most notable Republican candidate in the race is Steve Garvey, the former Los Angeles Dodgers star who also played for the San Diego Padres.

Garvey, 75, won a World Series with the Dodgers in 1981 as a first baseman, and still has decent name ID statewide (a relative metric in California, where even Schiff, the best-known candidate, has about 75 percent recognition). He has long harbored political ambitions, telling Playboy in 1981, "I start at the U.S. Senate," but his prospects took a hit after a messy paternity scandal tarnished his squeaky-clean public image. He spent much of his post-playing career running a marketing and branding shop and hawking various products, most notably dietary supplement Enforma, which landed him in hot water with the Federal Trade Commission (he beat the case), and hair replacement service Bosely.

After entering the race in October, Garvey spent his first months of the trail relatively low-profile, but he has started to appear in public more often since the new year began. His highest-profile moment in the campaign so far came this past week, when he appeared at the first debate of the election.

Garvey's general consultant is Matt Rexroad.

Eric Early, an attorney and perennial candidate, is also in the race. Most recently he ran for attorney general in 2022, finishing third in the primary with 17 percent. He is running as the most explicitly pro-Trump candidate in the field, but has struggled to raise money or his profile. He reported just $86,000 in the bank on Sept. 30.

The Primary Election

California's primary is just five weeks away and coincides with Super Tuesday. That's still a relatively new place of prominence for the Golden State in the primary election calendar; historically the primary was in June, but the state pushed up its schedule in 2017.

Elections in California are conducted using an all-party primary. Every candidate appears on the same ballot, and the top-two vote getters advance to the general election in November, regardless of their party affiliation. That creates the possibility of a Democrat-vs.-Democrat matchup for the seat.

Because of Feinstein's death, there will actually be two concurrent elections that day: one for the full, six year term to begin in 2025, and one for the remainder of Feinstein's term from November through the end of the year.

While the lion's share of attention has followed Schiff, Porter, Lee and Garvey, they won't be the only ones on the ballot for either election. There are 27 total candidates on the regular election ballot and seven total

Continued from page 9

candidates on the special election ballot.

The biggest wildcard in the race may be how the Republican primary vote splinters among the various GOP contenders. In 2022, GOP candidates combined for an average of 36.3 percent across seven statewide primary races. If one Republican captured all those votes they would be assured a general election spot.

While Garvey will perform far better than any other Republican candidate, every vote he loses to Early or one of the eight other Republicans on the ballot makes it more difficult for him to secure a spot in the top two. The latest Berkeley/LA Times poll found that Garvey had support from about one-third of registered Republicans, while another third supported various other candidates and a final third were undecided.

How It Plays Out

The consensus among California political insiders and national strategists is that Schiff is likely to take one of the two general election spots.

Schiff has led in every public poll of the race and has an overwhelming financial advantage over the rest of the field; his campaign says he entered the new year with an astounding $35 million in the bank. Porter reported $12 million in the bank on Sept. 30, and has not yet filed her end-of-year report. Lee, meanwhile, reported just $1.3 million on Sept. 30 and has never had the fundraising chops of her opponents.

"What makes him unbeatable is his amount of money and the cost of the state," said one Democratic strategist who opposes Schiff.

While Schiff's edge in polling is fairly minimal among all candidates — he led the most recent Berkeley/LA Times poll (Jan. 4-8) by 4 points, 21 -17 percent, over Porter, with Garvey at 13 percent and Lee at 9 percent — he is only now beginning to spend his war chest on paid media.

On Jan. 9, Schiff uncorked a massive, $17 million ad buy across the Los Angeles, San Francisco, Sacramento, and San Diego media markets, to run through primary day.

"Unlike some frontrunners who peak too early, he's maintained his support and he has some recent momentum" with endorsements from the Los Angeles Times editorial board and the United Farm Workers union, said one longtime California Democratic strategist not involved in the race.

Porter is also dipping her toe in the paid media environment, with a $3 million buy running through the week of January 30, though she is expected to place further buys in February. Her opening ad features her trademark whiteboard that she uses to create viral moments in committee hearings.

Lee, who cannot keep pace with the others on TV, has received limited air cover from a friendly Super PAC, which placed a $260,000 buy beginning Jan. 16. Her path to victory, which relies on progressives, Black voters, and the Bay Area, appears to be narrowing by the day, with polling showing her tied or trailing among all those groups. "Love her, hate that it's gone this way," said one national strategist watching the race.

Even if Lee would have to score a major upset to catapult into the top two, her presence has a serious impact on the race, as it likely prevents Porter from consolidating more of the progressive vote against Schiff and Garvey.

The race entered a new phase this week with the first debate of the cycle, which featured Schiff, Porter, Lee and Garvey. All three Democrats took their fair share of shots at the sole Republican, most notably on whether he continues to support Trump. Garvey didn't give a straight answer, and struggled also to articulate specific policy positions, at one point simply saying, ""policy, for me, is position."

The debate also underscored the main fissures between the three Democratic candidates, all of whom are well-liked by the Democratic rank and file and would ultimately vote similarly on most issues in the Senate.

Lee leaned into her anti-war reputation by highlighting her support for a ceasefire in Gaza, which neither Schiff nor Porter endorse. Porter kept relentless focus on corporations, at one point calling out Schiff for taking money from oil companies, and drew favorable attention to the relatively little time she's spent in Washington, DC compared to her opponents.

And Schiff, as he has done throughout his campaign, highlighted his long tenure in Congress and his role in prosecuting both impeachment cases against Trump.

The General Election

The post-March trajectory of this race depends almost entirely on whether two Democrats make the ballot, or if the general election is a Schiff-Garvey matchup.

In the latter situation, the election is as good as done. Republicans have been unable to win statewide in California since the days of Arnold Schwarzneggar, and have not won a Senate race in the Golden state since 1988. Garvey has shown neither the political skills nor the fundraising capability to score what would be the biggest upset of the cycle.

A Schiff vs. Porter general election would pit two of the strongest fundraisers in the Democratic party against one another, and could easily become one of the most expensive Senate elections this year despite having zero effect on the fight for the majority.

Schiff would begin that fight with some advantages as well, especially given his strong name ID, near-total backing from the California Democratic political establishment, and fundraising capacity. But the contest could take on an interesting dimension if Porter can successfully reframe the choice presented in the election away from a purely ideological decision to be one between an insider and an outsider.

On paper, Porter's Elizabeth Warren-inspired politics won't appeal to the 35 percent of California voters who typically cast a ballot for Republicans. But her allies believe there's a path for her to make up some ground among the state's independent voters with her "no BS" approach that pits her against corporate and financial interests in both parties. And if she makes it to the general election, she may look to her Iowa farm roots to leverage some Plains populism in an appeal to disaffected voters in California's Central Valley and other less densely populated areas.

More quietly said among Porter backers is that Schiff is among the most polarizing figures in politics these days, and many Republicans carry for him a deep animosity due to his starring role in the Trump impeachments. In a general election with no good choices, some of those voters may ultimately pull the lever for Porter, just to stick it to Trump's biggest enemy. A similar dynamic played out in 2018, when historically Republican parts of the state voted for Democratic state Sen. Kevin de León over Feinstein. Those Republican voters knew little or nothing about de León, a progressive legislator running to Feinstein's left, but they cast their ballot for him as a rebuke.

The Bottom Line

While it won't affect the math for a Senate majority — Republicans need to flip two seats to control the chamber, or one in addition to winning the White House — the California race illustrates some major divisions within the Democratic party.

And the result of what could be the last competitive Senate race in the Golden State for several decades will be a new lawmaker, with their own unique priorities and outlook on how to approach the business of governing.

IE