

# Inside Elections

with

Nathan L. Gonzales

Nonpartisan Analysis

FEBRUARY 23, 2024

VOLUME 8, NO. 4

This issue brought  
to you by



## Maryland Senate: Republicans' Hero Hogan

By Jacob Rubashkin

Senate Republicans scored a major coup when former Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan announced he would run for the Old Line State's open Senate seat this fall. Hogan's last-minute entrance, which caught even the most plugged-in Maryland politicians off-guard, puts Maryland's race on the battlefield, and it's a headache for Senate Democrats, who can afford few, if any, losses.

But a race in play is different from a race in hand for Republicans, and Hogan faces a steep climb in a state that hasn't sent a Republican to the Senate since Mac Mathias in 1980. Despite some polls showing Hogan with a lead over his potential Democratic opponents, Prince George's County Executive Angela Alsobrooks and Rep. David Trone, there's plenty of reason to be skeptical.

Maryland has become one of the most Democratic-leaning states in the country. In the 2020 presidential election, it voted for Joe Biden by 33.2 points, a greater spread for the Democrat than in all but two other states. It was one of just five states where Biden's advantage exceeded 1 million votes, more than larger states such as Washington, New Jersey and Virginia. (By comparison, the states Trump won by a similar percentage were North Dakota and Oklahoma.)

In Hogan's landslide victory in 2018, he won 1,275,644 votes — enough for 55 percent of the vote that year but nowhere close to the total he'll need to amass in a presidential election cycle when total votes cast will likely top 3 million. And he reached that mark largely untouched by his opponents. In 2018, Hogan was not a priority for Democrats, and between his campaign and the Republican Governors Association he outspent opponent Ben Jealous by more than three-to-one. This cycle, he's sure to face significant outside spending against him.

Hogan's two wins in ocean-blue Maryland are not to be understated. According to *Inside Elections'* Vote Above Replacement score, his 2018 performance was the seventh-strongest result relative to partisanship of any statewide candidate in the country over the last decade. But he also ran against two flawed opponents.

Neither Trone, an uber-wealthy three-term congressman, nor Alsobrooks, a two-term county executive and prosecutor with the potential to make history as Maryland's first Black senator, are slouches. Either would be Hogan's toughest opponent by far.

Hogan has never had to run in a presidential election year, and though he's long distanced himself from Trump — contemplating running against him in 2020 and 2024 — he'll still have to deal with an electorate primed to reject Republicans.

He's also never run in a post-*Dobbs* environment, and Democratic

*Continued on page 8*

### 2024 Senate Ratings

#### Toss-Up (3)

Brown (D-Ohio)

Tester (D-Mont.)

Sinema (I-Ariz.)

#### Tilt Democratic (2)

Casey (D-Penn.)

Rosen (D-Nev.)

#### Tilt Republican

#### Lean Democratic (1)

Baldwin (D-Wis.)

#### Lean Republican

#### Likely Democratic

CA Open (Butler, D)

DE Open (Carper, D)

Cantwell (D-Wash.)

Gillibrand (D-N.Y.)

Heinrich (D-N.M.)

Hirono (D-Hawaii)

Kaine (D-Va.)

King (I-Maine)

Klobuchar (D-Minn.)

Menendez (D-N.J.)

Murphy (D-Conn.)

Sander (I-Vt.)

Warren (D-Mass.)

Whitehouse (D-R.I.)

#### Likely Republican (1)

Cruz (R-Texas)

#### Solid Republican (11)

IN Open (Braun, R)

UT Open (Romney, R)

WV Open (*Manchin, D*)

Barrasso (R-Wyo.)

Blackburn (R-Tenn.)

Cramer (R-N.D.)

Fischer (R-Neb.)

Hawley (R-Mo.)

Ricketts (R-Neb.)

Scott (R-Fla.)

Wicker (R-Miss.)

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

### CALENDAR

<b>Feb. 24</b>	South Carolina GOP Presidential Primary
<b>Feb. 27</b>	Michigan Presidential Primaries
<b>March 5</b>	Super Tuesday
<b>March 10</b>	The Oscars
<b>March 19</b>	Arizona, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Ohio Primaries
<b>March 19</b>	California's 20th District Special Primary

# Report Shorts

**California's 22nd District.** There's a real possibility that Democrats are shut out of one of their best takeover targets in the country. Some Democratic strategists are concerned that GOP Rep. David Valadao and Republican Chris Mathys will finish in the top two ahead of 2022 Democratic nominee Rudy Salas and Democratic state Sen. Melissa Hurtado in the March 5 primary. It would take a race rated as Tilt Republican and move it to Solid Republican. TV ad spending by outside groups matches the volatility of this important race.

**California's 47th District.** The AIPAC-affiliated super PAC United Democracy Project has spent \$2.6 million on negative advertising against Democratic state Sen. Dave Min, in an effort to boost law professor Joanna Weiss into the second spot in the primary. Despite the negative spending — most of which has focused on Min's DUI last year — a Feb. 12-14 poll from Republican candidate Scott Baugh found Min in second place behind Baugh, 27-22 percent, with Weiss at 16 percent. Tilt Democratic.



Joanna Weiss

Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

**Georgia's 13th District.** Democrat Marcus Flowers gained some national attention for raising millions of dollars in a quixotic challenge to Republican Marjorie Taylor Greene in 2022 that he lost by more than 30 points. Now he's challenging Rep. David Scott in the Democratic primary. There have been multiple stories about the 78 year-old lawmaker's ability to continue to serve in Congress. Democrats have a 68-31 percent Baseline advantage in the Atlanta-area seat, so the May 21 primary is the most important race. Solid Democratic.

**Indiana's 8th District.** Former Rep. John Hostettler, 62, is on the comeback trail after losing re-election nearly 18 years ago. In 2006, Hostettler lost re-election in a competitive race to Democratic sheriff Brad Ellsworth. Ellsworth lost re-election to Republican Larry Buschon, who is

not seeking re-election to southwest Indiana district, where Republicans have a 62.4-35 percent Baseline advantage. Hostettler is a notoriously terrible fundraiser who consistently needed the party's financial support in tough races, but with some residual name ID from his past time representing the area and name ID from his son Matt, who currently serves in the state House, the elder Hostettler is a credible contender in the May 7 primary. Solid Republican.

**Michigan Senate.** Former Detroit police chief James Craig dropped out of the Republican race, making it easier for former FBI agent/former Rep. Mike Rogers to win the nomination. Rogers still needs to get past former Rep. Peter Meijer, but Meijer has limited appeal to GOP voters in the Aug. 6 primary because he voted to impeach President Donald Trump. Grosse Pointe financier Sandy Pensler is also in the race. With his high name I.D. but inability to put together a credible campaign, Craig caused some headaches for GOP strategists. It wasn't even clear he was going to make the ballot, but stepping aside now allows Republicans to focus earlier on the general election, where Democrats are likely to nominate Rep. Elissa Slotkin. Democratic Sen. Debbie Stabenow is not seeking re-election. Tilt Democratic.

**Michigan's 8th District.** Republicans are having a hard time getting a top-tier candidate in this competitive open seat left behind by Democratic Rep. Dan Kildee. Trauma surgeon/police officer/magazine publisher Martin Blank dropped out of the race, leaving 2022 nominee Paul Junge as the likely nominee once again. Junge, who lost by 10 points to Kildee last cycle and to Rep. Elissa Slotkin by 3 points in 2018, does not inspire confidence from GOP strategists. The filing deadline is April 23. Democrats have a competitive primary between state Sen. Kristen McDonald Rivet, State Board of Education President Pamela Pugh and Flint Mayor Sheldon Neeley. Tilt Democratic.

**Montana Senate.** It's been a rollercoaster for GOP Rep. Matt Rosendale, who finally announced his campaign for Senate only to drop out a couple days later. Rosendale likely realized that the GOP establishment had already lined up behind wealthy businessman Tim Sheehy and the anti-establishment groups weren't coming to Rosendale's rescue. After all the drama, Republicans have their challenger against

*Continued on page 3*

# Inside Elections

with

Nathan L. Gonzales

Nonpartisan Analysis

810 7th Street NE, Washington, DC, 20002  
202-546-2822



**Nathan L. Gonzales**  
Editor & Publisher  
nathan@insideelections.com  
@nathanlgonzales



**Jacob Rubashkin**  
Deputy Editor  
jacob@insideelections.com  
@jacוברubashkin



**Bradley Wascher**  
Contributing Analyst  
bradley@insideelections.com  
@bradwascher

**Will Taylor**  
Production Artist  
will@insideelections.com

**Stuart Rothenberg**  
Senior Editor  
stu@insideelections.com

@InsideElections facebook.com/InsideElections YouTube.com/@InsideElections

Copyright 2024, Inside Elections LLC. All rights reserved.

Continued from page 2

Democratic Sen. Jon Tester, who won't be easy to defeat even though the top of the ticket will benefit Republicans. This continues to be one of the two most important Senate races in the country, along with Ohio. Toss-up.

**New Mexico Senate.** Former Bernalillo County Sheriff Manny Gonzales did not submit enough signatures to make the GOP primary ballot. That leaves former Bridgewater hedge fund CFO Nella Domenici as the only GOP candidate in the race. Domenici is the daughter of former Sen. Pete Domenici, the last Republican to represent the state, and could bring personal resources to the table. But New Mexico is tough sledding for Republicans these days. Solid Democratic.

**New York's 1st District.** CNN analyst John Avlon announced his campaign as a Democrat against GOP Rep. Nick LaLota. First, Avlon will have to get past wealthy chemistry professor Nancy Goroff, who was the party's nominee in 2020 and is the favored candidate of national Democrats. Goroff had \$530,000 in her campaign account on Dec. 31. State Sen. James Gaughran (\$126,000) is also in the race but less of a factor. Lean Republican.

**New York's 3rd District.** Former Democratic Rep. Tom Suozzi defeated Republican Mazi Pilip in the Feb. 13 special election, narrowing Republicans' legislative majority this year and getting

Democrats one seat closer to a majority next year. With a Democratic incumbent running for re-election in a seat that Biden is likely to carry at the top of the ticket, the regular election race is rated as Lean Democratic.

**Tennessee's 7th District.** GOP Rep. Mark Green is not seeking re-election after just three terms. He leaves behind a Middle Tennessee district that sits west of Nashville and stretches from the border with Alabama north to the border with Kentucky. Republicans have a 57.6-39.4 percent Baseline advantage in the seat, so the Aug. 1 GOP primary is critical. Former state Rep. Brandon Ogles, whose cousin Andy represents the 5th District, is running as a Republican. Former Nashville Mayor Megan Barry, a Democrat, is already in the race and had \$158,000 in her campaign account on Dec. 31. As a member of the majority and chairman of the Homeland Security committee, Green's exit was not expected. Solid Republican.

**Wisconsin's 8th District.** GOP Rep. Mike Gallagher is not seeking re-election to his Green Bay-area seat. Republicans have a 15.2-point advantage in the district, according to Baseline, so the seat is not currently at risk of falling into Democratic hands. But his exit is notable because he's only 39 years old and was considered a rising star in the GOP, including being a coveted Senate recruit earlier in the cycle. Now he's leaving Washington altogether. The Aug. 13 GOP primary will be important in selecting his successor. Solid Republican. **IE**

## 2024 House Open Seats

District	Outgoing Member	2022 Result	2020 Presidential Result	Rating
AL-02	Barry Moore (R)	New	Biden 56%	Likely Democratic
AZ-03	Ruben Gallego (D)	77%	Biden 75%	Solid Democratic
AZ-08	Debbie Lesko (R)	96%	Trump 56%	Solid Republican
CA-12	Barbara Lee (D)	91%	Biden 89%	Solid Democratic
CA-16	Anna Eshoo (D)	58%	Biden 75%	Solid Democratic
CA-29	Tony Cardenas (D)	59%	Biden 75%	Solid Democratic
CA-30	Adam Schiff (D)	71%	Biden 72%	Solid Democratic
CA-31	Grace Napolitano (D)	60%	Biden 65%	Solid Democratic
CA-47	Katie Porter (D)	52%	Biden 55%	Tilt Democratic
CO-03	Lauren Boebert (R)	50%	Trump 53%	Tilt Republican
CO-04	Ken Buck (R)	61%	Trump 58%	Solid Republican
CO-05	Doug Lamborn (R)	56%	Trump 53%	Solid Republican
DE-AL	Lisa Blunt Rochester (D)	56%	Biden 59%	Solid Democratic
GA-03	Drew Ferguson (R)	69%	Trump 64%	Sold Republican
IN-03	Jim Banks (R)	65%	Trump 64%	Solid Republican
IN-06	Greg Pence (R)	68%	Trump 65%	Solid Republican
IN-08	Larry Buschon (R)	66%	Trump 66%	Solid Republican
MD-02	Dutch Ruppersberger (D)	57%	Biden 59%	Solid Democratic
MD-03	John Sarbanes (D)	60%	Biden 62%	Solid Democratic
MD-06	David Trone (D)	55%	Biden 54%	Likely Democratic
MI-07	Elissa Slotkin (D)	52%	Biden 49.4%	Toss-up
MI-08	Dan Kildee (D)	53%	Biden 50.3%	Tilt Democratic
MN-03	Dean Phillips (DFL)	60%	Biden 60%	Solid Democratic

District	Outgoing Member	2022 Result	2020 Presidential Result	Rating
MO-03	Blaine Luetkemeyer (R)	65%	Trump 62%	Solid Republican
NC-06	Kathy Manning (D)	New	Trump 57%	Likely Republican
NC-08	Dan Bishop (R)	New	Trump 57%	Solid Republican
NC-10	Patrick McHenry (R)	New	Trump 58%	Solid Republican
NC-13	Wiley Nickel (D)	New	Trump 55%	Likely Republican
NC-14	Jeff Jackson (D)	New	Trump 57%	Likely Republican
ND-AL	Kelly Armstrong	62%	Trump 65%	Solid Republican
NJ-03	Andy Kim (D)	56%	Biden 56%	Solid Democratic
OH-02	Brad Wenstrup (R)	75%	Trump 72%	Solid Republican
OR-03	Earl Blumenauer (D)	70%	Biden 73%	Solid Democratic
SC-03	Jeff Duncan (R)	98%	Trump 68%	Solid Republican
TN-07	Mark Green (R)	60%	Trump 56%	Solid Republican
TX-12	Kay Granger (R)	64%	Trump 58%	Solid Republican
TX-26	Michael Burgess (R)	69%	Trump 59%	Solid Republican
TX-32	Colin Alford (D)	65%	Biden 66%	Solid Democratic
UT-03	John Curtis (R)	64%	Trump 58%	Solid Republican
VA-07	Abigail Spanberger (D)	52%	Biden 53%	Tilt Democratic
VA-10	Jennifer Wexton (D)	53%	Biden 58%	Likely Democratic
WA-05	Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R)	60%	Trump 53%	Solid Republican
WA-06	Derek Kilmer (D)	60%	Biden 57%	Solid Democratic
WI-08	Mike Gallagher (R)	73%	Trump 57%	Solid Republican
WV-02	Alex Mooney (R)	66%	Trump 68%	Solid Republican

*New = Newly-drawn district*

# Pennsylvania 17: Deluzio Doubles Down

By Jacob Rubashkin

Pittsburgh may have crashed out of the NFL playoffs early this season, but Steel City and its surroundings still have a big role to play in the fight for the House this fall.

Western Pennsylvania had a moment in the political sun in 2022, with Braddock's John Fetterman parlaying a cult following into a crucial win for Senate Democrats, and Chris Deluzio holding a key swing district for House Democrats after their rising star, Conor Lamb, chose not to seek re-election.

But following better-than-expected results in local elections in 2023, Republicans are hopeful they can make inroads into the historically Democratic region.

With Democrats needing a net gain of just 4 seats to retake the House, they can't afford to lose ground in the swing seats they already control.

## The Lay of the Land

Pennsylvania's 17th District is based in the Pittsburgh suburbs. It does not include any of the city itself but wraps around its west, north and east sides, and encompasses all of western Allegheny County. The 17th also includes all of Beaver County on the Ohio border.

Roughly a quarter of the population lives in Beaver County, which leans Republican, while the Allegheny portion of the district skews Democratic. In 2020, Joe Biden won the district overall by 6 points, 52-46 percent, carrying the Allegheny portion 55-43 percent while losing Beaver 58-40 percent to President Donald Trump.

Democrats have done better in down-ballot races in the district in recent years. In 2022, weak GOP candidates for governor and Senate lost the district by 26 and 14 points, respectively, and 2018 was no better for the Republicans. Sen. Bob Casey Jr., who is on the ballot again this year, carried the 17th by 20 points in his 2018 re-election campaign.

The best-performing GOP statewide candidate over the past eight years was Sen. Pat Toomey in 2016, who won the district by 627 votes.

The 17th is predominantly white (89 percent of the citizen voting-age population), with a small Black population (8 percent of the citizen voting-age population) largely concentrated east of Pittsburgh in Penn Hills and the surrounding townships.

With a bachelor's degree rate of 43.3 percent, the district is in the top 100 House seats by educational attainment, and its median income of \$77,014 places it in the top half of districts.

## The Democratic Incumbent

Deluzio, 39, is in his first term in Congress. A native "Yinzer," a term for locals and their accent, Deluzio graduated from the Naval Academy in 2006 and deployed as a surface warfare officer, and a civil affairs officer in Iraq. He received a law degree from Georgetown in 2013 and worked for a New York City law firm before shifting to election security law, first at the Brennan Center in New York and, from 2018 to 2023, at University of Pittsburgh.

Deluzio entered the 17th District race in the 2022 cycle after incumbent Lamb ran for Senate, and he defeated political activist and Victory Fund executive Sean Meloy in the primary, 64-36 percent.

In November, he defeated Republican Jeremy Shaffer, 53-47 percent, in a race that attracted all four major outside groups, which spent \$16.8 million, the sixth-most of any contest in the country.

In Congress, Deluzio serves in the leadership of the Congressional

Progressive Caucus, and on the Veterans' Affairs and Armed Services committees.

Deluzio's campaign team includes media consultant Martha McKenna, pollsters Celinda Lake and Joshua Ulibarri of Lake Research Partners, and direct mail consultant Fiona Conroy of Deliver Strategies.

He reported \$986,000 in his campaign account on Dec. 31.

## The Republican Challenger

Rob Mercuri, 42, is in his second term representing northern Allegheny County in the state legislature.

A 2004 graduate of West Point, the Pittsburgh-area native served as an Army intelligence officer, including tours in Iraq, until 2009, when he received an MBA from University of Massachusetts, Amherst and



Courtesy Mercuri Campaign

Rob Mercuri

entered the private sector. Mercuri worked for EY, PwC, and PNC before making his first run for office in 2020. He and his wife also own a UPS franchise.

In 2020, Mercuri won the GOP primary to succeed state House speaker Mike

Turzai with 64 percent, and faced a competitive general election against screenwriter Emily Skopov, winning 54-46 percent. Biden carried the district 51-48 percent in the same election.

Following redistricting, Mercuri's seat became 10 points more Republican, and he won a more comfortable 56-44 percent re-election in 2022. In the state legislature, he has an 83 percent lifetime rating from the American Conservative Union, a 92 percent 2022 rating from the NRA, and a 100 percent 2022 rating from the NFIB.

His campaign team includes general consultant Scott Stone of Strategic Impact Strategies. Mercuri, who entered the race in August, reported \$281,000 in his war chest on Dec. 31.

## The General Election

Republicans are hopeful that an improved political environment in Pennsylvania this year will give them a better shot at taking out Deluzio than in 2022, when gubernatorial nominee Doug Mastriano and Senate nominee Mehmet Oz created serious headwinds for down ballot Republicans as they lost statewide.

In a presidential year, the 17th will be closer, especially if Biden's standing in Pennsylvania has slipped from his 2020 mark. And there's little evidence yet that Deluzio has the profile or brand to outrun the presidential ballot significantly — his *Inside Elections* Vote Above Replacement score is -0.4, indicating he's about as strong as a generic Democrat in the district.

But even if Biden loses ground, that should give Deluzio a reasonable cushion.

Deluzio has leaned into Pittsburgh's storied labor history to position himself as a fighter for the working class, and his two biggest pushes in

*Continued on page 5*

Continued from page 4

Congress had centered on blue collar issues: he was among the most vocal members pushing back on the potential acquisition of U.S. Steel by a Japanese company, and he has introduced rail safety legislation following the derailment of the Norfolk Southern trail in East Palestine, Ohio last year, which happened just across the border from the 17th District.

His allies anticipate he'll use that record to buttress his 2022 campaign strategy — which featured ads deriding “corporate jagoffs” and was deemed “populist pugilist” by liberal magazine *The American Prospect* — while using his military background to defend against attacks tying him to the “Squad” of progressive lawmakers including New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and fellow Pittsburgh-area Rep. Summer Lee.

Republican operatives still see Deluzio as out of step with the district, pointing to his role as a Bernie Sanders delegate at the 2020 Democratic National Convention. In 2022, several campaign ads made use of an interview snippet in which Deluzio says he “takes [his] cues” from Sanders and Ocasio-Cortez, though the full context of that clip is Deluzio explaining why he’s supporting Biden for president.

“This cycle we can pretty much run the same message because I think it worked,” said one GOP national strategist, who put the blame for Shaffer’s loss on Oz and Mastriano.

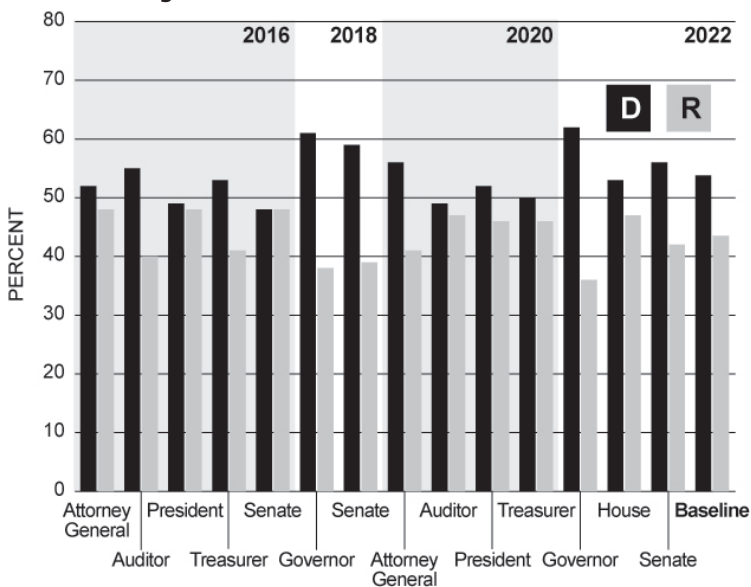
Republican strategists see a blueprint to winning the district in the results of the area’s local elections in 2023, specifically the races for Allegheny County Executive and District Attorney. In the County Executive race, state Rep. Sara Innamorato narrowly defeated Republican Joe Rockey, 51-49 percent, after weathering attacks on her previous membership in the Democratic Socialists of America.

But Rockey, who was Mercuri’s supervisor when both men worked in risk management at PNC bank, actually won the portion of the 17th District that sits in Allegheny County by 7 points.

And in the concurrent District Attorney race, Democratic incumbent Stephen Zapalla lost the primary to a progressive challenger but ran in the general election on the Republican line and won countywide by 2 points; he carried the 17th District’s Allegheny portion by 11 percent.

The GOP strategy in those races focused on crime, and the candidates

## Statewide Election Results for Pennsylvania’s 17th District



Painted their opponents as extreme. National strategists hope to replicate those messages against Deluzio this fall, and believe Mercuri’s profile as a veteran with a focus on fiscal issues and financial responsibility will create a strong contrast to the more brash Deluzio, especially among the college educated suburban voters who are overrepresented in the district and who have moved away from the GOP lately. “He’s smart, measured, not bombastic, thoughtful and deliberative,” said one Mercuri ally. “He’s the adult in the room.”

Deluzio’s allies maintain that the congressman is a much stronger candidate than Innamorato, who focused her campaign on winning a hotly contested primary and was caught flat-footed in the general election, when Rockey and his allies outspent her five-to-one on TV.

Democratic strategists see Mercuri and his legislative voting record as fertile ground for attacks, especially when it comes to abortion rights. In particular, Democratic strategists point to Mercuri’s co-sponsorship of a 2021 bill that would have banned abortions after detection of a fetal heartbeat (usually 6-8 weeks after conception) with no exceptions.

In 2022, Deluzio’s allies ran \$1.7 million in advertising hitting Shaffer on abortion — Shaffer’s response ad featuring his wife, a medical doctor, saying Shaffer “will stand up for women’s health care” couldn’t stem that tide. And it’s not obvious Mercuri has a better response.

### How It Plays Out

The Pittsburgh media market, which covers the entire district, will be crowded this cycle; Pennsylvania will host not only a highly competitive presidential election, but also an expensive Senate race featuring personally wealthy Republican Dave McCormick, whose path to victory likely includes overperforming a typical Republican in the western half of the state.

And Allegheny County has in recent years begun to stake its claim as an electoral prize for Democrats that rivals Philadelphia in the east, ensuring significant investment from all levels of the party. While Democrats still net more votes out of Philadelphia off the strength of their massive margins of victory, 2022 was the first year in which Allegheny County cast more votes overall than Philadelphia. And while Democrats’ strength in the City of Brotherly Love is largely static — Biden’s 81 percent was in fact the lowest share of the vote for a Democratic presidential candidate since 2004 — the party is on the upswing in Allegheny, where Biden won a larger victory than any Democratic candidate since Lyndon Johnson in 1964.

Both parties are likely to be invested in this House race again, as will other outside groups such as Americans for Prosperity Action. The Koch network-affiliated organization spent \$550,000 supporting Shaffer in 2022, and Mercuri was among their first endorsements of the 2024 cycle.

But it may not reach the heights of spending seen in 2022. GOP strategists still see the 7th and 8th Districts, represented by Democrats Susan Wild and Matt Cartwright, as better offensive opportunities given the more Republican lean of the districts, and the party will also have to play defense in the 10th District, where Rep. Scott Perry is a Democratic target.

### The Bottom Line

This district is no longer the pure toss-up it was in 2022, but it still can expect a competitive contest. Pennsylvania is sure to attract a wealth of energy and resources from both parties, which need a strong performance in the area to win their statewide races.

It’s a must-hold for Democrats looking to take back the majority, and some in the party would love to take this race off the table earlier on in the cycle so that more money can go to offensive opportunities elsewhere. For Republicans, winning here would be a cherry on top of an already-strong cycle.

# 2022 VAR: House Challengers Running Again in 2024

By Bradley Wascher

There's no shame in finishing second, because Congress is filled with losers who ran unsuccessfully before getting elected.

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; 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



Yvette Herrell

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-ooing 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.

# New York 3 Special: Democrats Strike Back

By Jacob Rubashkin

Democrat Tom Suozzi scored a decisive victory last week in the special election to replace former GOP Rep. George Santos. Suozzi, a former congressman, beat Republican county legislator Mazi Pilip by 7.8 points in New York's 3rd District.

Suozzi's win in the hard-fought race has immediate repercussions on Capitol Hill, where it will weaken an already teetering GOP majority, and also consequences for this fall's general election.

Once Suozzi is sworn in, Republicans will have a 219-213 majority, with three vacancies.

That means House Speaker Mike Johnson will only be able to afford two defections from his conference on any party-line vote. That includes looming votes on foreign aid and government funding. And a narrower majority also leaves Johnson that much more vulnerable to a potential motion to vacate.

Looking ahead to the fall, the results in New York's 3rd mean that Democrats now need a net gain of just 4 seats to recapture the House majority. Several of those gains could come in New York alone, where the party is targeting an additional five districts, all of which, like the 3rd, voted for Joe Biden in 2020.

Suozzi's tack toward the center on immigration could provide a blueprint for Democratic nominees elsewhere on Long Island, in the 1st and 4th districts, to defuse GOP attacks on the issue.

And his win could have more immediate impact too, with a court-ordered redistricting process set to kick off in just a few weeks. Had Pilip won the special election, Democrats in the state legislature might have felt obligated to redraw the 3rd District to be even more Democratic in an effort to dislodge her in the fall, and that would mean sacrificing opportunities elsewhere on Long Island. But with Suozzi back in office, state lawmakers can feel more comfortable about leaving the 3rd District as is and instead focusing their efforts on 1st District Rep. Nick LaLota and 4th District Rep. Anthony D'Esposito.

Though the results are good for Democrats, they also shouldn't be overstated. The unique circumstances surrounding the special election — the scandal that precipitated it, the drastic difference in candidate biographies, the hyper-local politics of Long Island, and even the snowstorm that hit the district on Election Day — make it difficult to extrapolate too many national lessons from the results. There's still a long way to go before November, and big special election wins for New York Democrats in the run-up to the 2022 midterms ultimately didn't predict how poorly the state would go for the party that fall.

For now, Democrats can celebrate, and Republicans ask themselves what went wrong. But the House majority was in play before New York 3, and the House majority is still in play now.



Tom Suozzi

Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

## 2024 House Ratings

### Toss-Up (5D, 6R)

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

CT 5 (Hayes, D)	PA 17 (Deluzio, 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 3 (Suozzi, D)	
NY 18 (Ryan, D)	
OH 1 (Landsman, D)	
OH 9 (Kaptur, D)	
OR 6 (Salinas, 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-Meeke, R)	
MT 1 (Zinke, R)	
NE 2 (Bacon, R)	
NY 1 (LaLota, R)	

	GOP	DEM
Solid	187	174
Likely/Lean/Tilt	29	34
Total	216	208
Toss-up		11
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



Available to listen on any of the regular podcast platforms or watch on YouTube.

## Podcast Episode 16

Nathan, Jacob, and special guest Scott Eidler of Newsday discuss Democrat Tom Suozzi's special election victory in New York's 3rd District in the race to replace George Santos. Nathan and Jacob also analyze former Gov. Larry Hogan's entry into the Maryland Senate race and the recent retirements in the House exodus.

Continued from page 1

strategists in the state believe that makes him more vulnerable. In his last year in office, Hogan vetoed legislation that would have expanded abortion access, which will be fodder for Democrats. And there will be a referendum enshrining abortion rights on the ballot this fall as well, meaning the issue will be top of voters' minds.

More broadly, Democrats in the state are taking Hogan and his chances of winning, very seriously, but there's also plenty of confidence that with appropriate resources they can defeat him without too much suspense in the fall.

"It's a very uphill climb in the general election," said one well-connected Democratic strategist. "Either Trone or Alsobrooks is going to be able to effectively communicate that Hogan is a nice guy but a vote for him is a vote for McConnell and Trump."

"I think he can win," said another longtime Democratic consultant, "but I don't think he will. We just have to make sure the money is there and the case is made."

The consultant argued that Maryland Democrats, most of whom approved of Hogan's job as governor, would be uniquely receptive to a nationalized political argument centered on controlling the Senate.

"Maryland is home to every assistant undersecretary of the department of the whatever," they said, "These are people who understand how a Republican senate screws us as a country, on civil rights, women's rights, abortion rights, democracy."

Recruiting a popular governor or former governor to run for the Senate is nothing new, but recent years underscore how difficult it can be to go from winning a gubernatorial contest, where voters are much more willing to look past national partisanship, to winning a Senate race that takes place within the national context.

Among Democrats, former Gov. Ronnie Musgrove lost the 2008 Mississippi Senate special election, former Gov. Ted Strickland lost the 2016 Senate race in Ohio, former Gov. Phil Bredesen lost the 2018 Tennessee Senate race, and Gov. Steve Bullock lost the 2020 Montana Senate race. Among Republicans, former Gov. Jim Gilmore lost the 2008 Senate race in Virginia and former Gov. Linda Lingle lost the 2012 Senate race in Hawaii.

That's not to say some of those governors weren't good gets for their party and didn't have an impact on the fight for the Senate.

The 2018 Tennessee race attracted \$41 million in outside advertising, including \$17.1 million from Democratic groups and \$21.4 million from GOP groups, money that, absent Bredesen's presence, would have gone to a dozen more competitive races. And though he lost by 11 points, Bredesen put up the best performance for a Tennessee Democrat in a decade, with a Vote Above Replacement of 8.5.

The 2020 Montana race was an even more expensive affair, with \$155 million in total spending, with \$104.6 million coming from outside groups. Bullock lost by 10 points but outperformed the top of the ticket by 7 points.

Ultimately, Maryland is more likely to resemble those races than previous decades in which significant ticket splitting was the norm. Hogan will outperform Trump by a significant margin, and may even have a polling lead for much of the spring and summer, as Bredesen, Strickland, and Bullock did.

But the former governor will face an onslaught of negative advertising and less favorable political dynamics than he is accustomed to.

While Democrats may have to spend big to encourage that political gravity to take hold, there's little question those resources will ultimately be available. In the end, the most important races for control of the Senate continue to be in Ohio and Montana, where Democrats, not Republicans, are hoping to break against the political tide.



## Statewide Election Results for Maryland

