

Inside Elections

with

Nathan L. Gonzales

Nonpartisan Analysis

JULY 11, 2024

VOLUME 8, NO. 13

This issue brought
to you by



Democrats Sinking or Swimming with Biden?

By Nathan L. Gonzales and Jacob Rubashkin

It only took 90 minutes on a debate stage for President Joe Biden to bring instability to an otherwise stable and competitive race. And the current focus on his age and ability has Democrats searching for direction in order to avoid a wipeout. While the election is technically more than three months away, this is a critical couple of weeks for the Democratic Party.

The race was not going well for Biden before the debate. National polls showing him deadlocked with former President Donald Trump understated Trump's advantage in the Electoral College. Trump led in the swing states (Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin) and was outperforming his 2020 margins in many battleground districts. But Biden was within striking distance.

Not only did Biden fumble the opportunity to change the trajectory of the race with the debate, he made it worse by failing to meet low expectations, and showed his age with his delivery and substance of his answers. While Biden hasn't lost significant ground in the polls (at least not yet), he has lost the narrative, drawing attention to himself at a time when Democrats want voters to focus on Trump.

House and Senate Democrats are starting to realize that Biden's problems could spill into their races and that he has a fundamental problem (he's old) that can't be easily fixed. Democrats are loyal to Biden but want to move on to a different nominee (even an imperfect one). But the president's commitment to the false notion that his 2020 victory makes him the best Trump opponent in 2024 is paralyzing the party. Down ballot Democrats have been able to overperform Biden up to this point, but it's unclear whether they can maintain that distance as the election grows closer.

Until it's more clear that Biden will ultimately be the nominee, we're maintaining our presidential ratings. If he is the nominee and the race doesn't fundamentally change, we'll likely push a number of states in Trump's favor. We'll continue to follow individual House and Senate race data when calibrating those ratings, instead of assuming that Biden's problems affect all Democrats. Democrats' Senate hopes are particularly closely tied to Biden's fate. With a sure loss in West Virginia, a Democratic vice president is integral to holding the chamber next year.

The most likely outcome is a Republican sweep of the White House, Senate, and House, but a shakeup on the Democratic ticket could reset the race in a way no one can predict with certainty. And, on the other side, skeptical independents and disaffected Democrats are some of the conditions for a larger political wave.

IE

2024 Senate Ratings

Toss-Up (2)

Tester (D-Mont.)

Brown (D-Ohio)

Tilt Democratic (4)

Tilt Republican

AZ Open (Sinema, I)

MI Open (Stabenow, D)

Casey (D-Penn.)

Rosen (D-Nev.)

Lean Democratic (1)

Lean Republican

Baldwin (D-Wis.)

Likely Democratic (1)

Likely Republican (1)

MD Open (Cardin, D)

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)

Cantwell (D-Wash.)

WV Open (Manchin, I)

Gillibrand (D-N.Y.)

Barrasso (R-Wyo.)

Heinrich (D-N.M.)

Blackburn (R-Tenn.)

Hirono (D-Hawaii)

Cramer (R-N.D.)

Kaine (D-Va.)

Fischer (R-Neb.)

King (I-Maine)

Hawley (R-Mo.)

Klobuchar (D-Minn.)

Ricketts (R-Neb.)

Menendez (D-N.J.)

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

July 15-18	Republican National Convention (Milwaukee)
July 30	Arizona primaries
Aug. 6	Kansas, Michigan, Missouri, Washington primaries
Aug. 13	Connecticut, Minnesota, South Dakota, Vermont, Wisconsin primaries
Aug. 19-22	Democratic National Convention (Chicago)
Nov. 5	Election Day

Key Primary Results in Colorado, New York, South Carolina and Utah

By Jacob Rubashkin

A second House incumbent was finally defeated in a primary this cycle, although it was not a surprise. Yet another is locked in a race that is still too close to call. And House Republicans had a good night overall in Colorado, where they avoided nominating flawed candidates in multiple races.

Voters in three more states – Colorado, New York and Utah – cast primary ballots on June 25, along with one runoff in South Carolina. That means 31 states have completed their primaries up to this point with 18 remaining between now and Sept. 10. (Yes, that adds up to 49. Louisiana has its all-party primary on Nov. 5.)

With less than four months still before Election Day, 37 candidates effectively have their tickets punched for Capitol Hill (31 to the House and 6 to the Senate). They are likely to be new members of Congress next year because they’ve already won primaries in districts or states that are either solidly Republican or solidly Democratic and the general election is more of a formality. Republicans Jeff Crank of Colorado, Sheri Biggs of South Carolina and Mike Kennedy of Utah, along with Democrat George Latimer of New York, are the newest House candidates on the list, while Utah’s John Curtis is the latest Senate addition.

Colorado.

3rd District (Pueblo area and Western Slope) Open; Lauren Boebert, R, running in 4th District. Trump 53%. Democratic efforts to push former state Rep.

Ron Hanks to the top of the GOP primary field fell flat as the Jan. 6 participant lost to attorney Jeff Hurd, 41-28 percent. That complicates the path to victory for Democrat Adam Frisch, the former Aspen City Councilman who nearly pulled off an upset two years ago against



Jeff Hurd

Courtesy Hurd Campaign

Boebert but will now have to run against a much more conventional Republican, in a district that typically favors GOP candidates. Lean Republican.

4th District (Eastern Colorado and Denver exurbs) Vacant; Ken Buck, R, resigned. Trump 57%. 3rd District Rep. Lauren Boebert



Lauren Boebert

clinched the GOP nomination with 44 percent of the vote, but a divided field meant that no other candidate even cracked 15 percent. Boebert, who crossed the state rather than run again in the more competitive 3rd District, is heavily

favored in the general election. Solid Republican.

4th District Special (Eastern Colorado and Denver exurbs) Vacant; Ken Buck, R, resigned. Trump 57%. Former Parker, Colorado Mayor Greg Lopez waltzed to victory over Democratic speechwriter Trisha Calvarese, 58-35 percent, and will fill out the remainder of Buck’s term.

5th District (Colorado Springs area) Open; Doug Lamborn, R, not seeking re-election. Trump 53%. Republicans avoided a headache as state party chairman Dave Williams lost resoundingly to radio host Jeff Crank, 65-35 percent. Williams, who was endorsed by Trump, has had a rocky tenure at the helm of the Colorado GOP and could have made this leftward-trending seat interesting in a general election. Instead, Crank, who lost primaries to Lamborn in 2006 and 2008, is finally a likely new member of Congress. Solid Republican.

8th District (Northern Denver suburbs and Greeley area) Yadira Caraveo, D, elected 48%. Biden 51%. One of 2024’s marquee matchups is officially set as state Rep. Gabe Evans blew past former state Rep. Janak Joshi, 78-22 percent, in the GOP primary. Evans will have to step up his fundraising but the district could be better for Republicans this year. Toss-up.

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

New York.

1st District (Eastern Long Island and north shore of Suffolk County) Nick LaLota, R, elected 54%. Trump 49.9%. Former CNN anchor John Avlon rode a wave of endorsements to a 70-30 percent romp over 2020 nominee Nancy Goroff in the Democratic primary. Now comes the hard part: beating LaLota at a moment when the Democratic brand on Long Island is in terrible shape. Lean Republican.

16th District (Southern Westchester County) Jamaal Bowman, D, re-elected 84%. Biden 72%. Bowman lost the most expensive House primary in history to Westchester County Executive George Latimer, 59-41 percent. Bowman faced an unprecedented onslaught of outside spending from AIPAC-affiliated groups. Solid Democratic.

22nd District (Syracuse and Utica areas) Brandon Williams, R, elected 51%. Biden 54%. State Sen. John Mannion clinched the Democratic nomination for what should be the party's best chance at beating a GOP

incumbent this cycle. Mannion outpaced DeWitt Town Councilor Sarah Klee Hood, 62-38 percent, and will be the slight favorite against Williams in this district that Democrats redrew to be more favorable to their party this year. Mannion is a favorite of organized labor and received significant support from the teachers' unions in the closing weeks of the race. Tilt Democratic.



John Mannion

Courtesy Mannion Campaign

South Carolina.

3rd District (Northwestern South Carolina) Open; Jeff Duncan, R, not seeking re-election. Trump 68%. A Trump endorsement wasn't enough for pastor Mark Burns to seal the deal in the runoff. He lost to Air Force National Guard Col. Sheri Biggs, 51-49 percent. Solid Republican.

Utah.

Governor. Spencer Cox (R) elected 2020 (63%). Cox outpaced state Rep. Phil Lyman, who ran to his right and had the state party's endorsement, by 12 points, 54-46 percent. Cox is the heavy favorite against state Rep. Brian King in the general election. Solid Republican.

Senate. Mitt Romney (R) not seeking re-election. 3rd District Rep. John Curtis won 49 percent of the vote against a divided field that included Trump-backed Trent Staggs, the mayor of Riverton (pop. 45,000) who also had the backing of the state party. Staggs won 33 percent, while former state House Speaker Brad Wilson finished with 13 percent. Curtis was backed by the Republican Main Street Partnership and will more closely resemble Romney in the Senate than the more MAGA-adjacent Staggs. Solid Republican.

2nd District (Central and western Salt Lake City and southwestern Utah) Celeste Maloy, R, elected in Nov. 2023 special election 57%. Trump 56%. Maloy currently leads her challenger, former Green Beret Colby Jenkins, by just 214 votes. Jenkins has raised issues surrounding the rejection of some mail-in ballots in Iron County, but will have to wait

Likely New Members of the Next Congress

Candidates Who Won Primaries in Solid or Likely Takeover Races

STATE	DISTRICT	NAME	PARTY
CA	29th	Luz Rivas	D
CA	30th	Laura Friedman	D
CA	31st	Gil Cisneros	D
CO	5th	Jeff Crank	R
DE	AL	Sarah McBride	D
GA	3rd	Brian Jack	R
IN	3rd	Marlin Stutzman	R
IN	6th	Jefferson Shreve	R
IN	8th	Mark Messmer	R
MD	2nd	Johnny Olszewski	D
MD	3rd	Sarah Elfreth	D
MD	6th	April McClain-Delaney	D
MN	3rd	Kelly Morrison	DFL
MT	2nd	Troy Downing	R
NC	6th	Addison McDowell	R
NC	8th	Mark Harris	R
NC	10th	Pat Harrigan	R
NC	13th	Brad Knott	R
NC	14th	Tim Moore	R
ND	At-Large	Julie Fedorchak	R
NJ	3rd	Herb Conaway	D
NY	16th	George Latimer	D
OH	2nd	David Taylor	R
OR	3rd	Maxine Dexter	D
SC	3rd	Sheri Biggs	R
TX	12th	Craig Goldman	R
TX	26th	Brandon Gill	R
TX	32nd	Julie Johnson	D
UT	3rd	Mike Kennedy	R
VA	10th	Suhas Subramanyam	D
WV	2nd	Riley Moore	R
CA	Senate	Adam Schiff	D
DE	Senate	Lisa Blunt Rochester	D
IN	Senate	Jim Banks	R
NJ	Senate	Andy Kim	D
UT	Senate	John Curtis	R
WV	Senate	Jim Justice	R

until after the state completes its canvas on July 22 to request a recount. A late endorsement from Trump for Maloy may have saved the new congresswoman's career. Solid Republican.

3rd District (Provo area, southeastern Salt Lake City, and rural southeastern Utah) Open; John Curtis, R, running for Senate. Trump 58%. State Sen. Mike Kennedy emerged from a crowded field to secure the GOP nomination with 39 percent. Kennedy, a physician, first arrived on the political scene when he challenged Mitt Romney in the 2018 Senate race. Now, he'll head to Washington as Romney heads for the exits. Solid Republican.



Nebraska 2: Omaha Tiebreaker

By Jacob Rubashkin

No one congressional district may have more political importance than Nebraska's 2nd.

Anchored by Omaha, the 2nd District is the most evenly divided district in the entire country (according to *Inside Elections'* Baseline). And it's also one of just five congressional districts to cast its own electoral vote, not including at-large districts, which makes it a critical piece in the path to victory for both President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump.

All that attention and importance puts a spotlight on the congressional race taking place in the district this fall, a rematch between GOP Rep. Don Bacon and Democratic state Sen. Tony Vargas.

Bacon is a white whale for Democrats, who have struggled to defeat him for four election cycles even as the party's statewide candidates often win the district at the top of the ticket. If they can finally topple him this cycle, it will make it easier for Democrats to achieve the 4-seat net gain necessary to win back the majority.

The Lay of the Land

The 2nd is a compact eastern Nebraska district that includes all of Douglas County, neighboring Saunders County, and the western half of Sarpy County.

The biggest city is Omaha, which makes up roughly three-quarters of the district, and the seat sits entirely within the Omaha media market.

The citizen voting-age population of the 2nd is 80 percent white, 10 percent Black, 6 percent Hispanic and 2 percent Asian-American, and 42 percent of residents have a bachelor's degree or more (six points higher than the national average). The median household income in the district is \$77,535, which ranks 182 in the House.

According to *Inside Elections* Baseline, the district is tied for being the most evenly divided seat in the country, with the average Democrat expected to receive 49.2 percent to the average Republican's 48.9 percent.

While Nebraska is often thought of as a rural Republican state, the 2nd District is more suburban and competitive.

In 2020, the 2nd would have voted for Biden by 6 points, 52-46 percent. In 2016, it would have voted for Trump by 2 points, 48-46 percent, and in 2012 it would have voted for Mitt Romney by 7 points, 53-47 percent.

Significant shifts in Omaha proper account for much of the district's leftward trend. Barack Obama carried Omaha by 1 point in 2012, 50-49 percent; Clinton carried Omaha by 7 points, 50-43 percent, and Biden carried it by 17 points, 57-40 percent. The Sarpy County portion of the district, to the south of Omaha, is still solidly Republican but also shifting

toward Democrats, voting for Romney by 37 points in 2012, Trump by 31 points in 2016, and Trump by 22 points in 2020.

In state races, the district is more open to voting for Democrats as well despite the GOP's dominance statewide. In 2022, the governor's race was tied, 48-48 percent. In 2018, Democratic gubernatorial candidate Bob Krist carried the 2nd by 2 points, 51-49 percent.

The Republican Incumbent

Bacon, 60, first won this seat in 2016, when he was the only Republican to defeat a Democratic House incumbent in the nation.

The Momence, Illinois-born Bacon was a political newcomer at the time: after graduating Northern Illinois University in 1984, he spent 29



Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

Don Bacon

years in the Air Force, rising to the rank of Brigadier General. After retiring in 2014 and settling in Omaha, Bacon taught at Bellevue University and worked as an aide to then-Rep. Jeff Fortenberry of the 1st District.

In 2016, Bacon defeated former state and Tea Party favorite Sen. Chip Maxwell in the GOP primary for the 2nd District, 66-34 percent, and then ousted incumbent Democrat Brad Ashford, 49-48 percent in the general election.

Since then, Bacon has been a perpetual target for Democrats. In 2018, Ashford sought his old seat but lost the primary to progressive Kara Eastman, who went on to lose to Bacon narrowly, 51-49 percent. In 2020, Bacon again beat Eastman, but by a wider 51-46 percent margin. And in 2022, Bacon defeated Vargas, 51-49 percent.

In Congress, he is a member of the bipartisan Problem Solvers Caucus and is a reliable vote for GOP leadership, often sparring in the press with members of the House Freedom Caucus. Though he did not vote to impeach Trump in 2019 or 2021, Bacon was one of a handful of Republicans to vote to certify the 2020 election results and for the creation of an independent January 6 commission, and to vote for Biden's bipartisan infrastructure bill last year.

Those breaks have created some issues on his right flank — in 2024 he only won his primary against an underfunded challenger 62-38 percent.

Bacon sits on the Agriculture and Armed Services committees.

His campaign team includes general consultant David Watts of Double Eagle Strategies, media consultant Casey Phillips of the Hereford Agency, pollster Rob Autry of Meeting Street Insights, and direct mail consultant Aaron Trost of HILC Strategic.

The Democratic Challenger

Vargas, 39, is making his second run in as many cycles, one of a dozen Democratic repeat candidates in top-tier districts.

The Democrat, born in Queens to Peruvian immigrant parents, graduated from University of Rochester in 2007 and worked for Teach

Continued on page 5



Convention Episode

Nathan and Jacob will record the next episode of the Inside Elections Podcast next week from the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee. They'll report on what they're seeing and hearing after two days of the convention and talk about the latest news and analysis on key congressional races. They'll record another episode from the Democratic Convention in August.

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

Continued from page 4

for America for six years, first as a teacher in Brooklyn and then as a staffer. He moved to Omaha in 2012 when his now-wife began law school and worked as an education consultant as well as serving on the Omaha School Board from 2013 to 2016.

In 2016, Vargas ran for Nebraska’s nominally nonpartisan unicameral legislature, placing first in the primary with 45 percent and winning the general election against a fellow Democrat, 62-38 percent. He won re-election, 78-22 percent, in 2020.

In the unicameral, Vargas was popular across the aisle, winning a leadership role with GOP support in 2019 and 2021.

His campaign team includes media consultant Raghu Devagutaptu of Left Hook Strategy, and pollster Angela Kuefler of Global Strategy Group.

How It Plays Out

Though they opted for a rematch, Democrats are hoping that the increased turnout from a presidential year and a sharper and better-funded message from the Vargas campaign will change the ultimate outcome.

In 2022, Vargas did not run a single pure negative ad against Bacon. He aired one contrast spot briefly dinging Bacon for votes on Medicare and Social Security two weeks before Election Day, but otherwise stuck to positive advertising that emphasized his working class roots and his desire to stay above the political fray.

Vargas’s decision not to engage Bacon on the airwaves, even as Republicans were going after him, is now roundly derided by national Democratic strategists watching the race, and the candidate himself acknowledges it was a strategic error he won’t make again.

Some more sympathetic operatives argue that it was a question of resource allocation, and that Vargas did not have the money to go negative (Vargas spent \$2.1 million on paid media). This cycle, at least, Vargas will have significantly more financial firepower. Through April 24, he had already raised \$2.4 million compared to just \$1 million at the end of April 2022; he reported \$1.6 million on April 24, 2024 compared to \$1.7 million for Bacon. Second quarter fundraising numbers are due July 15.

The biggest shift from 2022 will be an increased focus on abortion policy, where Democrats feel the pro-life Bacon is most out of step with the district. National strategists don’t have a good answer for why Vargas declined to hit Bacon on his support for a total abortion ban with no exceptions for rape or incest last cycle, but say that will not be the case this year. Even outside groups in 2022 largely focused on other aspects of Bacon’s record such as voting to repeal the Affordable Care Act (the only ads to mention abortion came from House Majority PAC and featured in just a third of their spending).

“Last time they didn’t make it an abortion referendum,” said one Democratic strategist not working on the race but familiar with the district. “They tried to make it about Vargas being likable and he’s just not that unique or interesting enough.” This year, Democrats say, will be different. “It is clear he’s willing and able to get into the mud,” said another national Democrat of Vargas.

In an interview with *Inside Elections* earlier this year, Vargas stressed the need to do better turning out Black and Hispanic voters in the district. The two places where Vargas did worst compared to 2020 nominee Eastman were the 2nd and 4th Wards of Douglas County, which are predominantly Black and Hispanic, respectively. Those were also the two places where turnout dropped significantly relative to 2020; turnout in those wards was 60 percent of 2020 compared to 71.6 percent of 2020 in the rest of the county.

Overall, Democratic turnout in Douglas County lagged behind

2024 House Ratings

Toss-Up (5D, 5R)

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

Tilt Democratic (8D, 1R)

AK AL (Peltola, D)
CA 47 (Open; Porter, D)
MI 8 (Open; Kildee, D)
NY 22 (Williams, R)
OH 13 (Sykes, D)
OH 9 (Kaptur, D)
PA 7 (Wild, D)
PA 8 (Cartwright, D)
VA 7 (Open; Spanberger, D)

Tilt Republican (9R)

AZ 1 (Schweikert, R)
AZ 6 (Ciscomani, R)
CA 22 (Valadao, R)
CA 41 (Calvert, R)
IA 3 (Nunn, R)
NE 2 (Bacon, R)
NJ 7 (Kean Jr., R)
NY 19 (Molinaro, R)
VA 2 (Kiggans, R)

Lean Democratic (7D)

CT 5 (Hayes, D)	NH 1 (Pappas, D)
IL 17 (Sorensen, D)	NY 18 (Ryan, D)
ME 2 (Golden, D)	PA 17 (Deluzio, D)
MN 2 (Craig, DFL)	

Lean Republican (8R)

CO3 (Open; Boebert, R)	MT 1 (Zinke, R)
CA 45 (Steel, R)	NY 1 (LaLota, R)
IA 1 (Miller-Meeks, R)	PA 10 (Perry, R)
MI 10 (James, R)	TX 15 (De La Cruz, R)

Likely Democratic (16D, 2R)

AL 2 (Open; Moore, R)	OH 1 (Landsman, D)
CA 9 (Harder, D)*	OR 4 (Hoyle, D)
CA 49 (Levin, D)	OR 6 (Salinas, D)
IN 1 (Mrvan, D)	TX 34 (Gonzalez, D)
KS 3 (Davids, D)	TX 28 (Cuellar, D)
LA 6 (Open; Graves, R)	WA 8 (Schrier, D)
MI 3 (Scholten, D)	
NH 2 (Open; Kuster, D)	
NV 1 (Titus, D)	
NV 3 (Lee, D)	
NV 4 (Horsford, D)	
NY 3 (Suoizzi, D)	

Likely Republican (7R, 3D)

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

	GOP	DEM
Solid	189	175
Likely/Lean/Tilt	27	34
Total	216	209
Toss-up		10
Needed for majority		218

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

Republican turnout by 8 points in 2022 compared to 5 points in 2020. GOP strategists are optimistic that Bacon will improve among Black and Hispanic voters, and note that Bacon’s share of the vote in Ward 4 has grown every year he’s been on the ballot (from 37 percent in 2016 to 44 percent in 2022).

“Bacon’s been smart about building relationships in South Omaha,” said the Democratic consultant with a history in the district. “He was one of the first Republicans to go for DACA and he’s been pretty moderate on some of the issues impacting that community.”

National and local Democratic strategists say that Vargas’s upbringing in a working-class family gives him an “economic relatability” that will help him run strong among minority communities.

But Vargas’ allies also believe he can pick up even more voters among the college educated white residents of the district as well by litigating abortion more effectively than last cycle.

Continued on page 6

Continued from page 5

Winning over more of those voters may depend on convincing them that Bacon is not the moderate he presents himself as. Though Bacon's image is not as strong as other blue-district colleagues such as Pennsylvania's Brian Fitzpatrick, he has worked hard to maintain an image of pragmatism and geniality. Once nicknamed "Bits," Bacon airs self-deprecating ads and never shies from tangling with more controversial Republicans such as Georgia's Marjorie Taylor Greene or Colorado's Lauren Boebert. He floated an alliance with Democrats to elect a consensus Speaker of the House after Kevin McCarthy's ouster in 2023.



Tony Vargas

Courtesy Vargas Campaign

And he's received a real boost from his former opponents, the Ashfords, who he has grown close to over the years. Both Brad and Ann Ashford (who ran for this seat in 2020 but lost the Democratic primary) endorsed Bacon's 2020 campaign against Eastman. Bacon was a pallbearer at Brad Ashford's funeral in 2022. One of the Ashfords' closest political aides, Mary Barrett, is now a top fundraiser for Bacon. And Ann Ashford, who supported Vargas's primary opponent in 2022, may get involved on Bacon's behalf this year. That kind of bipartisan support goes a long way in the evenly divided district.

Douglas County's Ward 7 is a good bellwether for those voters — and the district as a whole. In 2020 Biden carried Ward 7 by 6 points (his overall margin in the 2nd). But in 2022, Vargas lost it by 5 points, 52-47 percent. Republicans are likely to use a similar playbook against Vargas as they did last time, when Bacon and his allies painted Vargas as an radical, soft-on-crime tax-man. GOP ads hammered Vargas for votes he took on lighter sentences and a tax increase in the state legislature. (In 2019, Vargas proposed a tax increase on those making more than \$100,000 a year.)

Bacon and his allies will also point to the high number of votes Vargas has missed in the legislature. And a 2013 dispute between Vargas and a taxi driver that resulted in both men filing police reports alleging assault by the other (no charges were filed) could come up in attack ads as well.

Vargas and his allies are confident they can respond to the tax-focused messaging by pointing to his "Taxpayer Defender" designation from the libertarian-leaning Americans for Prosperity group (awarded based on his voting record in 2021), and point to his vote on a tax cut in the legislature

In 2022, Vargas did not respond effectively to attacks on his criminal justice record. The closest he got was an ad featuring his daughter in which he says that while his opponents were trying to make him seem scary and dangerous, the truth was "his dad was a taxi driver and his mom worked the factory line." HMP had to step in during the final two weeks of the race to air a positive ad pushing back on assertions that Vargas cut police funding.

This cycle, as with abortion, Vargas is likely to take a sharper edge to his rebuttals on crime, both highlighting votes to fund state troopers and pointing out Bacon's own votes on issues such as red flag gun laws for domestic abusers.

Both parties will be heavily invested in the race. The 2nd is one of just nine districts where all four major outside groups — HMP for Democrats, Congressional Leadership Fund for Republicans, and the independent

expenditure wings of the DCCC and the NRCC — have placed broadcast TV reservations for the fall. Republican outside groups have reserved \$4 million in the Omaha media market while Democratic groups have booked \$3.6 million.

The Presidential Election

Because the 2nd District has such a prominent place in the Electoral College, voters here will be subjected to as much or more presidential messaging than anywhere else in the country. That makes the outcome of the presidential election a crucial component to both campaigns. And it means the uncertainty surrounding Biden's position in the race could have an outsized effect on the outcome here.

While the president's dispiriting debate performance has spooked Democrats nationwide and failed to resuscitate his campaign, there's some evidence that the 2nd District may be more resilient for Biden than other swing districts. Despite the fallout from the debate, both Democratic and GOP strategists see Biden as the favorite to carry the district given how unpalatable Trump is to voters.

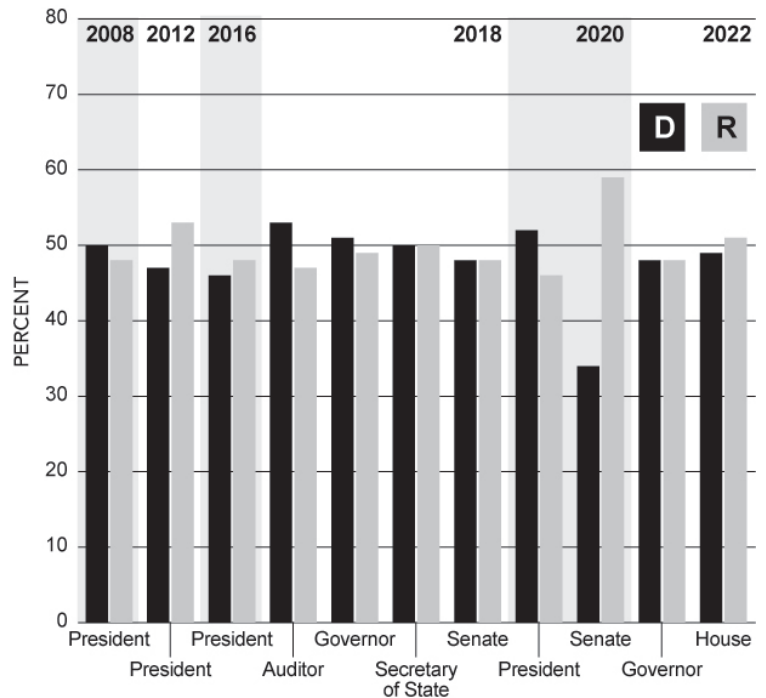
That's good news for Biden, who needs the 2nd District's vote, along with Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin to get to the required 270 electoral college votes if Trump wins Arizona, Georgia, and Nevada.

That's also good news for Vargas; if Bacon continues to run ahead of the top of the ticket as he has in previous years, Vargas will need a cushion to get over the finish line.

The Bottom Line

No single House district is a bellwether, but Nebraska's 2nd District is critical to Democratic success on Election Day. Biden likely needs to win the single electoral college vote on the path to re-election, and Democrats should be winning this type of district if things are going well in the House. But Biden's latest struggles and Bacon's electoral resilience make this a tougher seat than it looks on paper. **IE**

Statewide Election Results for Nebraska's 2nd District



Return to Sender: Bowman Joins Select Group of Primary In, Primary Out House Members

By Jacob Rubashkin

New York Rep. Jamaal Bowman's loss to George Latimer in the 16th District Democratic primary puts the progressive in rare company among House members.

While it is uncommon for any incumbent to lose a primary race — it happens just 2 percent of the time on average in any given cycle — it is exceedingly rare for a representative to lose a primary challenge *after* defeating another incumbent in a previous primary election. And it's even more rare for those primary wins and losses to be a function of ideological differences rather than corruption or misconduct, as Bowman's — and Virginia Republican Bob Good's — losses this year were.

Bowman, who lost to the more establishment-friendly Latimer by 17 points, had ousted party stalwart Eliot Engel in the 2020 Democratic primary. Engel can now welcome his one-time opponent into the small "primary-in, primary-out" club: he got to the House in 1988 by beating the legendary Mario Biaggi following Biaggi's corruption indictment.

Corruption is a recurring theme among this group of members. Of the 12 cases similar to Bowman's over the past 50 years, 9 of them involve corruption investigations or accusations of misconduct in some capacity. Most of the others involve significant generational contrasts.

An additional four members — Illinois' Marie Newman, Michigan's Hansen Clarke, New Jersey's Neil Gallagher, and New York's James Scheuer — beat incumbent members of Congress in primaries only to see their districts redrawn and later lost to fellow incumbents in primary elections.

Michigan's Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick beat Rep. Barbara-Rose Collins in 1996 as the congresswoman faced an ethics investigation into misuse of campaign and official funds. But Kilpatrick lost to Clarke in 2010 under the cloud of a corruption scandal that sent her son, Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick, to prison.

Pennsylvania's Chaka Fattah beat Lucien Blackwell in 1994 but was later indicted on corruption charges and lost the 2016 Democratic primary to Dwight Evans.

Back in 1978, Oklahoma Democrat Mike Synar won a primary challenge against Rep. Ted Risenhoover, who he portrayed as a playboy, informing voters Risenhoover slept on a "heart-shaped waterbed" in the nation's capital. But Synar's luck ran out in 1994, when he lost narrowly to a conservative Democratic primary challenger named Virgil Cooper who spent little money on his race but was backed by the NRA and tobacco companies. Cooper lost the general election, narrowly, to future Sen. Tom Coburn.

Kentucky Democrat Carroll Hubbard defeated an incumbent Democrat in 1974 but lost his own primary in 1992 after becoming mixed up in the House banking scandal. The Democrat Hubbard beat in 1974, Frank Stubblefield, had himself defeated an incumbent Democrat, Noble Gregory, in 1958.

Another Democrat, New York's Stephen Solarz, was also implicated in the 1992 banking scandal and lost his primary that year to Nydia

Velazquez, who's still in Congress today. Solarz himself got to Washington, DC by defeating a Democratic incumbent, Bertram Podell, in 1974. Podell was facing corruption charges at the time.

In 1978, Texas Democrat John Andrew Young lost renomination following accusations that he forced a staffer to have sex with him to keep her job. He had previously ousted incumbent John Junior Bell in the 1956 Democratic primary.

A rare Republican in the club, Californian Andrew Hinshaw was personally recruited by President Richard Nixon to beat arch-conservative John Schmitz in the 1972 GOP primary. But Hinshaw only served two terms before losing a primary in 1976 to Robert Badham.



Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

Jamaal Bowman

Hinshaw was under indictment for corruption at the time.

Another incumbent, Louisiana's Otto Passman, also lost renomination that year after facing accusations of influence peddling (he was later acquitted

of the charges). Passman had won his seat in Congress by ousting an incumbent in the 1946 Democratic primary.

Indiana's Ray Madden also received the boot in his 1976 primary, losing a generational matchup to the much younger state Sen. Adam Benjamin (the Almanac of American Politics cites news reports that Madden was "as senile as the day is long"). His exit came 34 years after he upset fellow Democrat William Schulte in a primary.

California Democrat Pete Stark is a provisional member of the club and also was on the losing end of a generational battle. He ousted longtime Rep. George Miller in 1972, and while he ultimately lost in the 2012 general election, not primary, it was against a fellow Democrat, now-Rep. Eric Swalwell. Swalwell used some of the same arguments Stark had levied against Miller 50 years earlier in that campaign.

Bowman and Good (who defeated an incumbent seen as insufficiently conservative) are outliers in their situations, two members who won and lost ideological primaries to bookend their congressional careers.

But they may also be the start of a trend. Missouri's Cori Bush, who defeated Rep. Lacy Clay in the 2020 Democratic primary, faces a well-funded challenge from St. Louis County Prosecutor Wesley Bell on Aug. 6.


Bell is running as a more establishment-friendly alternative to the incumbent's strident progressivism. But as was the case with so many other members foiled by primaries in years past, Bush is also under investigation for misuse of funds.

Report Shorts

Arizona's 1st District. A Noble Predictive Insights poll fielded June 25-27 of 420 likely Democratic primary voters found five candidates within 8 points of each other and more than a third of the electorate still undecided. Former state Rep. Amish Shah and former state party chairman Andrei Cherny tallied 16 percent each, former news anchor Marlene Galan-Woods followed with 14 percent, investment banker Conor O'Callaghan clocked in at 11 percent, and orthodontist Andrew Horne received 8 percent. A June 10-19 RMG Research poll for US Term Limits found a similarly bunched-up result. The primary is on July 30 and GOP Rep. David Schweikert awaits the winner. Tilt Republican.

California's 16th District. A Lake Research Partners poll from the Sam Liccardo campaign finds the former San Jose Mayor leading state Assemblyman Evan Low by 11 points, 39-28 percent. Both are Democrats. The mixed-mode poll was fielded from June 24-27 and surveyed 600 likely voters. Solid Democratic.

Washington's 3rd District. Republican Joe Kent released a Cygnal survey of the primary and general elections fielded June 20-22 showing a tight race between the 2022 GOP nominee and the woman who beat him, Rep. Marie Gluesenkamp-Perez. Gluesenkamp-Perez polled ahead of Kent in the all-party primary, 38-34 percent, but in a head-to-head matchup, the two deadlocked at 42 percent. Toss-up.

Wisconsin Senate. An AARP poll (6/28-7/2) of likely voters conducted by Fabrizio Ward (R) and Impact Research (D) found Sen. Tammy Baldwin running 5 points ahead of GOP candidate Eric Hovde, 50-45 percent, even as Biden trailed Trump at the top of the ticket by 5 points, 50-45 percent. Lean Democratic. 

2024 Presidential Ratings (Electoral Votes)

Toss-Up (77)			
Arizona (11)	Georgia (16)	Michigan (15)	Nevada (6)
Pennsylvania (19)		Wisconsin (10)	
Tilt Democratic (0)		Tilt Republican (16)	
		North Carolina (16)	
Lean Democratic (15)		Lean Republican (31)	
Minnesota (10)	Nebraska 2nd (1)	Florida (30)	
New Hampshire (4)		Maine 2nd (1)	
Likely Democratic (15)		Likely Republican (63)	
Maine Statewide (2)		Iowa (6)	Texas (40)
Virginia (13)		Ohio (17)	
Solid Democratic (196)		Solid Republican (125)	
California (54)	New York (28)	Alabama (9)	Nebraska 1st (1)
Colorado (10)	Oregon (8)	Alaska (3)	Nebraska 3rd (1)
Connecticut (7)	Rhode Island (4)	Arkansas (6)	North Dakota (3)
Delaware (3)	Vermont (3)	Idaho (4)	Oklahoma (7)
District of Columbia (3)	Washington (12)	Indiana (11)	South Carolina (9)
Hawaii (4)		Kansas (6)	South Dakota (3)
Illinois (19)		Kentucky (8)	Tennessee (11)
Maine 1st (1)		Louisiana (8)	Utah (6)
Maryland (10)		Mississippi (6)	West Virginia (4)
Massachusetts (11)		Missouri (10)	Wyoming (3)
New Jersey (14)		Montana (4)	
New Mexico (5)		Nebraska Statewide (2)	

2024 Gubernatorial Ratings

Toss-up (2)

NC Open (Cooper, D) NH Open (Sununu, R)

Tilt Democratic **Tilt Republican**

Lean Democratic **Lean Republican**

Likely Democratic (1) **Likely Republican**

WA Open (Inslee, D)

Solid Democratic (1) **Solid Republican (7)**

DE Open (Camey, D) IN Open (Holcomb, R)

MO Open (Parson, R)

ND Open (Burgum, R)

WV Open (Justice, R)

Cox, R (Utah)

Gianforte, R (Mont.)

Scott, R (Vt.)

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

Fall Television Ad Reservations in Senate Races

Combined Candidate, Independent Expenditure and Super PAC Spending from Labor Day to Election Day

	REPUBLICAN	DEMOCRATIC	TOTAL
Ohio	\$80,876,001	\$79,068,210	\$159,944,211
Pennsylvania	\$48,819,146	\$60,145,300	\$108,964,446
Montana	\$55,515,023	\$52,706,101	\$108,221,124
Nevada	\$10,382,051	\$39,610,391	\$49,992,442
Arizona	\$6,204,855	\$38,425,020	\$44,629,875
Michigan	\$5,161,791	\$26,718,078	\$31,879,869
Wisconsin	\$3,916,872	\$25,204,613	\$29,121,485
Maryland	\$7,403,989	0	\$7,403,989
Virginia	0	\$1,852,550	\$1,852,550
Indiana	\$782,044	0	\$782,044