Maine 2: Going for Golden

By Jacob Rubashkin

Maine's 2nd District has beguiled Republicans for the last three election cycles, as Democrat Jared Golden racks up wins in what is otherwise GOP country.

The rural district along the Canadian border is overwhelmingly white, doesn't have many college-educated voters, and backs Republicans for president, governor and Senate.

But ever since ousting a well-liked incumbent by a narrow margin in 2018's "blue wave," Golden has put up impressive victories despite significant GOP spending against him.

Now, with Republicans largely on defense as they fight to maintain a narrow, five-seat majority in the House, Maine's 2nd is a rare and valuable opportunity to take over a seat in favorable territory. But they'll need to crack the Golden code, likely with a different kind of candidate, in order to do so.

The Lay of the Land

Maine's 2nd, the largest district by area east of the Mississippi, includes most of inland Maine; the district begins just north of the Portland metro area and runs north to the Canadian border.

The district is one of the least densely populated in the country; its largest cities are Lewiston and Bangor, each with a population of under 40,000 residents.

White voters make up 95 percent of the citizen voting age population, making it the second-whitest electorate of any district in the country. Just 27.5 percent of residents have a bachelor's degree or higher, lower than the nationwide rate of 33.7 percent, and the median household income is $55,629, which ranks 365 out of 435 districts.

Politically, the district leans Republican. In 2016 and 2020, it cast its electoral vote for Donald Trump, 51-42 percent, and 51-45 percent, respectively (Maine allocates two of its electoral votes by congressional district).

In 2018, the 2nd voted for independent Sen. Angus King 51-40 percent, with the Democratic candidate receiving another 9 percent, while also voting for Republican gubernatorial nominee Shawn Moody,

2024 House Ratings

Toss-Up (4D, 7R)

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)
NY 3 (Santos, R)	

Tilt Democratic (5D)

CA 47 (Open; Porter, D)
OH 13 (Sykes, D)
PA 7 (Wild, D)
PA 8 (Cartwright, D)
VA 7 (Spanberger, D)

Tilt Republican (9R)

AZ 1 (Schweikert, R)
AZ 6 (Ciscomani, R)
CA 22 (Valadao, R)
CO 3 (Boebert, R)
IA 3 (Nunn, R)
MI 10 (James, R)
NJ 7 (Kean Jr., R)
NY 19 (Molinaro, R)
VA 2 (Kiggans, R)

Lean Democratic (13D)

AK AL (Peltola, D)
CT 5 (Hayes, D)
IL 17 (Sorensen, D)
ME 2 (Golden, D)
MI 3 (Scholten, D)
MN 2 (Craig, DFL)
NV 3 (Lee, D)
NH 1 (Pappas, D)
NY 18 (Ryan, D)
OH 1 (Landsman, D)
OH 9 (Kaptur, D)
OR 6 (Salinas, D)
PA 17 (Deluzio, D)

Lean Republican (7R)

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

	GOP	DEM
Solid	182	171
Likely/Lean/Tilt	26	31
Total	208	202
Toss-up		11
North Carolina		14
Needed for majority		218

Likely Democratic (13D)

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

Likely Republican (10R)

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

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

North Carolina ratings are being withheld pending a new map.

Report Shorts

Alabama Redistricting. Federal judges have decided on a new congressional map after the Republican-controlled state legislature failed to draw a map that complied with the court's order. Democrats are poised to flip the new 2nd District, which Joe Biden would have won by 12 points. Current 2nd District GOP Rep. Barry Moore has yet to announce his 2024 plans, but could end up running against GOP Rep. Jerry Carl in the new 1st District. Potential Democratic candidates who might run in the 2nd include Montgomery Mayor Steven Reed, House Minority Leader Anthony Daniels, and state Sen. Vivian Figures.

Arizona Senate. 2022 gubernatorial nominee Kari Lake is officially in the race. Though Lake's election denialism alienated her from Arizona moderates last cycle, Republicans in D.C. have resigned themselves to her frontrunner status in the GOP primary. According to *Politico*, the NRSC is considering endorsing her. Meanwhile, independent Sen. Kyrsten Sinema has yet to announce her 2024 plans, though she appears to be taking steps toward a run. Toss-up.

California's 27th District. Democrat Franky Carrillo dropped out of the primary, clearing the way for top Democratic recruit George Whitesides to take on GOP Rep. Mike Garcia. Democrats have a 3.7-point advantage in the Los Angeles-area seat, according to Inside Elections' Baseline. That makes it similar in performance to competitive districts represented by Republicans Brian Fitzpatrick in Pennsylvania and Marc Molinaro in New York. Toss-up.

New Jersey Senate. A superseding indictment alleges that Democratic Sen. Bob Menendez acted as a foreign agent of Egypt while serving as the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Most New Jersey political leaders, and many of his Senate colleagues, have already called for him to resign, but Menendez maintains his innocence and says he's staying put. Polls show Menendez dead in the water in a Democratic primary; Rep. Andy Kim is already challenging him. Likely Democratic.

New York's 3rd District. Republican George Santos was indicted on several more fraud charges, and faces renewed calls for his expulsion from fellow GOP members of the New York delegation.

Former Democratic Rep. Tom Suozzi, who beat Santos in 2020 but gave up this seat to run for governor in 2022, entered the Democratic primary. But there's still the possibility of a special election, in which county party leaders would pick the nominees. Toss-up.

New York's 18th District. Alison Esposito, the GOP nominee for lieutenant governor in 2022, launched her much-anticipated bid for Congress against Democratic Rep. Pat Ryan. Esposito, a retired NYPD detective, would be the first out lesbian Republican in Congress. Lean Democratic. **IE**

2024 Senate Ratings

Toss-Up (3)

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

Tilt Democratic (2)	**Tilt Republican (1)**
Casey (D-Penn.)	*Manchin (D-W.V.)*
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 (10)**
DE Open (Carper, D)	IN Open (Braun, R)
MD Open (Cardin, D)	UT Open (Romney, R)
Butler (D-Calif.)	Barrasso (R-Wyo.)
Cantwell (D-Wash.)	Blackburn (R-Tenn.)
Gillibrand (D-N.Y.)	Cramer (R-N.D.)
Heinrich (D-N.M.)	Fischer (R-Neb.)
Hirono (D-Hawaii)	Hawley (R-Mo.)
Kaine (D-Va.)	Ricketts (R-Neb.)
King (I-Maine)	Scott (R-Fla.)
Klobuchar (D-Minn.)	Wicker (R-Miss.)
Murphy (D-Conn.)	
Sander (I-Vt.)	
Warren (D-Mass.)	
Whitehouse (D-R.I.)	

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

Arizona 1: Scottsdale Showdown

By Erin Covey

Rep. David Schweikert has become increasingly vulnerable over the past several election cycles. Last November, local Democratic activist Jevin Hodge came just 3,195 votes away from unseating the Republican congressman, a tighter race than both Republicans and Democrats were expecting.

Last cycle's tantalizingly close race has inspired a slew of Democrats to throw their hats in the ring this year. But in order to take down Schweikert, they'll first need to navigate a six-way primary that threatens to drain valuable resources.

Arizona's primary isn't until Aug. 6, so it will be a marathon to the Democratic nomination — and the eventual winner has a two-month sprint until early voting for the general election starts on Oct. 9.

The Lay of the Land

The most affluent, highly educated congressional district in the state, Arizona's 1st has become less and less hospitable to Republicans in recent years.

The 1st is located entirely within Maricopa County, the fastest growing county in the U.S. in 2022 and a key swing county in the past few election cycles.

Aside from Schweikert, state Treasurer Kimberely Yee was the only Republican on the ballot to win this district (56-44 percent) last cycle. Democratic Sen. Mark Kelly carried it by 7 points, Secretary of State Adrian Fontes carried it by 8, and Gov. Katie Hobbs and Attorney General Kris Mayes carried it by 3.

For comparison, the late Sen. John McCain would have won the new iteration of the 1st by 20 points in the 2016 Senate race, though Donald Trump won it by just 4 points the same year. Four years later, Joe Biden narrowly carried the 1st by 1 point, 50-49 percent.

The district is anchored in Scottsdale, a wealthy city northeast of Phoenix that calls itself "The West's most Western town" and has become a popular vacation destination in the Sonoran Desert. It also encompasses a large portion of the northeastern suburbs of Phoenix and the more sparsely populated outer edges of Maricopa County.

The average household income in the district is $141,000 — higher than any other congressional district in Arizona — and the number of residents with graduate degrees outnumbers the number of residents with just high school diplomas. Nearly 80 percent of the citizen voting age population is White, while 12 percent is Hispanic.

The Republican Incumbent

Schweikert, 61, is a familiar name in Arizona politics. He served in the state House in the early 1990s before making his first unsuccessful bid for Congress in 1994. After serving as the chair of the Arizona State Board of Equalization for eight years, followed by a stint as the Maricopa County Treasurer, he ran for Congress again in 2008 and lost to then-Democratic Rep. Harry Mitchell. Two years later, Schweikert defeated Mitchell by 9 points in a Republican wave year.

After post-2010 Census redistricting, Schweikert decided to run for re-election in the safely Republican 6th District, based in his hometown of Scottsdale, setting up a member-on-member race against GOP Rep. Ben Quayle (the son of former Vice President Dan Quayle). During the bitter primary, Schweikert's campaign sent out widely-criticized mailers that appeared to insinuate that Quayle was bisexual (Schweikert's campaign denied that insinuation was intentional).

Schweikert defeated Quayle by 5 points, and went on to easily win the 2012 general election. He didn't face competitive races in 2014 and 2016, and in 2018, he defeated his Democratic opponent by 10 points — even as then-Democratic Senate nominee Kyrsten Sinema carried the 1st by 2 points.

He had a much closer race in 2020 against Democrat Hiral Tipirneni, who came 4 points away from defeating the congressman after Democrats collectively spent $8.7 million on the airwaves.

Though Schweikert was expected to have another competitive race on his hands in 2022, Democrats were less optimistic about flipping the district in a midterm cycle that should have favored Republicans. Hodge didn't receive that much support from outside groups; the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee did not invest in the race, and the House Majority PAC, House Democrats' primary super PAC, spent $1.3 million in the final few weeks.

The congressman won re-election by less than 1 point — after fending off a serious primary challenge from Elijah Norton in August that left him in a weaker position heading into the general election. Schweikert was forced to spend more than $1 million in the primary, and his campaign sent mailers that appeared to question Norton's sexuality in an echo of the Quayle primary a decade earlier.

Both Norton and Hodge hammered Schweikert for a slew of campaign finance violations, including failing to disclose loans and using campaign funds for personal expenses. The congressman paid a $50,000 fine to the House Ethics Committee in 2020, and two years later, paid a $125,000 fine to the Federal Election Commission. He blamed the campaign finance violations on his former chief of staff (who was also fined by the FEC), though the FEC's report implicated Schweikert as well.

The Republican has long been known as a fiscal conservative, less moderate than many of his peers who represent districts Biden won in 2020 (18 members in total). Unlike GOP Rep. Juan Ciscomani, who represents a similarly competitive Arizona district, Schweikert voted against a temporary bill this month to keep the government open.

But relative to some of his other peers in the Arizona congressional delegation (Reps. Andy Biggs and Paul Gosar), Schweikert is a fairly mainstream Republican. He left the House Freedom Caucus, of which he was a founding member, at the beginning of the year because he didn't want to be associated with the Arizona legislature's Freedom Caucus, which he called "much more populist."

The congressman is a member of the Ways and Means Committee, and is vice chairman of the U.S. Congress Joint Economic Committee.

The Democratic Field

Among the six candidates running for the Democratic nomination, three make up the top-tier: former broadcast journalist Marlene Galán-Woods, (the widow of the late state Attorney General Grant Woods), former Aspiration CEO Andrei Cherny, and state Rep. Amish Shah.

Though the three leading candidates come from varying backgrounds, they share one commonality — they're all first-generation Americans whose parents immigrated to the United States.

Galán-Woods, whose parents immigrated from Cuba, is the only

woman and the only Hispanic candidate in the crowded primary. If elected to Congress, the 59-year-old would become the first Latina elected to Congress from Arizona.

She was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, and went to Florida for college, attending Florida State University and the University of South Florida. In 1988, she moved to Arizona to cover the impeachment of then-Gov. Evan Mecham, and continued working as a broadcast journalist in the state for the next two decades. Her career included stints at the NBC and Fox affiliates in Phoenix.

Courtesy Galán-Woods Campaign

Marlene Galán-Woods

Galán-Woods has long been well-connected in Arizona political circles, as the wife of the late attorney general. Grant Woods served in the role for two terms in the 1990s and had previously worked as McCain's chief of staff.

After the 2016 presidential election, Galán-Woods and her husband left the Republican party, and Woods endorsed Biden in 2020. In 2022, Galán-Woods became more directly involved with Democratic politics; she chaired Fontes' secretary of state campaign, and was a member of Hobbs' transition team.

She now calls herself a moderate Democrat, and though she was a Republican for decades, is quick to say that she's always been pro-choice. "Marlene's values have never really changed." said a Democratic operative supporting Galán-Woods. "Her party registration has."

Galán-Woods' campaign team includes Global Strategy Group for polling, Pivot for direct mail, and AL Media.

Cherny, 48, is the son of Jewish parents who immigrated from Czechoslovakia, and the grandson of four Holocaust survivors. He grew up in the San Fernando Valley and became involved in Democratic politics at a very young age, volunteering for Michael Dukakis' 1988 presidential campaign when he was 12 years old.

While a senior at Harvard in 1997, he began working as a speechwriter for President Bill Clinton, and he was hired by Vice President Al Gore after he graduated. He was the lead author of the DNC platform in 2000 and worked on both Gore and John Kerry's presidential campaigns. Following 9/11, he joined the Navy Reserves as an intelligence officer and served for eight years.

He unsuccessfully ran for a California state assembly seat in 2002, and was accused of using racist mailers to smear his primary opponent (which became an issue in his first run for Congress a decade later).

After moving to Arizona, Cherny, a graduate of the UC Berkeley School of Law, worked as an assistant attorney general in Democratic Attorney General Terry Goddard's office. He ran for office a second time in 2010, losing the Arizona state treasurer race to Republican nominee and future Gov. Doug Ducey, 52-41 percent. He then chaired the state Democratic Party from 2011 to 2012.

In 2012, Cherny launched his first congressional campaign for an open seat based in the Phoenix suburbs. He ran against Sinema, a state senator at the time, and Senate Minority Leader David Schapira in a bitter three-way primary. Both Sinema and Schapira held a joint press conference criticizing Cherny for his campaign tactics in 2002. Cherny was defended by his allies, and then-state Rep. Ruben Gallego endorsed him in response to the attacks from his primary rivals. Sinema ultimately won the primary with 41 percent and went on to win the general election.

In 2013, Cherny co-founded the online bank Aspiration, which was backed by celebrities including Leonardo DiCaprio and Robert Downey Jr. and advertised itself as an environmentally sustainable banking platform. For the next several years, he commuted to Marina del Rey, California from his home in Phoenix, where his wife and children lived. In 2022 he stepped down as CEO.

Cherny's campaign team includes SKDK for media, Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research for polling, and Mission Control for direct mail.

The third top-tier candidate is Shah, an Indian-American emergency room physician who's served in the state legislature since 2019.

Shah, 45, was born and raised in Chicago and is the son of Indian immigrants. He received his bachelor's degree and M.D. from Northwestern University and went to complete a master's degree in public health from UC Berkeley. After completing his residency in New York City, he worked for the Mount Sinai Medical Center and the New York Jets.

Shah moved to Arizona in 2012 for a sports medicine fellowship with the University of Arizona Sports, and he currently works at the Mayo Clinic ER in Phoenix. When he first ran for the state House in 2018, he was totally unknown, but came in first place in the crowded Democratic primary, knocking off an incumbent legislator after running an aggressive field campaign.

Courtesy Shah Campaign

Amish Shah

Over the past five years, he's developed a reputation as a fairly moderate Democrat willing to break with his party and work with Republicans on legislation — though he tacks to the left on health care policy as a supporter of universal health care.

According to Shah's campaign, he has collectively represented about 22 percent of the current 1st District over the span of five years. Shah has picked endorsements from several of his peers in the state legislature, including House Minority Leader Lupe Contreras.

He would be the first Jain elected to the Congress and, because of his religious convictions, has said he will not release negative ads.

Shah's campaign team includes Three Point Media, Impact Research for polling, and AMHC for direct mail.

Three other Democratic candidates — finance professional Conor O'Callaghan, orthodontist Andrew Horne, and Arizona Red Cross CEO Kurt Kroemer — have a less clear path to the nomination. O'Callaghan, however, is personally wealthy and could have the resources to break into the top tier of candidates.

O'Callaghan, whose family immigrated from Ireland when he was four-years-old, was raised in Scottdale, and his father worked in Democratic Gov. Rose Mofford's administration. The Penn State and Wharton School graduate has worked on Wall Street for the past several years and moved back to Scottsdale with his family during the Covid-19 pandemic.

O'Callaghan, 40, has already invested $65,000 on TV ads and billboards and picked up endorsements from Democratic Rep. Val Hoyle of Oregon and former Democratic Rep. Max Rose of New York. He's hired Matters of State Strategies, the same consulting team that worked for Fontes' 2022 campaign.

Horne initially loaned his campaign $750,000 but hasn't been spending that investment, and has not raised much since launching his campaign in January; in the first two quarters of the year, he raised just $140,000. Kroemer, who launched his campaign in April, loaned himself $140,000 and only raised $81,000 in the second fundraiser quarter.

The Democratic Primary

Democratic strategists who spoke with *Inside Elections* don't see a clear frontrunner for the Democratic primary nomination. But most outside observers see Galán-Woods, Cherny, and Shah as the strongest candidates at the outset.

Though strategists believe any of these three candidates would be serious challengers to Schweikert, each of them has weaknesses in a Democratic primary.

Galán-Woods has already faced criticism for her Republican ties, which could be a liability for a Democratic electorate. In August, the *Daily Beast* reported that Galán-Woods had received a large campaign donation from Dennis Wilenchik, a Republican lawyer who defended the Arizona GOP in its lawsuit attempting to overturn the 2020 election results.

But despite those ties, Galán-Woods has won support from some high profile Arizona Democrats, including former Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano, Attorney General Mayes, Rep. Raúl Grijalva, and former Reps. Ann Kirkpatrick and Ron Barber. The National Education Association has also endorsed her, and is the first major union to take sides in the primary.

She's also shown some fundraising strength early on — in the first six weeks of her campaign, which was launched in May, she raised more than $300,000. She has not released her third quarter fundraising numbers, which are due Oct. 15.

And as the only woman in the crowded primary, she could have an edge — women make up a majority of the Democratic primary electorate, and in the post-*Dobbs* era, Galán-Woods has the ability to talk about reproductive issues in a more personal way than her primary opponents.

EMILY's List, the national Democratic organization that supports pro-choice Democratic women, has stayed out of the race so far, but lists Schweikert as one of its top targets in 2024.

Shah's record in the state legislature could also be problematic for some Democratic primary voters. In 2021, he faced criticism for not supporting a Democratic-sponsored bill that increased access to over-the-counter birth control (Shah cited the potential side effects of hormonal contraception as the reason for his vote).

And Democratic sources questioned whether Shah will have the resources to compete with Cherny and Galán-Woods. He raised $555,000 in the second quarter, a decent number for a House candidate, but has yet to release his third quarter fundraising numbers.

Cherny, meanwhile, has relationships in the national Democratic Party and is expected to be a strong fundraiser. His campaign reported raising $628,000 in the second quarter, and this week he announced raising over $1 million in total (implying that he raised about $372,000 in the third quarter).

Cherny is backed by the League of Conservation Voters and VoteVets, along with Democratic Reps. Adam Smith of Washington, Brad Schneider of Illinois, Wiley Nickel of North Carolina, and Seth Moulton of Massachusetts. Former White House Chief of Staff Ron Klain has also hosted fundraisers for Cherny (who worked under Klain in Gore's office).

But those relationships haven't translated to wins in his previous campaigns. One Democratic consultant in Arizona not involved with any of the campaigns called Cherny "charismatically challenged."

Cherny also has baggage from previous campaigns that could be an issue with primary voters. At a Tea Party forum in 2010, when he was running for state treasurer, Cherny said he opposed the Affordable Care Act, and did not take a position on SB 1070, Arizona's controversial anti-immigration bill. When asked about his comments two years later, Cherny said that he believed the ACA didn't go far enough and that he would have voted for it in Congress.

Whoever becomes the Democratic nominee won't have much time to replenish their war chest, since early voting starts just two months later.

And though the leading candidates are all relatively moderate, striking the balance between appealing to a Democratic primary electorate without alienating the independent and Republican voters needed to win the general election will be difficult.

"Everybody is worried about getting labeled the next Sinema," one Arizona Democratic consultant told *Inside Elections*, nodding to the now-independent senator's deep unpopularity among Democratic voters.

The General Election

Though vulnerable Republican members in New York and California have dominated the conversation, the battle for control of the U.S. House could hinge on districts like Arizona's 1st.

This race wasn't a priority for national Democratic groups last cycle, but that's unlikely to be the case in 2024. "This is a true flippable race if you spend some money," a national Democratic strategist told *Inside Elections*.

While Republicans acknowledge that Schweikert is vulnerable, the prospect of a messy Democratic primary has made them more optimistic about the congressman's odds. And unlike last cycle, the congressman is clearly gearing up for a competitive race next year — and isn't likely to have a competitive primary.

"My instinct is that I think he was asleep at the switch last cycle," one Republican consultant in Arizona told *Inside Elections*. Republicans attribute the close race to a host of factors — GOP losses in the Senate and gubernatorial contests, backlash to the Supreme Court's *Dobbs* decision, and the fact that a quarter of the 1st was new to Schweikert after redistricting.

Schweikert has amped up his fundraising operation and is on pace to be in a stronger position than he was in 2022. In the first three quarters of 2021, he raised just $493,000; he raised nearly double that amount ($988,000) in the first two quarters of 2023.

In the past two cycles, Democrats have hammered Schweikert for his campaign finance violations and attempted to paint the longtime incumbent as corrupt. But several Democrats who spoke with *Inside Elections* said that line of attack might not be as effective in 2024.

"What we've learned from the last couple of cycles is that that's not enough," a Democratic operative in Arizona said.

Instead, Democrats will be more focused on arguing that Schweikert is ideologically out of step with his purple district, particularly on the issue of abortion. The congressman is staunchly pro-life — he co-sponsored the Life at Conception Act in 2021 and signed an amicus brief in support of overturning *Roe v. Wade* in 2020 — and the abortion issue is likely to be a top issue for Arizona voters.

Both Democratic and Republican strategists anticipate that an amendment protecting abortion rights will be on the ballot next year. The constitutional amendment would permit abortions up to the point of fetal viability (about 24 weeks into pregnancy); currently, Arizona law allows abortions up to the fifteenth week. Last cycle proved that these ballot initiatives boost turnout, particularly among younger voters who lean Democratic, and Republican strategists acknowledge that it could hurt Schweikert's prospects in a close race.

The presidential race in this district is expected to be close again.

Though the top of the ticket was clearly a drag on down ballot Republicans in 2022, Republicans are less concerned about Trump dragging down Schweikert, partially because Biden remains unpopular, and partially because Trump has the ability to turn out more base voters than gubernatorial nominee Kari Lake and Senate nominee Blake Masters.

And though it's not at the top of the ticket next year, the Senate race could be a thorny issue for both parties in this district.

Sinema appears to be taking steps toward a re-election campaign, setting up a three-way general election. Most Democratic operatives expect that the Democratic nominee in the 1st will support Gallego, the likely Democratic Senate nominee, regardless of whether the independent senator runs for re-election or not.

"I don't think there's a huge risk with aligning yourself with Gallego," one Democratic consultant in Arizona said, noting that aligning with Sinema would alienate Democratic voters in the district. But, they acknowledged, "there might not be a huge gain."

Meanwhile, Republicans are likely to nominate Lake, whose election denialism and fierce loyalty to Trump has made her unpopular among the moderate voters that Schweikert needs to win in the 1st.
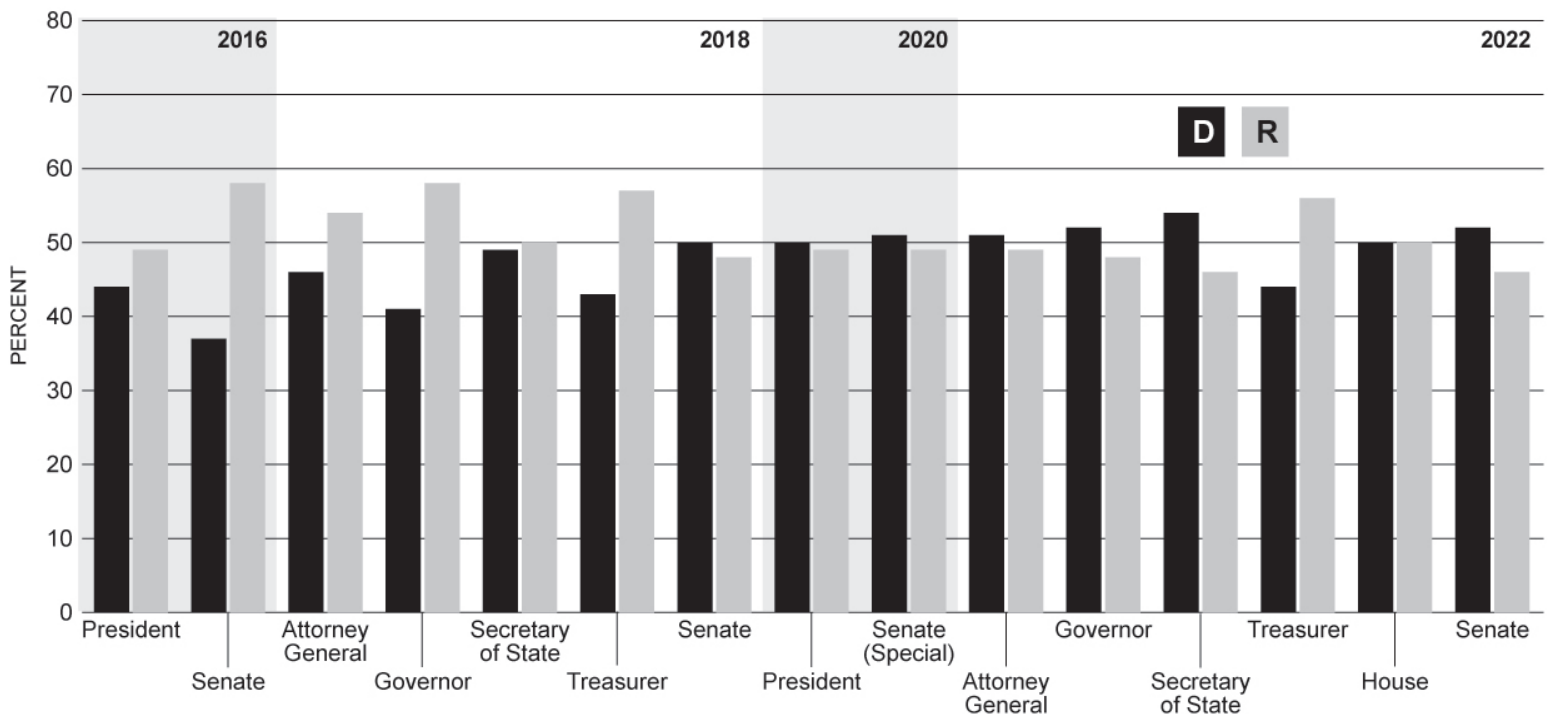
But Republicans don't expect Schweikert to take sides in the Senate race. "I would say that the median Sinema voter will be a Schweikert voter," one Republican operative from Arizona told *Inside Elections*, alluding to the pitfalls of being associated with Lake.

The Bottom Line

Schweikert could face his most competitive re-election campaign to date in 2024, as white, well-educated affluent voters continue to trend toward Democrats.

But the congressman has a track record of pulling out wins in close races, and conditions are ripe for a nasty Democratic primary that could hurt the party's chances of winning. IE

Statewide Election Results for Arizona's 1st District

48-46 percent.

In 2020, it broke hard for GOP Sen. Susan Collins, who was born in the northern tip of the district and carried it 58-36 percent. Two years later, the 2nd voted for GOP gubernatorial nominee Paul LePage, 51-48 percent.

The Republican Candidates

Three Republicans are currently in the race: state Rep. Austin Theriault, state Rep. Mike Soboleski, and businessman/2022 state Senate candidate Robert Cross. GOP strategists say that Theriault and Soboleski are the top tier, with Cross less of a factor due to his lack of fundraising.

State Rep. Laurel Libby has also expressed interest in running, but there hasn't been as much chatter around her lately.

Theriault, 29, is a former NASCAR driver in his first term in the state legislature. He comes from Aroostook County, the state's northernmost community, which borders Canada and is affectionately known by Mainers as "the County" because of its large size.

Theriault began stock car racing at age 13 on a local speedway, quickly rising through the racing world as a teenager to compete in progressively larger series. After graduating high school in 2012, he moved to North Carolina to pursue a professional racing career, and was competing in NASCAR's second-tier series as a highly touted prospect. A serious crash in 2015 set his career back, but he returned to win the semi-pro ARCA Series championship in 2017. In 2019, he raced in NASCAR's top tier Cup Series until another crash led to his retirement.

Since then, Theriault has run a driver development company in Fort Kent, Maine, which is about the same drive to Bangor as it is to Quebec City, Canada.

In 2022, he ran for an open state House seat, located at Maine's northern tip, that was held by the longest-serving Democrat in the state legislature but had trended rightward during the Trump years. After being unopposed in the GOP primary, Theriault won the general election, 71-29 percent.

Soboleski, 67, is also in his first term in the state legislature, where he represents a western Maine district that stretches from New Hampshire northwest along the Canadian border.

Born in Knox County (in the 1st District), Soboleski had a varied career prior to running for elected office. He enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1973, serving until 1976, and then attended the University of Maine at Machias. Soboleski also founded an exercise equipment business and worked as an automobile salesman.

Soboleski worked for several decades in New York as a professional actor and stunt performer on stage and film. He has played bit parts in a number of major motion pictures including *The Departed*, *Good Will Hunting*, and *Spider-Man 2 (2004)*, as well as in *Law & Order* and dozens of other TV shows, usually portraying police officers. On 9/11, he volunteered at Ground Zero in recovery efforts. He moved back to Maine in 2011 and worked in property support at Sugarloaf, a ski resort.

In 2022, Soboleski won the GOP primary for his state House district by 5 votes, and the general election, 57-43 percent.

His campaign team includes general consultant Jim Conroy of Battleground Strategies.

Cross was the first to enter the race, in April. The 54-year-old is a longtime mortgage broker from Dedham and in 2022 ran in a state

Senate primary, losing to Republican state Rep. Peter Lyford, 55-45 percent. Cross, who is running as a "constitutional conservative," is well-liked by Maine political consultants and comes from a well-known business family — his grandfather Woodrow Cross founded Cross Insurance in Bangor. But the candidate has barely raised any money, reporting just $42,000 in the bank on Sept. 30.

The Republican Primary

The upheaval unfolding in the House Republican Conference in Washington, D.C., where a few renegade members of the GOP successfully ousted House Speaker Kevin McCarthy using an obscure procedural tool, could have serious ramifications for the Republican primary in the 2nd District.

In the runup to Theriault's announcement, national Republicans lavished praise on the 29-year-old. McCarthy and National Republican Congressional Committee Chairman Richard Hudson had personally recruited Theriault into the race, and the NRCC told the *Bangor News* that Theriault had "the potential to be the best challenger to Jared Golden."

But with McCarthy no longer calling the shots, it's not obvious that the national support that once appeared destined for Theriault — either signaling from the NRCC to donors or actual outside spending from groups such as the McCarthy-aligned Congressional Leadership Fund — will materialize.

Courtesy Theriault Campaign

Austin Theriault

Whoever the new speaker is, they won't have had the same connection with Theriault as McCarthy, and may well have different political priorities that inform their electoral investments.

"A week ago, I would have said Austin's probably the guy to beat," one longtime Maine GOP strategist not working for any candidate told *Inside Elections* shortly after McCarthy's exit. "You've got the Speaker behind you, and that makes it really difficult for Mike, or anybody, to get through that noise."

"Now you're Austin saying, 'Mike is a good candidate as well, how much money can I raise? How much money can he raise?' And it actually becomes a race," said the strategist. "And for Mike, you're sitting there saying, 'I can win this primary.'"

One Soboleski ally told *Inside Elections*, "I think it does actually reset the race in a way that's very interesting, that will come down to two competent state representatives."

For the moment, national strategists are still signaling that Theriault is their favored candidate in the June 5 primary, but also stress that Soboleski would be a serviceable nominee as well.

Money is a constant theme among Republican strategists watching the race, who are paying close attention to Soboleski's haul in particular — the expectation is that Theriault will be able to raise more money given his national connections to GOP leadership, which extend beyond McCarthy to Hudson and others.

Theriault's NASCAR past may also help with fundraising. "It's a

poor state, very difficult to raise money in the district. If you go back and look, Bruce Poliquin only raised about $700,000 out of the state of Maine. Susan Collins only raised $1.3 million," said one Theriault ally. "So his connections in that industry, around the country and especially areas where NASCAR is big, the Carolinas, Texas, Florida, there are opportunities to raise money that the average person from the 2nd District does not have."

Theriault says he raised $100,000 in his first week as a candidate, roughly half of what 2020 nominee Dale Crafts raised over the course of the entire primary.

Neither Theriault nor Soboleski have been in politics for very long, and the early contrasts deal more with biography than policy.

The older candidate by 38 years, Soboleski's pitch rests on his life experience as a Marine, 9/11 first responder, and small businessman. The 2nd District has a high proportion of veterans (9.5 percent vs. a 6.4 percent national rate) and is older than the nation overall (a median age of 46 vs. 38 nationally). His allies will also be sure to point out that, though both he and Theriault moved out of Maine for professional reasons, Soboleski returned over a decade ago while Theriault has been back for just a few years.

Theriault, meanwhile, is leaning into the celebrity aspect of his biography as a NASCAR driver — motorsports are popular in the Ocean State — as well as his youth, which distinguishes himself from both Soboleski and previous GOP standard-bearers in the district, and, his allies believe, may neutralize some of the fresh-faced Golden's natural advantages.

Courtesy Soboleski Campaign

Mike Soboleski

"He's young and has a unique background. The NASCAR thing is an interesting angle, and it's just something different," said one national strategist, who also stressed that Theriault's Franco-American roots and home in the far northern reaches of the district could be an advantage both in the primary and general election.

"Do primary voters want to look to the future, to a young person who's energetic and about change and doing things differently, someone who came home to fight for this district, to make sure there's a future for the young people of the district?" said one Theriault ally, "or do they want more of the same-old-same-old?"

To the extent that policy will come to the fore, Soboleski's allies will try to paint their candidate as the true conservative in the race, citing his long standing support for Trump — he keeps a signed copy of "The Art of the Deal" from 1989 — and the votes in the state legislature on which he diverged from Theriault. For instance, Soboleski voted against the state's 2023 budget and an energy bill that gave Mainers a $450 relief check on their heating bill, while Theriault supported both laws (both of which passed with bipartisan majorities).

The Democratic Incumbent

Golden, 41, is a Lewiston native in his third term in Congress. A Marine veteran who served four years in Iraq and Afghanistan following 9/11, Golden graduated from Bates College in 2011 and worked for GOP Sen. Collins in Washington, DC until 2013.

After briefly working for the Maine state House Democratic caucus, Golden ran for a Lewiston seat himself, winning 66-34 percent in 2014, and 72-28 percent in 2016.

In 2018, Golden ran against GOP Rep. Bruce Poliquin in a race that turned on the state's implementation of a new ranked choice instant runoff voting system. Poliquin outpaced Golden in the initial tabulation, 46.3-45.6 percent, but when the votes cast for two third-party candidates were redistributed based on voters' second choices, Golden came out just ahead, 50.6-49.4 percent. Poliquin sued to invalidate the result but ultimately lost.

In 2020, Golden faced former state Rep. Dale Crafts in the general election, outpacing him 53-47 percent even as Trump carried the district at the top of the ticket.

In 2022, Republicans recruited Poliquin back into the fray, and had high hopes that the former member's fundraising capabilities and Biden's unpopularity would sink Golden in the GOP-leaning district. But despite $12 million in outside spending by GOP groups, Golden prevailed, running ahead of Poliquin in the initial tabulation, 48-45 percent, and ultimately winning 53-47 percent after the votes from independent Tiffany Bond were redistributed.

Golden is a co-chair of the centrist Blue Dog Coalition and is also a member of the bipartisan Problem Solvers Caucus; he's widely considered one of the most conservative Democrats in the House, and voted against the party line more than any other Democrat from 2021 to 2023, per *FiveThirtyEight*. He notably broke with Biden on issues including student loan forgiveness, coronavirus relief, and split his votes on the first Trump impeachment. He sits on the Armed Services and Small Business committees.

The core of Golden's original campaign team from 2018 remains intact including Ian Russell of Beacon Media for media, pollster Mark Mellman of Mellman Group, and Alan Moore of Moore Campaigns for direct mail.

Golden reported $611,000 in the bank on June 30. Third quarter FEC reports are due Oct. 15.

The General Election

Republican strategists are quick to acknowledge that Golden will be tough to beat, despite the partisan lean of the district working in the GOP's favor.

"Golden is a tough out. … He is definitely viewed as a non-liberal Democrat," said one GOP strategist who has worked against him before. "He has, with an enormous amount of money, persuaded his voters that he's a different kind of Democrat — and that's what they want."

Another GOP operative who worked on an anti-Golden campaign agreed, saying, "Jared has done an exceptional job as a candidate to paint his picture as a moderate, as a Maine dad, as a union supporter but also one who will stand up for the people." The congressman's ads often feature his sleeves rolled up, conveniently displaying his tattoos.

Republicans will again attempt to make an issue of Golden's vote for the Inflation Reduction Act, the signature legislation of the Biden administration, which was the centerpiece of both many GOP attacks against the incumbent last cycle and Golden's own positive advertising. Republicans hit Golden for the bill's price tag, and for its funding of new IRS employees, while Golden highlighted provisions allowing the government to negotiate Medicare drug prices.

But some Republicans are skeptical that simply attacking Golden on partisan grounds, like tying him to Biden, will be effective. In 2022, virtually all GOP advertising was negative and linked Golden to national Democrats.

"The attack ads are typically the same. There's not a lot of red meat there, in terms of oppo and what you can really hit him on," said one national GOP strategist, who said that the key "is changing the tone of how it's presented and making it more district-personal."

"The message just needs to be positive," said one longtime Maine GOP operative. "And in the past the message has been more negative. And that's just not going to cut it. I think Mainers don't like negative ads from candidates."

"You're never going to resonate above him just by beating him down," said another Maine-based GOP consultant, who stressed that whichever candidate emerges from the primary will face an uphill battle to introduce themselves with a positive message to the broader electorate over the summer. If both candidates have to spend to zero before the primary, they probably won't be able to get back up on TV before the end of the summer, with either a positive or a negative message.

GOP strategists uniformly ding their previous nominee, Poliquin. Voters "inherently took issue with Bruce Poliquin because of his affluence," said one Republican who had worked in the district. "Poliquin wore suits all the time, and looking the part is important in a district like this," said one national strategist.

Some of that conversation is revisionist. During the 2022 cycle, Poliquin was lauded by Republican operatives as a top fundraiser with a record of winning the district, and was also well-liked by the House GOP conference. Republican outside groups invested heavily in him, spending more in the 2nd than almost any other district.

Revisionist or not, it's no accident that neither Soboleski nor Theriault resemble Poliquin. Both, in fact, have things in common with Golden: Soboleski's time in the Marines (though unlike Golden he did not see combat), and Theriault's youth and energy.

Of Theriault, one national GOP strategist summed up the theory of the case: "If you give them the Republican version of Jared Golden, will they vote Republican? I think they will."

For Golden and the Democrats, the playbook remains largely the same. While they won't have Poliquin and his lengthy record to run against, Democratic operatives are confident that the incumbent's iconoclastic politics will be more than enough to send him to victory even as Trump wins the district. Both his party-defying votes, and his image as a tatted-up, gun-friendly Marine veteran more at home "sitting in a garage with three old guys in Northern Maine talking lobsters" (as one GOP consultant put it) than in a suit and tie, make it clear to voters that he's not "politics as usual," which has cross-partisan appeal and has allowed him to outperform other Democrats in the district.

That's not to say Biden's poor job performance rating — in the low 40s nationally and likely in the mid to low 30s in Maine's 2nd — doesn't worry Golden's allies, one of whom described the "nightmare scenario" of voters who approach the election saying "he's a nice guy but I can't vote for Democrats right now." In 2020 and 2022 he outperformed the top of the ticket by 12 and 9 points, respectively, so if the GOP presidential nominee were to win the district by double digits, things could get dicey for Golden.

But Democratic operatives are largely projecting confidence at this stage, especially after Democratic outside groups were outspent by their GOP counterparts last cycle and Poliquin still lost handily.

Republican operatives see Trump as an advantage in this district, as the former president is likely to carry it at the top of the ticket if he is the GOP nominee again. Golden is one of only five Democrats to represent a district Trump carried in 2020.

"It may be better with Trump on the ballot, and that kind of flies in the face of every other swing district," said one GOP consultant who has worked against Golden. Because the district is predominantly white and blue collar, GOP strategists believe that the lower propensity voters who didn't show up in the midterm election will be more amenable to Trump.

And while Maine is not a presidential battleground statewide, it does allocate an electoral vote for the winner of each congressional district, meaning that the 2nd District has been a battleground for presidential candidates in years past, and could see some spending from national GOP groups and the presidential nominee's campaign to boost turnout.
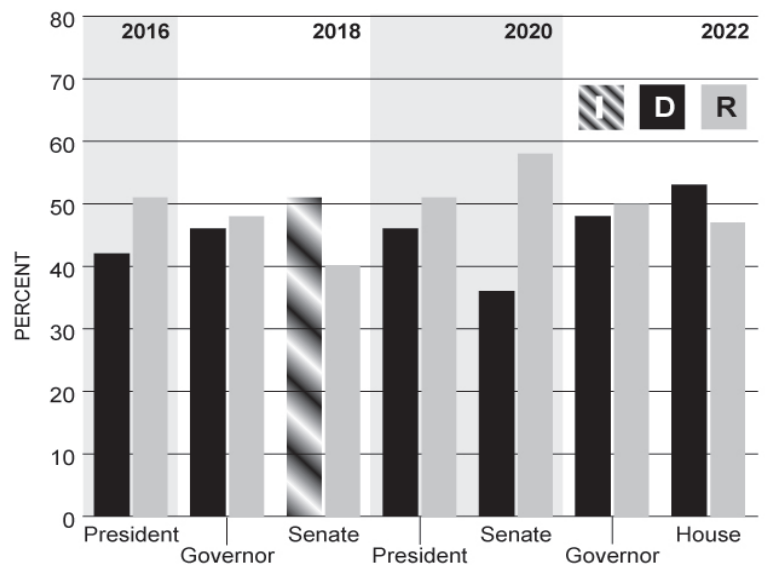
The Bottom Line

Golden is one of the last remaining Democrats in Congress who has — at least until now — successfully built a political brand that insulates him from the partisan winds. At a moment when ticket-splitting is at an all-time low, Republicans' chances at flipping this seat may come down to just how strong Golden's brand really is.

While most of the Democrats occupying seats won by Trump — Alaska's Mary Peltola, Ohio's Marcy Kaptur, Pennsylvania's Matt Cartwright, and Washington's Marie Gluesenkamp Perez — are top targets for Republicans this cycle, Golden gets a degree of deference from some GOP operatives.

"People on our side have been failing to properly estimate Golden and just think the partisan attacks work, and they just don't," said a national strategist following the race. "People here need a little more of a personal touch." **IE**

Statewide Election Results for Maine's 2nd District

Gerrymandering Is Not to Blame for the Speaker Mess

By Nathan L. Gonzales

Whenever something goes wrong on Capitol Hill, gerrymandering is cited as the root of the problem. But while redistricting continues to be a blatantly political act in most states, Speaker Kevin McCarthy's ouster is a good example of why gerrymandering is not always the cause of chaos in Congress.

"Congress arrived at this point for myriad reasons, all of which build on one another, scholars say: Social media and cable news incentivized politicians to perform for the camera, not for their constituents. Aggressive gerrymandering created deeply partisan districts where representation is decided in primary contests, not general elections. Weakened political parties became captive to their loudest and most extreme members," according to a story last week in The Washington Post. "Taken together, those factors handed a small number of lawmakers the power to throw one of the three branches of government into disarray and, for now, paralysis."

Eli Crane

Courtesy Office of Eli Crane

I am not a scholar, but there's more nuance in those supposed corrosive causes than most people probably realize.

The most commonly suggested antidote for gerrymandering is to take the map-making process out of the hands of partisan legislators. And yet most of the eight Republicans who voted to get rid of McCarthy represent districts drawn outside of the typical partisan legislative process.

GOP Reps. Ken Buck (Colorado's 4th District), Eli Crane (Arizona's 2nd), Andy Biggs (Arizona's 5th) and Matt Rosendale (Montana's 2nd) all come from states where lines were drawn by an independent redistricting commission. (A tie-breaking member chose the GOP plan in Montana, but it was still drawn through the commission process.)

A fifth anti-McCarthy Republican, Bob Good, represents the 5th District of Virginia, which has an independent/politician commission, but the congressional map was ultimately drawn by special masters and chosen by the state Supreme Court after the commission failed to unite around a new map.

Just three of the eight Republicans who voted to vacate the chair represent districts drawn by Republican-controlled legislatures: Tim Burchett (Tennessee's 2nd), Matt Gaetz (Florida's 1st) and Nancy Mace (South Carolina's 1st).

That indicates something more than, or other than, partisan redistricting is to blame for the current dysfunction on Capitol Hill.

There's also more involved here than having "safe" congressional districts. Republicans have a 32-point advantage in Burchett's Tennessee district, according to Inside Elections' Baseline, which measures the average performance of candidates over the most recent four election cycles.

But 51 Republicans who represent districts with a higher Republican performance voted to keep McCarthy as speaker. Gaetz was the only Republican who opposed McCarthy from a district with a higher GOP performance than Burchett's. Rep. Jim Banks represents a northeast Indiana district with nearly the same GOP performance as Gaetz's seat, and yet Banks was not a part of the small faction that wanted to get rid of McCarthy.

The dysfunction is also driven by personality and motivations.

Being contrarian and the cause of gridlock generates attention. Wherever Gaetz goes lately, there's a crowd of reporters. The natural progression is to then blame the media for making him the center of attention. But it's not that simple.

The media's job is to cover the news, and Gaetz made news with his plan to get rid of the Speaker of the House. The media also amplifies the loudest, and sometimes most partisan and abrasive voices, but consumers reward that coverage with eyeballs and clicks. If people really wanted stripped-down political coverage, then C-SPAN would be the most-watched cable news channel in the country. (It's not, although viewership apparently skyrockets when Republicans take hours to elect a Speaker.)

Like some of the experts in the Post article, I agree that the incentive structure is flawed. But voters and Americans incentivize aggressive behavior with their clicks, donations, and votes (or lack thereof). It's not necessarily the structure itself. If more people rewarded civility and voted in primaries, we'd have a more civil Congress.

Overall, I'm agnostic on redistricting reforms, but blaming gerrymandering for everything that's wrong with politics is lazy. IE

CALENDAR

Oct. 14	Louisiana Governor Primary
Oct. 24	NBA season begins
Oct. 27	World Series starts
Nov. 7	Kentucky and Mississippi General Election
Nov. 18	Louisiana Governor Runoff (if necessary)
Nov. 23	Thanksgiving
Dec. 25	Christmas Day
Jan. 8	College Football National Championship
Jan. 15	Iowa GOP Presidential Caucuses
Jan. TBD	New Hampshire GOP Primary
Jan. 26	West Virginia filing deadline
Feb. 6	Nevada Presidential Primaries
Feb. 8	Nevada Presidential GOP Caucuses
Feb. 11	Super Bowl LVII
Feb. 22	MLB Spring Training begins
Feb. 24	South Carolina GOP Presidential Primary
Feb. 25	MLS season begins
Feb. 27	Michigan Presidential Primaries
March 4	Trump federal trial about Jan. 6 begins
March 5	Super Tuesday