

Inside Elections

with

Nathan L. Gonzales

Nonpartisan Analysis

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California 47: Orange County Open

By Jacob Rubashkin

Once again, it could come down to the suburbs. The 2024 election cycle is just a couple of months old, yet some battlegrounds are emerging, including one in Southern California.

Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein has been a fixture in California politics for more than 40 years, but most observers believe she's headed for the exit. And an all-but-open Senate seat, just the second in three decades, is already causing a domino effect across the Golden State. As Reps. Katie Porter and Adam Schiff launch Senate campaigns, with fellow Reps. Barbara Lee and Ro Khanna potentially to follow, a buffet of House seats will be up for grabs in 2024.

Schiff's, Lee's and Khanna's seats are all Solid Democratic, and while that doesn't mean they won't be contested among Democrats, they also won't affect the majority math next year.

But Porter's 2022 re-election was among the most competitive races in the country. And as Republicans strive to maintain their narrow House majority, the opportunity to flip an Orange County open seat is enticing, especially for newly-minted Speaker Kevin McCarthy, a Californian himself.

The race has already attracted several heavy hitters: a former congressman, Harley Rouda; the 2022 GOP nominee, Scott Baugh; and a sitting state senator backed by Porter, Dave Min.

The Lay of the Land

The 47th District sits entirely within Orange County, south of Los Angeles. It runs along the Pacific coastline from Seal Beach southeast through Laguna Beach, and also reaches inland to encompass Irvine. Politically, most of the district's Democratic votes come from Irvine and neighboring Costa Mesa, while Republican strength is concentrated in Huntington Beach and Newport Beach.

Along with the rest of Orange County, the district has shifted leftward in recent years. It would have voted for Mitt Romney in 2012 by 8 points, 53-45 percent, for Hillary Clinton in 2016 by 7 points, 50-43 percent, and for Joe Biden in 2020 by 11 points, 54-43 percent.

In 2022, Porter won re-election by just 3 points, 51.7-48.3 percent. That contest was initially rated Likely Democratic, but narrowed over the election cycle as Democrats struggled in Southern California, and Republicans fielded a strong candidate in Baugh.

Porter actually overperformed the top of the ticket; Gov. Gavin Newsom lost the district to GOP challenger Brian Dahle by 0.6 points, while Sen. Alex Padilla carried it by 1.6 points over Republican Mark Meuser. Statewide, the governor won by 18 points and the senator by 22

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2024 Open House Seats

District	Outgoing Member	2022 Congressional Result	2020 Presidential Result
AZ-03	Ruben Gallego (D)	Gallego 77%	Biden 75%
CA-12*	Barbara Lee (D)	Lee 91%	Biden 89%
CA-30	Adam Schiff (D)	Schiff 71%	Biden 72%
CA-47	Katie Porter (D)	Porter 52%	Biden 55%
IN-03	Jim Banks (R)	Banks 65%	Trump 64%
IN-05	Victoria Spartz (R)	Spartz 61%	Trump 57%
MI-07*	Elissa Slotkin (D)	Slotkin 52%	Biden 49.4%
MT-01*	Ryan Zinke (R)	Zinke 49.6%	Trump 52%
MT-02*	Matt Rosendale (R)	Rosendale 57%	Trump 62%
WV-02	Alex Mooney (R)	Mooney 66%	Trump 68%

*Potential, but not official

2024 Gubernatorial Ratings

BATTLEGROUND

Democratic-Held (1)	Republican-Held (1)
NC Open (Cooper, D)	Sununu (R-N.H.)
Solid Democratic (2)	Solid Republican (7)
DE Open (Carney, D)	IN Open (Holcomb, R)
Inslee (D-Wash.)	MO Open (Parson, R)
	WV Open (Justice, R)
	Burgum (R-N.D.)
	Cox (R-Utah)
	Gianforte (R-Mont.)
	Scott (R-Vt.)

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

CALENDAR

Feb. 21	Virginia's 4th District Special General Election
May 16	Kentucky Governor Primary
Aug. 8	Mississippi Governor Primary
Aug. 10	Louisiana Governor Filing Deadline

Report Shorts

Arizona Senate. After publicly flirting with challenging Sen. Kyrsten Sinema for months, Rep. Ruben Gallego has officially announced his campaign. Now that Sinema has become an independent, he has a clear path to the Democratic nomination. But if Sinema decides to run for re-election, he'll have a more difficult task in the general election. A Democratic poll from the Replace Sinema Project showed that in a three-way race between Gallego, Sinema, and Republicans' 2022

gubernatorial nominee Kari Lake, Sinema has 24 percent while Gallego and Lake are tied at 36 percent — and Sinema would pull more votes away from Gallego than Lake. Battleground.

California Senate. Undaunted by Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein's indecision on re-election, Democratic Rep. Adam Schiff joined fellow Rep. Katie Porter in the race. Their colleague, Rep. Barbara Lee, is expected to join them. Feinstein told Raw Story that she'd announce in 2024 whether she'll run again, even though the filing deadline is Dec. 8, 2023. Feinstein's staff tried to clarify her comments and said she would announce her plans this spring. Former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi issued a statement endorsing Schiff — but only if Feinstein does not run. Solid Democratic.

California's 45th District. Democratic Garden Grove City Councilwoman Kim Bernice Nguyen announced her challenge to GOP Rep. Michelle Steel. At age 25, Nguyen was the youngest person and first Latina elected to the city council. She defeated a fellow Democrat by getting crossover support from Republicans. But that will be harder against a GOP incumbent. Battleground

Indiana Senate. It's early, but GOP Rep. Jim Banks is the clear frontrunner to replace Republican Sen. Mike Braun, who is running for governor. Former Gov. Mitch Daniels visited Washington this week but then announced he would not run for the Senate this year. Banks also received public support from the NRSC, in a sign the committee is going to be involved in primaries this cycle. The congressman has been endorsed by former President Donald Trump, Sens. Marco Rubio and John Barrasso, and Rep. Elise Stefanik. Democrats aren't likely to make a serious push at the race. Solid Republican.

Michigan Senate. On the Democratic side, 11th District Rep. Haley Stevens announced she will not run for retiring Democratic Sen. Debbie Stabenow's open seat. Reps. Elissa Slotkin and Debbie Dingell and Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist are still considering campaigns. The Republican side is wide open as well, with former House Intelligence Committee Chairman Mike Rogers the latest to float his name as a candidate. Battleground.



2024 Senate Ratings

BATTLEGROUND

Democratic-Held (8)

MI Open (Stabenow, D)
 Baldwin (D-Wis.)
 Brown (D-Ohio)
 Casey (D-Penn.)
 Kaine (D-Va.)
 Manchin (D-W.V.)
 Rosen (D-Nev.)
 Tester (D-Mont.)

Republican-Held (0)

Independent-Held (1)

Sinema (I-Ariz.)

Solid Democratic (14)

Cantwell (D-Wa.)
 Cardin (D-Md.)
 Carper (D-Del.)
 Feinstein (D-Calif.)
 Gillibrand (D-N.Y.)
 Heinrich (D-N.M.)
 Hirono (D-Hawaii)
 King (I-Maine)
 Klobuchar (DFL-Minn.)
 Menendez (D-N.J.)
 Murphy (D-Ct.)
 Sanders (I-Vt.)
 Warren (D-Mass.)
 Whitehouse (D-R.I.)

Solid Republican (11)

IN Open (Braun, R)
 Barrasso (R-Wy.)
 Blackburn (R-Tenn.)
 Cramer (R-N.D.)
 Cruz (R-Texas)
 Fischer (R-Neb.)
 Hawley (R-Mo.)
 Ricketts (R-Neb.)
 Romney (R-Utah)
 Scott (R-Fla.)
 Wicker (R-Miss.)

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

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Washington 3: Contest in the Cascades

By Erin Covey

Marie Gluesenkamp Perez wasn't supposed to win. The 34-year-old auto-shop owner launched her 2022 campaign in a district that Republican Rep. Jaime Herrera Beutler had represented for over a decade, and that Donald Trump won by 4 points in 2020.

The Democratic congresswoman is now one of the most vulnerable incumbents in the country.

Herrera Beutler's vote to impeach Trump after his supporters stormed the Capitol on Jan. 6 had placed a target on her back, and the president's supporters largely united behind Joe Kent, a retired Army special forces officer who had Trump's blessing. But it wasn't until after the August primary, when Herrera Beutler was locked out of the general election, that it became clear Democrats had a shot at flipping this seat. Winning over just enough of the congresswoman's former supporters, Perez defeated Kent by 2,600 votes.

This cycle, Perez is one of only five Democratic members who represent districts that voted for Trump in 2020 — and she is the only freshman member in that exclusive club. This seat will be a critical battleground as Democrats attempt to take control of the House next year.

Perez's path to victory last November was paved by a unique set of circumstances that won't be replicated in 2024. But unlike last year, she has the power of incumbency on her side — and she'll be running in an election cycle that could be more favorable to Democrats.

Kent has already announced that he's planning to run again in 2024. If Republicans nominate him again, Perez is more likely to hold together the coalition of voters who supported her last November. But if another Republican candidate is able to break through, her path to re-election becomes more complicated.

The Lay of the Land

The 3rd District spans the southwest corner of the Evergreen State, stretching from the Pacific coast to the forests in the Cascade Mountains.

Despite its purple hue, Herrera Beutler represented the 3rd District for 12 years, surviving in the blue wave of 2018 that swept away many of her moderate Republican colleagues. For the past four years, she was the lone Republican who represented a congressional district on the continental United State's west coast, which is now represented exclusively by Democratic members of Congress.

Her predecessor, Democratic Rep. Brian Baird, also held the seat for a dozen years. After Baird decided to retire in 2010, Herrera Beutler ran against now-Lt. Gov. Denny Heck, defeating the Democrat by 6 points. (Heck was elected to the newly-drawn 10th District two years later.)

Over the next several cycles, the congresswoman established herself as an independent-minded member who avoided the national spotlight, and she defeated her Democratic opponents by large margins. She had more competitive races in 2018 and 2020 against Carolyn Long, a political science professor at Washington State University Vancouver with support from the national Democratic Party. The race was closer in 2018, when the congresswoman defeated Long by just 5 points, but Herrera Beutler won the 2020 rematch by 13 points.

Geographically, the 3rd District's trajectory has mirrored the country's trajectory. Once Democratic-supporting rural counties swung further right in 2016 and are now solidly Republican territory, while the

suburban communities in Clark County have moved in Democrats' favor.

The district is anchored by the city of Vancouver, right across the Columbia River from Portland, Oregon. It's an attractive region for middle class Washingtonians — they can enjoy the amenities of Portland in a state that doesn't have a sales tax, while living in a state that doesn't have an income tax. In 2018, Herrera Beutler lost Clark County for the first time. And despite her double digit margin of victory in 2020, she only won it by 5 points. Perez won it by 11 points in 2022, confirming the county's increasingly Democratic bent.

The rest of the district — Lewis, Cowlitz, Skamania, Pacific, and Wahkiakum counties — is a largely rural, agricultural region. In 2008, Baird won Lewis County by 18 points, even as John McCain won it by almost 20 points. But Lewis County has become solidly Republican since then, and Kent won it by 30 points last November. Perez and her family live in Skamania County, the forested, eastern part of the district.

Running to the Middle

More so than in most other 2024 House districts, Republicans' nominee in the 3rd will determine Perez's re-election prospects.

In the meantime, the congresswoman is attempting to distinguish herself from the national Democratic Party — a necessary task as she'll have to persuade Republican-leaning voters to split their tickets for her again in 2024.



Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call

Marie Gluesenkamp Perez

Over the past month, she's cast votes and made headlines that burnish her independent bona fides. Perez was one of just three House Democrats who voted for a resolution condemning attacks on pro-life pregnancy centers and churches.

And she joined six of her Democratic colleagues to vote for a bill that would end COVID-19 vaccine mandates for health care workers.

She's continued to talk about expanding funding for trade schools and reinvesting in paper production, both of which disproportionately impact those in the rural parts of her district. And she's eager to work on federal right-to-repair legislation, which would ensure that consumers are able to fix their own vehicles and electronic devices. Her role as ranking member on the Subcommittee on Rural Development, Energy, and Supply Chains will give her a platform to work on these issues.

"Local folks are not treating her as an aberration," Phil Gardner, Perez's senior adviser told *Inside Elections*. "They're treating her as the next congresswoman."

Last month, Perez held her first town hall meeting at Skamania County Fairgrounds, earning a positive reaction from the county GOP's chairman.

But with Republicans setting the agenda in the House, Perez will be

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forced to take more difficult votes than she would under Democratic control. While Democrats like Pennsylvania Rep. Matt Cartwright and Maine Rep. Jared Golden have successfully crafted brands distinct from the national Democratic Party, Perez has much less time to define herself, and lacks the experience of someone such as Alaska Rep. Mary Peltola, who has worked in politics since the late 1990s.

And Perez, who significantly outspent Kent in 2022, didn't face negative ads until late October, when the Kent campaign aired TV ads tying her to President Biden and then-Speaker Nancy Pelosi and accusing her of supporting policies that would increase inflation.

But the congresswoman's prospects ultimately hinge on something outside of her control — whether Republicans nominate Kent again. She admits that she wouldn't have been able to win a race against Herrera Beutler in 2022.

"When I thought I was gonna have to run against Jaime for a few days after the primary, I was moping around the house," Perez told *Politico*. "I got in this race to stop a fascist."

The Republican Calculation

Meanwhile, Kent has become the standard bearer of the Republican base in Southwest Washington. He's built up a national profile thanks to frequent appearances on Tucker Carlson's Fox News show and Steve Bannon's *War Room* podcast, and is lining up support from allies

including Florida Rep. Matt Gaetz.

Throughout his 2022 campaign, the 42-year-old drew national attention for his ties to white nationalist figures and his involvement with the Justice for J6 rally, an event in support of Jan. 6 rioters who faced criminal charges. He's embraced the most polarizing elements of Trump's message, falsely claiming that the 2020 election was stolen and defending Russian President Vladimir Putin's justification for invading Ukraine.

After the primary was over, Kent didn't attempt to moderate his image. His positions on Ukraine and the 2020 election, along with comments about defunding the FBI and calling for Anthony Fauci to be charged with murder, proved to be a bridge too far for some Republican-leaning voters. One of Perez's campaign ads featured local Republican figures reading off a litany of headlines about Kent and declaring their support for the Democrat.

After Kent's loss, some Republicans are looking for an alternative. But so far, the list of other potential contenders is short.

"We were all prepping for Joe Kent to lose this cycle, rather than last cycle," one Republican operative told *Inside Elections*.

Herrera Beutler is reportedly weighing a comeback bid. But sources close to the congresswoman who spoke with *Inside Elections* were skeptical that she would run for this seat in 2024.

Since leaving Congress, Herrera Beutler has joined the Children's

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Hospital Association as an adviser (though she won't be working for the group in a full-time capacity). Pediatric issues are personal to the former congresswoman — 10 years ago, her oldest daughter survived Potter Syndrome, what was thought to be a fatal condition at the time. She'll also be a resident fellow at the University of Chicago's Institute of Politics this spring.

Were she to run again, she would face the same obstacles she faced in 2024. The Republican base has abandoned her — she received only 22 percent of the all-party primary vote last August, while other Republicans collectively won 43 percent of the vote.

One Republican who spoke with *Inside Elections* noted that Herrera Beutler had also alienated some her more moderate supporters after she voted against legalizing gay marriage last July. (When the House took up the revised version of the bill in December, she was one of just two Republicans who changed their position to a yes vote.)

And some of Herrera Beutler's former supporters are firmly in Perez's camp now. That list includes David Nierenberg, one of the former congresswoman's major donors who supported Perez after the primary.

"Many of the moderate Republicans from Clark County are already contributors to Marie," Nierenberg told *Inside Elections*. Nierenberg himself plans to continue to support Perez during the 2024 cycle.

Those moderate Republicans saw Perez as a bulwark against Kent, and that will continue to be the case next year since Kent is running again.

Tiffany Smiley, Republican's Senate nominee last year, has been floated as a potential candidate. Smiley, a former triage nurse and a veterans advocate, was considered a top GOP recruit last year, though she ultimately lost to Sen. Patty Murray by 14 points. Smiley isn't from the district (she lives in the 4th, represented by Republican Rep. Dan Newhouse), but she would be fairly well-known thanks to her statewide campaign, and she won this district by almost 8 points.

There are a number of Republican state legislators in the congressional district who could run as well.

Even though Kevin McCarthy's political operation has had to make

concessions with the more conservative wing of the party in his battle for the speakership, this is one race where Republican outside groups are more likely to be involved in intra-party battles. The consensus among Republicans in D.C. is that Kent is "not viable," as one Republican strategist put it, and attempts to find an alternative are underway.

Throughout the 2022 primary, then-Minority Leader McCarthy quietly supported Herrera Beutler against her Trump-backed opponent. McCarthy's joint fundraising committee, Take Back The House 2022, spent nearly \$200,000 supporting the congresswoman. And the Congressional Leadership Fund, the super PAC affiliated with McCarthy, funded two groups that aired ads attacking Kent by accusing him of being a leftist.

Their efforts were unsuccessful. Once it became clear after the primary that Republicans could lose this seat, the NRCC did a

coordinated ad buy with Kent's campaign. And a week before the election, McCarthy joined a last-minute fundraising event for Kent.

The Structural Advantage

Perez's ability to win this district is dependent on developing a reputation that sets her apart from the national Democratic Party. But unlike many of her other peers who represent purple districts, she also benefits from an electoral system that incentivizes politicians to hew to the middle.

Under Washington's open primary system, where all candidates regardless of party run on the same ballot, independent voters have more control over which two candidates will face each other in November. So



Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

Jaime Herrera Beutler

in a purple district like the 3rd, the system tends to benefit more moderate candidates.

Herrera Beutler's campaign courted Democratic and independent voters ahead of the primary, and she ultimately came just 1,096 votes short of defeating

Kent. While it wasn't enough to get her on the November ballot, she likely would have fared worse in a closed GOP primary.

Other Democrats representing Republican-leaning districts have also benefited from less traditional electoral systems. Both Golden in Maine and Peltola in Alaska won their elections under variations of a ranked-choice voting system, which gives an advantage to candidates who can appeal to the widest swath of voters.

Washington's open primary could benefit a more moderate Republican too — if one emerges, and if Perez's image becomes too liberal for the district.

The Bottom Line

Unlike last year, this race is guaranteed to draw much more attention from national groups in 2024. And because Perez — unlike her peers Golden, Cartwright, Peltola, and Ohio Rep. Marcy Kaptur — is a freshman, Republicans believe she'll be more vulnerable.

Regardless of who Republicans nominate, the race will be a top priority for both parties. And Kent's loss may turn out to be an opportunity for the GOP, if they can find a candidate who will draw enough Republican support away from Kent without alienating voters in the middle.

Last cycle, the Pelosi-aligned House Majority PAC and Together for Progress PAC, a progressive group based in the state, were the only outside groups that aired TV ads ahead of the general election. That won't be the case this year.

And the presidential race will have a crucial impact on competitive House races like this one. By the time Washington holds its congressional primary in August, both presidential nominees will be decided. Congressional candidates on both sides of the aisle will be forced to reckon with the nominees at the top of the ticket.

Running in a district that has voted for Republican presidential candidates for the past several cycles, Perez will have a steep path to victory.



Joe Kent

Courtesy Kent Campaign

West Virginia 2: More Moore?

By Jacob Rubashkin

When Republican Rep. Alex Mooney announced his long-expected 2024 Senate campaign just a week after the 2022 midterms, he kicked off a marquee Senate race that could determine control of that chamber.

But he also leaves an open seat in West Virginia's 2nd Congressional district for the first time under the new district lines.

While the general election in this Solid Republican district has become a formality, there's still the possibility of a highly contested primary election. And while the outcome may not affect the math of the House majority, for West Virginia politicians the open seat is a rare opportunity to seek federal office as the state's presence in Washington continues to dim in the new decade.

The Lay of the Land

Geographically, the 2nd District spans the northern third of West Virginia, encompassing both the Northern and Eastern Panhandles and extending south to Wood and Randolph counties.

West Virginia has been losing population steadily for the past decade and has fewer residents than anytime since the 1960s. Just eight of the state's 55 counties recorded population increases between 2010 and 2020. Of those, seven are located in the 2nd District, and are largely concentrated in the Eastern Panhandle, and around West Virginia University in Monongalia County.

Politically, the district is overwhelmingly Republican. It would have voted for Trump by 37 points in 2020, and Mooney won by 31 points in 2022. Even in the 2018 Senate election, when Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin pulled off a 3-point victory statewide, he would have lost the 2nd District narrowly, 47.6-47.5 percent.

The Republicans

The GOP primary is not until May 12, 2024, but candidates must file to run by Jan. 26, 2024.

The early frontrunner for the seat is state Treasurer Riley Moore. The 42-year-old is in his first term as the state's chief financial officer, and hails from one of West Virginia's most prominent political families — his grandfather Arch Moore was a three-term governor, his aunt Shelley Moore Capito is a U.S. Senator, and his cousin Moore Capito is a state legislator running for governor.



Riley Moore

The younger Moore has had a varied career, politically and professionally. He trained as a welder before graduating George Mason University in 2005, and worked for nearly a decade on Capitol Hill as a professional staffer for the House Foreign Affairs committee under California Democratic Reps. Tom Lantos and Howard Berman. After leaving the Hill, he joined the Podesta Group, a lobbying firm co-founded by Clinton confidant John Podesta.

In 2016, Moore ran as a Republican for a state House seat in Harper's Ferry (from where he had been commuting to Washington, D.C.). He won the swing seat narrowly, 50.5-49.5 percent, and appeared to be on the political fast track, even being floated as a potential candidate for state House speaker. Ahead of the 2018 elections, he was designated as the chamber's next majority leader, but then lost his seat to a Democrat, 55-45 percent, in that year's wave.

In 2020, he challenged six-term Treasurer John Perdue, by then one of the state's only remaining Democratic officeholders. Moore won, 56-44 percent, in what was the closest statewide race that cycle.

Moore reported raising \$136,000 over the last five weeks of 2022 for this race.

Also considering a run is state Attorney General Patrick Morrisey, who was previously the GOP nominee for Senate in 2018 (he lost to Manchin, 49-46 percent). The New Jersey-born Morrisey had a 20-year legal career after graduating Rutgers Law School in 1992, with stints



Patrick Morrisey

at major D.C. law firms and five years as counsel to the U.S. House Energy and Commerce Committee. He ran for Congress in New Jersey in 2000, placing last in the GOP primary. In 2006, Morrisey moved to West Virginia, and ran for attorney general in 2012. Unopposed in the primary, Morrisey ultimately defeated incumbent Democrat Darrell McGraw, 51-49 percent. He was re-elected in 2016, 52-42 percent, and in 2018 he ran for Senate.

In a brutal primary that saw his opponents pick through his lobbying record and accuse him of carpetbagging, Morrisey edged past Rep. Evan Jenkins for the nomination, 35-29 percent, only to lose to Manchin in the fall. In 2020, he easily won re-election, 64-36 percent.

Morrisey has said he is considering a run not only for the 2nd District, but for Senate or governor as well. He could also run for a fourth term as attorney general, and several West Virginia sources are skeptical he would run for Congress rather than a statewide position.

Several other names have been mentioned by West Virginia Republicans for this seat.

There's David H. McKinley, the son of former 1st District Rep. David McKinley (who represented two-thirds of the new 2nd District). He's a money manager based in Wheeling, in the Northern Panhandle. Ken Reed, a pharmacist and former state delegate who spent \$525,000 of his own money on a bid for the 2nd District in 2014, could run.

And state Sen. Mike Oliviero, who (as a Democrat) ousted longtime 1st District Rep. Alan Mollohan in the 2010 Democratic primary only to lose a nailbiter to McKinley in the general election, is now a Republican and could run as well.

A more out-of-the-box possibility is state Sen. Mike Azinger, who

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represents Wood County, at the district's westernmost point. Azinger has served in the state legislature since 2015 and drew attention and condemnation after marching on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. He says he did not enter the building, and blamed "Antifa" for the violence that day.

And there's always the chance, however slim, that if Gov. Jim Justice enters the Senate race, Mooney himself might reconsider and drop back down to the House seat rather than face the popular, Trump-friendly billionaire in a statewide GOP primary. Justice says he'll make his mind up about a Senate run by the end of February, but Mooney would have until next year to decide whether to switch races.

How It Plays Out

Moore has a strong political pedigree, and Republican sources say he's a strong retail politician. He also has backing from the state's two members of Congress — Mooney quickly endorsed him and Rep. Carol Miller donated to his campaign — and a base of support in the vote-rich and growing Eastern Panhandle.

And as treasurer, Moore has boosted his conservative bona fides by emerging as a leader of the anti-ESG (environmental, social and governance) movement among Republican-run states. Moore declared he would not let asset managers that factor in ESG considerations, among them BlackRock, Goldman Sachs, and JP Morgan, enter into banking contracts with West Virginia, due to the importance of coal to the state.

West Virginia's politics is historically parochial and regional. On the ballot, a candidate's hometown and county is listed next to their name.

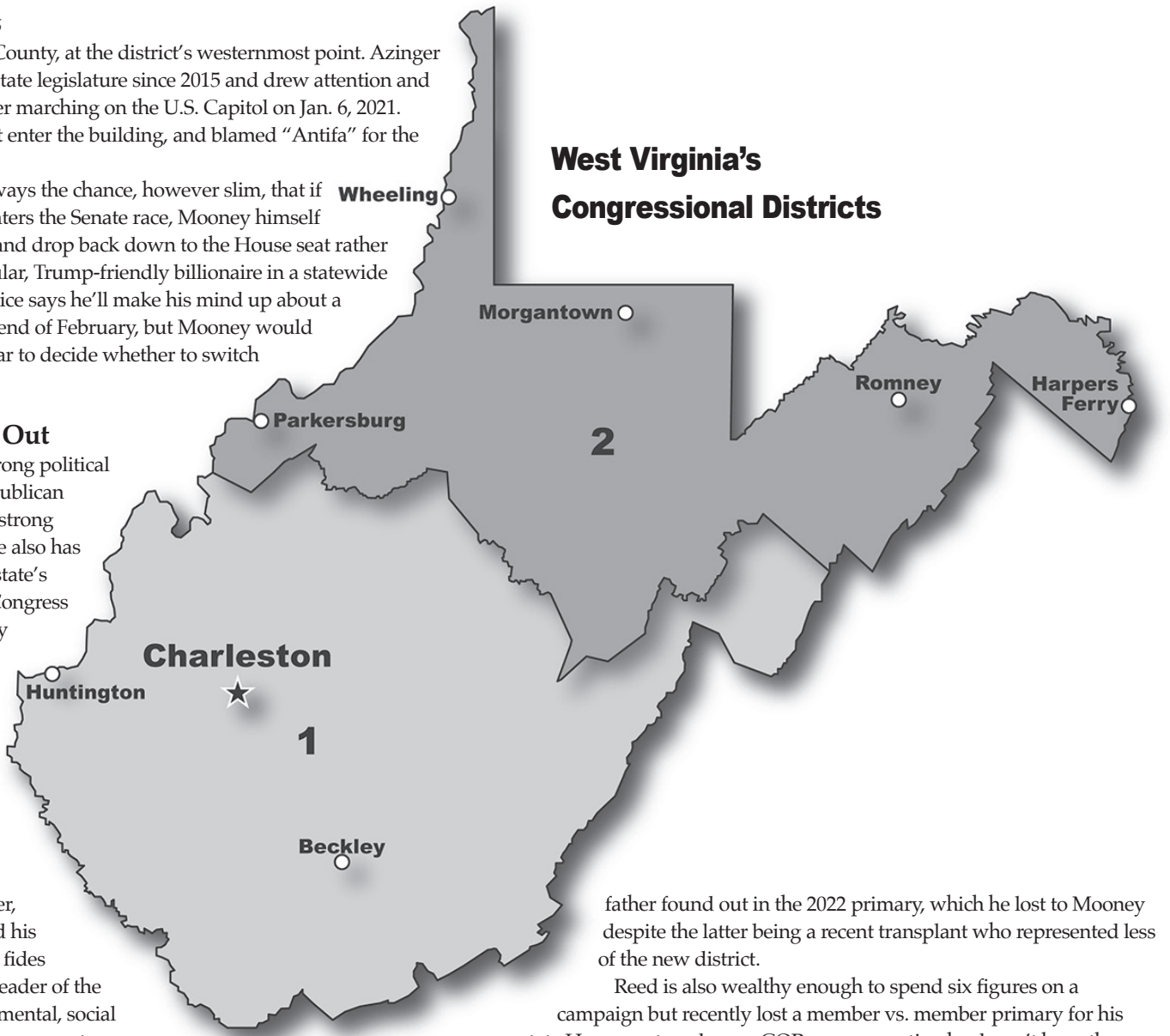
Both Moore and Morrisey are from the Eastern Panhandle, the state's growing GOP powerhouse, and if both run, it could create the possibility that a candidate from another part of the district could squeak by.

McKinley has some recognition because of his father's decade in office, and the family's deep roots in the Northern Panhandle going back seven generations. He's also wealthy and could put his own resources into a campaign.

That's important, because while McKinley may have a foothold in the north, he's not well known in the Eastern Panhandle, which is significantly more expensive to advertise in because it falls in the D.C. media market.

But money and roots aren't always enough to win, as McKinley's

West Virginia's Congressional Districts



father found out in the 2022 primary, which he lost to Mooney despite the latter being a recent transplant who represented less of the new district.

Reed is also wealthy enough to spend six figures on a campaign but recently lost a member vs. member primary for his state House seat, and some GOP sources caution he doesn't have the



Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

Alex Mooney

name ID to establish himself in the race should he run. He also comes from the Eastern Panhandle and could struggle to compete against the better known Moore and/or Morrisey there.

Ultimately, the uncertainty surrounding this race and the bevy of other potential primaries this cycle stems from the rapid political transformation of the state into a GOP stronghold over the past decade. It could be a year of growing pains for the ascendant Republican supermajority.

"It's not often that you have this cascade of open seats and a bench to go after it," one longtime West Virginia political operative told *Inside Elections*. "I'll be making popcorn."



Continued from page 1 points.

The 47th is 50 percent white, 28 percent Asian, 17 percent Hispanic, and 3 percent Black. That's a pronounced shift from a decade ago, when the district would have been 60 percent white and just 21 percent Asian.

Prior to redistricting, 59 percent of the 47th had been represented by Michelle Steel (and before that Rouda), and 41 percent had been represented by Porter.

The Democrats

Rouda, 61, represented the old 48th District for one term, from 2019 to 2021. The Ohio native attended the University of Kentucky ('84) and earned a law degree from Capitol University ('86) and later an MBA from Ohio State ('02).

Rouda worked in real estate for most of his career, amassing a small fortune (between \$24 million and \$103 million per 2018 financial disclosures) before entering politics in 2017. His father and sister are past presidents of the National Association of Realtors.

The one time Republican launched his campaign against GOP Rep. Dana Rohrabacher in the coastal, Orange County-based 48th District and was one of several Democrats to challenge the controversial incumbent.

His chief opponent for Democratic votes in the open primary was biomedical professor Hans Keirstead, who received the endorsement from the more stridently progressive state Democratic Party as Rouda ran in a more moderate lane. Rouda ultimately prevailed over Keirstead by just 125 votes, earning a spot in the general election versus Rohrabacher.

But Democratic leadership in Washington, DC had to pull out all the stops to prevent disaster in the all-party primary, because Baugh was also running as a Republican, creating the real possibility that *he* could advance to the general election against Rohrabacher, shutting Democrats out of the seat entirely.



Katie Porter

The DCCC ran advertisements targeting Baugh, and pressured several other Democratic candidates to drop out to avoid fracturing the vote. Baugh finished in fourth place, just 1.5 points away from placing second and assuring a GOP win in the fall.

California's 47th Congressional District



Instead, Rouda defeated Rohrabacher, 54-46 percent. In Congress, he was a member of the New Democrat Coalition, and served on the Oversight and Transportation committees.

In 2020, Rouda faced Orange County Supervisor Michelle Steel, and despite Biden carrying the district in the presidential election by 1.5 points, Rouda lost 51-49 percent.

He immediately announced he would challenge Steel in 2022, but redistricting scrambled his plans by placing him in the same district as Porter, and he dropped out rather than challenge Steel in a mostly

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unfamiliar district, or his former Democratic colleague in the new 47th.

Rouda's campaign team includes media consultant Dan Sena of Sena Kozar, and direct mail firm J&Z Strategies.

Min, 46, currently represents the 37th state Senate district, which includes Irvine, Newport Beach, and Costa Mesa. The Rhode Island-born Min received dual degrees from the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School and School of Arts and Sciences in 1999, and a law degree from Harvard in 2002.

As an attorney, Min alternated between government work and the private sector in Washington, D.C., with stints at the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Senate Joint Economic Committee, and law firm WilmerHale and liberal think tank Center for American Progress.

He began teaching law at the University of California, Irvine in 2012, and in 2018 ran for Congress for the old 45th District in a field that included incumbent Republican Mimi Walters and fellow UCI law professor Porter.

Unlike in Rouda's race that year, Walters was the only Republican running, so there was no worry for Democrats of being shut out. Min finished 4,099 votes (and about 2.5 points) behind Porter, who went on to defeat Walters in the general election.

In 2020, Min ran for state Senate, challenging incumbent Republican John Moorlach. In the all-party primary Min outpaced Costa Mesa Mayor Katrina Foley, 28-25 percent, and in the general election defeated Moorlach, 51-49 percent, as Biden carried the seat 54-44 percent.

Min's campaign team includes media consultant Orrin Evans of Left Hook Strategies, and pollster David Binder of David Binder Research.

Dominique Jones, who competed with her husband on the 34th season of reality show *The Amazing Race*, is also running. Jones, 36, owns a spin studio in Huntington Beach and is the co-founder of an organization that works to get high school girls involved in politics. She has never run for office before but did seek an appointment to the Huntington Beach city council last year, and campaigned with Porter during the 2022 election.

The Republican

Baugh, 60, is a former state assemblyman who represented coastal Orange County for five years in the 1990s. This is his third run for Congress since 2018.

A 1984 graduate of Liberty University, the Northern California

native received a J.D. from University of the Pacific Law School in 1987. In 1995, Baugh ran in a special election to replace a recalled state assemblywoman.

Though he won a crowded contest with 40.9 percent of the vote, he was indicted on several felony and misdemeanor charges regarding a scheme involving a straw candidate. While several GOP operatives pleaded guilty to related charges, Baugh maintained that the charges against him were politically motivated, and a judge dismissed them all (though that didn't stop Democrats from running multiple ads about the initial arrest in 2018 and 2022).

After serving as state House minority leader in 1999 and 2000, Baugh left office but not politics, turning in a stint as Orange County GOP chairman from 2005 to 2015.

In 2018, Baugh ran against his old mentor, Rohrabacher, in the primary that also included Rouda and Keirstad, finishing fourth.

In 2022, he sought the redrawn 47th District against Porter. With backing from the Club for Growth, he finished with 31 percent in the primary and ultimately held Porter to just a 3-point win despite being outspent 9-to-1.

His campaign team includes general consultant Dave Gilliard of Gilliard Blanning, media consultants Jon Reedy and Ben Burger of SRCP

Media, and pollster Chris Wilson of WPAI. All three firms worked on Baugh's 2022 campaign.

The Primary

With two credible Democrats and one credible Republican, the most likely outcome of the March

5 primary at the moment is that Baugh makes the general election, along with either Min or Rouda. Without a second high-profile Republican in the race, Democrats are not facing the doomsday lockout scenario they worked so hard to avoid in 2018.

It's not out of the question that another Republican could join the fray. One GOP source noted that while "anyone with \$100 million who wants to blow \$10 million has a shot," there aren't murmurs of any candidate in that mold appearing yet.

Baugh is well-liked dating back to his time as county party chairman, and local and national GOP leaders will be pushing hard to keep him as the sole option. Republicans are chastened by Orange County Supervisor Katrina Foley's 2021 special election win to replace now-Rep. Michelle Steel, in which a divided field of three GOP candidates allowed Foley to win with a 44 percent plurality. (Foley herself could run, but one Democratic source believes she'll endorse Rouda, at least partially because Min defeated her for state Senate in 2020.)

All three major candidates in this race have appeared on the ballot in all or a majority of the district before. Rouda represented roughly 60 percent of the new district in Congress. Min's state Senate district covers more than 80 percent of the congressional seat. And Baugh was the GOP nominee in 2022.

According to data from CA Target Book, in the parts of the new 47th District where Rouda was on the congressional ballot in 2020, he lost by

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Harley Rouda

Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call



Scott Baugh

Courtesy Baugh Campaign



Dave Min

Courtesy Office of Dave Min

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3 points, 51-48 percent. The parts of the new 47th where Min was on the ballot in his 2020 legislative race, Min carried by 4 points, 52-48 percent.

Both Rouda and Min will make their own versions of electability arguments to appeal to Democratic voters. Rouda's allies will point to Porter's narrow win in 2022 as evidence that Democrats need to run more moderate candidates in the district to appeal to independents and anti-Trump Republicans skeptical of progressives.

Min's supporters will note Rouda's own loss in 2020 to argue that Rouda's appeal to voters has its limits — though Rouda's allies maintain that the congressman's 1-point loss was actually a stronger result than many other California Democrats such as Gil Cisneros, TJ Cox, Mike Levin, and Christy Smith, because Rouda's seat was by far the most Republican-leaning of the bunch.

Porter has endorsed Min, who has also secured endorsements from state Attorney General Rob Bonta and state Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara. Porter's early nod is a vote of confidence from the progressive wing of the party, and a signal to those still smarting over the contentious Porter/Min fight in 2018 to fall in line (and a way to defuse attacks from Rouda, who may cast aspersions on Min's previous congressional campaign).

Min will have to address the similarities to Porter (both are Harvard Law graduates and UCI law professors), something the campaign is sensitive to as some California Democrats grumble that Porter didn't fit the district well.

In particular, look for Min to focus on criminal justice issues, including domestic violence prevention, hate crimes, and gun safety legislation he helped pass in Sacramento.

He may also highlight some of his more business-friendly votes in the state legislature — he has the second-highest rating of any Democrat in the state Senate from the National Federation of Independent Business.

Though Rouda is the former congressman, several Democratic sources say that Min may be the candidate to beat among Democrats, citing Rouda's lower profile in the district since leaving office, Min's base of support in Irvine, the district's Democratic stronghold, and his support from the more activist wing of the party who may be more likely to turn out in a primary.

In particular, Min, who is Korean-American, is going to make a strong play for the district's Asian American voters — roughly 20 percent of the district's citizen voting age population but overrepresented among Democratic voters and concentrated in Irvine. Democratic sources caution that the Asian vote is not monolithic. Chinese Americans make up the largest portion and tend to vote Democratic, followed by Korean Americans, and then Vietnamese Americans, who are more GOP-friendly. Min has been endorsed by ASPIRE PAC, which supports Asian American candidates.

One open question is how much of his own wealth Rouda will put into the primary. In 2018, he loaned his campaign \$1.6 million but didn't open his wallet in 2020 or 2022. In the brutally expensive Los Angeles media market, that easy access to resources could be a competitive advantage — but only if Rouda is willing to spend.

He also has access to the donor list and connections he assembled first as a Red-to-Blue candidate in 2018 and a DCCC Frontliner in 2020. In his 2020 bid Rouda raised \$5.5 million, and during his brief 2022 run he raised \$1.1 million, or slightly under \$400,000 per quarter.

In 2018, Min raised \$1.2 million for the 45th District congressional primary, and he raised \$2.6 million in his 2020 state Senate race.

Statewide Election Results in California's 47th District

Year	Race	Winner	Percentage
2022	Governor	Dahle (R)	50.3%
2022	Senate	Padilla (D)	50.8%
2022	House	Porter (D)	51.7%
2020	President	Biden (D)	54.2%
2018	Governor	Newsom (D)	51.5%
2016	President	Clinton (D)	50.5%
2012	President	Romney (R)	52.8%

While he never raised more than \$300,000 a quarter in a federal race (California races have higher contribution limits than federal races), a source familiar tells *Inside Elections* he has already raised that much one month into 2023.

Republicans believe that the reason Baugh lost in 2022 was because Porter spent \$28 million against him, and that a candidate with fewer resources will be easier to topple. Baugh's allies also hope that early consolidation of GOP votes, plus a competitive contest among Democrats, will allow him to stockpile cash, with a goal of raising \$5 million (that would be \$2 million more than last cycle).

Running for an open seat is fundamentally different from challenging an incumbent, particularly a well-heeled one. Baugh's close call in 2022 will serve as a signal to outside groups that this district is worthy of investment despite its Democratic bent on a presidential level.

The Bottom Line

Hanging over all of the Orange County races is the presidential race, and Trump's enduring and increasing unpopularity among well-off, educated suburban voters. While 2020 saw Republicans outperform the then-president all over Southern California, there's no guarantee that will continue to be the case.

If Trump is the nominee again, any non-incumbent Republican will be hard-pressed to win a district Trump is losing by double digits — especially if the Senate primary yields a Democrat-vs.-Democrat general election higher up on the ticket.

Republicans are defending a razor-thin majority in the House, with Democrats needing a net gain of just 5 seats to regain control. Taking over a Democratic-held seat would be a huge help for the GOP looking to offset potential losses elsewhere.



2023 Gubernatorial Ratings

Toss-up (1D)

Beshear (D-Ky.)

Lean Democratic

Lean Republican (1R)

LA Open (Edwards, D)

Likely Democratic

Likely Republican (1R)

Reeves (R-Miss.)

Solid Democratic

Solid Republican

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