

Inside Elections

with

Nathan L. Gonzales

Nonpartisan Analysis

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Colorado 8: Centennial State Showdown

By Jacob Rubashkin

Colorado's 8th District is one of America's newest House seats but it has already established itself as one of the most competitive. Just one of two districts where the winning candidate's margin of victory was less than 1 percent in both 2022 and 2024, the 8th is a crucial step in Democrats' path back to the majority in 2026.

After Republican Gabe Evans defeated Rep. Yadira Caraveo by 2,449 votes in 2024, he became a top target for state and national Democrats, who are eager to defeat the young helicopter pilot before he can solidify his hold over the district and develop into a potentially strong statewide candidate.

Now Caraveo may be angling for a rematch, but not all Democrats are happy about that prospect, and the party could face a contentious primary.

Democrats need a net gain of just three seats to reclaim the majority. Evans' low share of the vote and freshman status make him a top priority for Democrats. But his background as a Hispanic Army captain and police officer could make him a tough out.

The Lay of the Land

Drawn following the 2020 Census, Colorado's 8th is carved out of the suburban and rural communities north of Denver. Most of the district's votes (roughly 60 percent) come from Adams County, the closest to Denver and the most Democratic area. Another 36 percent are cast by Weld County, due north of Adams and significantly more Republican. A small number of 8th District residents live in Larimer County.

Thornton (population 145,000) and Greeley (113,000) are the district's two largest cities and typically comprise 20 percent and 15 percent of the vote

The 8th was drawn with Hispanic voters in mind — its population is 39 percent non-white Hispanic (more than any other Colorado district) and 52 percent non-Hispanic white. However, white voters are overrepresented in the electorate; they are 65 percent of the citizen voting-age population compared to the 28 percent who are Hispanic.

Just 31 percent of the district's population has a bachelor's degree or

Continued on page 6

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2026 House Ratings

Toss-Up (3D, 7R)

| | |
|-------------------------|---------------------|
| AZ 6 (Ciscomani, R) | MI 7 (Barrett, R) |
| CA 13 (Gray, D) | NC 1 (Davis, D) |
| CA 45 (Tran, D) | NY 17 (Lawler, R) |
| CO 8 (Evans, R) | PA 7 (Mackenzie, R) |
| IA 1 (Miller-Meeeks, R) | VA 2 (Kiggans, R) |

Tilt Democratic (7D)

| |
|--------------------------|
| CA 47 (Min, D) |
| ME 2 (Golden, D) |
| MI 8 (McDonald Rivet, D) |
| NM 2 (Vasquez, D) |
| NY 4 (Gillen, D) |
| TX 34 (Gonzalez, D) |
| WA 3 (Perez, D) |

Tilt Republican (6R)

| |
|----------------------|
| AZ 1 (Schweikert, R) |
| MI 10 (James, R) |
| NE 2 (Bacon, R) |
| NJ 7 (Kean Jr., R) |
| PA 10 (Perry, R) |
| WI 3 (Van Orden, R) |

Lean Democratic (17D)

| | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| CA 21 (Costa, D) | NV 1 (Titus, D) |
| CA 27 (Whitesides, D) | NV 3 (Lee, D) |
| CA 49 (Levin, D) | NV 4 (Horsford, D) |
| CA 9 (Harder, D) | NY 19 (Riley, D) |
| FL 23 (Moskowitz, D) | NY 3 (Suoizzi, D) |
| IN 1 (Mrvan, D) | OR 5 (Bynum, D) |
| MN 2 (Craig, DFL) | TX 28 (Cuellar, D) |
| NH 1 (Pappas, D) | VA 7 (Vindman, D) |
| NJ 9 (Pou, D) | |

Lean Republican (5R)

| |
|---------------------|
| CA 22 (Valadao, R) |
| CA 40 (Kim, R) |
| CA 41 (Calvert, R) |
| IA 3 (Nunn, R) |
| PA 8 (Bresnahan, R) |

Likely Democratic (7D)

| |
|----------------------|
| CA 25 (Ruiz, D) |
| IL 17 (Sorensen, D) |
| MI 3 (Scholten, D) |
| NH 2 (Goodlander, D) |
| NY 18 (Ryan, D) |
| NY 22 (Mannion, D) |
| PA 17 (Deluzio, D) |

Likely Republican (12R)

| | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| AK AL (Begich, R) | NY 21 (Stefanik, R) |
| AZ 2 (Crane, R) | PA 1 (Fitzpatrick, R) |
| CA 3 (Kiley, R) | TX 15 (De La Cruz, R) |
| CO 5 (Crank, R) | VA 1 (Wittman, R) |
| FL 13 (Luna, R) | WI 1 (Steil, R) |
| IA 2 (Hinson, R) | |
| MI 4 (Huizenga, R) | |

Pending New Map (3D)

| | GOP | DEM | |
|--------------------|---------------------|-----|-----|
| OH 1 (Landsman, D) | Solid | 180 | 176 |
| OH 9 (Kaptur, D) | Likely/Lean/Tilt | 23 | 31 |
| OH 13 (Sykes, D) | Total | 203 | 207 |
| | Toss-up | | 10 |
| | Ohio map TBD | | 15 |
| | Needed for majority | | 218 |

CALENDAR

| | |
|----------------|---|
| April 1 | Florida's 1st & 6th Special General Elections |
| April 3 | Virginia Candidate Filing Deadline |
| June 10 | New Jersey Gubernatorial Primary |
| June 17 | Virginia Gubernatorial Primary |

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New Hampshire Senate: Shaheen Retirement Creates Open Seat

By Jacob Rubashkin

New Hampshire Democrat Jeanne Shaheen will not run for a fourth term, complicating her party's already difficult path back to the Senate majority next year.

While New Hampshire was already on the Senate battleground, Shaheen's decision could set off a prolonged and difficult primary between several prominent Democrats and entice stronger GOP recruits into the race than if she had run for re-election.

Democrats need a net gain of four seats to regain control of the chamber, and with so few offensive opportunities they cannot afford to lose any of the states they already hold.

Shaheen, 78, is an institution in the Granite State, serving three two-year terms as governor before winning her first Senate race in 2008.

New Hampshire has one of the latest primaries in the nation, just two months before Election Day (there is a nascent effort in the state legislature to move up the primary).

On the Democratic side, both members of the House delegation are considering bids. Rep. Chris Pappas, whose 1st District is the more competitive of the two, has long had statewide ambitions. But new Rep. Maggie Goodlander, who has deep ties to the state's political establishment, has signaled interest in running as well.

Former Rep. Annie Kuster, who held Goodlander's seat from 2013 to 2025, also put her name into contention if Pappas doesn't run — even though she bowed out of politics last year at age 68.

On the Republican side, the initial focus will once again be on former Gov. Chris Sununu, who won four two-year terms from 2016 through 2022 and regularly appealed to independent and Democratic voters. Sununu passed up a Senate bid against Democrat Maggie Hassan in 2022 despite a massive recruitment push from Senate Republicans.

Former Massachusetts Sen. Scott Brown is another potential candidate. The former New Zealand Ambassador ran against Shaheen in 2012, just two years after losing his Bay State seat, and came within 3 points of beating her. He was spotted on Capitol Hill this week.

In a midterm with a Republican president in the White House,

2026 Senate Ratings

BATTLEGROUND

Democratic-Held (4)

Jon Ossoff (D-Ga.)
MI Open (Gary Peters, D)
NH Open (Jeanne Shaheen, D)
MN Open (Tina Smith, DFL)

Republican-Held (2)

Susan Collins (R-Maine)
Thom Tillis (R-N.C.)

Solid Democratic (9)

John Hickenlooper (D-Colo.)
Chris Coons (D-Del.)
Dick Durbin (D-Ill.)
Ed Markey (D-Mass.)
Cory Booker (D-N.J.)
Ben Ray Lujan (D-N.M.)
Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.)
Jack Reed (D-R.I.)
Mark Warner (D-Va.)

Solid Republican (20)

Tommy Tuberville (R-Ala.)
Dan Sullivan (R-Ak.)
Tom Cotton (R-Ark.)
Ashley Moody (R-Fla.)
Jim Risch (R-Idaho)
Joni Ernst (R-Iowa)
Roger Marshall (R-Kan.)
KY Open (McConnell, R)
Bill Cassidy (R-La.)
Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-Miss.)
Steve Daines (R-Mont.)
Pete Ricketts (R-Neb.)
Jon Husted (R-Ohio)
Markwayne Mullin (R-Okla.)
Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.)
Mike Rounds (R-S.D.)
Bill Hagerty (R-Tenn.)
John Cornyn (R-Texas)
Shelley Moore Capito (R-W.V.)
Cynthia Lummis (R-Wyo.)

Democrats will more likely than not have the national environment in their favor. And New Hampshire has leaned the lightest shade of blue at the federal level since 2010 — the last time Republicans won a Senate race in the state. Democrats have a 2.3-point advantage in the state, according to Inside Elections Baseline.

But Granite Staters pride themselves on their independence and split tickets to a greater degree than many other states. A Sununu bid would make this seat highly competitive and one Senate Democrats cannot ignore in their quest to reclaim the majority.



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Iowa's 1st: Third Time's a Charm?

By Jacob Rubashkin

In their quest to flip three seats and reclaim the House majority, Democrats are primarily focused on GOP incumbents in seats where Kamala Harris finished ahead of Donald Trump and seats where Trump won narrowly.

But one of the party's top targets is neither of those things. Iowa's 1st District voted handily for Trump in 2024 and is emblematic of the predominantly white midwestern districts where Democrats have lost serious ground since 2016.

The reason the 1st is such an attractive target is because incumbent Mariannette Miller-Meeks continues to struggle to hold her coalition together, and Democrats believe they have the right candidate to oust her: Christina Bohannon, a former state representative who has run against Miller-Meeks twice before.

It is rare for a party to be so excited about the prospect of a two-time loser running again, but national Democrats are all-in on Bohannon, who has not officially announced a campaign. Though she lost in 2024, she outperformed the political environment more than any other Democratic challenger, and the race's final margin — 799 votes — was the closest loss of any Democrat. And, as Democrats like to point out, Miller-Meeks ran and lost three times before finally winning this seat on her fourth try.

If Bohannon passes on a bid for whatever reason, this district will remain on Democrats' target list but won't be nearly as high a priority.

The Lay of the Land

Iowa's 1st District sits in the southeast corner of the state, bordered to the east by Illinois, to the south by Missouri, and extending west to the Des Moines exurbs.

The 1st includes 20 of Iowa's 99 counties, but nearly half of the district's population lives in just two of them: Scott County (home to Davenport and 22 percent of residents) and Johnson County (Iowa City and 19 percent of residents).

The district is largely non-Hispanic white (84 percent), with small numbers of Hispanic (6 percent) and Black (4 percent) residents. The median household income of \$71,659 is slightly lower than the national average of \$77,700 — as is the degree of education attainment, with 32.5 percent of residents holding at least a bachelor's degree compared to a national average of 36 percent.

The largely rural district has a significant manufacturing sector, which employs 16 percent of the workforce (the national rate is 10 percent). But the 1st is also home to the University of Iowa, the state's largest and oldest institute of higher education and a significant driver of economic activity in and around its home of Johnson County. And Fairfield, in Jefferson County, is the international base of the transcendental meditation movement.

Politically, the district has trended toward Republicans over the past decade. In 2024, it voted for Trump by 8 points, 53-45 percent, and for Trump by 2 points and 3 points, respectively, in 2020 and 2016. Down ballot Democrats have shown more resilience, with all but one statewide nominee carrying the 1st in 2018, and the state auditor and treasurer candidates carrying the district in 2022 even as Gov. Kim Reynolds and Sen. Chuck Grassley cruised to 12 and 6-point victories. Overall, the district has a Baseline score of R+1.9.

In 2022, Miller-Meeks won the seat by 7 points but in 2024 she eked out a win by just 0.2 percent.

Democratic votes are highly concentrated in the district's urban centers. Of the district's 20 counties, Harris won just one: Johnson, by 38 points. She held Trump to single-digit wins in two more counties, but lost the remainder of the district by 27 percent.

The Republican Candidates

Miller-Meeks is in her third term representing southeast Iowa, though the ophthalmologist has been a part of local politics for much longer than that thanks to three unsuccessful congressional bids and a stint in the state Senate.



Mariannette Miller-Meeks

Prior to politics, the California-born Miller-Meeks spent 24 years in the Army, enlisting at age 18 and serving six years on active duty and 18 more in the Reserve. She retired as a lieutenant colonel. Along the way, Miller-Meeks earned

a nursing degree from Texas Christian University (1976), a masters from University of Southern California (1980) and a medical degree from the University of Texas Health Science Center (1986).

After a residency at the University of Iowa and fellowship at University of Michigan, Miller-Meeks returned to Iowa, first as a professor at University of Iowa's medical school before settling and opening a private medical practice in Ottumwa, southeast of Des Moines and just outside the 1st.

In 2008, Miller-Meeks made her first foray into electoral politics, winning the GOP primary for Iowa's 2nd District by 114 votes (0.7 percent) over funeral home director Peter Teahan.

But freshman Democratic Rep. Dave Loebsack easily defeated her, 57-39 percent in the fall. Miller-Meeks would lose two more races to Loebsack by closer margins in 2010 and 2014.

In 2018, she set her sights slightly lower, to a competitive Ottumwa state Senate seat, which she captured by 3 points, 51-48 percent as Gov. Kim Reynolds carried it by a wider, 52-45 percent margin.

After Loebsack retired rather than run in 2020, Miller-Meeks tossed her hat in the ring a fourth time. In the GOP primary, she outpaced former Illinois Rep. Bobby Schilling, 47-36 percent (Schilling had previously represented a district just across the Mississippi River).

Outside GOP groups invested heavily in the general election against former state senator Rita Hart, and Miller-Meeks prevailed by just six votes in one of the closest congressional races in American history. Hart and the Democrats alleged irregularities and attempted to contest Miller-Meeks' victory in the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives. But they backed down to avoid the appearance of attempting to overturn an election result at the same time that Democrats were hammering Trump for his refusal to accept the results of the 2020 election.

In 2022 and 2024, Miller-Meeks faced off against Bohannon, winning by 7 points in 2022 but nearly losing in 2024 despite a strong GOP

Continued on page 4

Continued from page 3

performance at the top of the ticket. In a sign of weakness that presaged her tough 2024 election, Miller-Meeks faced a surprisingly stiff primary challenge from Quad Cities Prayer Breakfast founder David Pautsch, who spent virtually no money but came 12 points short of ousting her, losing 56-44 percent.

In Congress, Miller-Meeks sits on the Energy & Commerce and Veterans Affairs committees.

Her campaign team includes general consultant Gentry Collins. The paid media consultant is Brad Todd of OnMessage Inc.

Miller-Meeks already has a challenge in the GOP primary from Pautsch, her 2024 opponent. Pautsch announced in early February he would run against Miller-Meeks a second time. The Davenport resident runs an advertising agency and is a Gold Star father — his son Jared was killed during Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2009.

In 2024, Pautsch spent just \$38,000 (compared to more than \$1 million from Miller-Meeks) but drew sharp contrasts with Miller-Meeks on her votes to establish a bipartisan January 6 commission, certify the 2020 election, and repeal the anti-gay Defense of Marriage Act, among other issues where he positioned himself to her right such as abortion. His highest-profile endorsement came from former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, and he capitalized on a brief meeting with Trump in which the former president called him “a good man,” language that still features prominently in Pautsch’s campaign materials.

Pautsch performed well in the eastern part of the district, winning five counties including Scott, the 1st’s most populous.

The Republican Primary

National GOP strategists aren’t sweating Miller-Meeks’ primary yet and see Pautsch as a less-than-credible threat. But the incumbent has clearly taken to heart the message Republican primary voters sent her last cycle and is working hard to tie herself to Trump, who has declined to give her one of his “complete and total endorsements” since his initial nod in October 2020.

Most notably, Miller-Meeks joined Trump’s longshot lawsuit against the *Des Moines Register* and pollster J. Ann Selzer for publishing a poll showing Harris ahead in Iowa (she lost by 13 points). Miller-Meeks alleges that the poll violated Iowa consumer fraud laws and was intended to help her opponent, though the survey, which included a generic ballot question posed to all four Iowa districts, did not name her or Bohannon.

The Republican also tweets regularly about her support for Trump and used a recent floor speech to wish the president and First Lady Melania Trump a happy anniversary. In a bid to shore up support among

social conservatives, Miller-Meeks invited anti-transgender activist Riley Gaines as her guest to Trump’s latest joint address to Congress.

As a physician, Miller-Meeks was at the forefront of GOP Covid-19 vaccine outreach in early 2021, appearing in a white coat in a pro-vaccine video featuring Republican doctors and traveling the district to dispense injections herself.

But with a wave of vaccine skepticism washing through the party, Miller-Meeks has sought to appeal to her base by arguing against vaccine mandates. She also cheered on Trump’s nomination of vaccine critic Dave Weldon to be director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, specifically praising his work attempting to establish a link between vaccines and autism. (Weldon’s nomination was abruptly pulled last week.)

If Miller-Meeks can work herself back into Trump’s good graces and secure an endorsement, that likely cuts off any path Pautsch has to victory.

The primary will take place on June 2, 2026.

The (Likely) Democratic Nominee

While no Democrats are officially in the race, local and national Democrats expect Bohannon to make a third run for the seat and to attract little if any primary opposition. Bohannon has already lined up

her consulting team and traveled to DC for meetings about her next campaign.

Born in Georgia and raised in Florida, the 53-year-old former state legislator earned her undergraduate and law degrees from the University of Florida in 1994



Courtesy Iowa State House

Christina Bohannon

and 1997, and after a brief stint in the Sunshine State’s Department of Environmental Protection moved to Iowa to teach at University of Iowa’s law school, where she remains a faculty member.

In 2020, Bohannon challenged a 10-term incumbent in a state legislative primary, arguing that state Rep. Vicki Lensing wasn’t present enough in the district or aggressive enough in the capital. Bohannon easily defeated Lensing, 64-32 percent, and won the general election unopposed.

Rather than run for re-election in 2022, Bohannon chose to take on Miller-Meeks, who was coming off of her nailbiter election in 2020. The 1st District race flew under the radar, with more attention paid to the neighboring 3rd District where Democratic Rep. Cindy Axne was on the ropes. But stubbornly close polling in the 1st drew in GOP super PAC Congressional Leadership Fund, which spent \$1.4 million to boost Miller-Meeks in the closing weeks of the race. Outside Democratic groups did not spend on Bohannon’s behalf and she lost, 53-47 percent.

Bohannon jumped back into the fray in August 2023, and this time was a higher priority for national Democrats — the two largest Democratic independent expenditure groups ultimately spent \$8 million on Bohannon’s behalf in the 2024 cycle.

Bohannon consistently outraised Miller-Meeks and had pulled ahead of her in private polling by the time Election Day rolled around. But

Continued on page 5

Inside Elections Podcast

Nathan, Jacob and expert guests discuss the latest election news in a nonpartisan, data-driven and accessible way.

Episode 42: House Race Ratings w/ James Downs of National Journal’s Hotline

Episode 41: Minnesota Races w/ Briana Bierschbach of The Minnesota Star-Tribune

Continued from page 4

a stronger-than-expected performance from Trump helped drag the congresswoman to another photo-finish victory.

The 8.3 percent by which Bohannon outperformed Harris was the strongest showing of any Democratic challenger in a targeted race last year. And an *Inside Elections* analysis found Bohannon improved more than any other repeat Democratic nominee between 2022 and 2024.

Bohannon’s team included media consultant John Lapp of Ralston Lapp Guinn and pollster Jill Normington of Normington Petts.

How It Plays Out

After such a close 2024 result, both parties are gearing up for a highly competitive 2026 despite Trump’s strong performance — primarily because Miller-Meeks has a persistent image problem in the district.

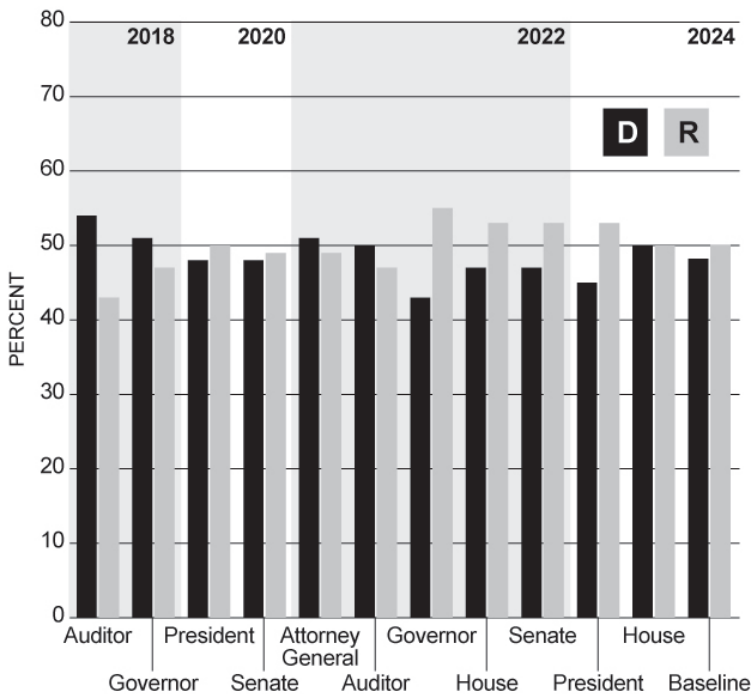
A poll from Democratic group House Majority Forward in February measured her popularity 25 points underwater, at 26 percent favorable and 51 percent unfavorable. And Democrats criticize her candidate skills and appeal, as evidenced by her losses in good Republican cycles (2010 and 2014).

Unsurprisingly Republican strategists are more forgiving and believe that Miller-Meeks’ problem is primarily a base issue stemming from her policy stances, and appreciate that she is taking care to win over the district’s more skeptical Republican voters ahead of 2026.

Some GOP sources are optimistic that a midterm environment will actually benefit the congresswoman because voters who were only turning out to support Trump and not her will not show up when Trump is not on the ballot.

Some Trump voters clearly did not vote at all in the House race in 2024, and the counties in which turnout dropped the most between the presidential race and the House race were also the counties in which Miller-Meeks ran the furthest behind Trump. But Bohannon also received 15,000 more votes than Harris in the district, indicating that a solid

Statewide Election Results in Iowa’s 1st District



number of Trump voters split their tickets. She carried three counties, two more than Harris.

Democrats believe that a populist message will continue to serve Bohannon well; she has focused on her working-class upbringing in her past two campaigns and run on a pro-union platform. Party strategists also credit her with campaigning all over the district, even in places where Democrats typically lose handily. Her overperformance was greatest in her worst counties, and she outran Harris the least in the two most Democratic counties, suggesting that the additional “gettable” votes for Democrats are more likely to be found in the more rural areas of the district.

Both women and their allies have already thoroughly litigated attacks against the other. Bohannon has weathered three years of ads tarring her as a radical, far-left Iowa City professor, and while she remained popular even at the end of the 2024 election, GOP strategists believe the message was effective and don’t see much reason to change tracks now.

For Bohannon’s part, Democratic sources say she’ll have to pick her moments carefully to break with the national Democratic Party, which has an increasingly toxic brand in much of the district.

One potentially new factor is the effect of Trump’s tariff plan on the Iowa economy. The state’s soybean industry is still dealing with the lingering effects of a 2018 trade war with China, and the Iowa Farm Bureau has expressed concern that increased tariffs could deal lasting damage, especially if Canada moves ahead with a proposed 25 percent retaliatory tariff on ethanol.

While neither party knows what to expect from the White House on tariffs, Democrats hope to tap into that uncertainty to harness anger against Republicans in Congress.

Democrats are also cautiously optimistic that the governor’s race will be competitive this year for the first time since 2018, with state Auditor Rob Sand appearing likely to wage a well-funded campaign against Gov. Reynolds. Sand has carried the 1st District twice and would need to win it again to win statewide.

Recent overperformances by two Democratic candidates in state legislative special elections have also given that party hope; races for state House and state Senate conducted entirely within the 1st District both saw Democrats outpace the 2024 presidential margin by roughly 20 points. Republicans say the results are more flukey than anything else.

The Bottom Line

Miller-Meeks’ unique vulnerabilities helps this race punch above its weight in competitiveness, but the district is Republican enough to keep her afloat despite those challenges. If she can effectively tie herself to Trump and the president maintains or improves his popularity, she will be in a stronger position.

The 1st isn’t a seat that Democrats have to win to take back the House, but Bohannon is a favorite of party leaders in Washington, DC and will have significant financial backing if she runs again. And as Democrats find themselves on defense in several of their own districts that swung hard toward the GOP last year, the opportunity to go on offense in a seat Trump carried is enticing.

More generally, Democrats are still searching for ways to win back the working class white voters that abandoned the party during the Trump years. Iowa has been ground zero for that shift over the past decade, and if Democrats can’t figure out how to win back areas like Iowa’s 1st, it will have significant consequences not only in the House (where the party likely has to flip Trump-won seats to reclaim the majority) but in the Senate and the Electoral College as well.

Continued from page 1

higher, below the national average of 36 percent and significantly lagging Colorado overall (46 percent).

The district contains a prominent natural resource extraction industry, ranking in the top 30 districts in the nation for percentage of workers in natural resources, construction, and maintenance. Weld County alone produces nearly all of Colorado's oil.

Politically, the district is evenly divided. Donald Trump carried it by 1.8 points in 2024, 49.6-47.7, after losing it by 4 points (50-46 percent) to Joe Biden in 2020. In 2016, Trump would have won the seat by 2 points.

Harris carried the Adams County portion by 9 points but lost the Weld County portion by 20 points, with both counties shifting roughly 6 points more Republican than their 2020 performance. A rare bright spot for Harris came in predominantly white Larimer County, which is just 4 percent of the district but shifted from a Trump win of 14 points in 2020 to a Trump win of 9 points in 2024.

Democrats have been more successful in downballot races in the 8th, with 15 of 18 statewide Democratic candidates carrying the district since 2016. Gov. Jared Polis and Sen. Michael Bennet both won the 8th in 2022 by 9 and 2 points, respectively.

In its two congressional cycles, the 8th has produced some of the hardest-fought and narrowest House races. In 2022, Caraveo won her first election by just 0.7 percent — a margin of fewer than 2,000 votes and with the lowest share of the vote (48.4 percent) of any successful House candidate that year.

In 2024, Caraveo was not so lucky, losing to Evans by 0.8 percent, or fewer than 3,000 votes.

The Republican Incumbent

Evans, 38, has enjoyed a rapid rise in Colorado politics.

The Aurora-born Evans graduated from Patrick Henry College in Virginia in 2009 and joined ROTC and the Virginia National Guard before moving back to Colorado and joining the state's National Guard. A Black Hawk pilot, Evans served in combat in the Middle East and also worked search and rescue and firefighting missions in Colorado. In 2011, Evans also joined the police department in Arvada, located in the southwest corner of the 8th.

In 2022, Evans ran for an open state Assembly that bordered Adams and Weld counties, winning the GOP primary 70-30 percent and the general election 63-34 percent.

But he quickly pivoted to running for Congress, jumping into the 8th District race in September, 2023. After a more formidable primary opponent dropped out, Evans secured endorsements from Trump and House Speaker Mike Johnson and easily beat former state Rep. Janak Joshi, 77-23 percent.

The general election against Caraveo was among the most expensive in the country, attracting \$19 million in outside spending from both parties. Polling showed a consistently competitive race but Evans ultimately prevailed, winning a 49-48.2 percent plurality as two minor party candidates took 2.8 percent of the vote.

In Congress, Evans sits on the Energy and Commerce and Homeland



Gabe Evans

Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

Security committees, and is a member of the Problem Solvers Caucus and the Main Street Partnership.

His campaign team includes general consultant Jerrod Dobkin of OnMessage, Inc., which is also handling direct mail. Caitlin Reed of Public Opinion Strategies is the pollster.

The Democratic Candidate(s)

So far, the only announced candidate in the Democratic field is state Rep. Manny Rutinel, whose early entrance and strong fundraising has surprised local and national Democratic strategists.

Caraveo is also a potential candidate, with party operatives divided over whether she will — and should — run again. That uncertainty may be freezing a larger group of potential candidates, who are far more likely to run if Caraveo sits this cycle out.

Democratic sources say state Treasurer Dave Young appears the most likely to run if Caraveo does not. Also in the mix are state Rep. Shannon Bird, state Sen. Kyle Mullica, Adams County Commissioner Julie Duran Mullica (the two are married), Adams County Commissioner Lynn Baca, and Jessica Killin, the former Chief of Staff to Second Gentleman Doug Emhoff who is also an attorney and retired Army captain.

Rutinel, 30, is in his first full term representing Commerce City in the state House, after being appointed to the post in October 2023 and elected unopposed in 2024.

Born to a single, immigrant mother, Rutinel grew up between California, Florida, and the Dominican Republic. He earned an associate degree from Pasco-Hernando State College in 2013, a dual degree BA/BS from the University of Florida in 2016, an economics masters from Johns Hopkins in 2018, and a law degree from Yale in 2022.

Rutinel worked as an economist for the Army Corps of Engineers from 2016 to 2018 and moved to Colorado after law school (he had briefly worked as a policy fellow for former Gov. John Hickenlooper's presidential campaign). In Colorado, Rutinel worked as an attorney for environmental rights group Earthjustice and also co-founded Climate Refarm, a company that aims to shift the world to a plant-based food system to fight climate change.

Food, climate change, and animal rights are a throughline in Rutinel's career. A vegan, he once started a petition for Popeyes to introduce plant-based fried chicken — it garnered 47,000 signatures.

Rutinel's campaign team includes media consultant Jon Vogel of MVAR, pollster Chris Keating of Keating Research, and direct mail consultant Ed Peavy of Mission Control.

Caraveo, 43, is a pediatrician who served two terms in the state legislature representing Thornton prior to her one term in Congress.

The daughter of Mexican immigrants, Caraveo graduated from Regis University (2003) and University of Colorado medical school (2009).

In 2018, Caraveo ran for the state House, winning her primary unopposed and the general election, 55-39 percent. In 2020, she ran unopposed in both the primary and general elections.

In 2022, Caraveo launched her bid for the 8th District before it was even drawn, with the expectation it would overlap with her constituency. After winning the Democratic primary unopposed, she eked out a 48.4-47.7 percent victory over state Sen. Barb Kirkmeyer in the general election, helped by strong performances from Polis and Bennet at the top of the ticket. Libertarian candidate/local metal band soundman Richard Ward won 4 percent of the vote, which GOP sources still blame for Kirkmeyer's loss.

In 2024, Caraveo disclosed that she had sought treatment for severe

Continued on page 7

Continued from page 6

depression, including an in-patient stay at Walter Reed Medical Center.

That fall, Caraveo lost to Evans in another nailbiter — Democrats were confident for several days after Election Day that she was victorious, until a county clerk corrected a significant error in the count of outstanding votes.

In Congress, Caraveo served on the Agriculture and Science, Space and Technology committees.

Her campaign team in 2024 included media consultant Lucinda Guinn of Ralston Lapp Guinn and pollster Andrew Baumann of Global Strategy Group.

Young, the state treasurer, is term-limited in his current role. Already 71, Young would be among the oldest freshmen elected to Congress. A former high school math teacher and computer programmer/instructor, Young represented Greeley in the state House from his appointment in 2011 until 2019. At times he was the only elected Democrat in heavily Republican Weld County.

He won his swingy district three times before easily winning the Democratic primary for state treasurer in 2018 and winning statewide by 7 points in the general election. In 2022, he won re-election by a more comfortable 11 percent. In his two statewide bids he carried the 8th District by 3 and 4 points, respectively. (Young's wife, Mary Young, held his old state House seat until 2024, when she narrowly lost re-election.)

Mullica, 38, is an emergency room nurse who ousted a GOP incumbent from a Thornton-area House seat in 2018 and won a comfortable 2020 re-election before seeking a promotion to the state Senate in 2022, winning 54-43 percent. Duran Mullica, the Adams County Commissioner, was elected in 2024 and previously served on the Northglenn council. She is an infection prevention manager.

Baca, 54, is a procurement agent who has been involved in local politics since 2011, when she joined the Brighton City council. She has held an at-large county commission seat since 2020.

Bird won her first state House race in 2018 and has been re-elected three times, always by comfortable margins in her Westminster-based seat. Considered by Democratic sources to be more moderate and business-friendly than many of her colleagues, Bird has launched a bid for state Senate next year but could switch to the House race if Caraveo doesn't run.

Killin may be the least likely to run but her name is still discussed in some DC circles. In addition to working for Emhoff, Killin has served as chief of staff to Reps. Marie Gluesenkamp-Perez of Washington, Carolyn Maloney of New York, and Donna Shalala of Florida, and as a lobbyist for USAA. She grew up in Colorado but has not lived in the state in decades.

Will She Or Won't She?

The course of the primary depends in large part on whether Caraveo goes through with a comeback bid.

Several national Democratic strategists expressed serious skepticism that Caraveo will run, largely due to her mental health struggles last cycle and the anticipated intensity of the coming campaign. "I don't think she'll end up doing it," said one Democratic source. "I don't think she enjoyed running for Congress and she'd be signing up for one of the dirtiest and hardest fought races."

Much of that sentiment, which is based primarily in concern for her personal wellbeing but also questions about her ability to win, may be more about Democrats trying to gently nudge Caraveo out of the race than a reflection of how likely she really is to run.

"Her trial balloon is being met with less than enthusiasm," said one Colorado Democrat.

But according to those with knowledge of her thinking, Caraveo is far more likely to run than not, and recently traveled to Washington, DC for meetings about a potential bid.

"I think it's all wishcasting for folks in DC to say they don't think she's going to run," said one senior national strategist. "If for some reason she doesn't run, there's been a major, major change." Another source put her likelihood of running at 80 percent.

One Democratic operative compared the discussion around Caraveo to the Democratic primary in New York's 17th District in 2024. The prospect of a comeback bid by former Rep. Mondaire Jones was met with a frosty reception by some Democrats, who did not believe he could win and coaxed local official Liz Whitmer Geraghty into the race. But support for Geraghty and her electability message never materialized and Jones used his fundraising and name ID advantage to bully her out of the race in a matter of months. Jones went on to lose to GOP Rep. Mike Lawler in the general election by 6 points.

"People are going to talk themselves into it," said the operative.

The Democratic Primary

Rutinel's strong start has placed pressure on all of the other potential candidates. Despite being a relative unknown, he raised \$1 million in just six weeks, including \$500,000 in his first 48 hours, surprising even Caraveo's allies.

While the primary is not for more than a year (June 30, 2026), that puts the candidates waiting for Caraveo to decide one way or another in a tough spot. Jump in before Caraveo and risk ruffling feathers — as Rutinel did, per Colorado Democratic sources — but wait too long and risk falling far behind Rutinel.



Courtesy Rutinel Campaign

Manny Rutinel

strong fundraising and compelling story. "She's well liked, well known, and would be the prohibitive favorite," said one Colorado Democrat, who noted that former nominees are hard to beat in primaries and former members even more so. Other sources are more skeptical that her campaign would be successful and believe that concerns over her ability to win a general election would help a different candidate win.

For his part, Rutinel is trying to make the most of his head start, stockpiling cash and leaning into his youth and energy at a time when Democrats are looking for leaders to aggressively confront Trump.

Rutinel has focused on his personal story and journey from donating plasma to pay his family's bills to graduating from Yale Law School, and economic inequality will be a central focus of the campaign. He'll also look to tap into Colorado's history of outdoorsmanship by highlighting the poor environmental track record of some of the district's companies, such as Suncor Energy, the Commerce city refinery that recently paid a record fine for pollution, and his success in passing an environmental justice law last year.

Continued on page 8

Continued from page 7

Rutinel’s allies believe that if Caraveo enters the race, she’ll have to face frustrations from Democrats in the district about her loss in 2024, and also assuage lingering frustrations about her vote to “strongly condemn” Biden and Harris on immigration while in Congress.

But Caraveo took those votes for a reason, her allies argue, and may make the case that Rutinel is too progressive to win the swing district and would be a general election risk. “She’s willing to buck her own party and put the district first,” said one Democratic source.

If Caraveo doesn’t run, party strategists see the field as wide open, though Rutinel would have significant momentum. Young has the deepest political ties and a base in Weld that no other candidate possesses, but will have to make the argument that an older white man is the best fit for the diversifying district. Several candidates’ paths to victory may depend on what the field looks like, with multiple women, Hispanic hopefuls, and moderates jockeying for support.

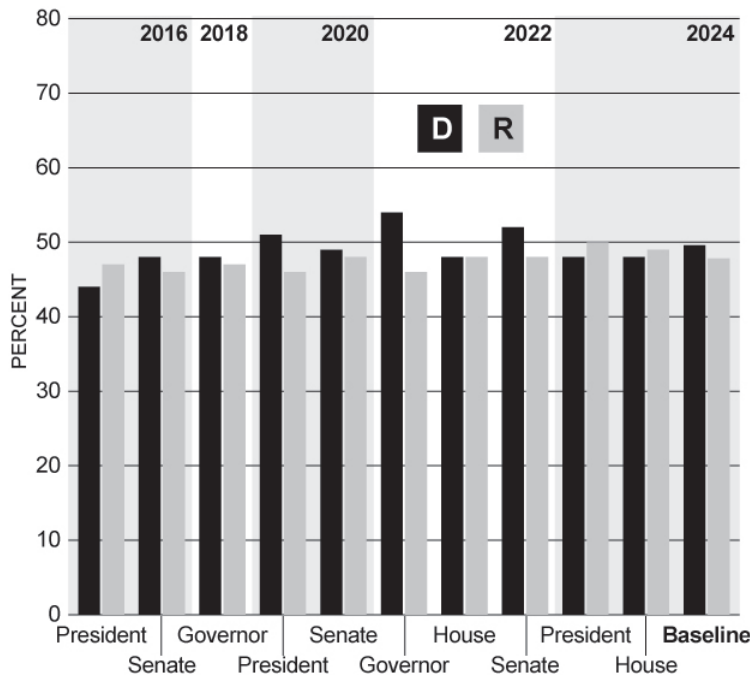
The General Election

Democrats see Evans as uniquely vulnerable on healthcare issues, pointing to his vote for the GOP budget plan earlier this year that would require significant cuts to Medicaid. Roughly a quarter of the 8th District is currently covered by the program, and Democrats were eager to point out that Evans did not sign a letter from several Hispanic House Republicans warning against cuts.

While Caraveo made her work treating Medicaid recipients a central component of her 2022 campaign, her 2024 messaging focused more on economic issues. If she runs in 2026, healthcare may once again take center stage, says one ally, who also pointed to a reward from the conservative-leaning American Farm Bureau Federation that Caraveo received late in the cycle in 2024.

Republicans believe their playbook against Caraveo worked last time, when they hammered her for a vote she took to reduce penalties

Statewide Election Results in Colorado’s 8th District



for fentanyl possession in 2019 (she later voted to reverse that bill) and Evans leveraged his background as a police officer to call out Democrats for high crime and homelessness in the Denver area.

If Rutinel is the nominee, Republicans are eager to litigate his stances on fossil fuels given the district’s large oil and gas industry, and also believe that they can use his Yale degree, animal rights activism (he has protested for veganism in a pig costume and also wearing nothing but a sign), and recent arrival to the state to paint him as an out-of-touch coastal elitist — a contrast to the crime-focused rhetoric of Evans.

Rutinel’s allies anticipate those attacks and believe the Democrat can insulate himself by introducing himself early, establishing his working class bona fides with his life story, and highlighting his background as an economist for the U.S. Army. Rutinel will also seek to assure voters he’s a market capitalist and that he’s not interested in pushing his views on veganism onto others.

How It Plays Out

One question Evans and all Republicans will have to answer next year is how to turn out the Trump coalition when Trump is not on the ballot.

In particular for this district, Trump’s improvement over his 2020 performance came largely from improvement among Hispanic voters. One source told *Inside Elections* that Harris underperformed Biden among Hispanics by 20 points, carrying heavily Hispanic areas by 12 points after Biden won them by 32 percent.

Caraveo also saw some slippage among Hispanic voters from 2022 to 2024, though won a higher portion than Harris did. Her performance among white voters essentially stayed the same. Democrats have hope that newly Trump-friendly Hispanic voters won’t turn out as much in a midterm year, and so a slightly whiter electorate may actually benefit the Democratic candidate.

Republicans, meanwhile, are going to work hard in the off-year to consolidate the gains they made in 2024 and motivate lower-propensity voters to show up even when Trump is not on the ballot.

Two other questions remain unanswered: what will the political environment look like, and who will make the ballot?

The less popular Trump is, the stronger any Democratic candidacy will be in the district (true across the country). But if Republicans cannot mount credible campaigns for Senate and governor, there may be additional top-of-ticket pressure on Evans, who benefited from Trump winning the district last year. If statewide Democrats carry the 8th, Evans will need to look for crossover votes — new territory for the freshman.

And given the narrow margins this district has produced, the presence of third-party candidates could be determinative. Republicans were successful in keeping a Libertarian off the ballot in 2024 but two other candidates still combined for nearly 3 percent of the vote.

The Bottom Line

One of 2024’s closest races is already shaping up to be one of 2026’s most competitive. Democrats have much to sort through in their primary but are eager to take on Evans, who they believe is a top target.

Republicans are hoping to solidify gains among working class Latinos in the district and regain a foothold in the Centennial State.

If this race is close on Election Day, Republicans have a fighting chance at holding their House majority. But if the cycle shifts against Republicans in response to GOP overreach or a sour mood of the country, evenly-divided districts could be in the first tier of races to shift toward the Democrats.



Report Shorts

Arizona’s 7th District Special. Gov. Katie Hobbs scheduled a July 15 primary and September 23 special election to replace the late Rep. Raúl Grijalva. No major candidates have announced their intention to run yet, but state Secretary of State Adrian Fontes is considering a bid. Grijalva’s daughter, Adelita Grijalva, is a Pima County commissioner and could run, as could former state Rep. Daniel Hernandez, who lost a Democratic primary for the neighboring 6th District in 2022. Tucson Mayor Regina Romero ruled herself out.

Florida’s 1st District Special. Democratic nominee Gay Valimont told the *Pensacola News-Journal* she had raised \$6.7 million in her campaign to replace former Rep. Matt Gaetz in the April 1 special election. That would be a strong total for a top-tier House candidate, but Valimont is running in a district that Trump won in 2024 by 38 points over



Jimmy Patronis

Courtesy Office of Chief Financial Officer

Vice President Kamala Harris. Her opponent, former state chief financial officer Jimmy Patronis, is the overwhelming favorite to win the seat. But Valimont and 6th District Democratic nominee Josh Weil have launched aggressive fundraising efforts and have pitched their races as a chance for Democrats to win back the House majority next month.

Florida’s 6th District Special. Democratic nominee/teacher Josh Weil said he raised \$10 million for his long-shot race against GOP nominee/state Sen. Randy Fine in the race to replace Trump National Security Advisor Mike Waltz. Trump finished ahead of Vice President Kamala Harris by 30 points in 2024, 65-35 percent, so Fine has been the considerable favorite ahead of the



Randy Fine

Courtesy Florida Senate

April 1 special general election. There’s been no major activity by GOP groups on defense or Democratic groups on offense that would point to this being a serious race. And it’s unclear how much of Weil’s money is being spent on communicating with voters, rather than just spending money to raise more money. But the fundraising totals are hard to ignore. The district sits south of Jacksonville on the Eastern Coast of Florida and extends south to Daytona Beach.

Republicans need to elect Fine in the 6th and Jimmy Patronis in the 1st District (the seat previously represented by Republican Matt Gaetz) as soon as possible to give Speaker Mike Johnson two more votes on the Hill and to make room for the confirmation of New York Rep. Elise

Stefanik as the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. Then her 21st District will be vacant until that special election is complete.

Florida’s 13th District. Former Democratic nominee Whitney Fox appeared at a local townhall meeting in Clearwater that was meant to highlight the early actions by the Trump administration and the absence of GOP Rep. Anna Paulina Luna. Fox, who lost to Luna by nearly 10 points in 2024, hasn’t been considered a likely candidate to run again, so her appearance is notable, although she “sidestepped” a question about a rematch, according to WTSP in Tampa.

The dream candidate for Democrats is John Kirby, the retired admiral who served as Biden’s national security spokesman. But Kirby has rebuffed recruitment efforts in years past. Trump received 55 percent in the district in 2024, so it’s a reach for Democrats unless the political environment shifts against the GOP.

Illinois Senate. Lt. Gov. Julianna Stratton would have the support of Democratic Gov. J.B. Pritzker in a race to replace Democratic Sen. Dick Durbin, if the senator decides not to run for re-election, according to *Politico*. Since Illinois is such a Democratic state and there hasn’t been an open Senate seat in 20 years, other Democrats wouldn’t certainly take a look at the race. But Pritzker’s personal and financial support would be significant.

Continued on page 10

Harris District Republicans

| District | Member | 2024 Member Vote | 2024 Harris Vote |
|----------|-------------------|------------------|------------------|
| NE-02 | Don Bacon | 51% | 52% |
| NY-17 | Mike Lawler | 52% | 49.9% |
| PA-01 | Brian Fitzpatrick | 56% | 50% |

Trump District Democrats

| District | Member | 2024 Member Vote | 2024 Trump Vote |
|----------|-------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| TX-28 | Henry Cuellar | 53% | 53% |
| ME-02 | Jared Golden | 50% | 54% |
| MI-08 | Kristin McDonald Rivet | 51% | 50% |
| NY-03 | Tom Suozzi | 52% | 52% |
| OH-09 | Marcy Kaptur | 48% | 53% |
| WA-03 | Marie Gluesenkamp Perez | 52% | 50% |
| TX-34 | Vicente Gonzalez | 51% | 52% |
| NM-02 | Gabe Vasquez | 52% | 50% |
| NJ-09 | Nellie Pou | 51% | 49% |
| CA-13 | Adam Gray | 50% | 51% |
| CA-09 | Josh Harder | 52% | 49% |
| NC-01 | Don Davis | 49.5% | 51% |
| NV-03 | Susie Lee | 51% | 49.5% |

Continued from page 9

Michigan. While rumors are floating around Washington, D.C. attaching former Rep. Andy Levin to either the 10th or 11th districts, the progressive Democrat told *Inside Elections* that he's actually being encouraged to run in *five* different races: the two congressional districts, and the open races for Senate, governor, and attorney general. Levin lost a contentious member vs. member primary for the 11th District in 2022 to Haley Stevens, but most of his old territory is in the 10th District.

Michigan Senate/Governor. Republican 2022 gubernatorial nominee Tudor Dixon says she is considering running for either governor or Senate next year. Both are open races. Rep. John James is seen as likely to run for governor, while 2024 Senate nominee/former Rep. Mike Rogers is moving toward another Senate bid. If Dixon can marshal support from President Trump or his allies, that would make her formidable in either GOP primary. But Republicans would probably prefer not to have her on the ticket after she lost the 2022 race by 10 points.

On the Democratic side, former South Bend, Ind. mayor/former Biden cabinet official Pete Buttigieg said he will not run for governor or Senate in Michigan next year.

New York's 4th District. Former GOP Rep. Anthony D'Esposito is lining up a rematch with Democratic Rep. Laura Gillen in a very competitive district, according to *Semafor*. But it's not a certainty, and D'Esposito could still land a job in the Trump administration. Gillen won the 2024 race by 2 points in a race where Harris received just 50 percent, so the seat is a focus for both parties. If D'Esposito doesn't run, Hempstead Town Supervisor Don Clavin (who beat Gillen to earn that spot in 2019) and state Sen. Patricia Canzoneri-Fitzpatrick are two names to watch.



Laura Gillen

Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call

Nebraska's 1st District. Former independent Senate candidate Dan Osborn floated a bid for the 1st District after months of teasing a potential run in the more Democratic 2nd District. In an interview with the *Nebraska Examiner* acknowledged the difficulty an independent would have in 2nd District if Democrats fielded a candidate against Rep. Don Bacon, as looks likely. In the 1st District, Rep. Mike Flood hosted a rare GOP town hall and was met with a raucous crowd that pressed him on standing up to Trump and Elon Musk.

New Jersey's 7th District. Former Democratic Rep. Tom Malinowski is considering a challenge to GOP Rep. Tom Kean Jr. Malinowski defeated Kean by 1 point in 2020 and Kean defeated Malinowski by nearly 3 points in 2022. The incumbent then defeated Sue Altman by 5 points in 2024 while Trump finished ahead of Harris but failed to crack 50 percent. This race is likely to be competitive no matter what Malinowski.

Texas' 18th District Special. A potential interesting Democratic primary is brewing between local officials who have been considered rising stars. Harris County District Attorney Christian Menefee and former Houston



Courtesy Amanda Edwards

Amanda Edwards

City Councilwoman Amanda Edwards are running to replace Democratic Rep. Sylvester Turner. Turner died on March 5, the day after attending Trump's speech to the joint session of Congress. Edwards lost to Rep. Sheila Jackson-Lee, 60-37 percent, in the March 2024 primary, but Jackson-Lee passed away that July and Turner was eventually elected to replace her. It's a very Democratic Houston-area seat, so the Democratic primary is the most important race, but the seat remains vacant until the special election is complete.

City Councilwoman Amanda Edwards are running to replace Democratic Rep. Sylvester Turner. Turner died on March 5, the day after attending Trump's speech to the joint session of Congress. Edwards lost to Rep. Sheila Jackson-Lee, 60-37 percent, in

Wisconsin's 3rd District. 2024 Democratic nominee Rebecca Cooke is making a third attempt for this seat after falling a few points short of Republican Derrick Van Orden last year. Cooke also ran in 2022 and lost the primary, but should have a clear path to the nomination this time.

2026 Governor Ratings

Battleground

Democratic-held (8D)

Hobbs (D-Ariz.)
 KS Open (Kelly, D)
 ME Open (Mills, D)
 MI Open (Whitmer, D)
 NM Open (Lujan Grisham, D)
 Hochul (D-N.Y.)
 Shapiro (D-Penn.)
 Evers (D-Wisc.)

Republican-held (3R)

GA Open (Kemp, R)
 Reynolds (R-Iowa)
 Lombardo (R-Nev.)

Solid Democratic (10D)

CA Open (Newsom, D)
 CO Open (Polis, D)
 Lamont (D-Conn.)
 Green (D-Hawaii)
 Pritzker (D-Ill.)
 Moore (D-Md.)
 Healey (D-Mass.)
 Walz (D-Minn.)
 Kotek (D-Ore.)
 McKee (D-R.I.)

Solid Republican (15R)

AL Open (Ivey, R)
 AK Open (Dunleavy, R)
 Sanders (R-Ark.)
 FL Open (DeSantis, R)
 Little (R-Idaho)
 Pillen (R-Neb.)
 Ayotte (R-N.H.)
 OH Open (DeWine, R)
 OK Open (Stitt, R)
 SC Open (McMaster, R)
 TN Open (Lee, R)

2025 RACES

Tilt Democratic

VA Open (Youngkin, R)

Lean Democratic

NJ Open (Murphy, D)

Rhoden (R-S.D.)
 Abbott (R-Texas)
 Scott (R-Vt.)
 WY Open (Gordon, R)