

Inside Elections

with
Nathan L. Gonzales
Nonpartisan Analysis

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Pennsylvania 7: Long Road Ahead in the Lehigh Valley

By Jacob Rubashkin

With Republicans clinging to a narrow House majority, Pennsylvania's 7th District is on the frontline of the GOP's battle to maintain control. A perpetual bellwether held by a freshman Republican, the 7th is close to a must-win for Democrats next year.

But the diverse district presents hurdles that mirror the larger challenges the Democratic Party faces across the country: how to stop the bleeding among Hispanic voters, solidify gains in wealthy and growing suburbs, and finally regain a foothold among white blue collar workers.

Ryan Mackenzie, in his third run for Congress, overcame a five-to-one fundraising disadvantage to oust three-term Democrat Susan Wild in one of 2024's closest races. His win was one of three closely watched House races in Pennsylvania that broke against Democrats, along with the commonwealth's all-important Senate and presidential contests.

Now Mackenzie finds himself at the center of attention, with no upcoming presidential or Senate races in the Keystone State. And Democrats are already talking about his evenly divided seat as a top five pickup opportunity.

Said one Democrat: "It's a tall order to flip the House without this seat."

The Lay of the Land

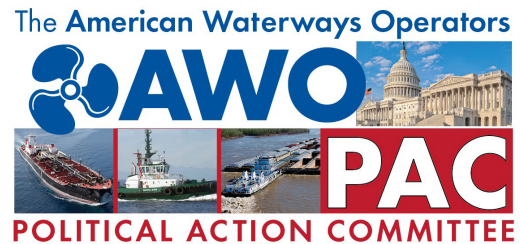
The 7th District sits in Pennsylvania's Lehigh Valley, bordering the Delaware River to the east. Nearly all of the district's votes are cast in Lehigh (46 percent) and Northampton (43 percent) counties; Carbon County casts an additional 9 percent and there's a sliver of Monroe County.

The district is majority-white (66 percent) and 21 percent Hispanic; Allentown, the 7th's largest city, is majority-Hispanic (Puerto Rican and Dominican).

The district has a prominent manufacturing sector, which employs 14 percent of the workforce compared to 10 percent nationwide, and also has a strong warehousing and trucking industry. Mack Trucks, Crayola,

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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-Meeks, 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 (Open; 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 (Suozzi, D)
IN 1 (Mrvan, D) OR 5 (Bynum, D)
MN 2 (Craig, DFL) TX 28 (Cuellar, D)
NH 1 (Open; 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)

OH 1 (Landsman, D)
OH 9 (Kaptur, D)
OH 13 (Sykes, D)

	GOP	DEM
Solid	180	176
Likely/Lean/Tilt	23	31
Total	203	207
Toss-up	10	
Ohio map TBD	15	
Needed for majority	218	

CALENDAR

June 10	New Jersey Gubernatorial Primary
July 15	Arizona's 7th Special Election Democratic Primary
Nov. 4	Texas' 18th District Special Primary
Nov. 4	New Jersey & Virginia Gubernatorial Elections
Dec. 9	Texas' 18th District Special Runoff (if necessary)

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Report Shorts

Colorado's 4th District. Navy Rear Admiral Eileen Laubacher filed to run against GOP Rep. Lauren Boebert. Laubacher, who also served on Biden's White House National Security Council, has a difficult road in a district Trump carried by 18 points in 2024. But Boebert typically underperforms, so the race is worth keeping an eye on. Solid Republican.

Georgia Senate. State Insurance Commissioner John King joined Rep. Buddy Carter in the Republican race to take on Democratic Sen. Jon Ossoff. Other Republicans, including businessman Clark Dean, could enter the race now that Gov. Brian Kemp ruled out a run. Much to Democrats' dismay, Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene is not running for the Senate. Battleground.



Buddy Carter

Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call

Illinois Senate. Reps. Robin Kelly and Raja Krishnamoorthi officially joined Lt. Gov. Juliana Stratton in the Democratic race to replace Democratic Sen. Dick Durbin, who is not seeking re-election. It remains to be seen whether Rep. Lauren Underwood will join them, but this should be one of the most competitive Democratic primaries in the country. Solid Democratic.

Illinois' 2nd District. State Sen. Robert Peters is running for the open seat currently held by Democratic Rep. Robin Kelly, who is running for the Senate. Other potential candidates include Cook County Commissioner Donna Miller, state Sen. Napoleon Harris and Chicago Alderman Anthony Beale. Considering Harris finished ahead of Trump by 33 points in 2024, the Democratic primary is the most important race. Solid Democratic.

Iowa Governor. Democratic state Auditor Rob Sand and GOP Rep. Randy Feenstra entered the race, giving both parties a high profile

2026 Senate Ratings

BATTLEGROUND

Democratic-Held (4)

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

Republican-Held (2)

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

Solid Democratic (9)

- IL Open (Dick Durbin, D)
- John Hickenlooper (D-Colo.)
- Chris Coons (D-Del.)
- 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)

- KY Open (McConnell, R)
- 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.)
- 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.)

candidate in the contest to replace Republican Kim Reynolds, who is not seeking re-election. Sand is off to a strong fundraising start and is likely to be the Democratic nominee while other Republicans such as state Attorney General Brenna Bird could still enter the race. Rep. Zach Nunn is a potential candidate while Rep. Ashley Hinson ruled herself out and is likely waiting for Chuck Grassley to retire. Feenstra represents the most Republican district in the state. Battleground.

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Maine Governor. Renewable energy company founder Angus King III is running for governor. He's the eldest son of independent Senator/former governor Angus King. He'll face Maine Secretary of State Shenna Bellows and potentially Rep. Jared Golden and former state Senate President Troy Jackson in the Democratic primary. Democratic Gov. Janet Mills is term-limited and not planning to challenge GOP Sen. Susan Collins. Former GOP Gov. Paul LePage is running in the 2nd District. Battleground.

Michigan's 11th District. Former GOP Rep. Dave Trott is considering a comeback, but as a Democrat or independent, according to the Detroit News. Trott did not seek re-election in 2018 and Democrat Haley Stevens won the open seat. Now Stevens is leaving her seat to run for the Senate and the field to replace her is still taking shape. State Sen. Jeremy Moss is running, and former Rep. Andy Levin, who lost to Stevens in the 2022 Democratic primary, is another potential candidate. Solid Democratic.



Dave Trott

Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call

Minnesota's 2nd District. DFL state Sens. Matt Klein and Matt Little have entered the race for Rep. Angie Craig's open seat. On the Republican side, 2020/2022 nominee Tyler Kistner launched his campaign on Thursday and could be joined in the race by 2024 nominee Joe Teirab and 2024 candidate Tayler Rahm. Craig is running for the Senate. Lean Democratic.

New Hampshire's 1st District. Hannah Trudo, a former reporter for The Hill newspaper, announced she's exploring a run for the open seat being left behind by Democrat Chris Pappas, who is running for the Senate. Trudo would run as a Democrat and face Iraq War veteran Maura Sullivan in the primary. Sullivan lost to Pappas in the 2018 primary. Lean Democratic.

New Jersey's 7th District. St. Peter's University Professor Beth Adubato is the latest Democrat to file against GOP Rep. Tom Kean Jr. A handful of other Democrats, including Navy veteran Rebecca Bennett, are already in the race. Adubato is a Rutgers graduate, criminal justice professor in Jersey City and the daughter of former Dallas Mavericks and New York Liberty coach Richie Adubato. Tilt Republican.

Ohio Governor. Former Ohio State head football coach/Lt. Gov. Jim Tressel is considering a run for governor. 2024 presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy is already running and was endorsed by President Donald Trump and the state party. Amy Acton is running on the Democratic side but former Rep. Tim Ryan is considering the race and Akron-area Rep. Emilia Sykes might look at statewide options if Republicans redraw her congressional seat to be unwinnable for a Democrat. Solid Republican.

2026 Governor Ratings

Battleground

Democratic-held (8D)

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

Republican-held (3R)

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

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)
FL Open (DeSantis, R)
OH Open (DeWine, R)
OK Open (Stitt, R)
SC Open (McMaster, R)
TN Open (Lee, R)
WY Open (Gordon, R)
Sanders (R-Ark.)
Little (R-Idaho)
Pillen (R-Neb.)

2025 RACES

Tilt Democratic

VA Open (Youngkin, R)

Lean Democratic

NJ Open (Murphy, D)

Ayotte (R-N.H.)
Rhoden (R-S.D.)
Abbott (R-Texas)
Scott (R-Vt.)

Texas Senate. Sen. John Cornyn faces a tough primary against state Attorney General Ken Paxton, according to a poll released by a Cornyn ally. Paxton led Cornyn 56-40 percent, according to an April 27-May 1 Tarrance Group survey for Senate Leadership Fund, which is supporting the incumbent. Paxton has some significant baggage and has been a close ally of Trump. Republicans in the Texas Senate acquitted Paxton on 16 impeachment charges alleging that he abused power to protect a political donor. The Lone Star State has been steadfastly Republican, and Democrats haven't won a Senate race in Texas since 1988, but the combination of a damaged nominee and midterm political environment working against Republicans, could make the race competitive once again. Solid Republican.

Virginia's 11th District. Democratic Rep. Gerry Connolly announced that his cancer has returned and he won't seek re-election. Considering Harris finished ahead of Trump by 34 points in this Northern Virginia seat outside of Washington, D.C., plenty of Democrats will take a look at the race. Former Connolly chief of staff James Walkinshaw is running and quickly collected endorsements from Connolly and former Northern Virginia Rep. Jennifer Wexton; state Sen. Stella Pekarsky is also running. When the neighboring 10th District was open last cycle, 12 Democrats faced off in the primary. Solid Democratic.

IE

Arizona 7 Special: The Tussle in Tucson

By Jacob Rubashkin

When Raúl Grijalva died on March 13 after a battle with lung cancer, he left his sprawling southern Arizona congressional district vacant, and Democrats down a crucial vote in the House of Representatives.

The seat will be filled via a special election, but Arizona law slows the process down considerably, so the earliest 7th District residents will regain representation is in late September, more than six months after the progressive twelve-term congressman passed away.

However, the 7th's partisan lean means that the next member will be decided months earlier, on July 15 in the Democratic primary.

That fast-approaching contest features two longtime fixtures of Tucson Democratic politics. One of them, Adelita Grijalva, is the late congressman's daughter, who has followed her father's footsteps from a local school board to the county commission and now potentially to Congress.

If Grijalva wins, she'll become one of just eight House members whose father was also a member of Congress, but just one of two to have directly succeeded them in office.

The Lay of the Land

The 7th District spans nearly the full length of Arizona's southern border with Mexico, from Yuma east to the Coronado National Forest. The district extends north from the border to encompass the western half of Tucson and some suburbs west of Phoenix.

Thirty-nine percent of the 7th's residents live in Tucson proper, while another 20 percent live in the greater metro area. Most of the rest of the population either lives in the Yuma (16 percent) or Phoenix (15 percent) metro areas.

The 7th is predominantly Hispanic at 60 percent; another 29 percent are non-Hispanic White. Nearly all of the Hispanic population is Mexican by origin, and half of households are bilingual with English and Spanish.

The median household income in the 7th is \$61,000, the lowest among Arizona districts, and just 22 percent of residents have a bachelor's degree (compared to 33 percent statewide).

Politically, the 7th is heavily Democratic, voting for Kamala Harris by 22 points in 2024 and Ruben Gallego by 30 points in the Senate race. The late Rep. Grijalva won his final re-election, 63-37 percent.

The vast majority of Democrats cast their ballots by mail in Arizona. In the uncompetitive 2024 primaries, upward of 90 percent of Democratic voters statewide cast their ballots before Election Day.

The 7th also has a lower voter turnout rate than most other districts in the state; 62 percent of registered voters cast ballots in the 2024 general election, compared to a statewide rate of 78 percent.

The Democratic Candidates

Three notable Democrats are running: the younger Grijalva, former state Rep. Daniel Hernandez, and social media influencer Deja Foxx. Two others, Patrick Harris and Jose Maldivo, will also appear on the ballot. But local and national strategists say it's a two-person race between Grijalva and Hernandez.

Grijalva, 54, was raised in Tucson and graduated from the University of Arizona in 1995. She worked at the Pima Prevention Partnership, a nonprofit that helps underserved youth, leading the organization's Teen Court, a diversionary justice program for minors. She held that position

until winning her supervisor election.

In 2002, she won her first of five terms on the Tucson Unified School District board, securing one of two at-large spots with 27 percent of the vote in the nonpartisan race. She won re-elections in 2006 (38 percent), 2010 (30 percent), 2014 (19 percent) and 2018 (25 percent).

In 2020, Grijalva ran for an open seat on the Pima County Board of Supervisors, the five-member body that governs the million-strong county. In the Democratic primary, she faced Sunnyside Unified School District board member Consuelo Hernandez, the sister of then-Rep. Daniel



Courtesy Grijalva Campaign

Adelita Grijalva

Hernandez. Grijalva won, 67-32 percent, and won the general election, 73-26 percent. In 2024 she won an easy re-election, 73-26 percent. Her district covered roughly half of the 7th's voting population.

Her campaign team includes media

consultant Colin Rogero of Conexion and pollster Jill Normington of Normington Petts. DJ Quinlan of Radar Strategies is handling direct mail.

Hernandez, 35, served three terms in the state legislature but is best known for his role responding to the shooting of then-Rep. Gabby Giffords in 2011. An intern at the time, Hernandez was the first to reach Giffords after she was shot and stanced her bleeding with his hands. In the aftermath, he received national news coverage and was honored by President Barack Obama at the State of the Union. Just 20 years old at the time, Hernandez wrote a book about the experience and his hardscrapple upbringing.

Still a student, Hernandez was approached in summer 2011 about running for the local Sunnyside Unified School District board. He ran and won, 63-37 percent; after surviving a recall attempt in which opponents circulated homophobic mailers, Hernandez was named board president in 2014.

Hernandez left the University of Arizona a credit short of graduating (a minor controversy early in his political career), but later completed his undergraduate degree in 2020 and earned a masters in legal studies in 2023.

In 2016, Hernandez ran for a state House seat, winning one of two seats in a multi-member district that included southeast Tucson and Santa Cruz County and ousting a GOP incumbent. He placed first with 35 percent, followed by the incumbent Democrat with 34 percent and the GOP incumbent with 30 percent; Hernandez was the only openly gay member of the state House at the time and cofounded the LGBTQ caucus.

Hernandez won wider re-elections in 2018 and 2020, placing first in both fields with 29 percent and 37 percent, respectively.

In 2022, Hernandez sought the Democratic nomination to succeed retiring Rep. Ann Kirkpatrick in the 6th District, which also includes parts of Tucson and Arizona's southeastern corner. He lost that primary to state Rep. Kirsten Engel, 59-35 percent.

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Since then, Hernandez has worked for education advocacy fund Stand for Children. He previously worked for several different left-leaning advocacy groups in the 2010s, such as Everytown for Gun Safety, Leadership for Educational Equity, Planned Parenthood, and Swing Left.

His campaign team includes media consultant Josh Wolf of AL Media, pollster Molly Murphy of Impact Research, and direct mail consultant Josh Grossfeld of Agency.

Foxx, 25, is a social media influencer and Democratic operative who worked for the Harris presidential campaigns in 2019 and 2024. A 2022 graduate of Columbia University, Foxx was raised by a single mother in Tucson and experienced homelessness and poverty growing up. After graduation Foxx worked for Democratic 501(c)4 group ACRONYM, which produces digital content for Democratic causes.

Foxx, who was a ubiquitous presence at the 2024 DNC in Chicago, focuses on reproductive rights on her social media pages, where she has several hundred thousand followers. As a teenager she served on the board of Planned Parenthood Arizona's board and founded a networking group for Gen Z women.

Her campaign team includes manager James Sonnemann, a Texas-based operative who also worked as the Harris campaign's North Carolina director.

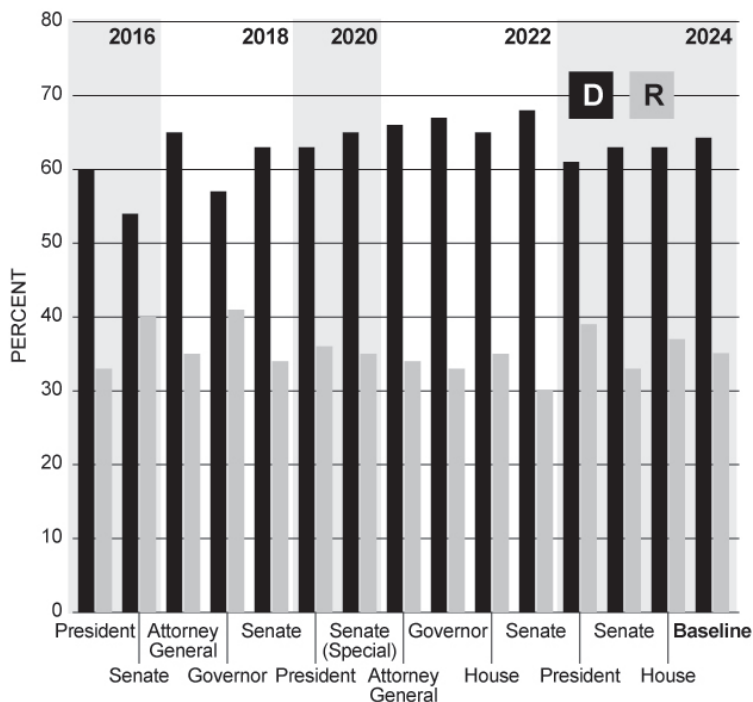
The Democratic Primary

The July 15 Democratic primary is the most important contest in the district, with the winner a shoo-in for the Sept. 23 general special election. Mail ballots will hit inboxes starting on June 18.

Grijalva begins the primary as the clear favorite, according to Democratic strategists following the campaign.

Her late father, who held elected office for 50 years in Tucson, is still very popular in the district — unlike in the similarly vacant Texas' 18th

Statewide Election Results in Arizona's 7th District



District, where some voters now chafe at the late Sheila Jackson Lee and Sylvester Turner's decisions to run for the seat despite their health issues (both died in office within the last year). Grijalva's last name gives her credibility even among voters who don't know much about her, and she doesn't shy away from capitalizing on the legacy, telling the *Arizona Mirror* that she's running because the district "deserves the bold leadership that they've had with my dad for the last 22 years."

Her own time in elected office makes her a familiar figure in local political circles, especially on education and environmental issues where she's sought to make a name for herself distinct from her father.

Grijalva has already rallied much of the state's political leadership around her candidacy.

Sens. Ruben Gallego and Mark Kelly have both backed her campaign,



Deja Foxx

as has Giffords — a notable endorsement due to her history with Hernandez. Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, Tucson Mayor Regina Romero, and Phoenix Mayor Kate Gallego have also backed her. Grijalva spoke at Sanders' nationwide

tour with New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez last month, and secured an endorsement from EMILY's List, notable as the pro-choice group will often sit out races with multiple women running.

Hernandez is not without his own strengths. He is the fundraising leader, announcing he had raised \$505,000 through the beginning of May. Hernandez was the only candidate to file a quarterly campaign finance report ending on March 31, which showed a haul of \$326,000 and \$295,000 in cash on hand. Grijalva, who filed her committee on the first day of the new quarter, told the *Arizona Republic* she had raised \$400,000 through the beginning of May. Foxx did not disclose a fundraising total.

Hernandez has also assembled his own formidable list of local endorsements, including several state legislators and former Nogales Mayor Marco Lopez. He has the backing of the American Federation of Teachers and the Amalgamated Transit Union, and LGBT rights groups such as Equality PAC and Victory Fund.

He also begins the race with significant name ID thanks to his turn as a national celebrity 15 years ago, his time in the state legislature, and his 2022 congressional campaign. Roughly 10 percent of the 7th District's voters live in Hernandez's old state legislative district. But that hasn't translated into an early advantage.

A Public Policy Polling survey sponsored by the Grijalva campaign conducted in early April found Grijalva ahead of Hernandez by 38 points, 49-11 percent, with Foxx at 5 percent. Hernandez's allies are clear-eyed about the steep climb the former legislator faces though quibble with the specifics of the poll, which was fielded before campaigning began in earnest.

For now, Hernandez's supporters are taking inspiration from two other upset victories in Arizona politics, both in downtown Phoenix. In 2014, Ruben Gallego, then a young state legislator, won the primary to succeed venerable Rep. Ed Pastor against Mary Jo Wilcox, an trailblazing Latina politician who had racked up endorsements from Pastor

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and other Democratic leaders. Gallego's superior ground game and fundraising ability proved crucial to his victory. A decade later, the race to succeed Gallego saw Yassamin Ansari, a city councilwoman, narrowly defeat state Rep. Raquel Teran, who had endorsements from Kelly, Grijalva, Sanders and other progressives. Ansari, who received support from pro-Israel group DMFI, also had a fundraising advantage.

None of those races featured the specific familial dynamics of this one. But as with Gallego and Ansari, hustle — working the phones, doors, and mailboxes — is key to Hernandez's path to victory as an underdog.

That scrappy mindset dovetails with Hernandez's overall goal in the campaign: to present himself as a fighter best suited to take on Trump and Elon Musk

in Washington, DC while still delivering wins for the district on the economy and protecting Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid.

In addition to highlighting his upbringing in a struggling family dependent on Medicaid for survival, his campaign has said it will mention Hernandez's efforts to curb gun violence and provide additional funding for schools in the wake of school shootings.

But with a fast-approaching primary, that may not be enough for Hernandez to make up all the ground he needs to, especially because he's already well-known and well-liked by the highly engaged special primary voters who may just prefer Grijalva more.

"This is fundamentally a testament to how difficult a position Daniel is in, even though he's running a fine campaign," said one Democrat.

"It's going to be hard to change the minds of people who are hyper-attentive," said another Democratic strategist, commenting on the unique nature of the special election electorate. "They know the Grijalva family, they read every piece of mail, they're in every Facebook community. They're hard people to move, they either know you and love you or they remember what you did in high school."

How It Plays Out

Like many other Democratic primaries developing this year, ideology appears to be less of a fault line than willingness and ability to fight against Trump. While the AP once wrote Hernandez "developed a moderate profile as one of a handful of Democrats who occasionally cross the aisle to work with Republicans, sometimes to the frustration of more progressive members of his party" and in endorsing him this year, a SMART union leader called him "very moderate," Hernandez doesn't embrace the label and his allies bristle at its application.

Hernandez isn't aiming to run as the centrist to Grijalva's progressive, and is prepared to use his time spent working for Giffords and Planned Parenthood to burnish his bona fides, say allies.

"In this type of race," said one national strategist following the contest, "you don't litigate the candidate, you litigate everyone being pissed off at Washington, DC."

This race is not the first in which the Grijalvas and the Hernandez siblings (self-named "the Hernandi") have been at odds, and the rift



Daniel Hernandez

Courtesy Hernandez Campaign

between the two families goes back at least a decade to when Daniel Hernandez worked to oust a school superintendent favored by Grijalva's political operation. More recently, Adelita Grijalva defeated Hernandez's sister Consuelo in the 2020 Pima supervisor race (Consuelo was later elected to the state House) and in 2022, when Daniel Hernandez ran for Congress the first time, Grijalva endorsed his primary opponent, Engel, breaking with the Congressional Hispanic Caucus's BOLD PAC. Days before Raul Grijalva's death, Alma Hernandez took to social media to complain that the congressman's illness had left the district "without representation for over a year."

There's also a beef with Tucson Mayor and longstanding Grijalva ally Romero, who Alma Hernandez has assailed as anti-Semitic in the wake of the October 7 attack on Israel and the war in Gaza (Hernandez and her sister converted to Judaism, while Daniel has not).

Israel issues play a complex role in the primary election. Mideast policy is unlikely to come up during the campaign, say allies of both major candidates, and it's not a salient issue for voters in the district who care more about cost of living and Trump. But it has already had an effect on the race's financial landscape, and has the potential to further upend the contest if pro-Israel outside groups get involved.

Hernandez is one of the most vocally pro-Israel Democrats, and has said that he has been a Zionist "since fifth grade." He often compares himself to New York Rep. Ritchie Torres, another gay Hispanic Democrat who often speaks out against his own party on Israel issues and has endorsed his campaign.

Raul Grijalva was more outspoken about Palestinian rights; he called for a ceasefire a month into the Gaza war, was one of eight Democrats to vote against additional funding for the Israeli Iron Dome missile system in 2021, and was an original co-sponsor of a 2017 Palestinian rights bill.

Adelita Grijalva has a less pronounced record. She voted in favor of a pro-Israel resolution in the days after October 7 but lamented that the resolution did not include discussion of "peace and humanitarian aid" for Gazans. One pro-Grijalva Democrat who also supports Israel pointed out that the younger Grijalva actually visited Israel in 2009 on an AIPAC-funded trip for Latino leaders.

Hernandez credits his early fundraising success to his support for Israel, telling *Jewish Insider* that "it is a lot easier to invest in a champion right now, in an open seat and special election in July...than having to go after and unseat an incumbent who is anti-Israel."

But the bigger prize would be if Hernandez can coax a pro-Israel super PAC into spending on his behalf, most likely either DMFI (where Alma Hernandez sits on the board) or the AIPAC-affiliated United Democracy Project. The two groups spent a combined \$60 million on primary races in 2022 and 2024 to defeat opponents of Israel such as New York Rep. Jamaal Bowman, Missouri Rep. Cori Bush, and two dozen others in safe Democratic districts across the country.

TV advertising in Tucson is inexpensive and even a modest (by UDP standards) investment could flood the zone with pro-Hernandez messaging. But both groups told *Jewish Insider* they were undecided on the race, and Grijalva's advantages may keep them away.

"DMFI and UDP could get involved," said one strategist who supports Grijalva, "but they don't like wasting money."

"The Mark Kelly endorsement was a real shield against DMFI and AIPAC," said another national Democratic strategist not involved in the race, who said it sent a message to "stay away."

Hernandez may also receive outside support from Equality PAC,

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which backs LGBTQ candidates. While less deep-pocketed than the pro-Israel groups, Equality PAC has spent up to \$900,000 on individual primaries — a respectable sum in the inexpensive media market.

Hernandez does have a “red box” on his campaign site, which is a legal way of communicating to friendly super PACs what messages the campaign would like them to carry.

In it, he asks allies to air broadcast TV ads arguing that Grijalva “isn’t who Southern Arizona needs fighting back against the attacks from Donald Trump and Elon Musk.”

Notably, the red box warns allies to “avoid personal attacks” against Grijalva, a nod to the delicate situation surrounding her father’s death.

Grijalva’s allies are girding for the race to turn negative regardless. “The only pathway forward is for someone to take some serious wax to Grijalva” said one Democratic ally.

Hernandez and his allies have telegraphed hits on Grijalva’s record as county supervisor and school board member, including a 2009 vote she took to cut several hundred teaching positions from the school

district, and her support for a 2025 sales tax proposal in Tucson that city voters rejected, 70-30 percent.

But there is also an effort to head off the primary entirely by convincing Hernandez that he has no path to victory and pushing him to drop out. “There’s no ill will or desire to embarrass [him],” said one person familiar with that effort, “but he’s going to lose worse here than he’s ever lost before, which could impact his future.”

The Bottom Line

Special elections are notoriously difficult to predict, but early signs point to an edge for Grijalva and the durability of the late congressman’s legacy. Hernandez is a serious candidate who will have the resources to run a full-fledged race, but has significant hurdles to overcome in his second congressional bid.

Ultimately, whichever Democrat advances from the primary will be a much needed vote for the party already diminished due to deaths and other medical issues in its aging caucus. Unfortunately for Democrats, that vote won’t arrive until mid-September at the earliest. **IE**

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and industrial gas supplier Air Products are among the largest private employers in the district.

While Lehigh and Northampton are evenly divided politically — Lehigh voted for Harris by 3 points in 2024, Northampton for Trump by 2 points — Carbon and the Monroe portion vote overwhelmingly Republican.

Northampton in particular has a reputation as a bellwether county. Every presidential and gubernatorial candidate who has won Pennsylvania since 1968 has won Northampton County, which has also picked the overall presidential winner in all but three elections since 1912.

In 2024, Trump won the 7th District by 3 points, 51-48 percent. In 2020, Biden won it by 1 point, 50-49 percent, and in 2016 Trump would have won it, 49-47 percent.

In 2024, GOP Senate candidate Dave McCormick won the district by 2 points, 50-48 percent, though in 2022 Democrat John Fetterman won the 7th, 51-46 percent. In 2018, Sen. Bob Casey won the 7th by 10 points, 54-44 percent, but in 2016 GOP Sen. Pat Toomey carried it, 50-46 percent.

The Republican Incumbent

Mackenzie, 42, is in his first term representing the 7th District, though the Allentown native had several false starts before making it to Congress.

After graduating from New York University in 2004, Mackenzie worked in real estate and as a political staffer before stints at the U.S. Department of Labor and as the policy director for the Pennsylvania Department of Labor. He received an MBA from Harvard in 2010.

In April 2012, Mackenzie ran in a special election to a state House seat just south of Allentown, winning 60-40 percent. Later that year, he held onto the redrawn version of his seat by a similar margin even as GOP



Ryan Mackenzie

Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call

presidential nominee Mitt Romney only carried it by 12 points, according to calculations by *The Downballot*.

After winning re-election in 2014 and 2016 unopposed, in late 2017 Mackenzie announced he would run for Congress to succeed Rep. Charlie Dent, who was not seeking re-election to the 15th District, which then stretched from Lehigh County west to the outskirts of Harrisburg.

But the state Supreme Court tossed out Pennsylvania’s congressional map and instituted a new plan, which renumbered the Lehigh-based district the 7th and made it more Democratic. While the old 15th voted for Trump by 3 points, the new 7th would have voted for Clinton by 1 point. Citing the change, Mackenzie dropped his bid and ran for re-election to the state House, easily defeating Lower Macungie Commissioner Ron Beitler in the GOP primary, 71-29 percent, and winning the general election 57-43 percent.

In 2020, Mackenzie won a fifth full term, 60-40 percent, as Trump won his district, 52-47 percent. That year, he and his mother Milou Mackenzie became the first mother-son duo to serve in the state House together as she was elected to a nearby seat.

In late 2021, Mackenzie flirted with another run for Congress, setting up a campaign committee and commissioning a poll, but ultimately opted against it to run for another term in the state legislature. Due to redistricting, he faced fellow state Rep. Gary Day in the GOP primary, which he won, 61-39 percent, and won the general election unopposed.

In 2024, Mackenzie finally made it to primary day, and with a boost from outside group Americans for Prosperity Action he won the GOP nomination with 43 percent over veteran Kevin Dellicker (34 percent) and attorney Maria Montero (23 percent).

Mackenzie’s general election fight against Rep. Susan Wild was among the most expensive and competitive in the country. Outside groups poured nearly \$30 million into the race. Democratic outside groups spent more than their GOP counterparts, \$15 million to \$12 million, and Wild’s campaign outspent Mackenzie 5-to-1 overall.

But Trump carried the district by 3 points over Harris and Mackenzie pulled off a mild upset, winning 50.5-49.5 percent in the seventh-closest race of the cycle.

In Congress, Mackenzie serves on the Homeland Security, Education

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and Workforce, and Foreign Affairs committees.

His campaign team includes general consultant Jason Ercole of Pathfinder, which is also handling direct mail, media consultant Brian Walsh of Red Elephant, and pollsters Dave Sackett and BJ Martino of the Tarrance Group.

The Democratic Candidates

Two Democrats have launched bids for the seat, but the field will likely grow over the summer. Northampton County Executive Lamont McClure Jr. and Carol Obando-Derstine, an executive at PPL Electric Utilities, are both in the race. Former federal prosecutor Ryan Crosswell is putting together a bid as well.

McClure, 54, is finishing his second term as county executive. The 1992 graduate of Wilkes University and 1995 graduate of Duquesne Law School is the son of a longtime Carbon County public official and worked as an asbestos lawyer at the firm of Orioles owner Pete Angelos. He arrived in Northampton County in 2000 to manage John Morganelli's unsuccessful state attorney general campaign and quickly entered the local political scene.

A 2001 bid for Northampton County Council never got off the ground. In 2005, McClure placed ninth out of ten candidates vying for five at-large spots on the council with 9 percent, but was appointed to fill a vacancy on the board several months later.

He beat a perennial candidate 78-22 in the 2007 Democratic primary and won a close general election by 91 votes (1.2 percent) despite outspending his opponent 40-to-1.

In 2011, McClure faced race car driver/future 17th District GOP nominee Matt Connolly in the general election and won another close race, by 109 votes (1.3 percent).

McClure sought the Democratic nomination for county executive in 2013, staking his campaign on his successful effort to save Gracedale, a county-owned nursing home, from being sold to a private company. He placed third, with 22 percent, behind Bethlehem Mayor John Callahan (50 percent) and former County Executive Glenn Reibman.

In 2017, McClure ran unopposed for the county executive nomination and faced incumbent Republican John Brown in the general election, winning 54-46 percent.

McClure won a second term in 2021, 56-44 percent, against personal trainer Steve Lynch. The GOP nominee courted controversy: Lynch had attended the January 6, 2021 rally in Washington, DC in a bulletproof vest, and in a viral clip at a local school board meeting, he threatened to bring "20 strong men" to remove board members if they didn't reverse a mask mandate.

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Episode 44: Trump, Tariffs, the Economy and Elections with Laura Weiss of Punchbowl News

McClure's campaign team includes media consultant Jon Vogel of MVAR, pollster Elizabeth Sena of GQR, and Michael Davies of GDA Wins for direct mail.

This is Obando-Derstine's first run for office, though the Colombian-born former utility executive has worked in Pennsylvania politics for more than a decade. After immigrating as a child to New Jersey, Obando-Derstine graduated from Rutgers in 1999 and received a masters in community psychology from Penn State in 2002.



Carol Obando-Derstine

Courtesy Obando-Derstine Campaign

After graduate school, Obando-Derstine worked in youth career and educational development, first at SkillsUSA, then at Northampton Community College, and finally at the Children's Coalition of the Lehigh Valley

advocacy group.

From 2011 to 2016, Obando-Derstine worked as a Latino affairs staffer for then-Sen. Bob Casey, and then shifted to working for PPL, the Fortune 500 utility company headquartered in Allentown.

While she began as a regional affairs manager, with responsibilities that included running the corporation's charitable foundation, in 2022, she received an engineering masters degree from Lehigh University and began working as an engineer supervisor.

Obando-Derstine's campaign team includes media consultant Ken Snyder of Snyder Pickirell, pollster Ethan Smith of Upswing Research, digital fundraiser Geoff Mackler of Blueprint Interactive, and Fiona Conroy of Deliver Strategies for direct mail. All four previously worked for Wild's campaign.

Crosswell, 44, made national headlines earlier this year when he resigned from the Department of Justice's Public Integrity Division in protest of the decision to drop corruption charges against New York City Eric Adams.

A native of Pottsville, which sits outside the district, Crosswell graduated Vanderbilt in 2003 and Duke Law School in 2007. He joined the Marine Corps in 2006 and served as a lawyer until 2011. After a 3-year stint in private practice in North Carolina, Crosswell worked as an assistant US Attorney in Louisiana and California until 2020, when he joined "Main Justice" in Washington, DC.

In 2025, top DOJ officials ordered the Southern District of New York to drop its corruption case against Adams. After those attorneys refused and several resigned, DOJ leadership pressured Crosswell's team to sign the motion instead. Several refused and resigned as well, including Crosswell, who wrote a public letter explaining his decision and later testified at a hearing held by congressional Democrats.

Crosswell now works for a San Diego-based law firm but moved back to Pennsylvania and has assembled a campaign team in advance of an expected summer launch. His media consultant will be Anson Kaye of GMMB.

The Democratic Primary

The primary will be held in just over a year, on May 19, 2026.

Neither McClure or Obando-Derstine enter the primary as favorites,

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say Democratic strategists watching the race who also don't see either candidate as endangering the party's chances in the general election.

Like many other developing Democratic primaries this cycle, there may not be a lot of ideological daylight between the candidates. For now, Democratic primary voters appear laser-focused on who can fight back against Trump and Republicans in Congress.

For McClure, that means highlighting his efforts to keep nursing home Gracedale in county hands, standing up for open spaces, and framing his work as an asbestos attorney as a career standing up to corporate interests on behalf of workers.

He has secured some significant local endorsements, from unions such as the Philadelphia and Lehigh Valley Building Trades, the Lehigh Valley Labor Council, and IBEW Local 375. And his early entrance helped him lock up political support from many local elected officials in the district.

"McClure's reputation has been as a union Democrat," said one local source. "He's played the blue collar Democrat card in a party that's struggling with a lot of those members right now."

"Nobody's ever said he's someone to watch for running statewide," said a longtime Democratic operative. "He just quietly goes about his business, but from what I do understand, he is willing to fight, he will not hold back."

He's also been on the primary ballot for half of the Democratic voters in the district every four years since his first bid for county executive in 2013, and enters the primary with a political base that outpaces his opponent.

Obando-Derstine has never run for office before and is politically untested, but some Democratic strategists believe she has more potential upside than McClure, a more known quantity.

Like McClure, she comes from a working class, union family and her allies say she'll draw upon her time spent training workers in the Lehigh Valley, and as an engineer at PPL, to speak to working class issues in the district.

"She ran one of the biggest nonprofits in the Lehigh Valley, ran a head start program, ran an after school program," said one ally. "She knows firsthand about how these families living on the economic edge are going to get hurt."

Her endorsement from Wild is important in a Democratic primary (even if Republicans will seek to make it an albatross in the general election) but more valuable may be the former member's email fundraising list with more than half a million small-dollar donors collected over six years, which she passed along to Obando-Derstine.

Wild had quietly become one of the strongest Democratic fundraisers in the House, but it's an open question if Obando-Derstine can recreate her success, even with her list and the same consulting team.

Her next fundraising report, due July 15, will be closely watched as a result, and a strong showing could elevate her position in the race, especially given McClure's first quarter. The Northampton executive raised just \$118,000 in his first five weeks in the race, plus a \$24,000 personal contribution.



Lamont McClure

Courtesy McClure Campaign

That's a slower pace than nearly any other Democrat in a top-tier 2026 race — 11 of the 14 Democrats running in targeted races who filed a report at the end of March reported raising close to double that amount or more. That's raised some eyebrows among national Democrats.

Historically, though, winning a primary in the district doesn't require a ton of money. The priciness of the Philadelphia media market puts broadcast TV out of the question for most campaigns, which spend more on direct mail, radio, and field. Mackenzie spent just \$150,000 to win the GOP primary in 2024. In 2018, Wild spent \$234,000 to win her first primary.

But if Obando-Derstine significantly outraises McClure it could give her some momentum heading into next year, and make her more attractive to national Democrats.

Obando-Derstine's allies are also optimistic that as the only woman in the race she will benefit from Democrats' preference for women House candidates ever since 2018, when the number of women winning Democratic nominations nearly doubled, and that being Hispanic will help her draw an even sharper contrast with her opponents.

"Having a candidate who can stand out from hours and hours of political ads is important," said one Obando-Derstine ally. "She's a dynamic, impressive, exciting young woman who meets the moment," said another.

Obando-Derstine's allies also believe she'll be better-positioned to win over the district's Hispanic voters, who have become considerably more Republican. While one strategist said that was more of a general election consideration, maximizing her vote share in the primary and pushing the electability argument will be an important part of her path to victory.

There's also lingering tension between Wild and McClure, say local and national sources, stemming from his decision to run for the seat before the former congresswoman had decided against it. "She is not at all a fan of his and has made that very well known in DC," said one senior Democrat.

"There's a lot of bad blood between Wild and McClure," said a longtime local political observer. "McClure jumped out really early, without even talking to Wild about it." "Wild was still deciding and he just started going," said a Pennsylvania Democratic operative.

That bad blood seems to have played a role in Wild's aggressive recruitment of Obando-Derstine.

Crosswell is a wildcard in the primary, but neither McClure's nor Obando-Derstine's allies seem to be sweating his entry at the moment. His lack of ties to the district or the Lehigh Valley, his only-recent switch to the Democratic Party, and his four years working for Trump's first administration are all challenges he'll have to overcome in convincing Democratic primary voters he is the best candidate to take on Republicans in Congress.

On paper, though, his profile resembles Democratic candidates from recent years who have quickly become favorites among national grassroots donors. His military service and high-profile break with the Trump administration could help him raise money.

The General Election

Democrats are optimistic about beating Mackenzie this year, given his narrow victory in 2024 and an expected midterm backlash to Trump and the GOP.

National and local Democratic strategists believe that Mackenzie was swept in on Trump's coattails and without Trump on the ballot — and with Shapiro potentially giving Democrats a tailwind — the district will be one of their best pickup opportunities in the country.

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Looming GOP votes on Medicaid will feature heavily in Democratic messaging, with the potential for cuts already motivating Democratic attacks on Mackenzie in the press.

The ongoing uncertainty on tariffs could also play an outsized role in the district given the importance of industry and logistics to the local economy. Mack Trucks recently announced layoffs at their factory in the district, and the trucking industry and shipping industry is bracing for slowdowns.

"The tariffs will play poorly in the district," said one Republican from the region not involved in the race. "If Mackenzie needs to separate from Trump on any issue it needs to be on these tariffs."

For now, Republicans are holding out hope that any economic pain caused by the tariffs is forgotten by the time the election arrives next year.

Mackenzie also faces a similar challenge to other vulnerable House incumbents: how to motivate the Trump coalition to vote when Trump isn't on the ballot. "If we get our voters to show up we're going to win," said one national GOP strategist. "But our voters are now the voters who don't show up [in midterms]."

"He wrapped himself around the MAGA movement, which helped with the Trump base but is not going to do him any good in a midterm election," said the Lehigh Valley Republican. But national strategists are less likely to agree; one told *Inside Elections* Mackenzie has "no need to put distance between himself and Trump."

For now, Mackenzie isn't allowing daylight between himself and Trump, who endorsed the freshman Republican for re-election last week. And he's using his time in Congress to introduce legislation on paid family leave and increasing the child tax credit that he hopes will help him create a fiscally focused brand in the district.

"Mackenzie's ability to win was less about a particular county and more about overperforming in suburban areas," said one ally of the congressman, who noted that Mackenzie actually overperformed Trump in his home base of Macungie and Lower Macungie and other suburban towns between Allentown and Bethlehem such as the Saucons, represented by his mother.

If there's one area where national strategists see the need for improvement, it's fundraising. Mackenzie raised \$1.7 million for the general election in 2024. "Picking up on the fundraising would be beneficial," said one Republican. Another Mackenzie ally noted that the \$673,000 he raised in the first three months of 2025 shows he will outpace his 2024 fundraising significantly.

Republicans are also eager to litigate immigration issues against either Democrat. Mackenzie has already clashed with McClure over the county executive's 2020 order requiring ICE to produce a judicial warrant to arrest someone on county property. And Republicans delighted in Obando-Derstine sharing a stage with a failed candidate for local office who spoke at a recent Bernie Sanders rally and said "F— ICE."

For Democrats, winning back Hispanic voters is integral to reclaiming the

district. In majority-Hispanic Allentown, Democrats have seen their margins slip considerably over the past eight years. Clinton won Allentown by 42 points in 2016, Biden won it by 35 percent in 2020, and Harris won it by just 23 points in 2024. In Wild's 2020 and 2022 races, she carried Allentown by 36 points, 68-32 percent. In 2024, she won it 64-35 percent, outrunning Harris by 6 points but still failing to meet her previous mark.

And Democrats can't ignore the Carbon and Monroe parts of the district. Though they only cast 9 percent of the overall vote, Mackenzie's massive margins there were enough to propel him to victory even as he lost both larger counties.

Overall, the fight for the 7th has all the makings of one of 2026's top House races. The evenly divided district is likely to attract serious outside investment. In 2024, the four major independent expenditure groups spent a combined \$21 million on the district, the fifth-most of any district. Spending could surpass that next year, as the Philly airwaves will be far less crowded with no presidential or Senate race taking place (in 2024, those two races accounted for \$330 million in TV spending over the last five months of the election).

The Bottom Line

There are still plenty of unanswered questions surrounding the race for Pennsylvania's 7th District. Who will be the Democratic nominee, what will the effects of this year's tariffs be on next year's economy, can Republicans successfully motivate their new coalition without Trump on the ticket, and what will Trump's standing be among the American people?

But there is no question about where this district sits on the larger House battlefield. Not only is it Democrats' best chance at a pickup in Pennsylvania, it's one of their most promising anywhere in the country. Democrats need a net gain of just three seats to reclaim the majority but are defending several vulnerable members of their own, so the path to House control may well run through the Lehigh Valley next fall.

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Statewide Election Results in Pennsylvania's 7th District

