

Inside Elections

With Nathan L. Gonzales

AUGUST 6, 2026 VOLUME 10, NO. 15

2026 Senate Ratings

Toss-up (1)

MI Open (Peters, D)	
Tilt Democratic (3)	Tilt Republican (3)
NC Open (Tillis, R)#	IA Open (Ernst, R)#
NH Open (Shaheen, D)	Collins (R-Maine)
Ossoff (D-Ga.)#	Husted (R-Ohio)
Lean Democratic	Lean Republican (2)
	TX Open (Cornyn, R)#
	Sullivan (R-Ak.)
Likely Democratic (1)	Likely Republican (2)
MN Open (Smith, DFL)	Graham (R-S.C.)
	Ricketts (R-Neb.)
Solid Democratic (9)	Solid Republican (14)
IL Open (Durbin, D)	AL Open (Tuberville, R)
Booker (D-N.J.)	KY Open (McConnell, R)
Coons (D-Del.)	LA Open (Cassidy, R)
Hickenlooper (D-Colo.)	MT Open (Daines, R)
Lujan (D-N.M.)	OK Open (Armstrong, R)
Markey (D-Mass.)	WY Open (Lummis, R)
Merkley (D-Ore.)	Capito (R-W.V.)
Reed (D-R.I.)	Cotton (R-Ark.)
Warner (D-Va.)	Hagerty (R-Tenn.)
	Hyde-Smith (R-Miss.)
	Marshall (R-Kan.)
	Moody (R-Fl.)
	Risch (R-Idaho)
	Rounds (R-S.D.)

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

CALENDAR

Aug. 6	Tennessee Primary
Aug. 8	Hawaii Primary
Aug. 11	Connecticut, Minnesota, Vermont and Wisconsin Primaries
Aug. 11	South Carolina Senate Special GOP Primary
Aug. 18	Alaska, Florida, Wyoming Primaries
Aug. 25	South Carolina Senate Special GOP Runoff
Sept. 1	Massachusetts Primary
Sept. 8	New Hampshire, Rhode Island Primaries



Independents' Day: Third-Party and Independent Candidates to Watch

By Inshara Ali

Possibly the most interesting story of the 2026 midterms may not be a candidate at all. It's a decision several Democratic candidates have made not to be one.

In Nebraska, South Dakota and Idaho, Democratic Senate candidates have withdrawn from their own races to clear the field for independents challenging GOP incumbents — and the Democratic nominee in Montana is facing pressure to do the same. Democratic leaders in conservative states seem to be testing an unconventional theory: that an independent can win where a Democrat can't.

That approach looks reasonable considering a surge of Americans identifying as political independents reaching 45 percent in 2025, according to Gallup. The candidate field reflects it: 47 independents have run in Senate races and 170 in House races this cycle, fueled by a mix of President Donald Trump's unpopularity and Democrats' own branding struggles.

Of course, independents aren't the only ones scrambling the usual math. There are several third-party candidacies — in the shape of protest bids and newer parties like Colorado's Forward Party — that could draw enough support to hand some races to a major party nominee with less than a majority of the vote.

There are at least two categories of third-party and independent candidates: Those who could win and those who could be potential spoilers. Nebraska offers the clearest test case of the first category, where Democrats decided an independent had a better shot of winning than they did.

Dan Osborn (Nebraska Senate)

In Nebraska, Democratic nominee Cindy Burbank withdrew after winning the primary, leaving independent Dan Osborn as the main challenger to GOP Sen. Pete Ricketts in the general election. (A Legal Marijuana Now candidate will also appear on the ballot.)

Osborn, a mechanic and Navy veteran, first ran for the Senate in 2024 and lost to incumbent Republican Deb Fischer 53-47 percent — a close result that marked the strongest performance by an independent Senate candidate in Nebraska history. The labor leader drew statewide attention leading the 77-day strike at Kellogg's Omaha plant as the president of Bakery, Confectionery, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union Local 50G.

The state Democratic party has endorsed Osborn despite the conservative stance on immigration he took during his 2024 run. That year, he ran ads offering to help Trump construct a border wall, and

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Governor Report Shorts

Kansas. Open; Laura Kelly (D), term-limited. State Senate President Ty Masterson won the Republican nomination with 43 percent with the help of President Donald Trump's endorsement and will look to win what may be the best opportunity for Republicans this year to flip a governorship. He defeated a crowded field of opponents including businessman Philip Sarnecki (22 percent), and state Insurance Commissioner Vicki Schmidt (14 percent) and Secretary of State Scott Schwab (11 percent).



Ty Masterson

Courtesy Masterson Campaign

Despite having the backing of much of the state's Democratic establishment including Gov. Laura Kelly and former Gov. Kathleen Sebelius, state Sen. Ethan Corson lost the Democratic primary to fellow state Sen. Cindy Holscher, 49-39 percent. Overland Park Mayor Curt Skoog finished in third with 13 percent. Even though this cycle is a good Democratic environment, Kansas is still a Republican state, and Holscher has to prove she has what it takes to defy the partisan gravity. Shift from Toss-up to Tilt Republican.

Michigan. Open; Gretchen Whitmer (D), term-limited. Rep. John James won the Republican primary over wealthy "quality guru" Perry Johnson, 50-35 percent. James had struggled to pull away for much of the race, but received a boost when Trump endorsed him last month. After that, state Senate Minority Leader Aric Nesbitt and former state Attorney General Mike Cox ended their campaigns and endorsed James. The Democratic primary had less drama, with Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson comfortably defeating Genesee County Sheriff Chris Swanson, 83-17 percent. Michigan is a swing state, but this isn't a neutral political environment. Tilt Democratic.

Glengariff Group Inc., July 22-24 (600 LV)— General election ballot: Benson over James, 44% - 39%.

Iowa. Kim Reynolds (R), not seeking re-election. Democratic state Auditor Rob Sand currently leads Republican Zach Lahn, the

question is whether Republicans can make up all the ground in the final three months. But right now, data at the statewide, congressional, and state legislative level point to Democrats' first victory in 20 years. Move from Toss-up to Tilt Democratic.

Emerson College, Aug. 2-4 (712 LV)(online panel/text-to-web)— General election ballot: Sand over Lahn 48% - 43%.

Beacon Research (D)/Shaw & Co. Research for Fox News, June 23-27 (1,003 RV) (multimodal)— General election ballot: Sand over Lahn 53% - 44%.

South Dakota. Larry Rhoden (R), assumed office January 2025. Rhoden emerged victorious in the Republican primary runoff with 71 percent, with political newcomer Toby Doeden capturing 29 percent. It's a remarkable turnaround from the initial primary, when he finished second with just 25 percent, five points behind. This marks Rhoden's first run for governor on his own, as he ascended to the governor's office when Kristi Noem left to join the Trump administration. Rhoden will take on former Democratic state Sen. Dan Ahlers in the general election, but a Democratic candidate has not been elected to the office of governor in over 50 years. Solid Republican.

Texas. Greg Abbott (R), elected 2014 (59%), 2018 (56%), 2022 (55%). Abbott is still the heavy favorite against state Rep. Gina Hinojosa, thanks to the GOP lean of the state and the incumbent's \$67 million war chest as of July 1. But with neither candidate on the airwaves, this race has gotten closer over the summer. Abbott may be getting the message: his campaign is set to begin advertising on TV next week. Hinojosa doesn't have the resources to keep pace, with just \$3 million in the bank, but she'll benefit from Senate nominee James Talarico's efforts to boost Democratic turnout. And with no campaign finance limits, any megadonor could make Hinojosa competitive financially with the stroke of a pen. Move from Solid Republican to Likely Republican.

Texas Southern Univ., July 27-30 (1,200 LV)(text-to-web)— General election ballot: Abbott over Hinojosa, 49% - 43%, Pat Dixon (L) 3%.

Beacon Research (D)/Shaw (R) for Fox News, July 23-27 (1,005 RV) (live caller/text-to-web)— General election ballot: Abbott over Hinojosa, 50% - 49%.

Slingshot Strategies (D) for Texas Public Opinion Research, July 15-17 (1,048 LV)(online panel)— General election ballot: Abbott over Hinojosa, 45% - 42%.

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Senate Report Shorts

Georgia. Jon Ossoff (D), elected 2020 (51%). Ossoff has maintained a healthy polling lead over GOP Rep. Mike Collins throughout the summer, and had a 21-1 cash-on-hand advantage over the Piedmont congressman on June 30. Georgia retains Republican DNA even as it has shifted left in recent years, and even if he can't juice his fundraising, Collins will benefit from free-spending gubernatorial nominee Rick Jackson's get-out-the-vote efforts. But



Jon Ossoff

Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

Ossoff is in the driver's seat with less than three months to go, as Republicans are left wondering if Trump's network of super PACs will spend to help Collins make up the difference. After the Libertarian Party failed to gain ballot access for the general election, Ossoff and Collins will be the only two options in front of voters in November, eliminating the possibility of a December runoff. Move from Toss-up to Tilt Democratic.

Fabrizio Ward (R)/Impact Research (D) for AARP, July 13-16 (1,060 LV)(live caller/text-to-web)— General election ballot: Ossoff over Collins, 52% - 43%.

Beacon Research (D)/Shaw (R) for Fox News, June 23-27 (1,002 RV)(live caller/text-to-web)— General election ballot: Ossoff over Collins, 56% - 43%.

Iowa. Open; Joni Ernst (R), not seeking re-election. Iowa continues to be fertile ground for Democrats up and down the ballot. A well-funded top-of-ticket campaign by state Auditor Rob Sand in the gubernatorial race is helping motivate Democrats, but Trump's tariff policies and the unpopularity of Ernst and outgoing Gov. Kim Reynolds aren't helping Republicans either. State Rep. Josh Turek is polling neck and neck with Rep. Ashley Hinson, and is even beating her in her home district, the Republican-leaning 2nd, according to some private polling. Turek needs to raise more money — he trailed Hinson in cash-on-hand, \$6.7 million to \$2.3 million, on June 30 — but this race has come online for Democrats. Move from Lean Republican to Tilt Republican.

Beacon Research (D)/Shaw (R) for Fox News, June 23-27 (1,003 RV)(live caller/text-to-web)— General election ballot: Turek over Hinson, 50% - 46%.

New York Times/Siena University, June 15-27 (600 LV)(live caller)— General election ballot: Hinson over Turek, 48% - 46%.

Cygnal (R) for Iowans for Tax Relief, June 16-19 (600 LV)(live caller/text-to-web)— General election ballot: Hinson over Turek, 46% - 44%.

Kansas. Roger Marshall (R), elected 2020 (53%). United Methodist pastor Adam Hamilton will be looking to put this race on the map now that he has emerged from the Democratic primary. He won with 35 percent of the vote in a surprisingly crowded field and will face Marshall in November. Former USDA official Christy Davis finished in second with 14 percent followed by Army veteran Noah Taylor (13.5 percent). Though some Democrats may still feel burned from six years ago when they believed this seat was winnable only to lose by 11

points, Kansas isn't too much redder than some of the other states like Alaska and Iowa that they are targeting. Solid Republican.

Michigan. Open; Gary Peters (D), not seeking re-election. It was a nailbiter in the Wolverine State. The Democratic establishment in Michigan and D.C. pulled out all the stops for Rep. Haley Stevens in the final weeks of this long and contentious primary — endorsements from Peters and Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and a record-breaking flurry of outside spending — but Stevens narrowly lost to progressive former Wayne County health official Abdul El-Sayed, 48.5-47.5 percent. Even though it's a significant victory, the result will feel somewhat disappointing for progressives, who had hoped for more of a statement win as late polling showed El-Sayed leading by 10 points or more. Nevertheless, El-Sayed now advances to a high-stakes general election against former congressman/2024 Senate nominee Mike Rogers.

While Republicans are excited to face a more progressive Democrat, Rogers still has work to do. Despite having the GOP field to himself and



Abdul El-Sayed

Courtesy El-Sayed Campaign

Democrats being bitterly divided for months, Rogers has been stuck at between 42-46 percent in general election matchups. Even against El-Sayed, Rogers was at 44 percent, 45 percent and 46 percent in recent

polls taken over the last month. One Glengariff survey, which showed him ahead 49-39 percent, looks like an outlier. Rogers received 48.3 percent in 2024 in what was a better political environment for Republicans compared to 2026.

Having proven that a progressive candidate can win over Democratic primary voters in a swing state, El-Sayed has to show he can connect with a wider electorate in a race that is a must-win for Democrats to have a shot at a Senate majority in November. Considering Trump's poor political standing in Michigan and nationwide, we're not immediately changing our rating of the race. Toss-up.

Mitchell Research & Communications, July 28-29 (672 LV)(text-to-web)— General election ballot: Rogers and El-Sayed tied at 45%.

Epic-MRA for Michigan Information & Research Service, July 24-31 (600 LV) — General election ballot: Rogers over El-Sayed, 46% - 43%.

Glengariff Group, July 22-24 (600 LV) – General election ballot: Rogers over El-Sayed, 49% - 39%.

North Carolina. Open; Thom Tillis (R) not seeking re-election. While former Gov. Roy Cooper probably won't win by the wide margins he's enjoyed in early polling, he's in the driver's seat with less than three months to go. Cooper leads in fundraising, sporting a \$21 million to \$3.5 million advantage over former RNC chairman Michael Whatley at the end of June, and congressional district-level polling suggests Cooper hitting his benchmarks across the state. Whatley's allies have long maintained that his support will increase as he introduces himself to the state, but a recent Fox News poll found 86 percent

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of North Carolina voters had an opinion of him (an earlier New York Times survey found just 58 percent of voters had an opinion). Either way, Whatley hasn't hit 45 percent in a single poll this cycle. Republicans will be heavily invested in Whatley. The Senate Leadership Fund has reserved \$71 million in advertising for the fall and recently began a \$17 million ad campaign, and GOP operatives anticipate this race will be a priority for MAGA Inc. and other Trump-run super PACs. But it's clear that Republicans need that money to change the trajectory of the race. Move from Toss-up to Tilt Democratic.

Beacon Research (D)/Shaw (R) for Fox News, July 23-27 (1,005 RV) (live caller/text-to-web)— General election ballot: Cooper over Whatley, 53% - 44%.

Public Policy Polling (D), July 10-11 (759 LV)— General election ballot: Cooper over Whatley, 48% - 44%.

New York Times/Siena Univ., June 15-27 (601 LV)(live caller)— General election ballot: Cooper over Whatley, 50% - 43%.

South Carolina. Darline Graham (R), appointed 2026. Special Republican Primary Aug. 11. Runoff (if necessary) Aug. 25.

Graham is working overtime to introduce herself to voters who have little idea where the newcomer stands politically. Graham has sponsored several pro-life bills and signed onto the SAVE America Act in her first weeks in Congress, and expressed her complete support for Trump's agenda at a GOP primary debate earlier this week. Polling suggests Graham is likely to be forced into a runoff two weeks after the primary's first round. Any of three other opponents might join her: Reps. Ralph Norman and Russell Fry, and former Gov. Mark Sanford, making his fourth political comeback attempt of the decade. It's not clear if the Democratic nominee, pediatrician Annie Andrews, will be able to capitalize on a late and messy GOP primary after Lindsey Graham's sudden death reset the race. Likely Republican.



Darline Graham

Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

co/efficient, July 28-30 (857 LV)(multimodal)— Republican special primary ballot: Graham 30%, Fry 16%, Norman 15%, Sanford 9%, Lynch 6%, Buckner 3%, McBride 1%, Parker 0%, Shepherd 0%.

Trafalgar Group (R), July 28-30 (989 LV)— Republican special primary ballot: Graham 27%, Fry 17%, Norman 17%, Sanford 15%, Lynch 8%, Shepherd 1%, Buckner 1%, McBride 0.4%, Parker 0.3%.

Emerson College for Nexstar, July 28-29 (500 LV)(text-to-web)— Republican special primary ballot: Norman 25%, Graham 23%, Fry 17%, Sanford 16%, Lynch 9%, Ford 3%, Buckner 2%, McBride 2%, Parker 1%, Shepherd 1%, Neilson 0%, Mitchell 0%.

Texas. Open; John Cornyn (R), lost primary runoff. State Rep. James Talarico continues to maintain a small polling lead over state Attorney General Ken Paxton, two months after Paxton clinched the GOP nomination over Cornyn. Republicans probably would have liked to see Paxton consolidate more GOP voters after a fractious primary by now. Paxton's fundraising has picked up moderately, but he still trails Talarico by a considerable gap and will need outside allies to

2026 Governor Ratings

Toss-up (2D, 1R)

GA Open (Kemp, R) Hobbs (D-Ariz.)
WI Open (Evers, D)

Tilt Democratic (1D, 1R)

IA Open (Reynolds, R)#
MI Open (Whitmer, D)

Tilt Republican (1D, 1R)

KS Open (Kelly, D)*
Lombardo (R-Nev.)

Lean Democratic (1D)

OR (Kotek, D)

Lean Republican (1R)

OH Open (DeWine, R)

Likely Democratic (4D)

ME Open (Mills, D)
NM Open (Lujan-Grisham, D)
MN Open (Walz, DFL)
Hochul (D-N.Y.)

Likely Republican (2R)

AK Open (Dunleavy, R)
Abbott (R-Texas)#

Solid Democratic (9D)

CA Open (Newsom, D)
CO Open (Polis, D)
Green (D-Hawaii)
Healey (D-Mass.)
Lamont (D-Ct.)
McKee (D-R.I.)
Moore (D-Md.)
Pritzker (D-Ill.)
Shapiro (D-Penn.)

Solid Republican (12R)

AL Open (Ivey, R)
FL Open (DeSantis, R)
OK Open (Stitt, R)
SC Open (McMaster, R)
TN Open (Lee, R)
WY Open (Gordon, R)
Ayotte (R-N.H.)
Huckabee Sanders (R-Ark.)
Little (R-Idaho)
Pillen (R-Neb.)
Rhoden (R-S.D.)
Scott (R-Vt.)

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

help him out as Election Day approaches. If the election were held today, Talarico might be the favorite. But he's also had the airwaves to himself for months, which won't be the case in the fall. Paxton also stands to benefit from GOP Gov. Greg Abbott's \$67 million campaign machine, which has yet to spin up serious operations around the state. Move from Likely Republican to Lean Republican.

Texas Southern Univ., July 27-30 (1,200 LV)(text-to-web)— General election ballot: Talarico over Paxton, 47% - 45%, Ted Brown (L) 2%.

Beacon (D)/Shaw (R) for Fox News, July 23-27 (1,005 RV)(live caller/text-to-web)— General election ballot, Talarico over Paxton, 51% - 48%.

Slingshot Strategies (D) for Texas Public Opinion Research, July 15-17 (1,048 LV)(online panel)— General election ballot: Talarico over Paxton, 45% - 40%, Brown (L) 1%.

Virginia. Mark Warner (D), elected 2008 (65%), 2014 (49%), and 2020 (56%). In the wake of their disastrous showing last fall, no credible Republicans were eager to mount an uphill challenge to Warner. Ultimately, retired Army Major General Bert Mizusawa won the primary with 51 percent, over 20 points ahead of his nearest competitor. After a close call in 2014, Warner rebounded to a 12-point victory in 2020 and is looking for another strong performance in November, which could approach Democratic Gov. Abigail Spanberger's 2025 margin. Solid Democratic.

House Report Shorts

Colorado's 3rd District. (Pueblo area and Western Slope) Jeff Hurd, R, elected 51%. Trump 54%. A Keating Research poll for the Dwayne Romero campaign found Romero trailing Hurd, 46-45 percent. Hurd's image was underwater as well. With Republicans facing a blowout at the top of the ticket with uncompetitive races for Senate and governor, this race is worth keeping an eye on. But Romero needs to raise more money: he effectively spent down to \$0 to win his primary while Hurd ended June with \$1.7 million. Likely Republican.

Keating Research (D) for Romero, July 21-23 (500 LV)(live caller/text-to-web)— General election ballot: Hurd over Romero, 46% - 45%.

Colorado's 5th District. (Colorado Springs area) Jeff Crank, R, elected 55%. Trump 53%. A Global Strategy Group poll for Jessica Killin found the Army veteran and former political staffer neck-and-neck with Crank, trailing 45-44 percent. The survey also found Democrat Phil Weiser ahead in the gubernatorial race, 44-42 percent, a sign that the GOP's candidate for governor, Victor Marx, may be a weight on down ballot candidates.



Jessica Killin

Courtesy Killin Campaign

Killin reported slightly more cash on hand at the end of June than Crank, \$1.6 million to \$1.5 million. Likely Republican.

Global Strategy Group (D) for Killin, July 16-21 (450 LV)— General election ballot: Crank over Killin, 45% - 44%.

Florida's 7th District. (Northern Orlando suburbs and part of Daytona Beach area) Cory Mills. Trump 56%. The embattled Mills is facing an ethics investigation surrounding allegations of financial impropriety and domestic violence. Local WOFL newscaster Ryan Elijah is running against Mills in the GOP primary and many Republicans are quietly hoping he takes care of the congressman before this district becomes a general election headache. Some of Mills' own colleagues have started to come off the sidelines as well: Reps. Anna Paulina Luna and Mike Haridopolos endorsed Elijah this week. Democrat Bale Dalton is the preferred pick of national Democratic strategists who like his military background and time at NASA. But former Rep. Alan Grayson, the wealthy political gadfly who has become a perennial candidate, is in the primary and advertising on TV. If the general election is Mills and Dalton, Democrats have a shot here. Likely Republican.

St. Pete Polls, August 3-4 (304 LV)(multimodal)— GOP primary ballot: Mills 30%, Elijah 14%, Ulrich 8%, Johnson 7%.

Florida's 8th District. (Cape Canaveral area) Mike Haridopolos. Trump 58%. Haridopolos and Democratic opponent Jennifer Jenkins, a former Brevard County school board member, both released internal polls showing the Republican ahead by 9 points. That's a healthy margin but reflects a significant drop from the district's

performance in 2024, when Trump won by 16 points, and 2022, when every statewide Republican won by at least 20 points. Both surveys also found Trump's image rating dead even in the district. While Haridopolos isn't vulnerable, polls like these underscore the difficult political environment the GOP faces this fall, even in friendly territory like Florida. Solid Republican.

Inquire LLC (R) for Haridopolos, July 27-29 (LV)— General election ballot: Haridopolos over Jenkins, 51% - 42%.

Public Policy Polling (D) for Jenkins, July 17-18 (RV)— General election ballot: Haridopolos over Jenkins, 44% - 35%.

Florida's 11th District. (Western Orlando suburbs and The Villages) Open; Daniel Webster, not seeking re-election. Trump 57%. Democratic attorney and lobbyist James Pericola released a poll conducted by MDW Communications showing a tied race with GOP candidate Joe Strada, one of several competing for the Republican nomination this month alongside former state Sen. Carey Baker, who is endorsed by Webster. Even though the district voted for Trump by 16 points, the poll showed the president's approval 1 point underwater. Solid Republican.

MDW Communications (D) for Pericola, July 28-29 (1044 LV)— General election ballot: Pericola and Strada tied at 42%.

Florida's 20th District. (North Lauderdale and parts of inland Fort Lauderdale) Vacant; Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick, D, resigned. Harris 68%. The Pro-Choice Majority Action super PAC, which spent to support Rep. Diana DeGette in Colorado's 1st District earlier this summer, is wading into the crowded Democratic primary to support Rep. Debbie Wasserman-Schultz with a \$250,000 ad buy. The super PAC is an affiliate of Elect Democratic Women, which took fire from some progressives earlier this year after receiving \$1 million from AIPAC's United Democratic Project. Wasserman-Schultz faces a crowded field that includes former Rep. Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick (who resigned from this seat earlier this year), organizer Elijah Manley, former Broward County Mayor Dale Holness, and 2 Live Crew rapper Luther Campbell. Solid Democratic.

Florida's 22nd District. (Inland Palm Beach and western suburbs to the Marco Island area across the Everglades) Lois Frankel, D, running in the 23rd District. Trump 55%. Pia Dandiya, the likely Democratic nominee, released a mid-June poll done by GQR showing her one point behind Republican Belinda Keiser. The district was redrawn to elect a Republican but with Trump's image rating 12 points underwater an upset is possible. Keiser is one of several wealthy Republicans running, along with 2020 19th District candidate Casey Askar and Michael Carbonara. All three have put several million dollars into their campaigns. Tilt Republican.

GQR for Pia Dandiya (D), June 18-25 (400 LV)— General election ballot: Keiser over Dandiya, 46% - 45%.

Florida's 24th District. (Inland Miami Beach area and western Hollywood) Open; Frederica Wilson, D. Harris 69%. The top three contenders to succeed Wilson are state Sen. Shevrin Jones,

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Miami-Dade Commissioner Oliver Gilbert, and Kendrick Meek, Jr., the son of former Rep. Kendrick Meek. Also running are former Miami-Dade commissioner Jean Monestime and physician Rudy Moise, who was previously running in the 20th. Solid Democratic.

St. Pete Polls, July 16-17 (303 LV)(live caller/SMS) —Democratic primary ballot: Gilbert 27%, Jones 24%, Meek 10%, Davis 1%, Moise 1%, Vereen 1%, Monestime 0%.

Iowa's 2nd District. (Northeastern Iowa) Open; Ashley Hinson, R, running for Senate. Trump 54%. If the election were today, it's not clear Hinson would carry the 2nd in the Senate race, so her candidacy might not be helping out former state Rep. Joe Mitchell as much as he'd like. Mitchell and Democratic nominee Lindsay James have raised and spent similar amounts of money so far, and there's increasing concern among Iowa Republicans that a whole swath of GOP-friendly seats at the House and state legislative level are vulnerable this cycle. Move from Likely Republican to Lean Republican.

Global Strategy Group (D) for House Majority PAC, July 14-19—General election ballot: James over Mitchell, 46% - 45%.

Iowa's 3rd District. (Des Moines and southwestern Iowa) Zach Nunn, R, re-elected 52%. Trump 52%. State Rep. Sarah Trone

Garriott ended June with more money in the bank than Nunn, and is at least tied in polling. Democrats up and down the ballot are benefitting from Rob Sand's strong gubernatorial campaign; if the election were today, Sand and Senate nominee Josh Turek would probably win the 3rd handily. That puts a lot of pressure on Nunn to find split-ticket voters. Move from Tilt Republican to Toss-up.



Sarah Trone Garriott

Courtesy Garriott Campaign

Indiana's 5th District. (Northern Indianapolis suburbs and part of central Indiana) Victoria Spartz, R, re-elected 57%. Trump 57%. State Sen. J.D. Ford only represents part of the 5th in the legislature, but he's hoping there are enough moderate Republican voters in the suburbs willing to support a Democrat this cycle. And Spartz has been one of Republicans' quirkier members. Still a long shot for Democrats but could get more interesting. Solid Republican.

Impact Research (D) for Ford, July 16-20 (400 LV)—General election ballot: Spartz over Ford 48%-46%.

Public Policy Polling (D) for Ford, June 11-12 (794 RV)—General election ballot: Spartz over Ford 44%-39%.

Michigan's 3rd District. (Grand Rapids and Muskegon areas) Hillary Scholten, D, re-elected 54%. Harris 53%. Local meteorologist Terri DeBoer will face Scholten in the general election after winning the Republican primary over businessman Ryan Cushman, 79-21 percent. Though the district's blue lean would likely put it off the board in this political environment, DeBoer's profile may be enough to give Scholten a competitive race regardless. The con-

gresswoman has been an outspoken critic of El-Sayed, which could be a function of her own brand and the more competitive nature of the district. Likely Democratic.

Michigan's 4th District. (Southwestern Michigan) Bill Huizenga, R, re-elected 55%. Trump 52%. Republicans are happy that Huizenga ultimately decided to run for re-election, but this will be the toughest race of his political career. State Sen. Sean McCann won the Democratic nomination with 66 percent. Lean Republican.

Michigan's 7th District. (Lansing area and northwestern Detroit exurbs) Tom Barrett, R, elected 50%. Trump 49.8%. Lansing organizer William Lawrence, until recently a member of the Democratic Socialists of America, won the Democratic primary with 43 percent. Lawrence enjoyed a late surge and benefitted from a split in the vote between his two more moderate opponents: former ambassador to Ukraine Bridget Brink (29 percent) and retired Navy SEAL Matt Maasdam (28 percent). Republicans are excited to run against the more progressive challenger, but this still won't be easy for the congressman with an unpopular Republican president. Barrett had a \$2.2 million to \$383,000 cash advantage over Lawrence on July 15. Toss-up.

Data for Progress (D) for Lawrence, June 24-30 (772 LV)—General election ballot: Lawrence over Barrett, 48% - 46%.

Michigan's 8th District. (Flint and Tri-Cities areas) Kristen McDonald Rivet, D, elected 51%. Trump 50%. McDonald Rivet put up an impressive showing in her first race in 2024, so much so that some Democrats wished she had run for Senate this year. Navy veteran Amir Hassan was favored by GOP strategists and endorsed by Trump, but he lost the primary to businessman Tom Smith, 50-33 percent. Amazingly, not only has Smith not reported raising any money, but he actually suspended his campaign last month. Safe to say this doesn't look like a top takeover opportunity. Move from Likely Democratic to Solid Democratic.

Michigan's 10th District. (Macomb County) Open; John James, R, running for governor. Trump 52%. Trump weighed in on the Republican primary in June, backing Army veteran Mike Bouchard, Jr. Bouchard's main rival, former prosecutor Robert Lulgjuraj, subsequently dropped out of the race. On the Democratic side, former Macomb County assistant prosecutor Christina Hines won with 47 percent, followed by former Commerce Department official Eric Chung (30 percent) and Pontiac Mayor Tim Greimel (23 percent). Tilt Republican.

Michigan's 11th District. (Northwestern Detroit suburbs) Open; Haley Stevens, D, lost Senate primary. Harris 57%. State Sen. Jeremy Moss won the Democratic primary to replace Stevens with 50 percent over former state House candidate Aisha Farooqi (32 percent), who ran as the progressive in the race. He will face the Republican nominee, Troy Mayor Ethan Baker, in November. Solid Democratic.

Michigan's 13th District. (Detroit and southwestern suburbs) Open; Shri Thanedar, D, lost primary. Harris 69%. Thanedar is the latest House incumbent to lose their primary to a progressive challenger, though this race's dynamics were definitely unique. A political gadfly, Thanedar lacked allies in D.C., won his previous primaries over a divided field and represents a heavily African-American district at a time when leaders are concerned redistricting could reduce the

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number of Black members of Congress. He was defeated by state Rep. Donovan McKinney, 52-48 percent. McKinney successfully forced a one-on-one race and had the support of Justice Democrats and Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders. Solid Democratic.

Missouri's 1st District. (St. Louis and northern suburbs)

Wesley Bell, D. Harris 78%. Bell defeated former Rep. Cori Bush, 59-37 percent, in a tense primary rematch from two years ago, when Bell won 51-46 percent. It's a win for AIPAC, which heavily supported Bell, and is a good example that not every incumbent is on the verge of defeat or susceptible to challenges from the left. Solid Democratic.

Missouri's 5th District. (Parts of Kansas City and southwestern Missouri) Emanuel Cleaver, D. Trump 58%.

Trump issued a last-minute endorsement Monday night for state Sen. Rick Brattin, though that wasn't necessarily pivotal to Brattin's victory. He defeated former Boone County Clerk Taylor Burks, 45-26 percent. Despite the state legislature redrawing the map



Rick Brattin

Courtesy Brattin Campaign

to turn his Kansas City district into one Trump won by double digits in 2024, Cleaver is still running for re-election. Voters will potentially decide in November on a ballot initiative to dictate whether these lines will hold in 2028 or be reversed, though the secretary of state ruled on Tuesday that the initiative had not qualified for the ballot. Proponents said that they will challenge the decision in court. Solid Republican.

Missouri's 6th District. (Northern Missouri) Open; Sam Graves, R, not seeking re-election. Trump 63%. Radio host Chris Stigall, who was endorsed by Graves, won the Republican primary to succeed him. He defeated Kansas City Councilman Nathan Willett, 44 to 34 percent, and is headed to Congress next year. Solid Republican.

North Carolina's 11th District. (Western North Carolina) Open; Chuck Edwards, R, not seeking re-election. Trump 54%. Republicans are searching for a new nominee now that Edwards has dropped his re-election bid after the House Ethics Committee recommended censuring him for "persistent unprofessional and inappropriate conduct" towards two young female staffers. Names to watch include state Sens. Ralph Hise and Tim Moffitt, as well as state Reps. Jake Johnson, Jennifer Balkcom and Kevin Corbin. Trump's former chief of staff Mark Meadows, who held the seat from 2012 to 2020, is also a potential contender. The district's GOP committee will meet on Monday to select a replacement. Lean Republican.

Ohio's 7th District. (Southern Cleveland suburbs) Max Miller, R. Trump 55%. Republican Sen. Bernie Moreno said Miller should not be serving in Congress and should "seek professional help" as Miller faces allegations of domestic abuse from ex-wife Emily Moreno, the senator's daughter, amid a very public and bitter custody battle. Miller has said he'll request a House Ethics Committee investigation into

2026 House Ratings

Toss-Up (3D, 12R)

AZ1 (Open; Schweikert, R)	IA 1 (Miller-Meeks, R)	PA 7 (Mackenzie, R)	VA 2 (Kiggans, R)
AZ 6 (Ciscomani, R)	IA 3 (Nunn, R)#	PA 8 (Bresnahan, R)	WA 3 (Perez, D)
CO 8 (Evans, R)	MI 7 (Barrett, R)	PA 10 (Perry, R)	WI 3 (Van Orden, R)
FL25 (Moskowitz, D)	NY 17 (Lawler, R)	TX 34 (Gonzalez, D)	

Tilt Democratic (6D, 3R)

CA 13 (Gray, D)	NY 4 (Gillen, D)
CA 45 (Tran, D)	OH 1 (Landsman, D)
CA 48 (Open; Issa, R)	TX 28 (Cuellar, D)
NE2 (Open; Bacon, R)	
NJ 7 (Kean Jr., R)	
NM 2 (Vasquez, D)	

Tilt Republican (2D, 2R)

CA 22 (Valadao, R)
FL 22 (Open; Frankel, D)
MI 10 (Open; James, R)
OH 9 (Kaptur, D)

Lean Democratic (6D, 1I)

CA 6 (Open; Bera, D/Kiley, I)	NY 3 (Suoizzi, D)
NH 1 (Open; Pappas, D)	
NJ 9 (Pou, D)	
NV 1 (Titus, D)	
NV 3 (Lee, D)	
NY 19 (Riley, D)	

Lean Republican (2D, 7R)

FL 14 (Castor, D)	PA 1 (Fitzpatrick, R)
IA 2 (Open; Hinson, R)#	TX 15 (De La Cruz, R)
MI 4 (Huizenga, R)	VA 1 (Wittman, R)
NC 1 (Davis, D)	
NC 11 (Edwards, R)	
OH 7 (Miller, R)#	

Likely Democratic (7D)

IN 1 (Mrvan, D)
CA 21 (Costa, D)
NH 2 (Goodlander, D)
MI 3 (Scholten, D)
MN 2 (Open; Craig, DFL)
NV 4 (Horsford, D)
VA 7 (Vindman, D)

Likely Republican (4D, 9R)

AK AL (Begich, R)	ME 2 (Open; Golden, D)
AL 2 (Figures, D)	MT 1 (Open; Zinke, R)
AZ 2 (Crane, R)	TX 23 (Vacant; Gonzales, R)
CO 3 (Hurd, R)	TX 35 (Open; Casar, D)
CO 5 (Crank, R)	
FL 7 (Mills, R)	
FL 9 (Soto, D)	
FL 13 (Luna, R)	
FL 27 (Salazar, R)	

	GOP	DEM
Solid	188	183
Likely/Lean/Tilt	26	23
Total	214	206
Toss-up	15	
Needed for majority	218	

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

himself to clear his name, and has made public a trove of evidence he believes exonerates him. The incumbent won just over 51 percent in his 2024 re-election bid under slightly different lines and against two opponents, and the ongoing messiness isn't doing him any favors in growing that vote share. Democrats see a pickup opportunity in ironworker Brian Poindexter, who's been endorsed by Sen. Bernie Sanders, and House Majority PAC has ad space reserved for the Cleveland media market that could be used to hit Miller. Miller could also drop out and be replaced on the ballot by a less damaged Republican. Move from Likely Republican to Lean Republican.

GBAO (D) for Poindexter, June 16-20 (500 LV) — General election ballot: Miller over Poindexter, 44% - 43%.

Ohio's 9th District. (Northwest Ohio) Marcy Kaptur, D. Trump 55%. Kaptur was injured in a hit-and-run on her way to church. The 80-year-old was still hospitalized as of Monday afternoon but

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her office says her injuries were non-life-threatening. She continues to face a difficult re-election race against Republican Derek Merrin in a seat drawn by Republicans to defeat her. Tilt Republican.

Ohio's 10th District. (Dayton area) Mike Turner, R. Trump

53%. Two Democratic polls underscore the challenge and opportunity for oncology nurse practitioner/Air Force veteran Kristina Knickerbocker, the Democratic nominee against Turner. An FM3 Research poll for the Democratic super PAC House Majority PAC, and a GSG poll for the Knickerbocker campaign, both found her trailing Turner by 7 points even as Democrats narrowly lead on the generic ballot. Knickerbocker needs more money to introduce herself, and make Turner into more of a generic Republican. Dayton isn't an expensive media market but the airwaves will be crowded with races for governor and Senate. If Democrats are winning statewide, they are likely carrying this district — but Turner typically overperforms the top of the ticket. Solid Republican.

Global Strategy Group (D) for Knickerbocker, July 20-23 (700 LV) (live caller/text-to-web)— General election ballot: Turner over Knickerbocker, 45% - 40%, Thomas McMasters (L) 4%; Turner over Knickerbocker, 49% - 42%.

FM3 Research (D) for House Majority PAC, July 6-12— General election ballot: Turner over Knickerbocker, 48% - 41%.

Virginia's 1st District. (Western Chesapeake Bay and suburbs north and west of Richmond) Rob Wittman, R, re-elected 56%. Trump 52%. Spanberger carried this blue-trending district in the gubernatorial race last year, and Democrats believe Wittman is vulnerable. Henrico County Commonwealth's Attorney Shannon Taylor was backed by the DCCC and won the Democratic primary with 53 percent of the vote. Wittman has outperformed in the past (1.8 Vote Above Replacement in 2024), but this will be his first truly competitive general election race. Lean Republican.

Virginia's 2nd District. (Suburban Hampton Roads) Jen Kiggans, R, re-elected 51%. Trump 49.3%. There wasn't a lot of primary drama, but the general election rematch is officially set, pitting Kiggans against her predecessor, former Rep. Elaine Luria, who won the Democratic nomination with 80 percent. Kiggans ousted Luria in 2022 and now Democrats are seeking to return the favor four years later, albeit without the added advantage of what would have been a bluer district had the state Supreme Court upheld the redistricting referendum earlier this year. On paper, this should be one of Democrats' best pick-up opportunities, but some party strategists admit it's going to be tougher in the wake of Spanberger's difficult first few months in office. Toss-up.

Tulchin Research for HMP, July 9-13 (700 LV) —General election ballot: Kiggans and Luria tied at 47%.



Kristina Knickerbocker

Courtesy Knickerbocker Campaign

Virginia's 7th District. (Southern D.C. exurbs) Eugene Vindman, D, elected 51%. Harris 50%. Retired Army Lt. Col. Doug Ollivant won the Republican primary with 57 percent, but this doesn't look like a promising takeover opportunity compared to the close race two years ago. Vindman continues to be a prolific fundraiser with over \$6.5 million in cash on hand as of July 15 compared to Ollivant's \$66,000. Likely Democratic.

Virginia's 8th District. (Inner D.C. suburbs) Don Beyer, D, re-elected 72%. Harris 74%. Beyer fended off four challengers, tallying 68 percent, which was 50 points ahead of former Alexandria City Council member Mo Seifeldin. Beyer will continue to enjoy one of the easiest commutes to Capitol Hill. Solid Democratic.

Washington's 3rd District. (Southwestern Washington) Marie Gluesenkamp Perez, D, re-elected 52%. Trump 49.9%. As expected, Perez and Republican state Senate Minority Leader John Braun advanced to the general election from the top-two all party primary. With three-quarters of the vote counted, Braun and the congresswoman are at 39 and 38 percent, respectively. Democrat Brent Hennrich, who ran to Perez's left, is in third with 16 percent. National Republicans see this seat as a great takeover opportunity because of Democratic division this cycle and attribute Perez's past two wins to her flawed opponent, Joe Kent. But so far it looks like Democratic candidates are combining for 54 percent of the primary vote, which is different from 2024, when Perez was the only Democrat and received 46 percent in the primary. Toss-up.

Washington's 4th District. (Central Washington) Open; Dan Newhouse, R, not seeking re-election. Trump 59%. Trump-endorsed Yakima County Commissioner Amanda McKinney advanced to November alongside Democratic retired Air Force Major John Duresky, currently earning 35 and 31 percent, respectively. She is expected to succeed Newhouse, who is one of the last remaining House Republicans who voted for Trump's second impeachment. Former NASCAR driver Jerrod Sessler, a Republican, challenged Newhouse the past two cycles, but he finished in third with 14 percent. Solid Republican.

Washington's 9th District. (Southeastern Seattle and southern and eastern suburbs) Adam Smith, D, re-elected 65%. Harris 68%. The only threat to Smith in this district was from the left. Former Seattle Councilwoman Kshama Sawant ran as a socialist alternative and is at 13 percent to the longtime congressman's 50 percent, but she came in third behind Republican Doug Basler (24 percent). Solid Democratic.

Wisconsin's 3rd District. (Southwestern Wisconsin) Derrick Van Orden, R, re-elected 51%. Trump 53%. Democrat Rebecca Cooke, the 2024 nominee, has been the frontrunner for the nomination the entire cycle, thanks to her strong fundraising and support from progressives and moderates alike. But Cooke and her allies are fretting over a late surge by Eau Claire City Council president Emily Berge, who is running to Cooke's left. Berge had narrowed the race to single digits, according to private polling, before Cooke uncorked a \$1 million paid media push in mid-July. Berge doesn't have the resources to compete, but a strong showing by democratic socialist state Rep. Francesca Hong in the gubernatorial primary could help her out. Toss-up.

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during the 2021 Kellogg strike he said he worked with ICE after rumors that the company planned to replace striking workers with undocumented immigrants. In recent months, Osborn has criticized Trump's immigration policy for hurting business owners.

Meanwhile, pastor William Forbes, who lost the nomination to Burbank in May, is suing the state party and argues Nebraska law requires it to name a replacement. Party leaders maintain the law doesn't mandate a replacement and have accused Ricketts and state Republicans of financing the suit, noting Forbes is represented by an expensive firm tied to conservative-backed lawsuits.

A recent poll sponsored by Contours Inc., a dark money group supporting Osborn, had the independent up five points over Ricketts, 47-42 percent — a notably strong showing for an independent candidate but the same percentage of the vote he received in 2024.

Seth Bodnar (Montana Senate)

Independent Seth Bodnar and his allies have spent months trying to push Democratic nominee Alani Bankhead out of Montana's open Senate race, pointing to polling that shows the two candidates are splitting the anti-Republican vote, and that Bodnar would be stronger in a one-on-one matchup against Republican nominee Kurt Alme.

Even if Bankhead did withdraw, the Montana Secretary of State's office has said the state party would be required to appoint a replacement nominee, which would complicate vote consolidation. But the state Democratic Party says its lawyers disagree with the secretary's assessment. Despite pleas from state Democratic leaders, Bankhead, an Air Force veteran, has repeatedly said she has no plans to drop out.

Bodnar brings a decorated resume to the race: a West Point graduate and Army veteran who later taught at the academy after earning Rhodes and Truman Scholarships. He became the University of Montana's president in 2018 and remained an active member of the Montana National Guard during his tenure, resigning from his post at the university to enter the Senate race earlier this year.

As it stands, Bodnar faces a four-way general election against Alme, Bankhead and Libertarian Kyle Austin. That matchup favors Alme.

In the money race, Bodnar has outraised Alme in the first two filing periods of the year. As of June 30, Bodnar had raised \$3.3 million to Alme's \$2 million. Bankhead's fundraising has trailed both by a wide margin, with a five-digit haul of \$59,000.

Montana is no stranger to plurality victories in Senate races. Democrat Jon Tester won both his 2006 and 2012 races with less than 50 percent of the vote, with a third-party candidate on the ballot each time. Of course, the dynamic differs this round as Tester benefitted from a Libertarian peeling votes from the Republican while Bankhead and Bodnar are competing for the same anti-Alme lane.

A recent Tavern Research poll showed Bodnar running as the more competitive of Alme's two rivals. Head to head, Alme led Bodnar 51-49 percent compared to 59-41 against Bankhead.

Todd Achilles (Idaho Senate)

Democratic nominee and perennial candidate David Roth bowed out of the Idaho Senate race late last month, leaving independent Todd Achilles as the only well-funded challenger to Republican incumbent Jim Risch. That's a reversal from earlier this year, when Roth — who lost his 2022 Senate bid to GOP Sen. Mike Crapo — told the Idaho Capital Sun he had debated "whether or not we should just all rally behind the independent" but had chosen to stay in the race due to policy differences with Achilles.

Achilles briefly served in the state legislature as a Democrat; he was appointed by Gov. Brad Little to fill a vacancy in 2024 and won his election that fall. An Army veteran and Boise State University public policy professor, Achilles became an unaffiliated voter in June 2025 and resigned from the Idaho House to run for the Senate seat a month later.

Also on the ballot are Natalie Fleming, who captured just under 3 percent of the vote as an independent in the 2020 Senate race, and state Libertarian party chair Matt Loesby.

This will be Achilles' first statewide race, and he has raised just under \$700,000 to Risch's \$4.4 million as of June 30. While that's the most any independent running for Idaho's Senate seat has raised, Idaho's conservative-leaning electorate (with a Baseline of R +32.2) and the senator's fundraising advantage mean an uphill battle for Achilles.

Bill Hill (Alaska's At-Large District)

In the race for Alaska's at-large congressional seat, Bristol Bay fisherman Bill Hill is looking to unseat Republican Rep. Nick Begich III. Hill, a political newcomer and former school district superintendent, is centering his platform around affordability concerns and has declined to say which party he'd caucus with.

Democratic pastor Matt Schultz suspended his campaign in July and endorsed Hill, citing his disappointment in Democrats for a "lack of meaningful support" and "Republican outside groups meddling" in the race after the NRCC encouraged outside GOP groups to back Schultz. The Democrat said the decision ultimately came down to money: campaign finance reports through June 30 showed Schultz's campaign with \$471,000 in cash on hand to Hill's \$703,000. Begich's campaign had more than \$3.3 million.

A Tavern Research poll conducted in late May had Begich up four points over Hill, 52 to 48 percent; Hill's support was built almost entirely on Democrats and independents.

This isn't the first time Alaska Democrats have tried to rally behind an independent rather than field their own candidate. In 2018 and 2020, independent Alyse Galvin was the de facto Democratic nominee against GOP Rep. Don Young and received 47 percent, and independent Al Gross was backed by Democrats in 2020's Senate race against GOP Sen. Dan Sullivan and received 41 percent.

Unlike the others in Nebraska and Idaho, Alaska's outcome won't come down to a simple head-to-head race. Hill and Begich must first clear the states' top-four primary on August 18 before advancing to November's ranked-choice general election.

Nate Powell (Washington's 5th District)

In Washington's 5th District, firefighter and Marine veteran Nate Powell currently trails 2024 Democratic nominee Carmela Conroy, 21-14 percent, for second place in the all-party primary. GOP Rep. Michael Baumgartner placed first with 47 percent and will advance to the general election.

In the weeks leading up to the crowded contest, Baumgartner ran ads highlighting elements of Conroy's platform aimed at appealing to left-leaning voters, in what was likely an attempt to prevent Powell from advancing to the general election. The ad portrayed Conroy as wanting "higher taxes for the rich, and Obamacare for everyone."

A political newcomer, Powell was recruited by the Working Class Heroes Fund, a PAC founded by Dan Osborn that has also endorsed Bill Hill in Alaska, Mike Thunow in Wisconsin's 6th and Osborn himself. The fund contributed \$7,500 to Powell's campaign, which had raised

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\$360,000 as of July 17 — trailing Conroy's \$386,000 and well behind Baumgartner's \$1.7 million.

But Powell's own fundraising is only part of the picture. The independent has built his campaign around populist ideals, casting himself as the candidate un beholden to corporate money and party machinery. But in a somewhat awkward twist for the populist, he also received a major boost from a super PAC, Fire House PAC, funded by dark money group Contours, Inc. and crypto billionaire Michael Novogratz. Fire House has spent \$1.2 million in independent expenditures boosting Powell or attacking Baumgartner. It's a tension increasingly common among this cycle's populist independents, whose successes depend on establishment-scale money to be viable candidates against resource-laden incumbents.

Kevin Kiley (California's 6th District)

Kiley's bid is not necessarily one of a typical anti-establishment independent. After California Democrats dismantled Kiley's old Sacramento Valley seat, the congressman left the GOP to run as an independent in the 6th District. Kiley, however, has said he would continue to caucus with the Republicans, distinguishing him from other independents who've declined to commit to caucusing with one party.

The run will be hard fought; Trump won the old 3rd District, which Kiley currently represents, by four points while the new 6th favored Harris by nine points. Polling sponsored by the Independent Center found Democrat Richard Pan leading Kiley by 4 points (39-35 percent), with over a quarter of voters undecided. The survey also found 39 percent of voters identifying as Democrats, 30 percent as Republicans and 29 percent as independents. While Kiley was the pick for 80 percent of Republican-identifying respondents, just 34 percent of independent voters preferred the representative — a signal that his campaign resonates more strongly with GOP voters than true independents.

Brian Bengs (South Dakota Senate)

On Tuesday, former state trooper and Democratic nominee Julian Beaudion dropped out of South Dakota's Senate race. Air Force officer and 2022 Democratic nominee Brian Bengs is now positioned to challenge Republican Sen. Mike Rounds one-on-one in the conservative-leaning state. Rounds cruised to victory in both 2014 and 2020 and enters the race with the president's endorsement. Yet, like other GOP incumbents facing independent challengers this year, Rounds has never before run for the Senate without a Democratic nominee on the ballot.

Polling sponsored by the Bengs campaign in May showed Beaudion and the independent splitting the anti-Republican vote, with Bengs performing modestly better against Rounds in a two-way matchup. Following Beaudion's withdrawal, Bengs praised the Democrat for what he called a "patriotic decision to make this a two-person race," although Beaudion has declined to endorse a candidate.

The financial picture, however, highlights the scale of Bengs' challenge. Rounds reported almost \$3 million on hand through June, while Bengs had just \$51,406 — leaving a steep climb for Bengs to build statewide name recognition and compete on the airwaves. A poll conducted by the National Republican Senatorial Committee in early July found Rounds leading Bengs in a two-way contest by 23 points, 56-33 percent.

Mike Thurow (Wisconsin's 6th District)

Independent Mike Thurow is challenging GOP Rep. Glenn Grothman in Wisconsin's 6th, but doesn't have a clean shot. The union fire captain and Mequon native is riding the independent wave of

economic populists and has received an endorsement from Osborn's Working Class Heroes Fund. He's also spoken out against ICE after federal immigration enforcement officers shot and killed nurse Alex Pretti in Minnesota, and criticized the incumbent's lack of response.

Winning will be difficult for Thurow since there will be a Democratic nominee. Progressive populist Amanda Bell and National Guard veteran Bradley Smith are running in the August 11 primary.

Moreover, the district hasn't elected anyone but a Republican to Congress since 1964, and Grothman holds a financial edge: as of July 22, he had \$830,000 cash on hand to Thurow's \$63,000. A Tavern Research poll conducted in late May had Grothman leading Thurow in a hypothetical head-to-head by 10 points, 55 to 45 percent. But that matchup might never materialize if Democrats field a candidate.

Spoilers?

It's a mistake to presume that every vote for an independent or third party candidate is a vote stolen from a major party. Some voters sincerely believe there should be more options and may not show up to the polls if only given Republican and Democratic options — or leave that part of their ballot blank.

At the same time, some races are so close that everything and every vote matters, and it's possible that disaffected major party voters defect to a third party candidate and potentially alter the outcome of the race. That's why Republicans and Democrats spend so much time trying to dictate voters' options.

Michael Bridgford (Iowa's 1st District)

In Iowa's 1st District, independent and financial advisor Michael Bridgford is hoping to crash a third consecutive matchup between GOP incumbent Mariannette Miller-Meeks and Democrat Christina Bohannon. Miller-Meeks first won the seat by a staggering six votes in 2020; she then defeated Bohannon by nearly 7 points in 2022 and by just 0.2 points (800 votes) in 2024. Donald Trump carried the district by nearly 9 points in 2024, even as Bohannon was running roughly even with Miller-Meeks.

Bridgford, alongside Bodnar and Kiley, attended former West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin's Independent Leadership Council kickoff event, the ex-Democrat's effort to get more independents elected in Congress.

Bridgford, a self-described member of the "exhausted majority" who has previously registered with both parties, is betting there's room in the competitive district for a candidate with neither label. Recent polling suggests otherwise: a survey sponsored by the Independent Center had Bridgford capturing just 11 percent of the vote, with Bohannon at 40 percent and Miller-Meeks at 35 percent. If these numbers hold, they'd make Bridgford far more spoiler than contender in a race that could plausibly be decided by fewer than a thousand votes.

Seamus O'Toole (New Jersey's 7th District)

In New Jersey's 7th District, one of the most competitive races in the country, a third-party candidate could pull enough votes away from Republican Tom Kean Jr. and Democrat Rebecca Bennett to help the winner prevail with less than a majority of the vote.

Seamus O'Toole is running under the Stop Israel's Genocide banner, and is currently the only third-party candidate on the ballot. But that distinction might not last for long: Libertarian Lana Leguía was removed from the ballot after the state Republican party challenged her petitioning process, but she's in ongoing litigation at the state supreme court to restore her position in the race. If her attempt prevails, she could be positioned to pull a larger portion of the vote alongside O'Toole.

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