

# Inside Elections

with

Nathan L. Gonzales

Nonpartisan Analysis

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## Virginia 7: No Such Thing as an Easy Race for Republicans

By Nathan L. Gonzales

It's becoming a familiar story: many of Republicans' best House takeover opportunities are represented by some of Democrats' strongest new incumbents. Virginia's 7th District is a great example.

All eyes were on central Virginia earlier this week when more than 20,000 gun-rights protesters descended on Richmond in opposition to legislation that would restrict access to firearms. While that rally ended peacefully, the focus on the capital region will pick back up as Republicans focus on defeating Democratic Rep. Abigail Spanberger.

The race has a little bit of everything, including a competitive race for the GOP nomination between multiple military veterans and a single, working mom who runs a non-profit. It will be a test of Democrats' ability to localize a race in a presidential year. And it will all take place in a district that is divided between suburban and rural communities.

Even as the commonwealth is shifting toward Democrats, winning back at least a House seat or two in Virginia is critical to GOP chances of regaining the House majority. Defeating Spanberger in a Republican-leaning district is as close to a must-win race as it gets for the GOP this cycle.

It's almost hard to believe that in less than a decade, the district was easily re-electing the Republican majority leader followed by a founding member of the House Freedom Caucus. Now the Richmond-area seat will potentially re-elect a Democratic woman who serves in the majority in Washington.

### The Lay of the Land

In 2018, Spanberger defeated GOP Rep. Dave Brat, 50.3-48.4 percent. Brat famously defeated House Majority Leader Eric Cantor in the 2014 GOP primary in one of the biggest upsets in modern political history.

Before Spanberger, the only federal or statewide Democratic candidate to win the 7th since 2012 was now-Gov. Ralph Northam, who carried the district by 3 points compared to his statewide margin of nearly 11 points in the 2013 race for lieutenant governor.

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## 2020 House Ratings

### Toss-Up (2R, 7D)

GA 7 (Open; Woodall, R)	NY 11 (Rose, D)
IA 3 (Axne, D)	NY 22 (Brindisi, D)
IL 13 (Davis, R)	OK 5 (Horn, D)
IL 14 (Underwood, D)	SC 1 (Cunningham, D)
	UT 4 (McAdams, D)

### Tilt Democratic (10D)

CA 21 (Cox, D)
GA 6 (McBath, D)
IA 1 (Finkenauer, D)
IA 2 (Open; Loebbeck, D)
ME 2 (Golden, D)
MN 7 (Peterson, DFL)
NJ 3 (Kim, D)
NM 2 (Torres Small, D)
NY 19 (Delgado, D)
VA 7 (Spanberger, D)

### Tilt Republican (7R)

IA 4 (King, R)
MN 1 (Hagedorn, R)
NJ 2 (Van Drew, R)
PA 1 (Fitzpatrick, R)
PA 10 (Perry, R)
TX 22 (Open; Olson, R)
TX 24 (Open; Marchant, R)

	GOP	DEM
116th Congress	200	234
Currently Solid	169	196
Competitive	31	38
Needed for majority	218	

### Lean Democratic (8D, 1R)

CA 48 (Rouda, D)
KS 3 (Davids, D)
MI 8 (Slotkin, D)
NJ 7 (Malinowski, D)
NV 3 (Lee, D)
TX 7 (Fletcher, D)
TX 23 (Open; Hurd, R)
TX 32 (Allred, D)
VA 2 (Luria, D)

### Lean Republican (7R, 1I)

MI 3 (Amash, I)
MO 2 (Wagner, R)
NC 9 (Bishop, R)
NE 2 (Bacon, R)
NY 2 (Open; King, R)
NY 24 (Katko, R)
OH 1 (Chabot, R)
TX 31 (Carter, R)

### Likely Democratic (13D, 2R)

AZ 1 (O'Halleran, D)	PA 17 (Lamb, D)
AZ 2 (Kirkpatrick, D)	WI 3 (Kind, D)
CA 10 (Harder, D)	
CA 39 (Cisneros, D)	
CA 45 (Porter, D)	
IL 6 (Casten, D)	
NH 1 (Pappas, D)	
MI 11 (Stevens, D)	
MN 2 (Craig, DFL)	
NC 2 (Open; Holding, R)	
NC 6 (Open; Walker, R)	
NJ 11 (Sherrill, D)	
PA 8 (Cartwright, D)	

### Likely Republican (12R)

AZ 6 (Schweikert, R)
IN 5 (Open; Brooks, R)
KY 6 (Barr, R)
MI 6 (Upton, R)
MN 8 (Stauber, R)
NC 8 (Hudson, R)
NY 1 (Zeldin, R)
OH 12 (Balderson, R)
TX2 (Crenshaw, R)
TX 10 (McCaul, R)
TX 21 (Roy, R)
WA 3 (Herrera-Beutler, R)

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

# California 50: GOP Benefits from Hunter's Absence

By Nathan L. Gonzales

California Republican Duncan Hunter finally left the House and took any Democratic chances of winning the 50th District with him.

Hunter won re-election in 2018 by 3 points in a Southern California seat that Republicans shouldn't have to worry about defending, considering President Donald Trump carried it by 15 points in 2016. Hunter was under indictment at the time, which shows the strength any GOP candidate should have in the district.

Hunter subsequently pleaded guilty on Dec. 3 to misusing hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign funds, but waited until mid-January to officially resign — extending the time he was eligible for congressional pay and benefits. He's scheduled to be sentenced in March.

A recent poll, conducted Jan. 9-12 by SurveyUSA, confirms the fundamental partisanship of the district. Under California law, all candidates, regardless of party, run in the same primary with the top two vote-getters advancing to the general election. Democrat Ammar Campa-Najjar was the leading candidate in the SurveyUSA poll with 26 percent and another Democrat, Marisa Calderon, the executive director of the National Association of Hispanic Real Estate Professionals, was in fifth with 3 percent. Their combined 29 percent was a far cry from the 48 percent Campa-Najjar received in the 2018 general election against Hunter and even down a few points from the 31 percent he received in an October survey.

Right now, it looks like a race for second in the March 3 primary is between former 49th District Rep. Darrell Issa (21 percent) and 2014 50th District nominee/former San Diego City Councilmember Carl DeMaio (20 percent). GOP state Sen. Brian Jones was in third place with 12 percent in the most recent poll.

The race is just getting started at this stage as Issa, the former wealthiest member of Congress, faces off against DeMaio, who is proving to be one of the best GOP fundraisers on the House side.

But the most important factor from a handicapping perspective is that Hunter will not be the GOP nominee. So the Inside Elections rating of the race in California's 50th from is changing from Leans Republican to Solid Republican.

Hunter's seat will remain vacant until next January when the winner of November's general election takes office. With two well-funded candidates, it's possible for two Republicans to make it to November. But Democratic turnout is likely to be high on March 3 because of the presidential primary, and should ensure Campa-Najjar finishes in the top two. **IE**

## Candidate Conversation



Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

### Cynthia Lummis (R)

Wyoming Senate —  
Rating: Solid Republican

**Interview Date:** Jan. 14, 2020

**Date of Birth:** Sept. 10, 1954;  
Cheyenne, Wyo.

**Education:** Univ. of Wyoming  
(Bachelors, law school)

**Elected Office:** U.S. House  
(former), state Treasurer (former), state Senate (former), state House (former)

**Current Outlook:** Lummis is the frontrunner to replace GOP Sen. Mike Enzi, who is not seeking re-election. Her path got easier last week when At-Large Rep. Liz Cheney decided to seek re-election rather than run for the Senate. Lummis, who has been elected statewide six times, was already a formidable candidate, but now has Club for Growth and Senate Conservatives Fund behind her in a race where the most important election is the GOP primary. The GOP nominee will be a prohibitive favorite in the general election in a state where Hillary Clinton failed to reach 22 percent in 2016.

**Evaluation:** Lummis is a former Member of Congress who has run for office 13 times, so this interview was not her first rodeo. She was personable and confident and managed to avoid sounding like someone who has been in public office for most of the last 35 years. Lummis is also unapologetically conservative and a supporter of President Donald Trump (she's interviewed twice to be his Secretary of the Interior) but also talked about the need to find any small opportunity to work with people with opposing viewpoints. Drawing on her previous experience, Lummis talked about working with Massachusetts Democrat Ed Markey during their time in the House. As a former founding member of the House Freedom Caucus, Lummis will be fascinating to watch in the Senate when her traditional conservative ideals don't line up with the president, if he wins re-election. Considering Senate seats don't come up very often, it's possible for other Republicans to jump into the race. But Lummis' combination of previous name ID from other races, endorsements, and personal money make her a favorite to become Wyoming's first female U.S. Senator.



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# Presidential Battlegrounds: Michigan

By Ryan Matsumoto

Michigan was one of the biggest surprises of the 2016 presidential election, voting Republican for the first time since 1988. It was the state where President Donald Trump won by his narrowest margin - just two tenths of a percentage point (10,704 raw votes). As Democrats look to flip states back into their column for the 2020 presidential election, Michigan will be at the top of their list.

## Michigan in Recent Elections

Michigan has been shifting to the right at the presidential level in the last three elections. In 2008, President Barack Obama carried the state by a whopping 16 percentage points while winning nationally by 7 percentage points. In 2012, he won Michigan by a healthy 9 percentage point margin while winning nationally by 4 percentage points. In 2016, Michigan made a sharp turn to the right, voting for Trump by two tenths of a percentage point while Clinton won the national popular vote by 2 percentage points.

Put another way, Michigan was 9 percentage points more Democratic than the nation in 2008, 6 percentage points more Democratic than the nation in 2012, and 2 percentage points more Republican than the nation in 2016. The driving force behind Michigan's big shift in 2016 was Trump's strength with white voters without a college degree, who make up about 56 percent of the state's eligible voters according to Daily Kos Elections.

Michigan has also been competitive in downballot elections, albeit with a slight Democratic lean. Our *Inside Elections* Baseline score, which

measures average partisan performance in Michigan over the past four election cycles, is 50.1 percent Democratic and 46.5 percent Republican.

## The Importance of Wayne County

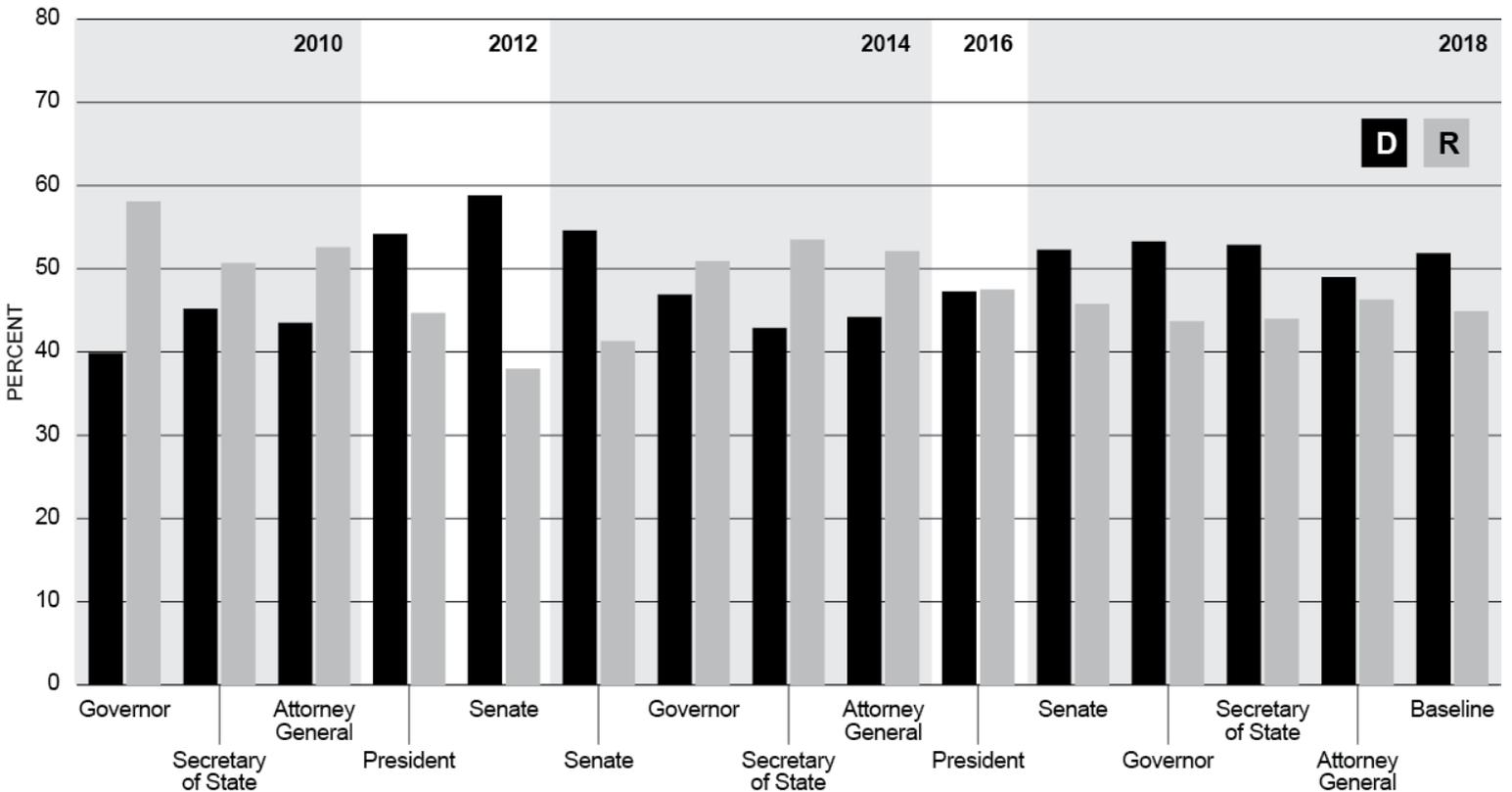
The most important county in Michigan for Democrats is probably Wayne County. It is the largest county by population in the state and includes the city of Detroit and its close-in suburbs. 39 percent of its residents are black, the highest of any county in Michigan. It has historically been a major source of Democratic votes in statewide elections, voting Democratic at the presidential level in every election since 1928.

The margins and turnout that Democrats get out of Wayne County are crucial to their success in statewide elections. In 2012, Obama defeated Romney 73 percent to 26 percent in Wayne County, netting a 382,032 vote margin. In 2016, Clinton defeated Trump 67 percent to 29 percent in Wayne County, netting a substantially smaller 290,451 vote margin out of the county. The drop in raw vote margin from 2012 to 2016 in Wayne County was almost nine times as large as Trump's winning margin statewide.

Democrats are hoping to increase turnout in Wayne County in 2020, especially among African-American voters in the city of Detroit. In 2016, the Clinton campaign notoriously paid very little attention to Michigan. They did not air any television ads until the final week. Clinton herself

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## Statewide Election Results in Michigan



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also made very few public appearances in Michigan compared to other swing states.

## An Opportunity for Democrats in Kent County

One county Democrats are hoping to flip is Kent County, which includes the city of Grand Rapids and some surrounding suburbs. This traditionally Republican county was one of only five counties in Michigan (out of 83 total) where Clinton outperformed Obama's margin from 2012. While Romney carried Kent County by 8 percentage points, Trump carried it by a narrower 3 percentage points.

This shift to the left was partially driven by the county's college education level. According to Census estimates, 35 percent of adults in Kent County have a college degree, well above the statewide average of 29 percent. Clinton also benefited from antipathy towards Trump among Republican-leaning voters in the county. Trump won just 23 percent of the vote here in the 2016 Republican presidential primary, his second worst performance in the state. Then GOP Rep. Justin Amash, who represents most of Kent County, was one of only several dozen sitting Republican representatives nationwide to oppose Trump in the general election. Since then, Amash left the Republican Party to become an independent and voted for impeachment.

Kent County is especially important because it is the fourth largest county in the state by population. Democrats' hopes of flipping the county in 2020 are buoyed by downballot performances in 2018, where they carried Kent County by 4 percentage points in the gubernatorial election and by three tenths of a percentage point in the Senate race.

## Other Suburban Opportunities for Democrats

Washtenaw County, anchored by the college town of Ann Arbor, has the highest percentage of adults with a college degree (55 percent) in the state according to Census estimates. Clinton won this county by 41 percentage points in 2016, an improvement over Obama's 36 percentage point winning margin in 2016. If Democrats continue to make gains with highly-educated voters, they may be able to increase this margin further.

Another potential opportunity for Democrats is Oakland County, a suburban county north of Detroit. It is the second largest county in the state by population and voted for Clinton by 8 percentage points, identical to Obama's 8 percentage point margin in 2012. However, it's possible that Democrats could do much better given its college education level.

Comparing Oakland County to Lake County in Illinois, which encompasses the northern suburbs of Chicago, 46 percent of adults in Oakland County have a college degree and 45 percent of adults in Lake County that have a college degree. Both counties voted for Obama by 8 percentage points in 2012, but Clinton's margin surged to 20 percentage points in Lake County while remaining stagnant in Oakland County.

If Democrats can grow their winning margins in suburban counties like Washtenaw and Oakland, that would go a long way in offsetting Trump's massive margins in rural Michigan.

## The Obama-Trump Vote

While Clinton improved on Obama's margins in a handful of suburban counties, these were exceptions rather than the rule. Seventy-eight of Michigan's 83 counties shifted to the right from 2012 to 2016, demonstrating Trump's strength with white working class voters. Twelve of these counties are Obama-Trump counties.

The most significant of the Obama-Trump counties is Macomb County, a working class county north of Detroit that is home to the proverbial Reagan

Democrats. Macomb is the third largest county in the state by population and voted for Trump by 12 percentage points after voting for Obama by 4 percentage points. This represented a raw vote margin shift of 64,451 votes, which was more than six times Trump's winning margin statewide. Democrats were encouraged by the midterm election results, where they carried the county in both the gubernatorial and Senate elections. The Democratic presidential nominee doesn't need to win Macomb, but if he or she can cut into Trump's margin, it would go a long way.

Another key county is Genesee County, which includes the city of Flint and is the fifth largest county by population in the state. While it voted for Obama by 28 percentage points in 2012, it only voted for Clinton by 10 percentage points. This represented a raw vote margin

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## Candidate Conversation



### Robert Emmons Jr. (D)

Illinois' 1st District —  
Rating: Solid Democratic

Interview Date: Nov. 15, 2019

Date of Birth: Oct. 10, 1992;  
Atlantic City, N.J.

Education: Univ. of Illinois  
Urbana-Champaign

Elected Office: None; First run  
for office

**Current Outlook:** As with virtually all primary challengers to incumbents, Emmons is an underdog against long-time Rep. Bobby Rush in the March 17 Democratic primary. Since the South Side Chicago and southern suburbs district is covered by the cost-prohibitive Chicago media market, this race will play out on the ground, in the mailbox, and on the radio. Rush has received more than 70 percent of the vote in the last two Democratic primaries, but Emmons is putting together a credible campaign.

**Evaluation:** When a 27-year-old first-time candidate challenges a 14-term incumbent, it's ok to be skeptical. But Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's victory in 2018 is a fresh reminder to not be dismissive. In our interview, Emmons was low-key, serious, and compelling in an understated way. Rather than just listing off top issues including systemic poverty, environmental justice, health care and education inequality, he also made it personal by talking about how he withdrew from college because he was dealing with losing his best friend to gun violence. Emmons, who is manager for programs and innovations at OneGoal, is also unafraid in his specific critique of the congressman. He will talk about Rush's vote for the 1994 Crime Bill, taking contributions from the oil & gas industry, and for his poor attendance record in Congress.

While Rush has been in office for more than a quarter of a century, he had just \$69,000 in his campaign account at the end of the year. So he's not necessarily a juggernaut. Primaries are often particularly difficult to handicap from the Beltway because it's tough to gauge local dynamics. That's why it's easy to envision Emmons receiving 10 percent of the vote or receiving 51 percent, and maybe not anything in between. But even if he comes up short, one previous primary challenger to Rush landed on his feet. State Sen. Barack Obama lost to Rush 59-30 in the 2000 primary, but was elected to the U.S. Senate in 2004 and president in 2008.

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shift of 38,594 votes, which was more than three times Trump's winning margin statewide. Clinton suffered from low voter enthusiasm among black voters here, who make up 20 percent of the county's residents. She probably also suffered because of the Flint water crisis, which increased dissatisfaction with the political establishment.

What made the difference in 2016 wasn't just counties that flipped from Obama to Trump, but also counties that started out red and got even redder. In 2012, only two counties in Michigan voted for Romney by more than 25 percentage points. In 2016, a whopping 47 Michigan counties voted for Trump by more than 25 percentage points. While the 2020 Democratic nominee is unlikely to win any of these counties, limiting Trump's margins in many of these more rural counties will make or break his or her chances of winning the state's 16 electoral votes.

However, it's also possible that Trump hasn't yet hit his ceiling with white working class voters in these counties. Roscommon County, for example, where only 15 percent of adults have a college degree and 96 percent of the population is Non-Hispanic white, voted for Romney by just 4 percentage points before voting for Trump by 30 percentage points. It's not hard to imagine a scenario where current demographic trends continue and Trump wins the county by 35 or 40 percentage points in 2020.

## The 2018 Midterm Elections

Michigan Democrats were encouraged by the results of the 2018 midterm elections, when they won all four statewide elections. Sen. Debbie Stabenow defeated Republican John James by 7 percentage points. Democrat Gretchen Whitmer beat Republican Bill Schuette in the gubernatorial race by an impressive 10 percentage points. Democrats also won elections for Secretary of State and Attorney General 9 percentage points and 3 percentage points, respectively.

Both sides should be careful though about overinterpreting midterm election results. They occurred in the context of a D+9 national environment, which will be hard to replicate in a presidential year. Stabenow's margin in the Senate race could actually be interpreted as relatively weak given the national environment and the power of incumbency. And of course, Republicans swept Michigan statewide elections in 2010 before Obama won the state in 2012.

## Early Polling

Early polling in Michigan suggests the state will be competitive again in 2020. According to the RealClearPolitics averages through January 22, Sanders led Trump by 6.7 percentage points, Biden led Trump by 6.5 percentage points, Buttigieg led Trump by 3 percentage points, and Warren led Trump by 2 percentage points.

However, it's still wise to take early polling with a grain of salt. One reason why polling underestimated Trump in the Midwest in 2016 was that many pollsters did not weight their results by education. While this may not have made much of a difference in the past when the education gap was much smaller, it made a huge difference in 2016 when the education divide exploded.

It appears that some pollsters still haven't learned this lesson. The Emerson College poll from November 2019 apparently did not weight their results by education. Their polling sample had 48 percent of respondents with a college degree, which is substantially higher than the 29 percent of Michigan adults with a college degree according to Census estimates. The New York Times / Siena College Michigan poll, which did weight by education, found a much closer race.

## The Bottom Line

If Trump wins Michigan's 16 electoral votes again in 2020, it will be very difficult for the Democratic nominee to emerge victorious. Many factors can make the difference when Trump won the state so narrowly in 2016, but here are several keys to the race:

First, can Democrats improve base turnout in Wayne County? Increasing African-American turnout closer to 2012 levels will go a long way.

Second, can Democrats continue to make gains in highly-educated suburban counties? Democrats will aim to flip Kent County in western Michigan and increase their margins in Washtenaw and Oakland counties right outside Detroit.

Third, can Democrats make inroads with Obama-Trump voters? If they can win back a small portion of these voters, they can flip Michigan. However, it's also possible that Trump hasn't yet hit his ceiling among white voters without a college degree, and could increase his margins even further in rural counties.

IE

## Candidate Conversation



### Jason Church (R)

Wisconsin's 7th District —  
Rating: Solid Republican

**Interview Date:** Nov. 15, 2019

**Date of Birth:** Feb. 23, 1989;  
Fort Knox, Ky.

**Education:** Univ. of Wisconsin La Crosse (2011), Georgetown Univ. (Masters, 2015), Univ. of Wisconsin law school (2018)

**Elected Office:** None; First run for office

**Current Outlook:** Church is facing off against state Sen. Tom Tiffany in the special election GOP primary on Feb. 15 in the race to replace GOP Rep. Sean Duffy, who resigned. Tiffany has been endorsed by Duffy and former Gov. Scott Walker, but Church has put together a credible consulting team with extensive experience in Wisconsin. Church should be considered a serious candidate, particularly as a wounded combat veteran running as a political outsider.

**Evaluation:** Hearing a former platoon leader recount the scene of his men dragging his leg-less body to safety after an IED explosion in Afghanistan is a humbling experience. But after 21 surgeries in 15 months, Church was physically running again, and now he's running for Congress. Church, who is also a former aide to GOP Sen. Ron Johnson of Wisconsin, considers this bid an extension of his commitment to service. Even though he's a first-time candidate, Church was warm and comfortable in our interview. He didn't reveal any daylight between himself and President Donald Trump, but did say he wouldn't join the House Freedom Caucus because he would be focused on getting things done. Church's path to the House won't be easy since his opponent, Tiffany, currently represents approximately one-third of the expansive, rural northern Wisconsin district in the state Legislature. But if he wins the nomination, Church would be a heavy favorite in the May 12 general election. And if he wins the election, the 30-year-old double-amputee would likely garner more attention than the average freshman Member of Congress.

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At the presidential level, the 7th has been remarkably stable and reliable for Republicans. In 2008, John McCain won the suburban Richmond district by 9 points (54-45 percent), Mitt Romney won it by 11 points (55-44 percent) four years later, and Trump won it by more than 6 points (51-44 percent) in 2016, according to Daily Kos Elections.

The 7th also has Republican DNA further down the ballot. In 2017, Republican Ed Gillespie won the district 51-48 percent even though he lost statewide 54-45 percent. The same dynamic held in the races for lieutenant governor and attorney general that cycle.

The result in 2019 was somewhat similar. Even as Democrats were taking control of the state House of Delegates, Republicans held their ground in races within the 7th District. GOP state Sen. Siobhan Dunnivant was in one of the most competitive races and won 51-49 percent. State Delegates Kirk Cox (52 percent) and Roxann Robinson (50.3 percent) won as well. GOP state Sen. Glen Sturtevant lost re-election largely because of

the Richmond areas outside the 7th, but won the Chesterfield areas within the congressional district. Even though Democrats failed to make gains they were encouraged by the turnout and close margins.

The good news for Democrats is that the 7th is approximately 52 percent suburban, 30 percent rural, and 16 percent urban. But more than half of district residents are white voters without a college degree, which could buoy Republicans.

Looking further ahead, Democrats will be in control of drawing new congressional lines prior to the 2022 elections. They could make Spanberger's district more Democratic, even if it will still likely be competitive. But her first step will be winning this difficult 2020 race.

## The Republicans

Nick Freitas, 40, is a former Army Green Beret who served two tours in Iraq. In 2015, he was elected, unopposed, to an open seat in the Virginia House of Delegates when the GOP incumbent declined to run



Nick Freitas

for re-election. Freitas was subsequently re-elected two years later with 62 percent of the vote in a district that includes Madison County, Orange County, and the southern half of Culpeper County.

In 2018, Freitas ran for the U.S. Senate

against Democratic incumbent Tim Kaine, but lost in the GOP primary to polarizing Prince William County Chairman Corey Stewart, 45-43 percent. Freitas raised and spent \$605,000 for that race.

Freitas ran for re-election in 2019 but didn't make the ballot after he failed to file the proper paperwork. The snafu resonated beyond his race because Republicans had narrow control of the chamber at the time, and the mistake had the potential to jeopardize the majority. But Freitas ran for re-election as a write-in candidate and won with 56 percent of the vote, even though Republicans still lost control.

He announced his congressional campaign in December and his consulting team includes former NRCC Executive Director Rob Simms of Convergence.

John McGuire, 51, is a retired Navy Seal after 10 years on active duty. He moved back to Henrico County with his family and started his own business, SEAL Team PT, which has done trainings around the Richmond area for the last 20 years. In 2017 he ran successfully for the House of Delegates and was re-elected last fall, 61-39 percent, to an Henrico County-area seat.

McGuire announced his congressional campaign in mid-November, a couple weeks after winning re-election. His campaign team includes GOP strategist Chris LaCivita, who is both a retired Marine and a veteran of races in Virginia.

Tina Ramirez, 41, grew up in Powhatan (west of Richmond) and earned undergraduate and master's degrees from Vanguard Univ. (Costa Mesa, California) and a master of arts in human rights from the Univ. of Essex (United Kingdom). She's the president and founder of Hardwired, Inc., a non-profit organization dedicated to international religious freedom. That work has taken her to 30 countries and she has spent time living in Iraq.

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## Candidate Conversation



### Cal Cunningham (D)

North Carolina Senate —  
Rating: Toss-up

Interview Date: Dec. 6, 2019

Date of Birth: Aug. 6, 1973;  
Winston-Salem, N.C.

Education: Univ. of North Carolina Chapel Hill (1999);  
Vanderbilt Univ. (attended),  
American Univ. (attended);

London School of Economics (attended).

Elected Office: State Senate (former); 2014 Senate candidate

**Current Outlook:** Cunningham is the frontrunner for the Democratic nomination in the race to challenge GOP Sen. Thom Tillis. Cunningham has been endorsed by the DSCC and has raised the most money, but must get past state Sen. Erica Smith and Charlotte-Mecklenburg County Commissioner Trevor Fuller in the March 3 primary. If he wins, Cunningham will be in one of the most competitive and expensive Senate races in the country and a key contest that will decide control of the Senate.

**Evaluation:** Cunningham looks and sounds like a stereotypical U.S. Senate candidate, and that's not necessarily a negative. Republicans enjoy bringing up his 2014 loss, but Cunningham certainly wouldn't be the first senator to lose before winning. In this race, he'll highlight his military background (he earned a Bronze Star with the U.S. Army Reserves in Iraq) and business experience, with a goal of stemming some of the Democratic losses in rural areas. Cunningham did cast 1,600 votes in the Legislature that will be mined by Republicans for potential attacks and, like many other Democrats this cycle, Cunningham might have to defend or contend with a progressive presidential nominee. When asked to respond to upcoming GOP attacks, Cunningham always found a way to turn questions about him into attacks on Tillis. It's not a bad skill to have, even if it wasn't enlightening. If Cunningham doesn't make it through the primary, it will be a public embarrassment for him and the DSCC. But if he's the nominee, Cunningham will be in prime position against one of the most vulnerable senators in the country.



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to activists that the other candidates don't have, and he's known for giving great speeches. Freitas also enjoys national support from Club for Growth and Sens. Sens. Ted Cruz (Texas), Mike Lee (Utah), and Rand Paul (Kentucky). But it's not clear those will be critical in the convention process.

Freitas isn't without liabilities. According to *The Washington Post*, he deleted social media posts from 2015 and 2016 where he referred to the president as a "5 time draft deferring tough guy." And Freitas' wife Tina challenged state Sen. Emmett Hanger in the 2019 GOP primary and lost handily 57-43 percent. That frustrated some Republicans determined to defeat the moderate incumbent.

McGuire is regarded as a hard worker with a good story (his mother abandoned him and he spent his early years in the foster system), while not being the most skilled politician. But he also has the largest constituency in the district.

As a Hispanic, single mom who works full-time while running for Congress, Ramirez gained some early national attention for her

candidacy considering the dwindling number of GOP women on Capitol Hill. Republicans watching or involved in the race give her credit for being active in the district.

But she also started the race from a weaker position than Freitas and McGuire, with virtually no name identification. And while fundraising is less important in a convention, it can be evidence of support and Ramirez's lack of fundraising (she raised approximately \$250,000 since her spring announcement) has prevented her from keeping peoples' attention. She is hoping to win endorsements from some of the GOP groups focused on electing more women to Congress.

McGuire and Freitas are in legislative session, but since the congressional district is adjacent to the capitol city, it won't likely be a factor. Ramirez is betting that delegates will be searching for someone with a different profile to take on Spanberger and she'll try to bring new delegates to the convention.

Even though there's some uncertainty on the GOP side, Republicans

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## Candidate Conversations



Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

### Bob Elliott (R)

California's 10th District —  
Rating: Likely Democratic

**Interview Date:** Nov. 14, 2019

**Date of Birth:** May 8, 1949;  
Russell, Kansas

**Education:** U.S. Military Academy West Point; Naval Postgraduate School (Masters, 1985);

**Elected Office:** San Joaquin Board of Supervisors; Tracy City Council (former)

**Current Outlook:** Elliott is battling fellow Republican/former Turlock City Councilman Ted Howze for second place in the March 3 all-party primary. Democratic Rep. Josh Harder will finish first. Howze finished third in the 2018 primary with 14.6 percent, but rubbed some Republicans the wrong way because GOP Rep. Jeff Denham was seeking re-election. Harder defeated Denham 52-48 percent and will be a formidable incumbent, particularly with more than \$2 million in campaign funds.

**Evaluation:** Elliott had declared to run for the state Senate in 2020 before Denham lost in 2018, then he switched missions. Elliott is old enough to have extensive experience in multiple arenas. He's a retired Colonel who served 30 years in the U.S. Army, including service with the Green Berets, as well as a career with GE and Westinghouse. Elliott is also not new to politics. He ran for the city council in 2010 and currently represents more than 100,000 people in the congressional district as a county supervisor. He'll use that resume diversity and leadership positions in military and civilian life as a selling point to voters. In our interview, Elliott was serious and clear in his effort to label Harder as too extreme for the district. He also reverted to typical GOP talking points about impeachment undoing the 2016 election results, securing the border, and Democrats' support of a government takeover of health care. The general election will be tough, but Elliott's initial challenge will be the primary, and whether his current constituency is enough to overcome a financial deficit to Howze.



Caroline Brehman/CQ Roll Call

### Kendall Qualls (R)

Minnesota's 3rd District —  
Rating: Solid Democratic

**Interview Date:** Dec. 11, 2019

**Date of Birth:** Oct. 16, 1963;  
New York City, N.Y.

**Education:** Cameron Univ. (1985); Univ. of Oklahoma (Masters, 1988); Univ. of Michigan (MBA, 2011);

**Elected Office:** None; First run for office

**Current Outlook:** Qualls is the likely GOP nominee against freshman DFL Rep. Dean Phillips. But winning in this suburban Twin Cities district will be difficult considering Phillips defeated GOP Rep. Erik Paulsen by more than 10 points in 2018, Republicans continue to struggle in the suburbs with President Donald Trump leading the GOP, and Phillips has personal wealth to draw on in this race if necessary. Qualls had \$98,000 in his campaign account on Sept. 30.

**Evaluation:** After five years of active duty in the Army, Qualls began a long career in the healthcare and medical technology industries, including time with Johnson & Johnson, Bristol Myers Squibb and multiple startups. Qualls spent his early years in Harlem before growing up in Kentucky, and has only spent the last few years full-time in Minnesota. He was compelled to run after attending a Phillips town hall in April and wasn't satisfied with representation provided by the new incumbent. Qualls will make the case that Phillips campaigned as a moderate yet he voted for Nancy Pelosi for speaker and votes often with neighboring Rep. Ilhan Omar. Qualls is all-in for President Trump and believes an excited GOP base gives him more of a chance in 2020 than Paulsen, whom he believes got caught in political no-man's land trying to placate both the base and moderate voters, in 2018. In November, Qualls needs the district to perform closer to 2012 (when President Barack Obama won by less than 1 percentage point) rather than 2016 (when Trump lost by more than 9 points). Yet there's scant evidence the former will happen.

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will have a credible nominee in the general election, which is better than some of their other takeover targets around the country.

### The Incumbent

Spanberger, 40, was born in Red Bank, N.J., and earned degrees from Univ. of Virginia (2001) and German International School of Management and Administration/Purdue Univ. (MBA 2002).

With experience handling narcotics and money laundering cases for the Postal Inspection Service and training people to commit espionage and running covert action programs overseas through her work at the CIA, she didn't fit the profile of a typical congressional candidate when she ran in 2018. Spanberger also worked at the Advisory Board Company, where she was a consultant to colleges and universities on student enrollment before running for Congress.

But she ended up being one of several Democrats with national security backgrounds to run last cycle. Some Republicans are now willing to admit (and even admire) the potency of her message as a former CIA officer who is also a Girl Scout troop leader. Contrary to the narrative about how Democrats won the House in 2018, Spanberger's ads weren't primarily about health care. She talked more about border security, bipartisanship, and even being open to working with President Trump. Now in Congress, she serves on the Agriculture and Foreign Affairs committees.

The Spanberger campaign team includes Eichenbaum Skinner for media, Global Strategy Group for polling, and Gumbinner Davies for direct mail.

### How It Plays Out

Spanberger's fundamental challenge has more to do with the nature of the district than the specific GOP nominee. Although Republicans are excited to nominate someone other than Brat.

Republicans in DC have a particularly unfavorable opinion of the former congressman. It's rooted in his defeat of Cantor, but blossomed after he failed to make traditional connections or run a good campaign. Spanberger allies contend that Brat's profile as an economics professor with a bipartisan image played well in the district and that he was a stronger opponent than he gets credit for. Democrats had to make the case that being in Washington had changed him. Now that's the same case Republicans will make against Spanberger.

That prosecution will include highlighting her voting record with Speaker Nancy Pelosi and New York City Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez along with her role in impeachment. Spanberger co-authored an op-ed in *The Washington Post* that led to the initial official inquiry, voted to impeach the president and was viewed as a leader on impeachment, according to a CNN piece that will be used by Republicans. They'll also accuse her of wanting to bankroll her campaigns with taxpayer money because of her vote for H.R. 1, which includes a public financing system for campaigns.

Spanberger will point to her vote against Pelosi for Speaker (she voted for DCCC Chairwoman/Illinois Rep. Cheri Bustos) and authoring border security legislation that was signed by President Trump as evidence of her independence. Dictating the conversation and terms of the debate is a practical area where a fundraising advantage will help. In 2018, Spanberger's campaign was able to spend money in the expensive Washington, DC media market (which covers only a fraction of the congressional district) while Republicans did not. Most of the district lives in the Richmond market.

GOP strategists can't identify a specific weakness with McGuire or

Ramirez, except that they believe Freitas gives Republicans the best opportunity to win because of his ability to raise money and compete with the incumbent's cash. Critics of Freitas' fundraising reputation point out that he benefited from a single donor to his 2019 campaign (GOP megadonor Richard Uihlein of Illinois gave him \$500,000). Even with Freitas, Republicans realize they won't outspend Spanberger.

Relative to some of her colleagues, Spanberger's fundraising has been more modest. But she still had \$1.5 million at the end of September, and is likely to show she had more than \$2 million at the end of the year, when reports are due Jan. 31. In comparison, Ramirez had \$52,000 at the end of September and McGuire and Freitas were just getting started.

Republicans are encouraged that Spanberger outspent Brat \$7.3 million to \$3.4 million in 2018, and won by slightly less than 2 points. But there's no guarantee she won't do that again, and of course outside groups will be on the airwaves as well.

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## 2020 Senate Ratings

Toss-Up		
Gardner (R-Colo.)		Tillis (R-N.C.)
McSally (R-Ariz.)		
Tilt Democratic		Tilt Republican
		Collins (R-Maine)
Lean Democratic		Lean Republican
Peters (D-Mich.)		KS Open (Roberts, R)
		Ernst (R-Iowa)
		<i>Jones (D-Ala.)</i>
Likely Democratic		Likely Republican
Shaheen (D-N.H.)		Cornyn (R-Texas)
		Loeffler (R-Ga.)
		Perdue (R-Ga.)
Solid Democratic		Solid Republican
NM Open (Udall, D)		TN Open (Alexander, R)
Booker (D-N.J.)		WY Open (Enzi, R)
Coons (D-Del.)		Cassidy (R-La.)
Durbin (D-Ill.)		Capito (R-W.Va.)
Markey (D-Mass.)		Cotton (R-Ark.)
Merkley (D-Ore.)		Daines (R-Mont.)
Reed (D-R.I.)		Graham (R-S.C.)
Smith (D-Minn.)		Hyde-Smith (R-Miss.)
Warner (D-Va.)		Inhofe (R-Okla.)
		McConnell (R-Ky.)
		Risch (R-Idaho)
	<b>GOP</b>	<b>DEM</b>
116th Congress	53	47
Not up this cycle	30	35
Currently Solid	14	9
Competitive	9	3

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

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In November, Spanberger was one of 20 Democrats initially targeted by American Action Network with TV and digital ads to urge her to vote “no” on impeachment. Congressional Leadership Fund, the go-to GOP outside group for House races, is targeting the district and will continue to be involved.

It will draw heavy interest and spending from both sides because it’s such a Republican seat. Based on that partisanship, it’s a critical seat for the GOP to win back the majority, along with New York’s 22nd, Oklahoma’s 5th, South Carolina’s 1st, and Utah’s 4th. But none of those races will be easy because they are represented by some of Democrats’ strongest new incumbents. If Republicans don’t win that handful of seats, they will have to win in more Democratic seats elsewhere.

While the district’s fundamentals are positive for Republicans, Spanberger might not be the top target in Virginia. Some GOP strategists are more excited about the 2nd District, where former GOP Rep. Scott Taylor is trying to regain his seat by defeating Democratic Rep. Elaine Luria. The district isn’t necessarily better for Democrats, but strategists have more faith in Taylor than their 7th District candidates at this stage.

Spanberger is adept. Within hours of news of Scott Taylor’s comment about referring to Spanberger and Luria as “those girls,” the congresswoman had sent out a fundraising email- looking to capitalize on the moment. But it’s remarkable that Democrats haven’t suffered any downturn in donors, enthusiasm, or support after their three state officeholders went through a firestorm of stories about racism and sexual harassment last year.

Neither Republican nor Democratic strategists fear the politics of the impeachment process. The greater challenge for Democrats could be their presidential nominee. Sens. Elizabeth Warren or Bernie Sanders at the top of the ticket are more likely to make Spanberger’s job more difficult. In that scenario, it’s likely the Spanberger and some of her House colleagues in competitive districts run explicitly against some of the policies professed at the top of the Democratic ticket. Whether that distinction resonates or not is a key open question.

Republicans are confident in the GOP DNA of the district but realize they can’t defeat the congresswoman simply by running up the score in the rural areas. They have to address their suburban deficiencies. Overall, Republicans fundamentally believe that 2018 was a Democratic high-water mark and that they’ll benefit from presidential-level turnout when Trump is inspiring base voters.

After the 2019 elections, Republicans are hoping that new Democrats in power in Richmond will overreach and further inspire conservative voters in 2020. Normally, state and local races don’t impact federal races, but since that narrative adds to the overall GOP message about Democratic overreach at the federal level, there’s a chance it could resonate on the margins of a close race.

## The Bottom Line

Spanberger isn’t at the top of the most vulnerable list, but this is the type of district Republicans should be winning if they are on the path back to the majority. But it won’t be easy. Neither party can afford significant drag at the top of the ticket. And both parties have to address their challenges in rural areas (for Democrats) and the suburbs (for Republicans).

Even though it’s possible for Spanberger to lose and Democrats to maintain control of the House, it’s also possible that her loss would be indicative of a broader problem- that a member is viewed as doing all the “right” things (raising money, choosing issues to be bipartisan, etc.)

and yet it wasn’t enough to secure another term. If that’s the case, some members who weren’t as aggressive but represent more Democratic districts could be in peril.

The pressure is on for Republicans: This could also be their best chance of knocking off Spanberger before she runs statewide under more favorable conditions. **IE**

## 2020 Presidential Ratings (Electoral Votes)

Toss-Up (54)			
Florida (29)	North Carolina (15)	Wisconsin (10)	
Tilt Democratic (36)		Tilt Republican (11)	
Michigan (16)	Pennsylvania (20)	Arizona (11)	
Lean Democratic (14)		Lean Republican (6)	
Maine (4)	Nevada (6)	Iowa (6)	
New Hampshire (4)			
Likely Democratic (10)		Likely Republican (34)	
Minnesota (10)		Georgia (16)	Ohio (18)
Solid Democratic (209)		Solid Republican (164)	
California (55)	Vermont (3)	Alabama (9)	South Carolina (9)
Colorado (9)	Virginia (13)	Alaska (3)	South Dakota (3)
Connecticut (7)	Washington (12)	Arkansas (6)	Tennessee (11)
Delaware (3)		Idaho (4)	Texas (38)
D.C. (3)		Indiana (11)	Utah (6)
Hawaii (4)		Kansas (6)	West Virginia (5)
Illinois (20)		Kentucky (8)	Wyoming (3)
Maryland (10)		Louisiana (8)	
Massachusetts (11)		Mississippi (6)	
New Jersey (14)		Missouri (10)	
New Mexico (5)		Montana (3)	
New York (29)		Nebraska (5)	
Oregon (7)		North Dakota (3)	
Rhode Island (4)		Oklahoma (7)	
270 needed to win		<b>GOP</b>	<b>DEM</b>
		2016 Results	304 227
# moved benefiting Democrats,		<b>2020 Ratings</b>	215 269
* moved benefiting Republicans		Toss-up	54

## CALENDAR

<b>Feb. 2</b>	Super Bowl LIV
<b>Feb. 3</b>	Iowa Caucuses
<b>Feb. 11</b>	New Hampshire Primary
<b>Feb. 22</b>	Nevada Caucuses
<b>Feb. 29</b>	South Carolina Primary
<b>March 3</b>	Super Tuesday (14 states)