

Inside Elections

with

Nathan L. Gonzales

Nonpartisan Analysis

APRIL 14, 2022

VOLUME 6, NO. 8

Alaska At-Large Special: Frontier Fiasco

By Jacob Rubashkin

The death of Republican Don Young, Alaska's sole congressman and the longest-serving member of the House of Representatives, has set off what is already proving to be the most crowded, unpredictable special election in recent memory.

Young first came to Congress 49 years ago, in a 1973 special election after Democratic Rep. Nick Begich disappeared in a plane crash. Young was just the fourth person to represent Alaska in the U.S. House after it became a state.

Not only is Alaska's at-large seat open for the first time in half a century, but the special will take place under Alaska's new voting system: a novel, top-four ranked-choice process approved in 2020.

There are 48 candidates vying to replace Young, including the man Young beat in 1973, former Gov. Sarah Palin, and even Santa Claus.

The chaos of a large field and newfangled system even has Democrats hoping they can make a run for this seat, despite the poor national political environment.

The Lay of the Land

According to the 2020 Census, Alaska's population was 60 percent non-Hispanic White, 16 percent American Indian or Alaska Native, 7 percent Latino, 7 percent Asian, and 4 percent Black. By education, 30 percent of residents have a four-year college degree — slightly below the national average — and unlike the country as a whole, Alaska's population skews male.

Democrats have struggled to win statewide elections since the 1990s. The only one to do so was Mark Begich in the 2008 Senate election, when he defeated GOP Sen. Ted Stevens, 48-47 percent, just a few days after the Alaska institution was convicted of bribery. No Democrat has won the state's electoral votes since Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964 and Joe Biden lost the state by 10 points in 2020.

But the state isn't as Republican as that streak makes it seem. In 2014, Begich lost to Republican Dan Sullivan, though by a narrow 48-

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2022 House Ratings

Due to delays in the redistricting process, ratings are incomplete. New ratings and states will be added on a rolling basis as final maps are approved in each state.

Toss-Up (8D, 7R)

CA 22 (Valadao, R)	NC13 (Open, R)
CA 27 (Garcia, R)	NJ7 (Malinowski, D)
CA 45 (Steel, R)	NM 2 (Herrell, R)
CO 8 (Open, New)	NY 11 (Malliotakis, R)
IA 3 (Axne, D)	PA 7 (Wild, D)
KS 3 (Davids, D)	PA 8 (Cartwright, D)
ME 2 (Golden, D)	VA 2 (Luria, D)
MI 3 (Meijer, R)	WA 8 (Schrier, D)

Tilt Democratic (6D)

IL17 (Open; Bustos, D)
MI 7 (Slotkin, D)
MI 8 (Kildee, D)
MN 2 (Craig, DFL)
PA 17 (Open; Lamb, D)
VA 7 (Spanberger, D)

Tilt Republican (3D)

AZ 6 (Open; Kirkpatrick, D)
MI 10 (Open; Levin, D)
TX 15 (Open; V. Gonzalez, R)

Lean Democratic (3D, 2R)

IL13 (Open; Davis, R)
IL14 (Underwood, D)
NC 1 (Open; Butterfield, D)
NV 3 (S. Lee, D)
NY 1 (Open; Zeldin, R)

Lean Republican (2D, 2R)

AZ 1 (Schweikert, R)
AZ 2 (O'Halleran, D)
NE 2 (Bacon, R)
WI 3 (Open; Kind, D)

Likely Democratic (18D, 1R)

AZ 4 (Stanton, D)
CA 13 (Open; Harder, D)
CA 47 (Porter, D)
CA 49 (Levin, D)
CO 7 (Open; Perlmutter, D)
CT 5 (Hayes, D)
IL6 (Newman, D/Casten, D)
MD 6 (Trone, D)*
NC 6 (Manning, D)
NC 14 (Open, New)
NM 3 (Leger Fernandez, D)
NV 1 (Titus, D)
NV 4 (Horsford, D)
NY 4 (Open; Rice, D)
NY 18 (S. P. Maloney, D)
NY 19 (Delgado, D)
NY 22 (Open; Katko, R)
OR 4 (Open; DeFazio, D)
OR 5 (Schrader, D)
OR 6 (Open, New)
TX 28 (Cuellar, D)

Likely Republican (8R, 2D)

AK AL Special (Vacant, R)
CA 3 (Open; McClintock, R)
CA 40 (Kim, R)
CA 41 (Calvert, R)
CO 3 (Boebert, R)
GA6 (Open; McBeth, D)
IA 1 (Miller-Meeks, R)
IA 2 (Hinson, R)
MT 1 (Open, New)
PA 1 (Fitzpatrick, R)
TN 5 (Open; Cooper, D)

	GOP	DEM
Solid	156	161
Likely/Lean/Tilt	17	32
Total	173	193
Toss-up		16
Not yet finalized		53
Needed for majority		218

moved benefiting Democrats, * moved benefiting Republicans Takeovers in Italics

Biden's Approval Rating Struggles Continue

By Ryan Matsumoto

In December, *Inside Elections* took a look at President Joe Biden's job approval rating and noted how much it had declined since the start of his term. While Biden enjoyed a positive approval rating during his first few months in office, his standing quickly deteriorated throughout the summer and fall. By December 1, Biden's job rating was at 42 percent approval and 52 percent disapproval in the *FiveThirtyEight* polling average. This deterioration tracked well with the emergence of issues such as the Delta variant, the situation in Afghanistan, and inflation.

As of April 13, Biden's job rating was still at 42 percent approval and 52 percent disapproval in the *FiveThirtyEight* polling average: almost exactly the same as it was in early December, despite major news developments including the rise and fall of the first Omicron wave, the removal of mask mandates, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the State of the Union address, rising gas prices, and the historic confirmation of Ketanji Brown Jackson to the Supreme Court.

In the first few months of Biden's presidency, his handling of the coronavirus pandemic was a clear positive for him politically. On June 1, 2021, 63 percent of Americans approved of Biden's response to the coronavirus crisis and just 33 percent disapproved, according to the *FiveThirtyEight* polling average. This was well above his overall approval rating, suggesting that falling case counts and the distribution of vaccines were helping him.

However, Biden's marks on the pandemic dropped quickly throughout the summer and fall. By December 1, Biden was at 48 percent approval, 46 percent disapproval on this issue. His standing deteriorated a bit more during the Omicron surge, reaching a low of 43 percent approve and 50 percent disapprove on January 25. Many Democrats had hoped that falling case counts and a "return to normal" by dropping remaining mask mandates and pandemic-related restrictions would help Biden's standing.

It does look like Biden is back in positive territory (49 percent approve vs. 44 percent disapprove) on coronavirus, but hasn't seemed to help his overall approval rating much: he's still 10 points underwater. One potential reason is that the relative salience of the pandemic as a political issue has declined compared to other news developments. A recent NBC News poll found that just 3 percent of respondents said that the coronavirus was the most important issue facing the country – down from 14 percent in January.

That same poll found that 21 percent of respondents said cost of living was the most important issue facing the country – up from 13 percent

in January. Inflation, measured by the Consumer Price Index, recently reached its highest level in more than 40 years, with prices up 8.5 percent over the last year. High gas prices have been a major headline, with the national average at \$4.083 per gallon as of April 13, compared to \$2.861 per gallon one year ago, per AAA data.

It looks like inflation is the major issue anchoring Biden's overall job rating. Per a recent CBS News / YouGov poll, just 31 percent of respondents said they approved of how the president was handling inflation. This was worse than his approval rating on the economy (37 percent), immigration (38 percent), crime (39 percent), climate change (43 percent), the situation with Russia and Ukraine (45 percent), and the coronavirus outbreak (53 percent).

And while Democrats had hoped otherwise, most of the evidence suggests that Biden did not get much of an approval rating bounce from his State of the Union address. While an NPR/PBS/Marist poll generated much discussion about a Biden bounceback, it was a major outlier compared to other polls like Quinnipiac, YouGov, and Pew Research. Overall, Biden's job rating was stable at 42 percent in the polling average from mid-February to mid-April.

It also appears the president has not benefited from any rally-around-the-flag effect during Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In a recent CBS News / YouGov poll, 45 percent of respondents said they approved of Biden's handling of the situation with Russia and Ukraine, while 55 percent said they disapproved. A recent Quinnipiac poll found similar results, with Biden's approval rating on the response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine at 42 percent approve and 50 percent disapprove.

One positive area for Democrats has been the confirmation of Jackson to the Supreme Court. An average of polls by *FiveThirtyEight's* Jean Yi found that 47 percent of Americans supported confirming Jackson, with just 23 percent opposed. But ultimately it may not be a big enough issue to help Biden and the Democrats politically. A recent Quinnipiac poll found that just 2 percent of Americans listed the Supreme Court as the most urgent issue facing the country today, compared to 30 percent for inflation, 14 percent for Russia/Ukraine, and 9 percent for immigration.

Biden's low approval rating bodes poorly for Democrats' chances of maintaining control of the House in November. Biden's net approval rating is at 10 percentage points underwater right now – pretty close to former President Donald Trump's net approval rating of 12 percentage points below water at this point in his term. In the following midterm election, the president's party went on to lose 40 House seats and the majority. **IE**

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Massachusetts Redistricting: A Common Story in the Commonwealth

By Bradley Wascher

Democrats are poised to take over the governorship of Massachusetts from Republicans and will likely hold all of the Bay State’s U.S. House seats, yet potentially lose control of Congress.

The Massachusetts congressional map received minimal modifications in redistricting. Not only will the state keep its nine seats, but those districts will mostly resemble the current map. Republican Gov. Charlie Baker signed off on the new lines in November after the plan cleared the state Legislature.

All nine congressional districts in Massachusetts are overwhelmingly Democratic, preferring the party by around 20 points on average, according to calculations by Inside Elections. In the 2020 presidential election, Joe Biden would have carried the districts over President Donald Trump by a median margin of 29 points under the new map, similar to his median lead of 28 points under the current map.

Massachusetts has not elected a Republican to the House since 1994, and none of its redrawn districts look to be very competitive in 2022. All nine Democratic incumbents are well-positioned for re-election.

1st District

The 1st, Massachusetts’s westernmost district, contains Springfield. It remains heavily Democratic: according to a composite of 11 statewide and federal elections in Massachusetts between 2014 and 2020 calculated by Inside Elections, the 1st preferred Democrats by an average margin of 17.6 points. Biden would have carried the district by 22 points in 2020. Democratic Rep. Richard Neal is in no real danger — especially without a well-funded primary challenger to worry about this time. Initial Rating: Solid Democratic.

2nd District

Located in the western and central parts of the state, including Worcester, the 2nd is a bit more compact compared to its current configuration. But not much else has changed, which is good news for Democratic Rep. Jim McGovern. The district preferred Democrats by an average of 19.9 points in the composite of 2014-2020 elections, and Biden would have won by 30 points in 2020. Child care center owner Jeffrey Sossa-Paquette was the best-funded Republican in the race on December 31. Solid Democratic.

3rd District

The 3rd is located in northern and central Massachusetts and contains Lowell and Lawrence. Under the new map, the district trades area in Andover for much of Billerica in the east, while also exchanging portions of Westminster and Winchendon in the west. The 3rd had an average partisanship of D+16.5 in the 2014-2020 composite, and it would have voted for Biden by 27 points in 2020. Democratic Rep. Lori Trahan seems set; on the Republican side, former state Sen. Dean Tran is running. Solid Democratic.

4th District

The 4th covers many of the suburbs west of Boston, beginning in Brookline and Newton, and continues south toward Bristol. One point of

Rating Massachusetts’ New Districts

DISTRICT	INCUMBENT	INITIAL RATING
1st	Richard Neal, D	Solid Democratic
2nd	Jim McGovern, D	Solid Democratic
3rd	Lori Trahan, D	Solid Democratic
4th	Jake Auchincloss, D	Solid Democratic
5th	Katherine Clark, D	Solid Democratic
6th	Seth Moulton, D	Solid Democratic
7th	Ayanna Pressley, D	Solid Democratic
8th	Stephen Lynch, D	Solid Democratic
9th	Bill Keating, D	Solid Democratic

contention during the mapmaking process was the decision to move Fall River entirely into the 4th district; the current map split the city between the 4th and 9th districts, but the changes now separate it from New Bedford, another major South Coast city.

The seat is still strongly Democratic. According to the composite of 2014-2020 elections, the 4th preferred Democrats by an average of 19.1 points, and it would have voted for Biden by 28 points in 2020. Democratic Rep. Jake Auchincloss was elected in 2020 after Rep. Joe Kennedy gave up his seat to run for Senate, and the freshman is well-positioned for a second term — though his path could be more complicated if progressive Jesse Mermell, who narrowly lost the 2020 Democratic primary, decides to run again. A number of Republicans in the field, including businesswoman Emily Burns and 2020 nominee Julie Hall, have already withdrawn. Solid Democratic.

5th District

The 5th contains suburbs north and west of Boston, including Medford and Sudbury.

Compared to the current map, the district loses Southborough, Ashland, Sherborn, and Holliston, while seeing other changes around Cambridge, Revere, and Wellesley. Democratic Rep. Katherine Clark faces no serious challenge in this Biden+51 seat: the 5th voted for Democrats by an average of 38.7 points in the composite of federal and statewide elections. Solid Democratic.

6th District

The 6th is Massachusetts’s northeasternmost district, containing Lynn and Salem as well as much of the North Shore. The district saw few changes apart from trading land between Andover and Billerica.

The 6th District has hosted two of the most exciting general election House races anywhere in Massachusetts in recent memory. In 2012, GOP state Sen. Richard Tisei (who is one of the few openly gay Republicans to run for Congress) nearly defeated embattled Democratic Rep. John Tierney, 48 percent to 47 percent, while President Barack Obama won the district by 11 points. Two years later, the race got more interesting

Massachusetts, continued on page 4

Massachusetts, continued from page 3

when Seth Moulton defeated Tierney in the Democratic primary and Republicans thought they had a legitimate shot at winning the open seat with Tisei running again. A majority of public polls showed Tisei with the lead. But in the end, Moulton won by 14 points.

Fast forward to today, the newly-drawn 6th had an average partisanship of D+16.1 in the election composite, and it would have preferred Biden by 28 points in 2020, meaning the excitement is probably over and Moulton is well-positioned to win his fifth term. Solid Democratic.

7th District

The 7th District covers many areas in and around Boston, including Cambridge, Somerville, and Chelsea, while extending as far south as Randolph. The district preferred Democrats by an average of 62 points, making it the most Democratic-leaning district in Massachusetts. Biden would have won by 70 points in 2020, and Democratic Rep. Ayanna Pressley should have no problem in 2022. Solid Democratic.

8th District

The 8th primarily comprises cities and suburbs south of Boston, such as Quincy and Brockton. The district's reach into Boston has been redrawn slightly, and it saw a few other reconfigurations around its southern border with the 9th District. But it remains very favorable for Democratic Rep. Stephen Lynch. The 8th preferred Democrats by an average of 26.7 points in the election composite, and it would have voted for Biden by 38 points in 2020. Solid Democratic.

9th District

The southeasternmost district in Massachusetts, the 9th, contains much of the South Shore as well as Cape Cod. Although it loses the South Coast city of Fall River to the 4th District, the district otherwise saw few changes. In 2020, Biden would have carried the 9th by 18 points, meaning it is the least Democratic-leaning district in the state. But that isn't saying much in Massachusetts: the seat still has an average partisanship of D+8.2 in the composite of elections, and Republicans haven't won this seat since 1960. Democratic Rep. Bill Keating should be able to keep any potential challengers at bay. Solid Democratic. **IE**

Report Shorts

By Jacob Rubashkin

California's 22nd District Special. Former state Assemblywoman Connie Conway finished first with 35 percent in the April 5 special election primary. She'll face Democrat Lourin Hubbard (who received 19 percent) in the June 7 runoff in the race for the remainder of GOP Rep. Devin Nunes' term. Republican candidates combined for 66 percent of the vote in the initial election, so Conway is the heavy favorite to win in June.

Colorado Senate. State Rep. Ron Hanks was the only candidate to secure a ballot spot at the state GOP assembly, beating out talk show host Deborah Flora, former Ft. Collins councilman Gino Campana, and Olympian/former El Paso County GOP chairman Eli Bremer. That sets up an interesting June 28 primary between Hanks, who crossed police lines at the Capitol on Jan. 6, and wealthy construction company CEO Joe O'Dea, who acknowledges that Joe Biden won the 2020 election. This looks like Republicans' best opportunity to expand the Senate battleground, but Colorado has voted against Donald Trump twice, and might be cool to a GOP nominee who touts similar theories about a stolen election.

Colorado's 4th District. GOP Rep. Ken Buck came within 24 votes of not even making the primary ballot at the 4th District assembly. As it stands, he'll face Bob Lewis, a real estate broker with no campaign website who has not filed with the FEC; Lewis outpaced Buck 62-38 percent after criticizing him "for referring to election conspiracy theorists as 'conspiracy theorists,'" according to 9News Denver.

Colorado's 5th District. GOP Rep. Doug Lamborn will face state Rep. David Williams, who believes Joe Biden was not legitimately elected and has falsely claimed thousands of dead Coloradoans voted in 2020.

Colorado's 7th District. State Sen. Brittany Pettersen will be the Democratic nominee in the race to replace retiring Democratic Rep. Ed Perlmutter. Republicans still have a primary to sort out. This open seat

begins at the edge of the House battlefield.

Colorado's 8th District. State Rep. Yadira Caraveo will be the Democratic nominee after Adams Co. Commissioner Chaz Tedesco narrowly failed to make the ballot via assembly. Republicans have to sort out a primary between Weld Co. Commissioner Lori Saine, state Sen. Barbara Kirkmeyer, and Thornton Mayor Jan Kulmann. This new district is a toss-up.

Iowa Senate. Former Rep. Abby Finkenauer was removed from the Democratic Senate primary ballot over an issue with signatures on her petitions. Finkenauer has appealed to the state Supreme Court; a decision is pending. Retired admiral/2020 Democratic primary runner-up Michael Franken is also running. It will be hard for either of them to beat Sen. Chuck Grassley in this political environment.

Nevada Senate. An April 2-6 poll by Suffolk Univ. for USA Today showed GOP former state Attorney General Paul Laxalt with a 43-40 percent edge over Democratic Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto. That confirms Nevada as the top GOP takeover opportunity in the country.

New Hampshire Senate. A March 23-24 poll by St. Anselm College showed Democratic Sen. Maggie Hassan with 7 and 10-point leads over the top two GOP candidates. But she was also at 43 percent against those lesser-known challengers, which isn't a great starting point for the incumbent in a potentially turbulent cycle.

Pennsylvania Senate. Former President Trump endorsed Mehmet Oz, known on TV as Dr. Oz, in the GOP primary. It's a much-needed boost for the celebrity surgeon, who has been trailing former hedge fund CEO Dave McCormick in polling. Three other candidates are also running for the GOP nomination. Lt. Gov. John Fetterman is still the frontrunner for the Democratic nomination. **IE**

Continued from page 1

46 percent despite the terrible political environment. In 2018, Begich attempted a comeback run for governor, losing by 7 points, 51-44 percent.

Young faced some close races as well, including a 5-point win over Democrat Ethan Berkowitz in 2008 and a 7-point win over *de facto* Democratic nominee Alyse Galvin in 2018. Most recently, in 2020 Young defeated Galvin, 55-44 percent, and Sen. Sullivan beat back Democratic nominee Al Gross, 54-41 percent.

Alaska can also produce quirky outcomes and is more friendly to coalition politics than many other states, owing in part to its low rates of party affiliation. Just 24 percent of voters are registered Republicans, and 13 percent are registered Democrats. More than half — 57 percent — of voters are registered nonpartisan or undeclared.

Most famously, GOP Sen. Lisa Murkowski won a write-in campaign for re-election in 2010, winning 40 percent of the vote against GOP nominee Joe Miller (36 percent) and Democrat Scott McAdams (24 percent), and then won again in a four-person race in 2016 with 44 percent against Miller (now a Libertarian, with 30 percent), independent Margaret Stock (13 percent) and Democrat Ray Metcalfe (12 percent).

In 2014, independent Bill Walker led a unity ticket with a Democratic running mate to victory in the gubernatorial contest, ousting GOP Gov. Sean Parnell 48-46 percent despite the great national environment for Republicans. And since 2017, Democrats have controlled the state House through a coalition with a handful of Republicans.

The Republicans

Sixteen Republicans will appear on the ballot.

Palin, 58, was elected as the state's youngest and first female governor in 2006, and came to national prominence as the vice presidential nominee on the 2008 GOP ticket with Arizona Sen. John McCain that lost to Barack Obama and Joe Biden.

Born in Idaho but raised in Skagway, Alaska, Palin graduated University of Idaho in 1987 and worked as a sports reporter in Anchorage before winning two terms as mayor of Wasilla (population less than 10,000). In 2002, she narrowly lost the GOP primary for lieutenant governor, 29-27 percent. After briefly



Sarah Palin

serving and resigning from a state government position, she launched a primary challenge to embattled Gov. Frank Murkowski, decisively defeating him 51-20 percent on a good government platform. Palin beat former Democratic Gov. Tony Knowles, 48-41 percent, in the general.

An unknown on the national stage, Palin was a dark horse pick for McCain and briefly led to a surge in his polling. But a deluge of gaffes and poor interviews soon made clear she wasn't ready for primetime. The ticket lost by 7 points, 53-46 percent.

Citing a number of lawsuits against her, Palin resigned the governorship shortly after the 2008 election. Over the next half-decade she became a coveted political endorsement for conservative candidates and Tea Party hopefuls, and several times teased presidential and Senate bids but did not run. She also starred in two reality TV series and was a

Fox News contributor from 2012-2015. During that time it's not obvious how much she was in Alaska — local sources say she was absent from the political scene for much of the past decade — though she says she maintained a home in Wasilla.

The Palin campaign says it raised about \$100,000 through the first week of April, though that was mostly before Trump endorsed her in a press release.

Palin's campaign team includes longtime aide Kris Perry and senior adviser Michael Glassner, who was the Trump 2020 presidential campaign's chief operating officer.

Nicholas Begich III, 44, is a member of Alaska's most prominent Democratic dynasty — but he's a conservative Republican who was



Courtesy Begich Campaign

Nick Begich III

running for this seat even before Young died. Begich is the grandson of Rep. Nick Begich, whose own disappearance 49 years ago precipitated the special election that brought Young to Congress, and the nephew of former U.S. Sen. Mark Begich and

state Senate Minority Leader Tom Begich.

Nick Begich graduated from Baylor and Indiana Univ.-Bloomington (MBA), and runs a software development company in Chugiak that he founded in 2006. He also sits on several corporate boards.

Though he was a co-chair of Young's 2020 re-election campaign himself, Begich made Young's long tenure a primary focus of his race, telling *Alaska Public Media*, "I think folks recognize that there's a limit to the amount of time left" for Young to serve the state, and emphasized his own fiscal conservative chops.

Begich reported \$227,000 in campaign funds at the end of 2021, including \$150,000 of his own money.

Begich's campaign team includes general consultant Justin Matheson of Axiom Strategies, and campaign manager Truman Reed, who managed Young's campaign in 2020.

Josh Revak, 41, represents part of Anchorage in the state Senate since 2019, and briefly in the state House before that. Born in Lake County, Minnesota Revak enlisted in the Army after 9/11 and was awarded two Purple Hearts for injuries sustained in Iraq. After a brief stint working for the Minnesota GOP, in 2009 he moved to Alaska to work as a military and veterans affairs liaison first for Young's House office and then Sullivan's Senate office in 2016, and earned a business degree from Alaska Pacific Univ. in 2018.

That year he ran for state House, first ousting the state House minority leader in the GOP primary, 57-43 percent (969 votes to 725), and then narrowly winning the general election, 52-48 percent as Democrat Mark Begich was carrying the district, 49-48 percent. In 2019, he was appointed to fill a vacancy in the state Senate, and won election to that seat in his own right in 2020, 58-42 percent, as Trump carried the seat by a narrow, 50-47 percent spread.

In the state Senate, local GOP sources say Revak has a more moderate reputation than some of his colleagues; he chairs the Resources Committee.

Revak had been working with longtime Alaska consultant Art

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Hackney, but Hackney has since left the campaign to run a pro-Revak Super PAC that expects to be active in the race.

Tara Sweeney, 48, served in the Trump administration as Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Indian Affairs. Originally from Utqiagvik (Barrow) north of the Arctic Circle, Sweeney is of Iñupiat descent and would be the first Alaska Native in Congress. A graduate of Cornell, Sweeney worked in external affairs for the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation, served in the Murkowski administration, and chaired Sullivan’s 2014 Senate campaign against Mark Begich. In 2018, she was unanimously confirmed by the Senate to lead the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Sweeney has been an ardent advocate of opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for oil drilling for over two decades. While Congress finally approved opening ANWR as part of the 2017 tax cuts, President Biden issued a moratorium on the process on his first day in office.

Sweeney’s campaign manager is Karina Waller, a former aide to Sen. Ted Stevens and director of the Ted Stevens Foundation.

John Coghill, 71, recently ended two decades in the state legislature, representing North Pole in the state House and Senate, including stints as majority leader of both chambers. The son of former Lt. Gov. Jack Coghill, John Coghill lost his 2020 primary by 14 votes in an upset against a truck driver. An Air Force veteran, Coghill has stayed active in politics since his loss, most recently assisting an effort to block a new constitutional convention in the state — Coghill’s father was one of the delegates to Alaska’s original constitutional convention.

Eleven other Republicans will appear on the ballot.

The Democrats

Six Democrats filed to run in the special election. Five are current or former officeholders: Anchorage assemblyman Chris Constant; state Rep. Adam Wool; former state Rep. Mary Sattler, who served in the legislature from 1999-2009; former Kodiak assemblyman Mike Milligan, who won 4 percent of the vote against Young as a Green Party candidate in 1992; and former commissioner of the Alaska Department of Commerce/ former chairman of the Alaska Democratic Party Emil Notti, who narrowly lost to Young in 1973. Sattler, 48, and Notti, 89, are both Alaska Native.

Constant, a 50-year-old real estate agent who represents downtown Anchorage, was the only Democrat in the race prior to Young’s death, and the Alaska Democratic Party is supporting him. But the state party executive director told the *Anchorage Daily News* that there’s “time and space for other candidates’ to draw support from Alaska Democrats, as well.”

Notti nearly won this seat 42 years ago. Between his political experience, time spent in various gubernatorial administrations, and status as a leader in the Alaska Native community, he would be a credible candidate if not for his age. But with just one House seat, Alaskan voters care deeply about seniority and the benefits that accrue with it; Young was famous for bringing home much-needed federal dollars off the strength of his 48-year tenure, as was legendary appropriator Sen. Ted Stevens.

The Nonpartisans

Al Gross, the orthopedic surgeon and commercial fisherman who was the *de facto* Democratic nominee for Senate in 2020, is running in the special election as a “nonpartisan” candidate. (Contenders can also appear as “undeclared” on the ballot.) Gross, 59, is the son of a former



Courtesy Gross Campaign

Alaska attorney general. He lost to Sullivan, 54-41 percent, in a closely watched race that saw more than \$10 million in outside spending, and last year lost a much lower-profile race for hospital board in Petersburg, where he lives.

Al Gross

Gross brings to the race a formidable donor file after raising more money in his Senate race — \$20 million — than any candidate in Alaska history. He’s also personally wealthy, which means he had the cash to hit the ground running in the special election.

Gross’s team includes general consultant David Keith of VMML, campaign manager Gary Ferguson and veteran direct mail consultant Joe Hansen.

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2022 Senate Ratings

Toss-up

Cortez Masto (D-Nev.) Warnock (D-Ga.)
Kelly (D-Ariz.)

Tilt Democratic Hassan (D-N.H.)
Tilt Republican PA Open (Toomey, R)
Johnson (R-Wisc.)

Lean Democratic
Lean Republican NC Open (Burr, R)

Likely Democratic
Likely Republican Rubio (R-Fl.)

Solid Democratic VT Open (Leahy, D)
Bennet (D-Colo.)
Blumenthal (D-Conn.)
Duckworth (D-Ill.)
Murray (D-Wash.)
Padilla (D-Calif.)
Schatz (D-Hawaii)
Schumer (D-N.Y.)
Van Hollen (D-Md.)
Wyden (D-Ore.)

Solid Republican AL Open (Shelby, R)
MO Open (Blunt, R)
OH Open (Portman, R)
OK Open (Inhofe, R)
Boozman (R-Ark.)
Crapo (R-Idaho)
Grassley (R-Iowa)
Hoeven (R-N.D.)
Kennedy (R-La.)
Lankford (R-Okla.)
Lee (R-Utah)
Moran (R-Kan.)
Murkowski (R-Alaska)
Paul (R-Ky.)
Scott (R-S.C.)
Thune (R-S.D.)
Young (R-Ind.)

moved benefiting Democrats, * moved benefiting Republicans Takeovers in Italics

Continued from page 6

Andrew Halcro, 57, served five years as a Republican in the state legislature representing Sand Lake, from 1998 to 2003, where he developed a reputation for bucking party leadership. In 2006, he ran for governor as an independent against Palin and Knowles, winning 9 percent of the vote. He also placed a close third in the 2015 Anchorage mayoral race, missing out on the runoff by 3 percent, 24-21 percent, to the second-place finisher. A longtime rental car proprietor, Halcro also led the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce from 2013-2015.

Halcro has a slick website (that prominently promotes his political podcast) but he's seen as more of a gadfly than a serious contender, and says he won't run for a full term in the fall.

Santa Claus, 74 (birth name Thomas O'Connor), is a

councilman in North Pole, Alaska. A self-described Democratic socialist with an affinity for Bernie Sanders, Claus looks the part, with a bushy white beard and rotund physique. He's not campaigning and says he'll spend just \$400. But with a name like Santa Claus, he could actually be a factor, given how many candidates will be on the ballot and the tendency for some voters to cast protest or joking votes. And he might get a few from voters who support his stances on Medicare for All and legal cannabis, or are attracted to his national security background: he's a former New York Police Department and counterterrorism official.

Jeff Lowenfels, 73, is another wildcard. A former state assistant attorney general, Lowenfels was the president of a natural gas pipeline company in the 1990s, and also writes a longstanding gardening column for the *Anchorage Daily News* and tours the country extolling the virtues of cannabis.

What makes Lowenfels compelling is not his idiosyncrasies but rather the \$50,000 in radio ads he's running in support of his campaign. While that's not a particularly large amount, Alaska is a cheap state to advertise and it comes out to a spot count of nearly 2,000. More importantly, it makes him the only candidate in the race currently advertising on TV or radio at all. While several other candidates will eventually be on air, that early start could help Lowenfels build some name ID.

The Primary System

Under Alaska's new election system approved by voters in 2020, there are no longer traditional party primaries. Instead, all 48 candidates will appear on the same ballot. The election will be conducted entirely by mail, with all registered voters automatically receiving a ballot. Returned ballots must be postmarked by June 11, and received by June 21.

Every voter will be able to vote for one candidate, and the four candidates who receive the most votes will progress to the August 16 general election, which, unlike the primary, will be ranked-choice.

The system is unprecedented in federal politics, and the vastness of the field only makes the outcome even more unpredictable.

With so many running, a candidate's position on the ballot could be a slight but meaningful advantage or disadvantage. According to the Alaska Division of Elections, "Candidates for the vacant U.S. House seat

are listed alphabetically in House District 1. Then the candidate at the top of the list drops to the bottom of the list in House District 2. This process repeats through House District 40." Meaning depending on where a voter lives, they will see one of 40 different ballots. All but the final eight candidates by last name — "Thistle" through "Wright" — will appear in the top spot in one district across the state.

Recent elections with a large number of candidates indicate that the threshold to make the general election could be as little as 7 or 8 percent of the vote. In the 2021 special election in Texas' 6th District, 23 candidates from all parties appeared on the same ballot; Republican Susan Wright led the pack with 19 percent, while the fourth place finisher, Republican Brian Harrison, received 10.8 percent of the vote.

And in the 2018 California gubernatorial election, 27 candidates of all parties appeared on the ballot; Democrat Gavin Newsom led with 34 percent, and fourth place finisher Travis Allen received 9.5 percent.

How It Plays Out

Because of the number of candidates, and the short time before ballots are mailed out (April 27), name recognition will be paramount.

That should accrue to Palin's benefit (though she recently called the system "whacko" and "a total nightmare"). As a former governor and vice presidential nominee she still has near-universal name ID in the state, and despite being unpopular overall she still has more than enough fans to exceed that 7 or 8 percent benchmark, especially with the Trump endorsement.

It could also help Gross, who retains name ID after his 2020 run, and who can take advantage of the nationwide donor network he developed in that race to fundraise more quickly than most other candidates running. The goal for Gross will be to box out the Democrats running, none of whom have comparable name recognition or resources. Former Gov. Knowles, the last Democrat to win a statewide race, is backing his campaign.

And with six candidates running as Democrats, none of whom are well-known, it's more likely that the state's Democratic-leaning voters who aren't supporting Gross will scatter between them and other progressive candidates such as Santa Claus, rather than consolidate behind a single contender. If there's a Democrat who can break out, it's likely Constant, but he has his work cut out for him with Gross in the race.

Begich III could also benefit from his famous last name, even though his family is known for its Democrats. But he has a following among conservative activists in the state and is collecting endorsements from local party leaders and organizations at a faster clip than his GOP opponents, including from a dozen state legislators.

Before Young died, Begich painted Young as insufficiently fiscally conservative, and is continuing to campaign in that vein. He's had a head start of several months, but he may have to answer for his attacks on Young's advanced age, which some found tasteless.

Revak is taking a different tack. Along with Sweeney, Revak was a co-chair of Young's re-election campaign, and of all the Republican contenders is most explicitly running as a successor to Young and the late congressman's bipartisan work. He co-authored an op-ed with Young just days before the congressman's death, and has an endorsement from Young's widow, Ann. Revak will point to his ability to win a swing district in the legislature as evidence he can bring people together.

Sweeney, who has a wealth of connections from her time as an energy lobbyist, has also picked up some notable support, including the prominent Ashlock family in Anchorage; Kara Moriarty, the president

Continued on page 8



Santa Claus

Courtesy Claus Campaign

Continued from page 7

of the Alaska Oil and Gas Association; and former Lt. Gov. Mead Treadwell. Her husband, Kevin, is a longtime Murkowski confidant who is the executive chairman of the senator's re-election campaign. That's a double-edged sword, as Murkowski is deeply unpopular among the state's GOP rank-and-file. But Sweeney's time as a Trump appointee could blunt that criticism.

Additionally, Sweeney is the highest profile Alaska Native in the race and may be able to perform well among Alaska Native voters who tend to vote Democratic but often crossed the aisle to support Young. Sweeney recently secured an endorsement from the ANCSA Association board of directors, which represents the 12 Alaska Native Regional Corporations (the analog to tribes in Alaska), and will benefit from their Super PAC. But Sweeney's campaign is only just now getting off the ground with staff hires, and her website is still inactive. With ballots hitting mailboxes in a few weeks, there's not much time to get things going.

And Santa Claus, the North Pole councilman, could conceivably take a significant chunk of the vote, observers say — not enough to win, perhaps, especially because Claus has said he won't raise money or hire staff, but enough to block another candidate from moving on to the general election.

The Early Numbers

Polling the race will prove a challenge given the size of the field.

An April 7-9 Remington Research Group survey of likely voters, conducted by the GOP firm for the conservative outlet Must Read Alaska, found Palin in first with 31 percent, followed by Gross (26 percent), Begich (21 percent), Constant (7 percent), Revak (3 percent), and Sweeney (2 percent).

But those were the only six candidates listed as options. "Another candidate not listed" received just 4 percent, a strikingly low number. With 42 candidates not listed, including several current and former officeholders, it's possible — even likely — there is significant dilution in the named candidates' totals when voters are presented with the full slate.

That may not make a difference for the top candidates, who have room to spare. But for candidates at the bottom of the pack — Constant, Revak, and Sweeney — the addition of 42 other options could drop them out of position to advance.

The Special General Election

With so much uncertainty about which four candidates emerge from the primary, it's difficult to handicap the general election. And that's before the ranked-choice voting is factored in: in the general election, voters can rank all four candidates in order of preference. If no candidate receives an outright majority, the lowest-performing candidate is eliminated, and their votes are redistributed according to voters' second choices. That continues until a candidate hits 50 percent plus one.

Observers agree that Palin certainly, and Gross likely, will make the general, leaving two other spots up for grabs. Palin is already working

to recreate the magic behind her first (and only) successful statewide race, in 2006, when she ousted Murkowski and became the youngest governor in Alaska history, and again in 2008 when for a brief few moments she revitalized the McCain presidential campaign with a burst of youth, folksy charm, and outsider energy. And she'll lean on her role as a godmother of Trumpism, punctuated by the former president's "complete and total endorsement."

For his part, Gross has already pivoted to the general election, using Palin as a foil in advertising on Facebook and Google. (Gross and Begich are the only two candidates advertising on Facebook.)

And Palin will likely draw the most fire from the other three candidates in the runoff. The others are likely to attack her for quitting as governor a decade ago and leaving Alaska in pursuit of fame and riches in the "Lower 48." Voters are sure to hear about Palin's two multimillion dollar mansions in Scottsdale, Ariz.

While those hits are likely to come from opponents on both ends of the spectrum, there are specific vulnerabilities from the right that a candidate like Begich could exploit. Palin could also take some heat for her oil tax increase plan she championed as governor, which was undone by her successor, as well as her decision to support independent Bill Walker in the 2014 gubernatorial race against her own lieutenant governor, when Walker was the *de facto* Democratic nominee.

The former governor is still unpopular in the state, according to polling last October from Alaska Survey Research (a Democratic firm), which found her favorability rating at just 31 percent, and the Remington Research Group survey, which pegged it at 37 percent. That weakness not just among Democrats but among GOP-leaning independents, creates a real opportunity for another GOP candidate — be it Begich, Revak, Sweeney, Coghill, or someone else — to promote themselves as a conservative who won't just be mugging for the camera.

One open question: will the Club for Growth get involved in the race on behalf of Begich, who recently completed a fellowship with the anti-tax group? While the Club has tended to side with Trump on endorsements of late, they have broken with the former president, most notably in Alabama, and their outside spending dwarfs most other groups.

As is the case in contests across the country this year, Republicans will work to nationalize the race, taking advantage of Biden's unpopularity and the weakness of the Democratic brand to paint Gross (and, potentially, a Democratic candidate) as too liberal for the state.

It will be incumbent on Gross to create some distance between himself and the national brand; unlike in 2020, he won't be saddled with a "D" next to his name, and he has long emphasized support for gun rights and oil drilling as a way of demonstrating his independence from the party. But he has his work cut out for him: Remington Research found his favorability rating at an anemic 32/51 percent.

The Bottom Line

Given the national environment and Alaska's partisan lean, Republicans begin as clear favorites to retain control of the seat — though which Republican wins it is very much an open question.

But Alaska's quirky politics, the scores of candidates, an all-mail race, and an untested process makes this a difficult race to handicap, especially because no poll will be able to capture the true scope of the field. Combined with a credible independent contender in Gross, this race still has the potential to get even more interesting than it already is. Likely Republican.



CALENDAR

May 3	Indiana, Ohio Primaries
May 10	Nebraska, West Virginia Primaries
May 17	Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Oregon Primaries
May 24	Georgia, Alabama, Arkansas Primaries

2022 State Legislature Preview: GOP Poised for Gains

By Guest Contributor Chaz Nuttycombe, Director of CNalysis

It's clear that President Joe Biden's sagging job approval rating is making it difficult for Democrats to maintain their majorities in Congress in this year's midterm elections. But the downballot effect is real with Republicans poised to make significant gains in state legislatures as well.

Now that the 2020 state legislative elections are behind us, we can safely say that last cycle was a disappointment for the rose-colored glasses coalition in the Democratic Party. While the Democrats created a federal trifecta, it was within a margin of a gnat's eyebrow, and Republicans simultaneously made some down-ballot gains in state governments. After netting 137 seats in 2020 nationwide and flipping both legislative chambers in New Hampshire, Republicans found themselves in an enviable position as they began their warm-ups for the 2022 midterms.

Already, the CNalysis forecasts show that Republicans are favored to have an average nationwide net gain of 118 state legislative seats across chambers that are entirely comprised of single-member districts (lower chambers in Arizona, South Dakota, North Dakota, New Hampshire, and Maryland, and both Vermont chambers, are comprised of either single-member/multi-member districts or wholly multi-member districts), with the exclusion of Ohio. Given the precarious status of their recently enacted legislative maps and GOP mapmakers' staunch refusal to obey the Ohio Supreme Court's rulings, handicapping the Buckeye State is on hold.

With seven months to go before Election Day, not only are Republicans favored to have a triple-digit net gain in seats, but they're also slight favorites to flip three state legislative chambers: the Alaska House, the Minnesota House, and the Maine House. To sweeten the deal, they have several chambers up for grabs that just might tip them over into "red tsunami" territory.

The fights for the Nevada Assembly, Maine Senate, and Oregon Senate are rated Tilt Democratic. If the national political environment favors Republicans by 4 or 5 points, these chambers are likely to flip. The Oregon House and Colorado House are rated Lean Democratic; it would take an R+5 or +6 national environment to flip these chambers. In the Likely Democratic column, we have the New Mexico House, Nevada Senate, Colorado Senate, Connecticut House, and Connecticut Senate, where it would take an R+6 or +7 environment for these chambers to flip. And in the Very Likely Democratic column, we have the Washington House: if Republicans flip this chamber it will likely be the biggest GOP year since 2010.

A triple-digit net gain in a midterm is not unusual in state legislative elections. In 2010, Republicans saw a net gain of 660 seats and added another 275 seats four years later. In the 2018 midterms, Democrats earned a net gain of 309 seats.

Republicans' forecasted gains in 2022 can be attributed to several key factors. The most notable: Biden's job approval rating is consistently underwater (his disapproval rating is higher than his approval rating) and Republicans have a narrow lead in the generic ballot.

That should produce a temporary reversion in Democratic-trending suburbs that will help the GOP win seats they wouldn't win if the president had enjoyed better public favor.

Republican gains won't come from *only* the suburbs; most of the conservative Democrats representing rural areas have been serving on

borrowed time since 2018. These are districts that have been trending rightward and their Democratic incumbents narrowly escaped an upset in 2020 or were flat-out left uncontested at the state legislative level. In the case of some state Senate districts which haven't been up for re-election since 2018, Democrats are trying to stay in the good graces of the white working-class voters that have trended away from them since 2016.

Many of the aforementioned Democratic incumbents are already headed out of the door, creating safe, open-seat pickup opportunities for Republicans in these rural areas. These incumbents likely knew that they would be underdogs in their re-election bids. The double-whammy of both a red wave and the inevitability of rightward trends catching up to Democrats creates a dilemma, and it's understandable why an

incumbent would prefer to retire on their own accord rather than be humiliated in defeat.

Another factor is redistricting: Republicans have been able to gerrymander themselves into some new seats in South Carolina, Texas, and Arkansas. Meanwhile, Democrats have been able to mitigate the damage by stacking the independent commission in California and gerrymandering Illinois and Maryland. The undoing of Republican gerrymanders in places such as Michigan and Pennsylvania by nonpartisan redistricting commissions also cuts into the national projected Republican net gain.

As a result of these factors, it will be an *extreme* rarity this year if a Democrat wins a district that Donald Trump carried in 2020, but there will be a plethora of districts that voted for Biden in 2020 and choose to vote for their local Republican this year. After the 2021 November elections, there are 170 Democratic state legislators representing districts that Trump carried compared to 409 Republican state legislators representing districts that Biden carried.

In the single-member state legislative districts up this year (some chambers are not up until 2024 and some state senates have staggered terms), Republicans are favored in a whopping 253 districts that voted for Joe Biden in 2020. If we exclude New England, where many voters split their ticket for Republicans, the number of districts comes to 181. Meanwhile, Democrats are favored in 25 districts that voted for Donald Trump in 2020. By this estimation, Republicans are favored to win 10 times more Biden districts than Democrats are favored to win Trump districts.

These counts do not include Ohio or Kentucky. Ohio's maps are still in flux due to litigation, and Kentucky did not collect precinct results in most counties in the 2020 election.

These are only for chambers that are comprised entirely of single-member districts—so the South Dakota House, North Dakota House, Arizona House, Vermont House, Vermont Senate, Maryland House, and the infamous New Hampshire House are not included in this count. This count also includes the latest maps in Wisconsin, Alaska, and New York despite ongoing legal challenges.

Of course, there's still more than six months before Election Day, but as of now, Republicans stand to make significant gains in state legislatures as well as in federal races.

For more detailed, district-specific analysis and access to CNalysis's custom-built model, which identifies the most competitive districts that will decide control of chambers, consider subscribing to the CNalysis newsletter.



State Legislative Chamber Ratings Provided by CNAlysis

State	Chamber	CURRENT COMPOSITION*			CNAlysis Rating	State	Chamber	CURRENT COMPOSITION*			CNAlysis Rating
		Dem	GOP	Ind				Dem	GOP	Ind	
Alabama	Upper	8	27		Solid R	Montana	Upper	19	31		Solid R
	Lower	28	77		Solid R		Lower	33	67		Solid R
Alaska	Upper	7	13		Solid R	Nebraska	Uni-cameral	17	32		Solid R
	Lower	17	19	4	<i>Tilt R</i>		Nevada	Upper	12	9	
Arizona	Upper	14	16		Very Likely R	Lower	26	16		Tilt D	
	Lower	29	31		Likely R	New Hampshire	Upper	10	14		Very Likely R
Arkansas	Upper	7	27	1	Solid R		Lower	187	211	2	Tilt R
	Lower	24	76		Solid R	New Jersey	Upper	25	15		No Election D
California	Upper	31	9		Solid D		Lower	52	28		No Election D
	Lower	60	19	1	Solid D	New Mexico	Upper	26	15	1	No Election D
Colorado	Upper	20	15		Likely D		Lower	45	24	1	Likely D
	Lower	41	24		Lean D	New York	Upper	43	20		Solid D
Connecticut	Upper	23	13		Likely D		Lower	107	43		Solid D
	Lower	97	54		Likely D	North Carolina	Upper	22	28		Solid R
Delaware	Upper	14	7		Solid D		Lower	51	69		Very Likely R
	Lower	26	15		Solid D	North Dakota	Upper	7	40		Solid R
Florida	Upper	16	24		Solid R		Lower	14	80		Solid R
	Lower	42	78		Solid R	Ohio	Upper	8	25		Solid R
Georgia	Upper	22	34		Solid R		Lower	35	64		Solid R
	Lower	77	103		Solid R	Oklahoma	Upper	9	39		Solid R
Hawaii	Upper	24	1		Solid D		Lower	19	82		Solid R
	Lower	47	4		Solid D	Oregon	Upper	18	10	2	Tilt D
Idaho	Upper	7	28		Solid R		Lower	37	23		Lean D
	Lower	12	58		Solid R	Pennsylvania	Upper	21	28	1	Very Likely R
Illinois	Upper	41	18		Solid D		Lower	90	113		Likely R
	Lower	73	45		Solid D	Rhode Island	Upper	33	5		Solid D
Indiana	Upper	11	39		Solid R		Lower	65	10		Solid D
	Lower	29	71		Solid R	South Carolina	Upper	16	30		No Election R
Iowa	Upper	18	32		Solid R		Lower	42	82		Solid R
	Lower	40	60		Solid R	South Dakota	Upper	3	32		Solid R
Kansas	Upper	11	29		No Election R		Lower	8	62		Solid R
	Lower	39	86		Solid R	Tennessee	Upper	6	27		Solid R
Kentucky	Upper	8	30		Solid R		Lower	26	73		Solid R
	Lower	24	76		Solid R	Texas	Upper	13	18		Solid R
Louisiana	Upper	12	27		No Election R		Lower	65	85		Solid R
	Lower	34	68	3	No Election R	Utah	Upper	6	23		Solid R
Maine	Upper	22	13		Tilt D		Lower	17	58		Solid R
	Lower	81	67	3	<i>Tilt R</i>	Vermont	Upper	21	7	2	Solid D
Maryland	Upper	32	15		Solid D		Lower	92	47	11	Solid D
	Lower	99	42		Solid D	Virginia	Upper	21	19		No Election D
Massachusetts	Upper	37	3		Solid D		Lower	48	52		No Election R
	Lower	129	30	1	Solid D	Washington	Upper	29	20		Solid D
Michigan	Upper	16	22		Tilt R		Lower	57	41		Very Likely D
	Lower	52	58		Likely R	West Virginia	Upper	11	23		Solid R
Minnesota	Upper	31	34	2	Likely R		Lower	22	78		Solid R
	Lower	69	64	1	<i>Tilt R</i>	Wisconsin	Upper	12	21		Solid R
Mississippi	Upper	16	36		No Election R		Lower	38	61		Solid R
	Lower	42	76	4	No Election R	Wyoming	Upper	2	28		Solid R
Missouri	Upper	10	24		Solid R		Lower	7	51	2	Solid R
	Lower	49	114		Solid R						

*As of April 12, 2022

Note: Flips are in italics