Inside Elections
with
Nathan L. Gonzales
Nonpartisan Analysis

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2024 Senate Ratings

Toss-Up (3)	
AZ Open (Sinema, I)	Tester (D-Mont.)
Brown (D-Ohio)	
Tilt Democratic (3)	**Tilt Republican**
MI Open (Stabenow, D)	
Casey (D-Penn.)	
Rosen (D-Nev.)	
Lean Democratic (1)	**Lean Republican**
Baldwin (D-Wis.)	
Likely Democratic (1)	**Likely Republican (1)**
MD Open (Cardin, D)	Cruz (R-Texas)
Solid Democratic (14)	**Solid Republican (11)**
CA Open (Butler, D)	IN Open (Braun, R)
DE Open (Carper, D)	UT Open (Romney, R)
Cantwell (D-Wash.)	*WV Open (Manchin, D)*
Gillibrand (D-N.Y.)	Barrasso (R-Wyo.)
Heinrich (D-N.M.)	Blackburn (R-Tenn.)
Hirono (D-Hawaii)	Cramer (R-N.D.)
Kaine (D-Va.)	Fischer (R-Neb.)
King (I-Maine)	Hawley (R-Mo.)
Klobuchar (D-Minn.)	Ricketts (R-Neb.)
Menendez (D-N.J.)	Scott (R-Fla.)
Murphy (D-Conn.)	Wicker (R-Miss.)
Sander (I-Vt.)	
Warren (D-Mass.)	
Whitehouse (D-R.I.)	

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

CALENDAR

March 19	Arizona, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Ohio Presidential Primaries
March 19	California's 20th Special, Illinois, Ohio Congressional Primaries
March 28	MLB Opening Day
April 8	Total solar eclipse
April 23	Pennsylvania Primary
April 30	New York's 26th District Special Election

Wisconsin Senate: GOP Puts Hope in Hovde

By Jacob Rubashkin

Overshadowed by better GOP pickup opportunities in Montana and Ohio, and flashier candidates in Arizona, Michigan and Nevada, Wisconsin's Senate race has flown under the radar this cycle.

But two-term Democrat Tammy Baldwin's quest for re-election is quietly shaping up to be the toughest test of her political career, and the outcome — while it probably won't determine which party holds the majority — will shape how large that majority is.

The Badger State was, for all of last year, the most glaring recruitment hole for the GOP. But Republicans finally landed a candidate to take on Baldwin, and in keeping with the national party's Senate strategy this cycle, it's an uber-wealthy businessman with limited political experience, who can fund much of his own race but also has some obvious vulnerabilities.

The Lay of the Land

When it comes to politics, Wisconsin might be the most evenly divided state in the country. Its Baseline score, D+1, is the narrowest of any state. It's one of just five states represented by both a Democrat and a Republican in the Senate.

The two parties are constantly battling for control of the state. The last governor to succeed another governor from his own party in an election was in 1962 (several governors have ascended from the lieutenant governorship due to a vacancy).

Over the past decade, the state played host to four nationally watched gubernatorial races featuring polarizing Republican Scott Walker — he won the first three before losing in 2018 to Democrat Tony Evers by 1.1 percent. Evers won re-election by 3.4 points in 2022.

In the last two presidential elections, the winning candidate's margin of victory was less than 1 percent. In 2016, Donald Trump eked out a 0.77-point victory over Hillary Clinton; four years later, Joe Biden outran Trump by an even skinnier 0.63 percent. The presidential is expected to be highly competitive once again in 2024. (*Inside Elections* rates it as one of five Toss-Up states.)

And at the Senate level, both parties have struggled to dislodge the others' incumbents since Ron Johnson ousted liberal icon Russ Feingold in 2010. Feingold failed in his 2016 comeback (despite Johnson being triaged by national Republicans in the run-up to the election), and Baldwin easily dispatched opponent Leah Vukmir by 11 points in 2018.

In 2022, Democrats again targeted Johnson and believed his low image rating would be enough to sink him. But the Republican still managed to defeat his challenger, Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes, by 1 point, 50.5-49.5, in the second-closest Senate race of the cycle.

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Report Shorts

Arizona Senate. Independent Sen. Kyrsten Sinema announced she will not seek re-election, simplifying one of the most complicated and competitive races in the country. It will be at least a few weeks before there's clarity on which party might benefit. Even though the primary isn't until July 30, the general election will likely feature Democratic Rep. Ruben Gallego and 2022 GOP gubernatorial nominee/former TV anchor Kari Lake. Both candidates have to bolster their profiles statewide, but, fundamentally, this is an open-seat race in a presidential swing state, which are ingredients for a close race. Toss-up.

California Senate. Democratic Rep. Adam Schiff and former baseball star/Republican Steve Garvey topped 30 percent in the primary and will face off in the November general election. Democratic Rep. Katie Porter finished a distant third at 15 percent and expressed her frustration with Schiff for "attacking" Garvey in his own ads in order to boost the Republican and lock Porter out of the general election. Democratic Rep. Barbara Lee finished fourth with 9 percent.

The seat, which was held by Democrat Dianne Feinstein for 30 years, is open because appointed Democratic Sen. Laphonza Butler decided not to seek a full term. With a Republican as an opponent this fall, Schiff is the first member of the Likely New Senators club. Solid Democratic.

Colorado's 4th District. GOP Rep. Ken Buck, already not seeking re-election, will now resign next Friday. Temporarily, Republicans will be down another seat on Capitol Hill, making life harder for Speaker Mike Johnson. Gov. Jared Polis has scheduled a special election on June 25, which will coincide with Colorado's regular primary elections. Third District Rep. Lauren Boebert will not seek the nomination for the 4th District special election, but will still run in the regular primary in the 4th District after barely winning her current seat in 2022. Solid Republican.

Minnesota Senate. Navy veteran Joe Fraser announced his campaign against DFL Sen. Amy Klobuchar. He's got a credible resume, but it's unclear how much money he'll be able to raise and how well Republicans can do in Minnesota, where Democrats had a 6.4-point Baseline advantage after the 2022 elections. Solid DFL.

Mississippi Senate. Sen. Roger Wicker defeated two primary opponents with 61 percent of the vote. Knowing that the GOP race was the most important contest in the very Republican state, Wicker left nothing to chance, spending $2.7 million on TV ads to avoid a runoff. Based on his showing, it looks like his concern was warranted. Solid Republican.

North Carolina Governor. Democratic attorney general Josh Stein and Republican Lieutenant Governor Mark Robinson handily won their primaries with 70 and 65 percent, respectively. This is the marquee gubernatorial matchup of the cycle, with Democrats salivating at the chance to litigate the homophobic, misogynistic, and anti-Semitic remarks Robinson has made over the years. Robinson will test the rightward lean of the state in recent cycles. Toss-up.

Texas Senate. Rep. Colin Allred defeated state Rep. Roland Gutierrez 59-17 percent in the Democratic primary. Allred avoided a runoff and will face GOP Sen. Ted Cruz in the general election in the GOP's only vulnerability on the current Senate battleground map. Likely Republican. IE

2024 Gubernatorial Ratings

Toss-up (2)	
NC Open (Cooper, D)	NH Open (Sununu, R)
Tilt Democratic	**Tilt Republican**
Lean Democratic	**Lean Republican**
Likely Democratic (1)	**Likely Republican**
WA Open (Inslee, D)	
Solid Democratic (1)	**Solid Republican (7)**
DE Open (Carney, D)	IN Open (Holcomb, R)
	MO Open (Parson, R)
	ND Open (Burgum, R)
	WV Open (Justice, R)
	Cox, R (Utah)
	Gianforte, R (Mont.)
	Scott, R (Vt.)

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

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Presidential Race Looks Even between Biden and Trump

By Nathan L. Gonzales

While the presidential race is careening toward a rematch, 2024 won't necessarily be a replay of 2020.

The race looks familiar with President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump topping the ballot, but both men are bringing more baggage to the contest, creating a level of volatility that doesn't often accompany rematches.

The familiar is apparently fueling optimism from the incumbent. "I'm the only one who has ever beat him. And I'll beat him again," Biden told *The New Yorke*r recently about facing Trump again. But Biden is in a fundamentally weaker position this time around.

Instead of a challenger facing an unpopular incumbent, Biden is the unpopular incumbent seeking reelection. Voters are holding Biden responsible for the country's ills while romanticizing (or at least forgetting about) the challenges during Trump's first term.

Biden's job rating has been poor and steady for two-and-a-half years. The president's disapproval rating has been higher than his approval rating ever since the country's exit from Afghanistan. Biden is also the country's oldest president in history with a disproportionate focus on his ability to serve a second term.

Last fall, Democrats comforted themselves by comparing Biden's unpopularity to President Barack Obama's standing in 2011. But Obama's job rating had improved by this point in 2012.

Since public opinion has hardened around Biden, the president will likely have to rely on voters who disapprove of the president to support him for a second term. Luckily for Democrats, Trump gives Biden an opening to do just that.

With more than 90 indictments in four different federal cases, hundreds of millions of dollars in fines due in civil cases, and his unwillingness to call off his supporters as they invaded the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, Trump has given independent voters reasons to pause before giving him a second term.

Yet despite his remarkable list of liabilities, Trump is in a strong position if the election were held today. He leads by a couple points in the national polling average, which doesn't mean as much as his polling lead in key swing states including Arizona, Nevada, Michigan, North Carolina, and Georgia. But the election is more than seven months away.

Optimistic Democrats will argue that Trump is hovering where he's always been, and his polling advantage is a result of Biden's soft support. But that glosses over the president's challenge in the race and the uphill climb to avoid the same fate as other unpopular incumbents who lost reelection including President George H.W. Bush in 1992 and Trump in 2020.

While Biden may still ultimately win the race, it's hard to see him with a fundamental advantage, as our current race ratings reflect.

Inside Elections is changing Michigan (and its 15 Electoral College votes) from Tilt Democratic to Toss-Up. With that change, the GOP nominee is favored to win 235 Electoral College votes compared to 232 for the Democratic nominee, leaving both short of the 270 needed to win. That leaves five states and 71 Electoral College votes in Toss-up, including Arizona (11), Georgia (16), Michigan (15), Pennsylvania (19), and Wisconsin (10).

Since ratings are a combination of where a race is and where it's most likely to end up, states such as Nevada remain in Tilt Democratic for now. Even though it appears Trump currently has a lead, Republicans haven't won the Silver State in a presidential race since President George W. Bush's re-election in 2004. But Trump doesn't need to win Nevada in order to get to the White House.

On the other hand, Biden is at risk of losing Georgia, despite his narrow 2020 win and Democratic success in recent Senate races. Biden is the only Democrat to win the Peach State since Democrat Bill Clinton's victory with 43.5 percent in 1992. But Biden doesn't need Georgia for a reelection.

As the general election comes into focus, Democrats are counting on the contrast to boost Biden's standing among base Democrats and independents. It's a plausible path to victory, but if the race doesn't start to take that shape before too long, it could be a difficult hole for Biden to climb out of. IE

2024 Presidential Ratings
(Electoral Votes)

Toss-Up (71)

Arizona (11), Georgia (16), Michigan (15), Pennsylvania (19), Wisconsin (10)

Tilt Democratic (6)	Tilt Republican (16)
Nevada (6)	North Carolina (16)
Lean Democratic (15)	**Lean Republican (31)**
Minnesota (10), Nebraska 2nd (1), New Hampshire (4)	Florida (30), Maine 2nd (1)
Likely Democratic (15)	**Likely Republican (63)**
Maine Statewide (2), Virginia (13)	Iowa (6), Texas (40), Ohio (17)
Solid Democratic (196)	**Solid Republican (125)**
California (54), Colorado (10), Connecticut (7), Delaware (3), District of Columbia (3), Hawaii (4), Illinois (19), Maine 1st (1), Maryland (10), Massachusetts (11), New Jersey (14), New Mexico (5), New York (28), Oregon (8), Rhode Island (4), Vermont (3), Washington (12)	Alabama (9), Alaska (3), Arkansas (6), Idaho (4), Indiana (11), Kansas (6), Kentucky (8), Louisiana (8), Mississippi (6), Missouri (10), Montana (4), Nebraska Statewide (2), Nebraska 1st (1), Nebraska 3rd (1), North Dakota (3), Oklahoma (7), South Carolina (9), South Dakota (3), Tennessee (11), Utah (6), West Virginia (4), Wyoming (3)

	GOP	DEM
2020 Results	232	306
2024 Ratings	235	232
Toss-up	71	
Needed to Win	270	

Key House Primary Results in Alabama, California, Mississippi, North Carolina and Texas

By Jacob Rubashkin

Candidate filing deadlines haven't passed in some states, but other states are done with their primaries. Over the last two weeks, a few dozen consequential congressional primaries set the stage of competitive general elections or effectively elected a new member of Congress by choosing a winner in a solid district.

Rather than a summary of all the primary results, these are the races in which the primary was uncertain and the result had a future impact.

Alabama.

1st District (Southern Alabama) Jerry Carl, R, re-elected 84%. Trump 75%. Rep. Barry Moore defeated fellow Rep. Jerry Carl, 52-48 percent. Carl is the first incumbent to lose re-election this cycle, but the circumstances are unique given that the district was redrawn by court order. The result is a slight upset; Carl represented more of the new district than Moore did, but Moore had outside support from the Club for Growth. Solid Republican.



Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

Jerry Carl

2nd District (Mobile, Montgomery, and eastern Black Belt) Open; Barry Moore, running in 1st District. Biden 56%. Shomari Figures and Anthony Daniels are heading for a April 16 runoff for the Democratic nomination in this newly-drawn district. Figures led the initial race 44-22 percent. On the GOP side, former state Sen. Dick Brewbaker and attorney Caroleene Dobson are also headed to a runoff. Likely Democratic.

California.

12th District (Oakland and Berkeley) Open; Barbara Lee, D, ran for Senate. Biden 89%. Bay Area Rapid Transit Board member Lateefah Simon (53 percent of the vote with two-thirds counted) will be the clear favorite in the general election against either Oakland Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce President Jennifer Tran (15 percent) or Alameda vice mayor Tony Daysog (13 percent), though the second place spot has not been called yet. Solid Democratic.

16th District (Silicon Valley) Open; Anna Eshoo, D, not seeking re-election. Biden 75%. Former San Jose Mayor Sam Liccardo finished ahead of a crowded field with just more than 21 percent. He'll face either fellow Democrat/Santa Clara Supervisor Joe Simitian (16.68 percent) or Democratic state Assemblyman Evan Low (16.71 percent) in November. Solid Democratic.

20th District (Eastern Central Valley from the Bakersfield to Fresno areas) Open; Kevin McCarthy, R, resigning. Trump 61%. State Assemblyman Vince Fong - McCarthy's preferred successor - finished first in the primary with 41 percent and will face fellow Republican/Tulare County Sheriff Mike Boudreaux (24.8 percent) in the November election for the full term. Solid Republican.

22nd District (Southern Central Valley and eastern Bakersfield area) David Valadao, R, re-elected 52%. Biden 55%. After some uncertainty and millions of dollars in TV spending, Rep. David Valadao will face Democrat Rudy Salas in a rematch of the 2022 race. Valado won that race by 3 points. Overall in this year's primary, the two GOP candidates combined to outpace the two Democratic candidates 55-45 percent. Tilt Republican.

29th District (Eastern San Fernando Valley) Open; Tony Cárdenas, not seeking re-election. Biden 75%. State Assemblywoman Luz Rivas finished first in the primary with 49 percent, more than 20 points ahead of the only Republican, retired labor union official Benny Bernal. That means Rivas will likely be a member of Congress next year. Solid Democratic.

30th District (Los Angeles, Burbank, and Glendale) Open; Adam Schiff, D, running for Senate. Biden 72%. State Assemblywoman Laura Friedman (30 percent) will likely be a member of Congress next year as well. She'll face Republican Alex Balekian (18 percent) in November in this blue district. Boy Meets World actor Ben Savage finished a distant seventh with 4 percent. Solid Democratic.

31st District (Eastern San Gabriel Valley) Open; Grace Napolitano, D, retiring. Biden 65%.

Former Democratic Rep. Gil Cisneros will be coming back to Congress after finishing first in the primary 23 percent. He'll face GOP attorney Dan Martinez in the general election, but it's a significant Democratic district. State Sen. Susan Rubio, the next-strongest Democrat, finished a close fourth. Cisneros served a term in Congress from a different district before he was defeated by Republican Young Kim in 2020. Solid Democratic.



Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

Gil Cisneros

40th District (Eastern Orange County) Young Kim R, re-elected 57%. Biden 49.9%. Kim (55 percent in the primary) will face Democrat/retired fire captain Joe Kerr (25 percent) in November. Some Democrats believed Tustin Unified School District Board Member Allyson Muñiz Damikolas had more upside. But she finished third with 20 percent. Likely Republican.

41st District (Southern Riverside suburbs to Palm Springs) Ken Calvert, R, re-elected 52%. Trump 50%. Calvert received less than 53 percent of the vote in the primary, a less-than-stellar showing given that turnout in the district favored Republicans. Democrat Will Rollins took in 39 percent and another Democrat won 9 percent; Rollins is a favorite of national Democratic strategists. Lean Republican.

45th District (Western Orange County) Michelle Steel, R, re-elected 52%. Biden 52%. Just 256 votes separate attorney Derek Tran and Garden

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Grove City Councilwoman Kim Nguyen-Penaloza; both Democrats are vying for the second place spot and a chance to take on Steel. Tran is the superior fundraiser but a political newcomer; Nguyen-Penaloza has struggled to raise cash but has backing from much of the local party leadership. Lean Republican.

47th District (Coastal Orange County and Irvine) Open; Katie Porter, D, running for U.S. Senate. Biden 54%. Millions of dollars in negative ads wasn't enough to derail Democratic state Sen. Dave Min, who secured a spot in the general election with 26 percent, second to Republican Scott Baugh (32 percent). Min's 2023 DUI added intrigue to this race, especially when well-funded attorney Joanna Weiss (19 percent) began receiving serious support from AIPAC and EMILY's List. Tilt Democratic.

49th District (Coastal southern Orange and northern San Diego counties) Mike Levin, D, re-elected 53%. Biden 55%. National Republicans did not get their favored candidate, media executive Margarita Wilkinson, in this race; instead their standard-bearer will be 2022 state Senate nominee Matt Gunderson, who finished in second with 26 percent. Levin is at the edge of the battlefield. Likely Democratic.

Mississippi.

4th District (Gulf Coast) Mike Ezell, R, elected 73%. Trump 68%. Ezell defeated Carl Boyanton 73-19 percent on Tuesday. Ezell used incumbency and a spending advantage to knock down any serious threats. Solid Republican.

North Carolina.

1st District (Inland northeastern North Carolina) Don Davis, D, elected 52%. Biden 50.4%. Retired U.S. Army Col. Laurie Buckout won the GOP nomination and will face Democratic Rep. Don Davis in the general election in a district Republicans drew to defeat the congressman. This should be one of the most competitive races in the country. Toss-up.

6th District (Central Piedmont region) Open; Kathy Manning, D, not seeking re-election. Trump 57%. Health care lobbyist Addison McDowell and former Rep. Mark Walker were headed to a runoff until Wednesday, when Walker announced he was leaving the race to join the Trump campaign. That makes McDowell a likely new member of Congress since the district was drawn by Republicans to heavily favor a Republican candidate. Likely Republican.



Courtesy McDowell Campaign

Addison McDowell

8th District (Eastern Charlotte suburbs and rural areas east of Charlotte) Open; Dan Bishop, R, running for attorney general. Trump 58%. Mark Harris, the pastor who was the 2018 nominee for this seat, narrowly won the nomination without a runoff with 30.4 percent. Allan Baucom is in second with 27 percent. Harris will likely, finally, be a member of Congress next year. Solid Republican.

10th District (Winston-Salem and western Piedmont region) Open; Patrick McHenry, R, not seeking re-election. Trump 57%. Former Green Beret Pat Harrigan won the GOP nomination with 41 percent. State Rep. Grey Mills finished a close second at 39 percent. Harrigan will be a member of Congress next year. Solid Republican.

13th District (Raleigh exurbs and nearby rural areas) Open; Wiley Nickel, D, not seeking re-election. Trump 58%. 2022 candidate Kelly Daughtry (27 percent) and former federal prosecutor Brad Knott (19 percent) are headed for the May 14 runoff. Likely Republican

14th District (Western Charlotte and western foothills) Open; Jeff Jackson, D, running for attorney general. Trump 57%. State House Speaker Tim Moore won the GOP primary with 75 percent and will be a member of Congress next year. Likely Republican.

Texas.

7th District (Southwest Houston and Houston suburbs) Lizzie Fletcher, D, re-elected 64%. Biden 60%. Rep. Lizzie Fletcher faced

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2024 House Ratings

Toss-Up (5D, 5R)

CA 13 (Duarte, R)	NC 1 (Davis, D)
CA 27 (Garcia, R)	NY 4 (D'Esposito, R)
CO 8 (Caraveo, D)	NY 17 (Lawler, R)
MI 7 (Open; Slotkin, D)	OR 5 (DeRemer, R)
NM 2 (Vasquez, D)	WA 3 (Perez, D)

Tilt Democratic (7D, 1R)

AK AL (Peltola, D)
CA 47 (Open; Porter, D)
MI 8 (Open; Kildee, D)
NY 22 (Williams, R)
OH 13 (Sykes, D)
PA 7 (Wild, D)
PA 8 (Cartwright, D)
VA 7 (Open; Spanberger, D)

Tilt Republican (9R)

AZ 1 (Schweikert, R)
AZ 6 (Ciscomani, R)
CA 22 (Valadao, R)
CO 3 (Open; Boebert, R)
IA 3 (Nunn, R)
MI 10 (James, R)
NJ 7 (Kean Jr., R)
NY 19 (Molinaro, R)
VA 2 (Kiggans, R)

Lean Democratic (13D)

CT 5 (Hayes, D)
IL 17 (Sorensen, D)
ME 2 (Golden, D)
MI 3 (Scholten, D)
MN 2 (Craig, DFL)
NV 3 (Lee, D)
NH 1 (Pappas, D)
NY 3 (Suozzi, D)
NY 18 (Ryan, D)
OH 1 (Landsman, D)
OH 9 (Kaptur, D)
OR 6 (Salinas, D)
PA 17 (Deluzio, D)

Lean Republican (8R)

CA 41 (Calvert, R)
CA 45 (Steel, R)
IA 1 (Miller-Meeks, R)
MT 1 (Zinke, R)
NE 2 (Bacon, R)
NY 1 (LaLota, R)
PA 10 (Perry, R)
TX 15 (De La Cruz, R)

	GOP	DEM
Solid	187	174
Likely/Lean/Tilt	29	35
Total	216	209
Toss-up	10	
Needed for majority	218	

Likely Democratic (12D, 2R)

AL 2 *(Open; Moore, R)*
CA 49 (Levin, D)
FL 9 (Soto, D)
IN 1 (Mrvan, D)
KS 3 (Davids, D)
LA 6 (Graves, R)
MD 6 (Open; Trone, D)
NV 1 (Titus, D)
NV 4 (Horsford, D)
NH 2 (Kuster, D)
OR 4 (Hoyle, D)
TX 34 (Gonzalez, D)
VA 10 (Open; Wexton, D)
WA 8 (Schrier, D)

Likely Republican (9R, 3D)

CA 3 (Kiley, R)
CA 40 (Kim, R)
FL 13 (Luna, R)
FL 27 (Salazar, R)
IA 2 (Hinson, R)
NC 6 (Open, Manning, D)
NC 13 (Open, Nickel, D)
NC 14 (Open; Jackson, D)
PA 1 (Fitzpatrick, R)
SC 1 (Mace, R)
WI 1 (Steil, R)
WI 3 (Van Orden, R)

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

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down progressive challenger Pervez Agwan, 74-26 percent in a race that included messaging on Israel before the Oct. 7 Hamas attack. Solid Democratic.

12th District (Western Fort Worth and western suburbs) Open; Kay Granger, R, not seeking re-election. Trump 58%. State Rep. Craig Goldman leads construction company owner John O'Shea, 44-26 percent, with 99 percent of the estimated vote counted. As expected, Goldman continues to be the frontrunner but the runoff adds a layer of uncertainty. Solid Republican.

18th District (Parts of central and northern Houston) Sheila Jackson Lee, D, elected 71%. Biden 74%. Jackson Lee defeated challenger Amanda Edwards, 60-37 percent. Jackson Lee's failed run for mayor of Houston complicated the race, but the congresswoman prevailed over an upstart challenger who is regarded as a rising star in the party. Solid Democratic.

23rd District (San Antonio suburbs to El Paso suburbs) Tony Gonzales, R, re-elected 56%. Trump 53%. Gonzales (45 percent) was forced into a runoff with YouTuber Brendan Herrera after falling short of the 50 percent threshold. Herrera received 25 percent. Gonzales was rebuked by the state Republican party for his votes on a gun bill and gay marriage. Solid Republican.

26th District (Northern Fort Worth suburbs and exurbs) Open; Michael Burgess, R, not seeking re-election. Trump 59%. Brandon Gill, Dinesh D'Souza's son-in-law, will be a member of Congress after winning the GOP primary with 58 percent over a field that included Scott Armey, former Rep. Dick Armey's son. Solid Republican.



Courtesy Julie Johnson Campaign

Julie Johnson

32nd District (Northern Dallas) Open; Colin Allred, D, running for U.S. Senate. Biden 66%.

State Rep. Julie Johnson defeated trauma surgeon Brian Williams, 50.4-19.1 percent, just barely enough to avoid a runoff in the Democratic primary. She'll be a member of Congress next year. Solid Democratic. IE

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The Democratic Incumbent

Baldwin, 62, was born in Madison, where her political career began in 1986. Baldwin's time in elected office began when she was 24, after she had graduated from Smith College but before receiving her law degree from University of Wisconsin in 1989, and included stints on the Dane County Board of Supervisors, Madison Common Council, and in the state assembly before she ran for Congress in 1998.



Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call

Tammy Baldwin

Initially a swing seat — she won her first two races by 6 and 3 points — Baldwin's district was redrawn to be more favorable, and she did not face another tough election until she ran for Senate to succeed retiring Democrat Herb Kohl in 2012. In that race she beat former Gov. Tommy Thompson, 51-46 percent, as President Barack Obama carried the state by a slightly wider 53-46 percent margin, becoming the first openly gay or lesbian senator in history.

In 2018, Republicans struggled to recruit a top-tier challenger to Baldwin, ultimately lining up behind state Sen. Leah Vukmir. The race never developed for the GOP; Vukmir was outspent by Baldwin by six-to-one and lost by 11 points, 55-44 percent.

In the Senate, Baldwin sits on the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP), Commerce, Science and Transportation, and Appropriations committees.

Baldwin has earned a reputation as one of the Senate's more progressive legislators, with 100 percent lifetime ratings from Planned Parenthood and Human Rights Campaign, a 99 percent lifetime rating from the AFL-CIO — and 3 and 8 percent scores from the Club for Growth and Americans for Prosperity.

In 2022, she negotiated the Respect for Marriage Act, which codified protections for same-sex marriages and narrowly avoided a filibuster, 62-37.

Her campaign team includes media consultants Adam Magnus, Saul Shorr, and Mandy Grunwald and pollster Jill Normington of Normington Petts. Roy Temple is the digital consultant and Peter Giangreco is the direct mail consultant.

The Republican Challenger(s)

The most notable Republican in the race is banker Eric Hovde, who previously sought this seat in 2012.

National Republicans had tried hard to woo Rep. Mike Gallagher into running against Baldwin; the NRSC even released a poll showing him trailing Baldwin by just 1 point in May 2023. But Gallagher passed (and later decided not to seek re-election at all). Reps. Tom Tiffany and Bryan Steil also declined to run.

Hovde, 59, is a wealthy real estate investor, bank CEO, and entrepreneur. A 1986 graduate of University of Wisconsin, Hovde founded a financial services firm with his father — a Reagan administration appointee and onetime president of the National Association of Realtors — in 1987, when the younger Hovde moved to Washington, DC.

Over the following 25 years, Hovde expanded his business interests into community banks via a hedge fund, and in the early 2000s took over his family's 70-year-old realty group in Madison.

Hovde was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 1991, and in 1998 he and his brother founded a charitable foundation that works toward a cure for MS, and helps vulnerable and homeless children in several Latin American countries and Ghana.

In 2011, Hovde moved back to Wisconsin from Washington, DC in anticipation of a Senate run. In the 2012 GOP primary, he narrowly lost to Thompson, 34-30 percent, after spending roughly $6 million of his own money. In that race, which also featured former Rep. Mark Neumann and state House speaker Jeff Fitzgerald, Hovde employed a similar strategy to Sen. Ron Johnson, with a late entry followed by an early

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positive ad blitz in February (a tactic he is looking to replicate this year).

Following his loss, Hovde expanded his banking portfolio to the West Coast with the 2014 creation of H Bancorp, a bank holding company that operates Orange County, California's Sunwest Bank.

Hovde, who maintains that he has lived in Wisconsin for most of the time since his 2012 bid, bought a Laguna Beach, CA mansion in 2018 and has been recognized by Orange County business publications for his work at Sunwest.

He also considered bids for Senate against Baldwin in 2018 and governor against Evers in 2022; that year, he even aired an anti-Evers ad in 2020 (that the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* noted was shot in Los Angeles).

Because Hovde filed so late in the cycle, he will not have to file a personal financial disclosure until August, so it's not obvious what his net worth is. But in 2012, he reported between $58 million and $240 million in assets, and GOP strategists say he's increased his wealth significantly since. His allies anticipate he'll spend $20 million of his own money on the race, though he's also fundraising.

Hovde's campaign team includes general consultant Dave Rexrode, media consultants Zack Roday and Liesl Hickey of Ascent Strategic, and pollster BJ Martino of The Tarrance Group.

Former staffing company CEO Scott Mayer could also launch a bid. He has flirted with the idea for a year, and at one point announced a campaign team — but the people he named said they hadn't agreed to work for him, and he retracted his statements. And former Milwaukee County Sheriff David Clarke, a one-time Democrat who is popular in conservative circles but whose tenure was mired in controversy, has made noises about running, but GOP strategists believe he ultimately will not.

The General Election

Although the primary picture won't be entirely clear until the June 3 filing deadline, neither Hovde nor Baldwin are waiting to begin the general election. Both candidates and a Democratic super PAC are already airing TV ads.

Democrats have been laying the groundwork to run against Hovde as an out-of-touch California banker for months, and wasted no time tagging him as such after he got in the race, pointing out that Hovde didn't mention Wisconsin at all in his announcement video.

A Democratic super PAC affiliated with Majority Leader Chuck Schumer has reserved a $2.4 million March ad buy targeting Hovde's California riches. The main Republican super PAC, Senate Leadership Fund, has not made any reservations in Wisconsin yet.

The criticisms hit close enough to home to warrant several responses from the Republican..

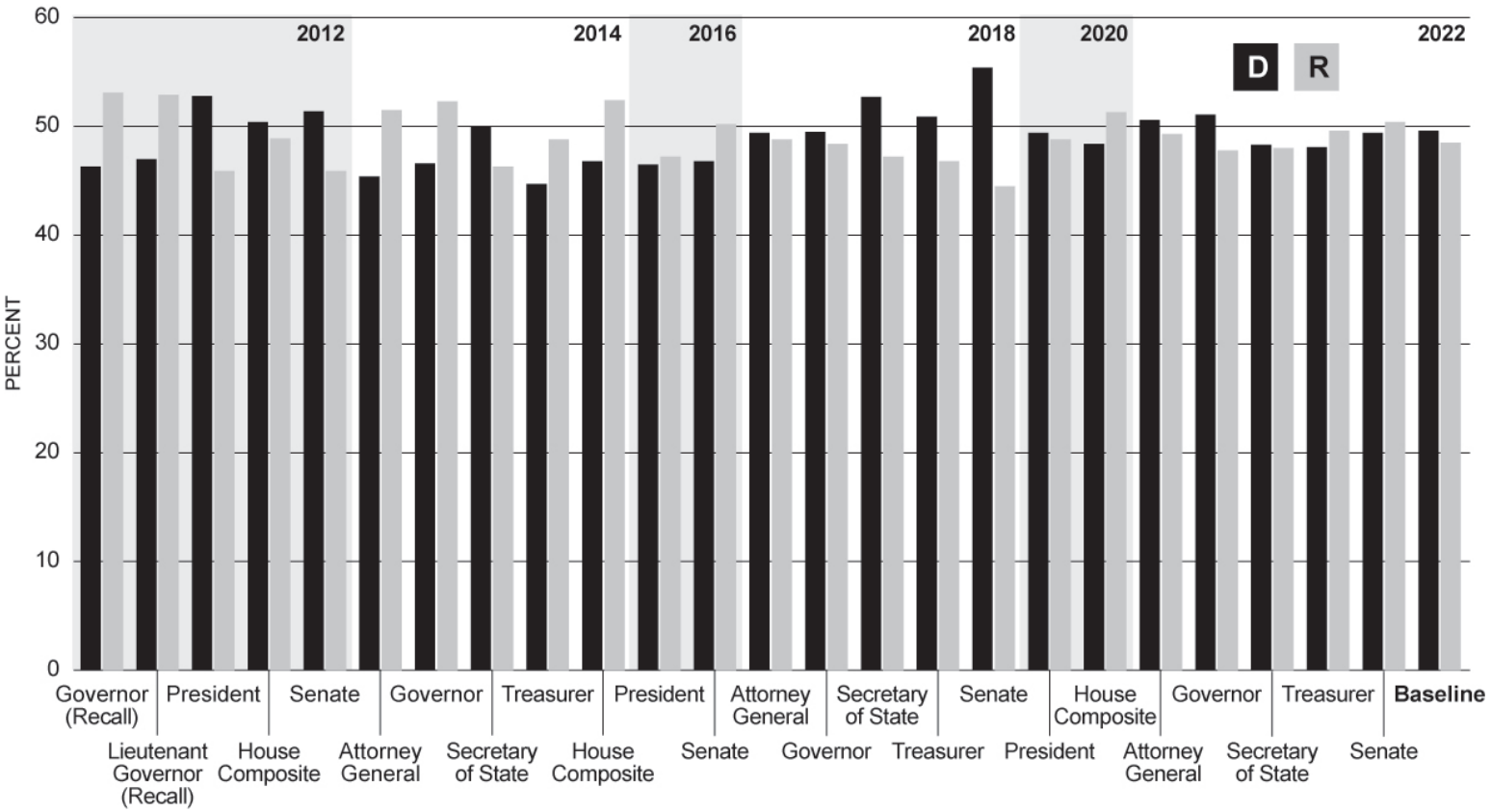
In recent days, Hovde has posted a video in which he sits shirtless in a frozen lake to demonstrate his Badger State bona fides, and another in which he goes ax-throwing. He's also running a soft-focus TV ad featuring his wife talking about his Wisconsin roots, complete with photos from high school and college.

In keeping with his 2012 strategy, Hovde is blanketing the airwaves early, with $3.4 million in TV time reserved through the end of March. And he's hoping his economy-focused bluntness and successful business record will be a sharp contrast with Baldwin's history of public office.

Republicans intend to run against Baldwin as a career politician who's not right for Wisconsin anymore and who voted for Biden's agenda 95 percent of the time (per a *FiveThirtyEight* tracker that stopped updating at

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Statewide Election Results for Wisconsin



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the end of the last Congress).

Hovde allies respond to the notion that Democrats can paint him as anything other than a red-blooded Wisconsinite, pointing to his accent and thick mustache (the focus of his campaign merchandise) as well as his longtime Packers and Badgers fandom.

Democratic strategists say the focus on California is less about trying to convince voters Hovde isn't a Wisconsinite, but rather that his values don't align with the state.

Baldwin, for her part, plans a heavy focus on the same issues that powered her to victory in 2018, most notably trade, particularly her Buy American and Made in Wisconsin efforts, and also the Wisconsin-specific fight over dairy products — Baldwin memorably "declared war" on almond milk back in 2017 and ran an ad in 2018 about protecting cheese board manufacturing.

Her first TV ad of the 2024 cycle, backed by a $500,000 reservation over three weeks in March according to AdImpact, features steelworkers talking about Baldwin's bipartisan legislation to require government contracts to use American steel.

As it has in nearly every competitive race for House and Senate since 2022, abortion will take a central role in the race.

Hovde speaks about abortion differently now than he did in 2012, when he said he was "totally opposed to abortion" — now he says he supports exceptions for rape, incest, and the life of the mother. That won't stop Democrats from using his previous stance in advertising.

How It Plays Out

Baldwin's strength lies in her ability to "lose by less" in areas of the state where Democrats have struggled in recent years, particularly the more rural parts of the state outside of Madison and Milwaukee.

Her 2018 run, which coincided with Democrat Evers' narrow win, lays that bare. In the congressional districts anchored by the state's two big cities, Madison and Milwaukee, Baldwin ran 5 and 7 points ahead of Evers' margin. But in the other six districts, Baldwin outpaced Evers by double-digits. Overall, Baldwin outperformed an average Democrat in Wisconsin by a considerable 6.5 points in 2018, according to *Inside Elections* Vote Above Replacement (VAR) score.

Democrats acknowledge that Baldwin's big win that year indicates a rosier picture than reality. "Some of it is a complete mirage," said one Baldwin ally, pointing to the good national environment for Democrats, and Vukmir's lackluster campaign, "but some of it is her sincerity." One longtime WIsconsin Republican agreed: "she's kept her head down and done a good job, she doesn't make waves."

"She's not going to win like she did in 2018," said one Wisconsin Democratic strategist, but "she probably outperforms the president by 2 to 3 points."

Baldwin's relentless travel schedule means that Hovde will have to keep pace as he looks to steal votes from all over the state. And despite Hovde's attitude of being a happy warrior, he'll have to make the case specifically against Baldwin without relying on Trump to also carry the state at the top of the ticket.



Courtesy Hovde Campaign

Eric Hovde

"If you're just laying back, Tammy Baldwin is going to beat you every day of the week because that's what she does," said one longtime Wisconsin Republican operative.

A Jan. 24-31 Marquette Law poll found Baldwin's image rating underwater at 42 percent favorable/45 percent unfavorable, which makes GOP strategists optimistic Hovde can break through, despite Baldwin's strong past performances.

Democrats are hopeful that the presidential year helps boost turnout among younger voters and voters of color in Madison and Milwaukee, where party strategists say Barnes fell short in 2022 in his narrow loss.

The race, another Baldwin ally said, might also turn on her ability to outrun Biden in the "BOW counties" of Brown, Outagamie, and Winnebago, home to Green Bay and Oshkosh. Baldwin won the BOW by 3 points in 2018 but Biden lost them by 7 points in 2020.

And of course, both Baldwin and Biden will need to continue to improve in the WOW counties of Waukesha, Ozaukee and Washington, which sit outside Milwaukee. Those rapidly changing suburbs and exurbs voted Republican by 26 points in 2008 (even as Obama won statewide by 14 points) for Trump by 28 and 23 points in 2016 and 2020, respectively, when the state was a dead heat. In 2020, Biden actually matched Baldwin's performance in the WOW counties despite winning statewide by 10 points less, a sign that the area continues to shift rapidly.

The Bottom Line

Republicans need a net gain of just one seat, plus the White House, to regain control of the Senate, or a net gain of two seats to flip the chamber regardless of the presidential result. With West Virginia already in the bag for the GOP, that means control of the Senate could actually hinge on the result of the presidential election.

If Biden wins re-election, he'll do so by prevailing in battleground Senate states: not just Wisconsin but Michigan, Pennsylvania, Nevada and Arizona. If he loses, it will be because he lost some or all of those states, and likely dragged down some senators with him.

The Wisconsin race hasn't broken into the top tier yet, but Republicans are hopeful that the wealthy Hovde's entrance into the race will put additional pressure on Democrats already stretched thin — and in the event of a Biden wipeout at the top of the ticket, having a credible candidate in place in Wisconsin to take advantage of a favorable environment could mean padding a new GOP majority with another seat. IE



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Podcast Episode 18

Nathan Gonzales, Jacob Rubashkin and guest Mary Ellen McIntire of *Roll Call* talk about how the State of the Union speech and Republican response will impact congressional races, dive into key primaries from Super Tuesday that will help decide the House and Senate majorities and identify a handful of candidates who look like they are already headed to Congress next year.