



Inside Elections

with

Nathan L. Gonzales

Nonpartisan Analysis

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2021-22 Gubernatorial Overview: Hail to the (State) Chiefs

By Jacob Rubashkin

Natural disaster, mass protests, election administration, and the omnipresent coronavirus pandemic have cemented governors as an unmissable part of the American landscape. Last year, state chiefs stepped into the void left by the federal government. This year, the opportunity to exercise leadership and political power will likely come again.

With Congress closely divided for the unforeseeable future, the push for major policy movement and experimentation could shift to the states — so it benefits the political parties to hold power in as many states as possible.

There are currently 27 Republican governors compared to 23 Democratic governors. And while there are no perks to holding a “majority” of gubernatorial seats, the more governorships a party holds, the more influence it has on policy and the lives of Americans.

Over the next two years, 38 states — including New Jersey and Virginia this year — will elect a governor. Typically, this large class of governors offers members of Congress and other ambitious politicians an opportunity to climb the political ladder. But with so few term-limited governors (just nine of 38), those chances are more scarce, at the outset.

The New Jersey and Virginia races will provide the first substantive look at the post-Trump political landscape (there will be House special elections before then, but nothing on the scale of a statewide race).

Each of those states has its own unique politics, and Democrats are favored in both races. But their results, plus a potential 2021 California recall election, will give us clues as to whether the Democratic shift among suburban and college-educated voters will persist even with Trump out of office and no longer dominating the news, and if enthusiasm among Republican voters is dampened without the former president on the ballot. In 2017, Democratic victories in New Jersey and Virginia presaged the party’s suburban path to victory in 2018 (of the 43 seats Democrats flipped in the midterm, seven were in New Jersey or Virginia).

At this early stage of the cycle, we’ve simplified our 2022 ratings into two categories: Solid and Battleground. Later on, we’ll divide the races into our more traditional ratings; Toss-up, Lean, etc. (We have assigned traditional ratings to the two 2021 races, in Virginia and New Jersey, since those elections are more developed.)

2022 Governor Ratings

Battleground

Democratic-held (6)

- Kelly (D-Kan.)
- Mills (D-Maine)
- Whitmer (D-Mich.)
- Sisolak (D-Nev.)
- PA Open (D-Wolf)
- Evers (D-Wisc.)

Republican-held (5)

- AZ Open (Ducey, R)
- DeSantis (R-Fl.)
- Kemp (R-Ga.)
- MD Open (Hogan, R)
- Sununu (R-N.H.)

Solid Democratic (10)

- Newsom (D-Calif.)
- Polis (D-Colo.)
- Lamont (D-Conn.)
- HI Open (Ige, D)
- Pritzker (D-Ill.)
- Walz (D-Minn.)
- Lujan Grisham (D-N.M.)
- Cuomo (D-N.Y.)
- OR Open (Brown, D)
- RI Open (Raimondo, D)

Solid Republican (15)

- Ivey (R-Ala.)
- Dunleavy (R-Alaska)
- AR Open (Hutchinson, R)
- Little (R-Idaho)
- Reynolds (R-Iowa)
- Baker (R-Mass.)
- NE Open (Ricketts, R)
- Noem (R-N.D.)
- DeWine (R-Ohio)
- Stitt (R-Okla.)
- McMaster (R-S.C.)
- Lee (R-Tenn.)

2021 RACES

Likely Democratic

- VA Open (Northam, D)

Solid Democratic

- Murphy (D-N.J.)

- Abbott (R-Texas)
- Scott (R-Vt.)
- Gordon (R-Wyo.)

ALABAMA. Kay Ivey (R), assumed office 2017, elected 2018 (60%). Ivey, who took over for the scandal-plagued Robert Bentley in early 2017, will have served for nearly seven years by Election Day, but is eligible to seek a second consecutive full term under Alabama's constitution. If she runs, her vulnerability would be in a GOP primary, but no serious challenge has materialized yet. Solid Republican.

ALASKA. Mike Dunleavy (R), elected 2018 (51%). The ongoing effort to recall Dunleavy is still tens of thousands of signatures short of the 71,252 names it needs to force an up-or-down vote on the first-term Republican. There's no deadline on when the organizers can submit their petitions, but it is unclear if they will be able to pass verification even if they do hit the required number — experts usually recommend turning in two or more times the threshold in order to avoid verification issues. A potential recall would take place 60 to 90 days after signature verification was completed; a loss for Dunleavy would mean being replaced by his Lt. Gov. Kevin Meyer, who is also a Republican. In 2022, the gubernatorial race will be conducted under Alaska's new elections system, where candidates from all parties run in one primary, and the top four vote-getters progress to the general, which is then decided using ranked-choice voting. That could create an opportunity for a Democrat or Democrat-backed unaffiliated candidate, but it's unclear who that candidate could be. Former Anchorage Mayor Ethan Berkowitz (who lost a competitive race to GOP Rep. Don Young in 2008) resigned over a sex scandal last year, and 2014 U.S. House nominee Forrest Dunbar is running to succeed him this year. If Dunbar wins that April election he would likely vault to the top of the list of potential 2022 contenders. Solid Republican.



Mike Dunleavy

Courtesy Office Of Mike Dunleavy

and local Republicans fear the party won't be able to get its house in order to win the governor's race or the Senate race approaching in 2022.

State Treasurer Kimberly Yee is seen as Ducey's favored successor, and is considering running, though another Ducey ally, former chief of staff Kirk Adams (who is also a former state representative who ran for Congress unsuccessfully in 2012), could also throw his hat in the ring. State Attorney General Mark Brnovich has a better relationship with the right wing of the state party, and may run as well. Former Rep. Matt Salmon narrowly lost the 2002 gubernatorial election and is someone who has relationships with both the establishment and insurgent wings of the state party. Businesswoman Christine Jones placed third in the 2014 GOP gubernatorial primary and then lost a 2016 congressional primary by nine votes, self-funding both races with a combined \$7.5 million, and could run again.

On the Democratic side, state Secretary of State Katie Hobbs is viewed as likely to run. Other potential candidates include Rep. Greg Stanton, a former mayor of Phoenix; Kate Gallego, the current mayor of Phoenix; 7th District Rep. Ruben Gallego, Kate Gallego's ex-husband and a Marine veteran with a national progressive following; state House Minority Leader Charlene Fernandez; and former Nogales mayor / chief of staff at U.S. Customs and Border Protection Marco Lopez, who currently serves as a senior adviser to Mexican billionaire Carlos Slim. Battleground.

ARKANSAS. Open; Asa Hutchinson (R), term-limited. The entrance of Sarah Huckabee Sanders, the former Trump aide, shook up the race to succeed Hutchinson. Shortly after Sanders, whose father was governor in the 1990s, entered the race with an endorsement from Trump, Lt. Gov. Tim Griffin announced he would no longer seek the GOP nomination. Despite having his eye on the state's top spot for at least six years, Griffin will instead run for attorney general. That leaves state Attorney General Lisa Rutledge (\$638,000 in the bank on Dec. 31) as Sanders' biggest competition, but the former White House press secretary is the early favorite. On the Democratic side, businessman / 2014 lieutenant governor nominee John Burkhalter may run. Former state Sen. Majority Leader Jim Hendren, nephew of former Sen. Tim Hutchinson and the outgoing governor, recently left the GOP and has discussed running as an independent. Trump won the state by 27 points in November. Solid Republican.

CALIFORNIA. Gavin Newsom (D), elected 2018 (62%). Newsom came under fire last year after being photographed at a fancy restaurant in violation of his own coronavirus guidelines. The fracas was a boost to the Recall Newsom effort, which now says it has

Continued on page 3

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Continued from page 2

collected enough signatures to force a recall vote on the governor — they submit their petitions for verification next month. Don't be tempted into thinking this is 2003 all over again, when Democratic Gov. Gray Davis was successfully recalled and replaced with Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger. Newsom's approval rating is in the high 40s, while Davis was mired in the mid 20s at the time of his recall. Newsom won election in 2018 by 24 points; Davis won re-election in 2002 by just 5 points. And California is a far bluer state than it was then. In 2004, John Kerry won the state by just 10 points over President George W. Bush, while in 2020, Biden won it by 29 points.

If the recall makes it on the ballot, it will consist of two questions. The first will ask voters if Newsom should be recalled. The second will offer voters a slate of candidates to choose from to replace Newsom, who cannot be listed as an option (in 2003, 135 candidates qualified for the ballot). Republicans John Cox, the 2018 gubernatorial nominee who Newsom beat in a landslide, and former San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer, have said they will both seek to be listed as recall candidates.

Unlike in 2003, when Democrats ran on two semi-conflicting messages — the much-maligned "No on recall, yes on Bustamante" campaign — the party will likely not put up a standard bearer in the recall, and will instead seek to rally around Newsom and attack Faulconer and Cox as unacceptable options.

Democrats are frustrated they will have to spend money running an expensive race in an expensive state but are not in panic mode and believe Newsom is safe from being recalled. For now, that seems to be the case, but if the governor stumbles more on covid and his numbers take a hit, things could get interesting. Solid Democratic.

COLORADO. Jared Polis (D), elected 2018 (53%). Colorado is no longer the swing state it once was. Joe Biden won it in 2020 by 14 points, the largest margin for a Democrat since 1964 and the largest margin for any presidential candidate since 1984, and Sen. Cory Gardner, despite a reputation as a strong GOP candidate, lost re-election by 9 points. Polis starts out as a clear favorite against a GOP field with no potential standouts. Commerce, Colo. Mayor Ben Huseman and former Parker, Colo. Mayor Kevin Parker are running; Rep. Ken Buck is reportedly looking at both the governor and Senate races, and Colorado State Regent Heidi Ganahl, the only statewide elected Republican, may run. Gardner will most likely not. Solid Democratic.

CONNECTICUT. Ned Lamont (D), elected 2018 (49.4%). Lamont won a narrow victory in 2018, burdened by his deeply unpopular Democratic predecessor Dan Malloy. But both Democrats and Republicans say Lamont has solidified his position over the past year, and is in good shape for re-election. Republicans often talk about contesting the Nutmeg State but haven't won a statewide race in more than a decade, and actually lost seats in the state Legislature last year. 2018 GOP nominee Bob Stefanowski may run, but even if he does he faces a steep climb. Solid Democratic.

FLORIDA. Ron DeSantis (R), elected 2018 (49.6%). Democrats last won a gubernatorial election in Florida in 1994, but that hasn't stopped the party from seriously contesting the state every four years; the party has lost the last three races by an average of 0.9 points. DeSantis was highly popular in his first year in office, but became a nationally polarizing figure due to his less restrictive handling of the

2022 Senate Ratings

BATTLEGROUND

Democratic-Held (4)

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

Republican-Held (4)

NC Open (Burr, R)
PA Open (Toomey, R)
Johnson (R-Wisc.)
Rubio (R-Fl.)

Solid Democratic (10)

Bennet (D-Colo.)
Blumenthal (D-Conn.)
Duckworth (D-Ill.)
Padilla (D-Calif.)
Leahy (D-Vt.)
Murray (D-Wash.)
Schutz (D-Hawaii)
Schumer (D-N.Y.)
Van Hollen (D-Md.)
Wyden (D-Ore.)

Solid Republican (16)

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

coronavirus pandemic, with Republicans holding him up as an exemplar of conservative leadership and Democrats charging that he cost lives by refusing to enact more stringent regulations.

DeSantis has leaned into that national profile, with what many see as an eye toward the 2024 GOP presidential nomination. First he has to win re-election in 2022. Former GOP Gov./current Democratic Rep. Charlie Crist is looking at running (he lost to Gov. Rick Scott by 1 point in 2014), as are former Rep./2018 gubernatorial candidate Gwen Graham and Orlando-area Rep. Val Demings. Agriculture Commissioner Nikki Fried, the only Democrat currently holding statewide elected office, has stepped up her attacks on DeSantis in recent weeks, and is seriously considering a bid as well. With Florida as evenly divided as it is, this race will be competitive despite Democrats' losing streak. Battleground.

GEORGIA. Brian Kemp (R), elected 2018 (50.2%). Coming on the heels of Democrats' stunning victories in the Georgia Senate runoffs, this race will be a marquee contest of the 2022 cycle. On the Republican side, the beleaguered Kemp — having come under assault from Trump for refusing to overturn the state's certified election results — may face a primary challenge, from former Rep. Doug Collins or another of the former president's allies. On the Democratic side, former state House minority leader/2018 gubernatorial nominee Stacey Abrams is widely expected to run again after losing to Kemp by 3 points last time, and will be a fundraising juggernaut. Battleground.

HAWAII. Open; David Ige (D), term-limited. The real race to succeed Ige is in the Democratic primary. While Hawaii had a Republican

Continued on page 4

Continued from page 3

governor as recently as 2010, the state has grown even more Democratic than it was in the 2000s, when its electoral votes became a late GOP target in the 2004 presidential election. Former Honolulu Mayor Kirk Caldwell is already raising money for a gubernatorial run, and Lt. Gov. Josh Green may run as well. Former Rep. Colleen Hanabusa ran for office every election cycle last decade, including a run for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination in 2018, and may run as well. Former Rep. Tulsi Gabbard is a wild card. Republican Honolulu City Councilwoman Andria Tupola is running again; she lost the 2018 race to Ige by 29 points. Solid Democratic.

IDAHO. Brad Little (R), elected 2018 (60%). Little has some vulnerability in the Republican primary, where he could be challenged by Lt. Gov. Janice McGeachin. Little has come under fire from his right flank for declaring a state emergency due to the coronavirus, and is fighting off efforts by the state legislature to limit his powers. McGeachin has called into question the existence of the pandemic, and attacked Little for implementing restrictions last year and for refusing to promote Trump's false claim that he won the election. Trump won Idaho by 30 points in November. Solid Republican.

ILLINOIS. J.B. Pritzker (D), elected 2018 (55%). The billionaire Hyatt heir spent more than \$170 million of his own money to beat an unpopular Republican incumbent in 2018, but his re-election campaign will likely be less expensive. GOP Rep. Adam Kinzinger, who has made national headlines for his anti-Trump votes and positions, has already ruled out a run. Although, Illinois is likely to lose a seat during reapportionment, so a GOP House member could be looking for a new job after Democrats draw the new lines. Solid Democratic.

IOWA. Kim Reynolds (R), assumed office 2017, elected 2018 (50.3%). Reynolds won a narrow victory in 2018 but is better situated this time around, despite Democrats' displeasure with her hands-off attitude toward the coronavirus pandemic. Oft-cited as a potential Democratic candidate is state Auditor Rob Sand, who narrowly defeated the incumbent auditor in 2018 and was the subject of a *New York Times* profile in 2019 in which he described being courted by most 2020 Democratic presidential candidates. Also mentioned is state Rep. Ras Smith, a Black lawmaker from Waterloo and the top Democrat on the state House education committee. Rep. Cindy Axne, the last remaining Democratic member of Congress from the state, could run and would be the primary's immediate frontrunner, but she hasn't made any moves in that direction. In 2018, a good year for Democrats that saw them pick up two House seats in Iowa, Reynolds beat well-funded, moderate businessman Fred Hubbell. This time she'll get to run as an elected incumbent in a Biden midterm. For now, this is Solid Republican.

KANSAS. Laura Kelly (D), elected 2018 (48%). Kelly, who won one of Democrats' biggest victories in 2018 over controversial Trump ally Kris Kobach, is Democrats' most endangered incumbent on the map. In 2020, Trump won this state by 15 points and Rep. Roger Marshall cruised to victory in the Senate contest despite polls showing a competitive race. But Kelly enjoys advantages as an incumbent and has a reputation within the state as a moderate. Kansas also has a history of electing Democratic governors even as it has shut out the party from Senate races for more than a century.

Former Gov. Jeff Colyer, who ascended to the top spot in 2018 after

Sam Brownback took a job in the Trump administration, and who lost the 2018 GOP primary to Kobach by a few hundred votes, is looking at running. Derek Schmidt, the state's attorney general, may also run, as may Bob Hamilton, who placed third in the GOP Senate primary last year. Republicans do not expect Kobach to run — and hope that he doesn't. A wildcard here is former U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who is widely believed to be eyeing the 2024 presidential nomination, but is often mentioned as a potential statewide candidate. Battleground.

MAINE. Janet Mills (D), elected 2018 (50.9%). When Gov. Paul LePage left office in 2019, he announced he was leaving Maine for Florida. A year later, the bombastic Republican returned and declared he was running for his old job. While some national Democrats are skeptical he'll actually run, Republicans believe he will. Democrats thought they



Courtesy, Office of Janet Mills

Janet Mills

had LePage dead to rights in both 2010 (when he won with 38 percent) and 2014 (when he won with 48 percent), but whiffed both times, so Democrats won't take this race for granted if he's the candidate. LePage's sub-50 percent wins

prompted the state to pass ranked-choice voting, but a state court later barred the use of ranked-choice voting in the gubernatorial general election (it will be in place for the primary). However, an amendment to the state constitution expanding ranked-choice voting to the gubernatorial general election is working its way through the legislature and, if passed, would be effective in 2022. Battleground.

MARYLAND. Open; Larry Hogan (R), term-limited. With the popular two-term Republican unable to run for re-election, this is Democrats' top pickup opportunity this cycle, in a state Joe Biden carried with 66 percent of the vote (more than any presidential candidate since 1868). Hogan, whose 2014 upset win came in the midst of a terrible cycle for Democrats, remains well-liked and has staked out an anti-Trump position that endears him to independents and moderates, but it's not clear there's another Republican in the state that can replicate his success. Lt. Gov. Boyd Rutherford may try, but he doesn't look like a candidate, considering he didn't raise any money last year. Former Lt. Gov./former RNC chairman Michael Steele is also reportedly looking at a run, but would face an uphill battle in a GOP primary as a Biden endorser most frequently seen these days on MSNBC.

On the Democratic side, a laundry list of state and national figures will take a look at this race. Longtime state Comptroller Peter Franchot is the only announced candidate, but Prince George's County Executive Angela Alsobrooks, Baltimore County Executive John Olszewski, U.S. Reps. David Trone and Anthony Brown (who lost the 2014 election to Hogan), former Rep. John Delaney, former U.S. Labor Secretary/DNC chairman Tom Perez (who the DGA attempted to recruit for a 2018 run), former U.S. Education Secretary John King, and former NAACP president and CEO Ben Jealous (who lost to Hogan by 12 points in 2018) may also run. Battleground.

Continued on page 5

Continued from page 4

MASSACHUSETTS. Charlie Baker (R), elected 2014 (48%), 2018 (67%). Baker has been one of the most popular governors in the nation since winning election six years ago. Last cycle, Democrats couldn't get a top-tier (or even mid-tier) candidate, and former state Finance Secretary Jay Gonzalez lost by 33 points in a Democratic wave year. If Baker runs for a third time, Democrats will likely struggle to find a credible candidate yet again. In a Senate debate last year, neither Sen. Ed Markey nor Rep. Joe Kennedy would even commit to *voting* against Baker in 2022. If Baker does bow out, all eyes will turn to Democratic state Attorney General Maura Healy. But for now, this race is Solid Republican.

MICHIGAN. Gretchen Whitmer (D), elected 2018 (53%). No incumbent Michigan governor has lost a bid for re-election since 1990. That doesn't mean it can't happen this time, and the GOP would love to make an issue of Whitmer's coronavirus response (and what they see as her disregard for her own rules). But first Republicans need to find a candidate, and the state bench is looking a bit thin. Former Rep. Candice Miller, now a Macomb County public works commissioner and viewed by many as the strongest possible contender, ruled out a bid, as did state Senate Majority Leader Mike Shirkey. Former Lt. Gov. Brian Calley, who ran for governor in 2018 and lost in the primary and is now the president of the Small Business Association of Michigan, appears uninterested. Former state House Speaker Lee Chatfield is a possibility, but he would come with some baggage. And there's always 2018/2020 Senate nominee John James, a favorite of national Republicans and former President Trump, who could run. Because Republicans can seriously compete in Michigan, this race begins on the Battleground, but Whitmer has a real head start.

MINNESOTA. Tim Walz (DFL), elected 2018 (54%). The Trump campaign insisted Minnesota was in play in the 2020 election, after Hillary Clinton won it by less than 2 points in 2016, but Biden won it by 7 points. Walz, a former schoolteacher who is now overseeing the reopening of Minnesota's middle and high schools, begins the

2020 Republican Governor Candidates, Results, Baseline & Vote Above Replacement

State	Candidate	Percent Earned	Republican Baseline	VAR
VT	Phil Scott	68.5%	35.6%	32.9
NH	Chris Sununu	65.2%	47.1%	18.1
WV	Jim Justice	63.5%	58.7%	4.8
ND	Doug Burgum	69.2%	65.0%	4.3
MO	Mike Parson	57.1%	56.1%	1.0
UT	Spencer Cox	63.0%	62.3%	0.7
IN	Eric Holcomb	56.5%	56.4%	0.1
WA	Loren Culp	43.1%	43.2%	-0.1
MT	Greg Gianforte	54.4%	54.6%	-0.2
DE	Julianne Murray	38.6%	40.9%	-2.3
NC	Dan Forest	47.0%	50.6%	-3.6

Note: Margin discrepancies due to rounding

cycle in good shape. Republicans don't have a strong bench — in 2018 former Gov. Tim Pawlenty couldn't even make it through the primary, and former Rep. Jason Lewis ran several points behind Trump in last year's Senate race. Potential GOP candidates include state Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka, former state Sen. Scott Jensen, and pillow manufacturer Mike Lindell, who has been at the forefront of Trump's false claims that he won the election. Solid Democratic.

NEBRASKA. Open; Pete Ricketts (R), term-limited. With Ricketts unable to run for a third term, the most important contest is the GOP primary to succeed him. Wealthy rancher Charles Herbster, a major Trump campaign donor and former senior Trump agriculture adviser, is the only announced candidate. Herbster briefly sought the GOP nomination in 2014, but dropped out before the primary. Lt. Gov.



Courtesy Conklin Company

Charles Herbster

Mike Foley (who placed fourth in the 2014 gubernatorial primary), Nebraska Chamber of Commerce President Bryan Sloane (who placed sixth in the same 2014 GOP contest), and two members of the University of Nebraska Board of Regents,

Chairman Tim Clare and Jim Pillen, may join the field as well. Sen. Deb Fischer's name has been floated, but national Republicans say she hasn't made serious moves to run yet. The GOP primary could be a test case for former President Trump's influence and willingness to involve himself in down-ballot elections now that he is out of office; Herbster is a longtime friend of Trump's who even attended the Jan. 6 "Stop the Steal" rally on the Ellipse (he says he did not participate in the subsequent riot at the Capitol). On the Democratic side, former state Sen. Bob Krist is running — he was the party's nominee in 2018 and lost by 18 points. Solid Republican.

NEVADA. Steve Sisolak (D), elected 2018 (49.4%). Sisolak broke a 20-year GOP hold on the Nevada governorship in 2018, and Democrats believe he is in good position to win a second term despite the state consistently producing narrow results at the presidential level. Biden won Nevada by just 2.4 points, an identical margin to Hillary Clinton in 2016 even as the country voted more Democratic overall. The state is 30 percent Hispanic; Democrats struggled to maintain their typical margins with Hispanic voters last cycle, and if the right candidate emerges for Republicans this race could grow more competitive. Potential entrants include former Sen. Dean Heller, former Lt. Gov. Mark Hutchinson, Rep. Mark Amodei, and 2018 nominee/former state Attorney General Adam Laxalt. Battleground.

NEW HAMPSHIRE. Chris Sununu (R), elected 2016 (49%), 2018 (54%), 2020 (65%). Sununu has been publicly weighing a challenge to Sen. Maggie Hassan, recently saying he wouldn't make a decision until after the state legislative session is over (that would be on June 30). If he chooses to seek another term, he'll be the clear favorite, though New Hampshire's swingy electorate means re-election is never a sure thing. If he passes up a run for a fourth two-year term, former Sen. Kelly Ayotte

Continued on page 6

Continued from page 5

will look hard at running, as will former Trump campaign manager Corey Lewandowski, who also explored a bid against Democratic Sen. Jeanne Shaheen last year. On the Democratic side, potential candidates include Manchester Mayor Joyce Craig and Rep. Chris Pappas, who may find himself in a more Republican district after new lines are drawn by the GOP-held state legislature. Sununu's decision looms over this race, but the state is still close enough that he can't take another win for granted against a credible opponent. Battleground.

NEW JERSEY. Phil Murphy (D), elected 2018 (56%), 2021 election (full analysis in the Feb. 5 issue). Murphy had a rocky start to his tenure, spending much of the two years battling his own party in the state legislature. But the pandemic provided an opportunity for him to consolidate his position; he made peace with his opponents in the legislature, passed big-ticket items on his agenda including a millionaire's tax, and received high marks for his handling of covid. Likely GOP nominee Jack Ciattarelli, a former assemblyman, is a credible candidate but will begin the race a heavy underdog. The state is far more Democratic down ballot than the last time a GOP gubernatorial candidate beat an incumbent in 2009. If the covid situation worsens, Murphy's outlook could worsen with it, but unless that happens this race is Solid Democratic.

NEW MEXICO. Michelle Lujan Grisham (D), elected 2018 (57%). The Democratic Party's struggles with Hispanic voters — should they continue — have the potential to make for an interesting race in 49 percent-Hispanic New Mexico. But the onus is on the GOP to put up a credible candidate who could take advantage of a favorable national environment and any Democratic weakness among Hispanic voters. So far, that candidate has not made themselves known. Republicans would love for weatherman Mark Ronchetti, who lost the 2020 Senate race by a closer-than-expected 6 points, to run, but he has shown no interest as of yet. Former Rep. Steve Pearce, who lost to Lujan Grisham by 15 points in 2018, may look at running. Solid Democratic.



Michelle Lujan Grisham

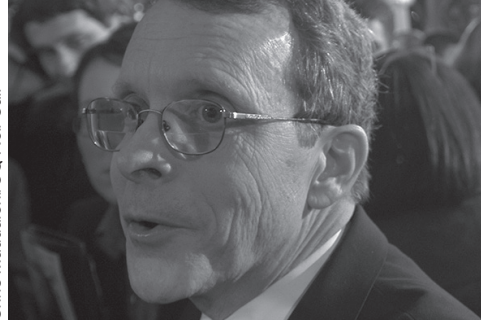
Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

NEW YORK. Andrew Cuomo (D), elected 2010 (63%), 2014 (54%), 2018 (60%). Cuomo is a perennial target of progressives; he faced high-profile challenges from the left in both 2014 (Zephyr Teachout) and 2018 (Cynthia Nixon) but defeated both handily. This time around, his handling of the coronavirus pandemic has provided ample fodder for both supporters and detractors, and recent revelations about his administration's handling of nursing home deaths have earned him national scrutiny, though it remains to be seen if they affect his standing in the state. For now, progressive organizers and institutions are focusing on local elections in New York City, where the mayoralty and a bevy of other offices are up for grabs; those primaries will be on June 22, after which more attention may be paid to Cuomo.

Democrats will have complete control of redistricting in New York

for the first time in a century, which means one or more of the state's eight GOP representatives may be drawn out of their seats and choose to launch a longshot bid for governor instead. Rep. Elise Stefanik, who aligned with the more moderate Tuesday Group but has become an ardent Trump supporter and favorite of the right, has talked about running. So has Rep. Tom Reed, who was elected as a conservative but has strived to cultivate a more moderate image as a co-chairman of the Congressional Problem Solvers' Caucus. Solid Democratic.

OHIO. Mike DeWine (R), elected 2018 (50.4%). DeWine earned the ire of then-President Donald Trump after the governor acknowledged Trump lost the 2020 election. Trump indicated in November he would back



Mike DeWine

Chris Maddaloni/CQ Roll Call

a primary challenge to DeWine, and following his acquittal last week emerged to say he was still intent on backing primary challenges to GOP officeholders he views as insufficiently loyal. One obvious choice to take on DeWine, Rep. Jim Jordan, says

he is running for re-election to the House (where he hopes to move up the leadership ladder). Another option, former Rep. Jim Renacci, isn't ruling out challenging the incumbent, telling WKSU in December that he "will be either supporting candidates who are taking [DeWine] on or running against him myself." Democrats believe their field will come down to Cincinnati Mayor John Cranley, who lost two congressional races in the early 2000s, and Dayton Mayor Nan Whaley, who rose to national prominence after the 2019 mass shooting in that city. Cranley has already announced his candidacy; Whaley has not, but is the name mentioned first by most Democrats watching this race. No Democrat not named Sherrod Brown has won a statewide race in Ohio since President Barack Obama in 2012, so the onus is on Democrats to show they can still seriously compete in the Buckeye State. Solid Republican.

OKLAHOMA. Kevin Stitt (R), elected 2018 (54.3%). Stitt will face at least one primary challenger, former state Sen. Ervin Yen, but doesn't appear to be in any real danger, in the primary or the general. In 2018, Democrats' dream recruit, former Rep. Dan Boren, passed up an opportunity to run, and former US Attorney Drew Edmondson, a credible candidate in his own right, lost by 13 points. Trump won the state by 33 points last year. Solid Republican.

OREGON. Open; Kate Brown (D), term-limited. This open seat in a state Biden won by 16 points will attract a wide Democratic field. State House Speaker Tina Kotek (the country's first openly lesbian person to hold that position), state Treasurer Tobias Read, newly elected state Secretary of State Shemia Fagan, Multnomah County Commissioner Deborah Kafoury, and Portland Metro Council President Lynn Peterson could all run. Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler, who narrowly won re-election last year, has long been considered a possible candidate, but his handling of the violence in Portland last summer has Democrats skeptical he will actually run. On the Republican side, oncologist/2016

Continued on page 7

Continued from page 6

gubernatorial nominee Bud Pierce is running again — he lost to Brown four years ago by 7 points. Republicans haven't won a gubernatorial race in Oregon since 1982. Solid Democratic.

PENNSYLVANIA. Open; Tom Wolf (D), term-limited.

With both an open Senate and gubernatorial race, Pennsylvania will occupy center stage for the second cycle in a row. While the Democratic primary for Senate is expected to be highly competitive, the race for the gubernatorial nomination begins as a one-man show: state Attorney General Josh Shapiro is the odds-on favorite. Shapiro was the top statewide vote-getter in both 2016 and 2020, and with Lt. Gov. John Fetterman opting to run for Senate, Shapiro is in a tier of his own, above other potential candidates such as Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney or former state Treasurer Joe Torsella.

The Republican field remains wide open, and is unlikely to come into greater focus until the summer, as potential candidates decide whether they want to run for Senate or governor. The state party is wrestling with itself on how to approach the post-Trump era; the rift is exemplified by retiring Sen. Pat Toomey's vote to convict the former president, and the state party's move to censure him. Montgomery County Commissioner Joe Gale is running as an ardent Trump supporter, and could be joined in that lane by 2018 Senate nominee/former Rep. Lou Barletta, 2018 gubernatorial candidate Paul Mango, Rep. Mike Kelly, and state Sen. Doug Mastriano, who spearheaded efforts in the state legislature to overturn the results of the presidential election in support of Trump. This race is firmly on the Battleground.

RHODE ISLAND. Open; Gina Raimondo (D), term-limited.

Raimondo will resign after she is confirmed to be Biden's commerce secretary, allowing Lt. Gov. Daniel McKee (elected on a separate ticket) to ascend to the top spot and giving him incumbency advantage heading into 2022. With Rhode Island projected to lose a House seat, one of the state's two congressmen — David Cicilline and Jim Langevin — will be in the market for a new job and could challenge McKee. State General Treasurer Seth Magaziner could run; both state Secretary of State Nellie Gorbea and Providence Mayor Jorge Elorza are term-limited in their current roles and

2020 Democratic Governor Candidates, Results, Baseline & Vote Above Replacement

State	Candidate	Percent Earned	Democratic Baseline	VAR
NC	Roy Cooper	51.5%	48.3%	3.2
DE	John Carney	59.5%	57.1%	2.4
WA	Jay Inslee	56.6%	55.8%	0.7
MO	Nicole Galloway	40.7%	40.6%	0.1
UT	Chris Peterson	30.4%	31.0%	-0.7
MT	Mike Cooney	41.6%	42.9%	-1.4
ND	Shelley Lenz	26.7%	31.8%	-5.1
WV	Ben Salango	30.2%	38.0%	-7.8
IN	Woody Myers	32.1%	40.5%	-8.5
NH	Dan Feltes	33.4%	49.9%	-16.6
VT	David Zuckerman	27.4%	59.2%	-31.8

Note: Margin discrepancies due to rounding

have substantial campaign funds at their disposal (\$415,000 on Dec. 31 for Gorbea, \$887,000 for Elorza). The winner of the Democratic primary will be the prohibitive favorite in the general election. Solid Democratic.

SOUTH CAROLINA. Henry McMaster (R) assumed office 2017, elected 2018 (54%). McMaster could face a primary challenge from businessman/2018 candidate John Warren, the self-funder who



Courtesy, McLeod Campaign

Mia McLeod

McMaster beat by 8 points in the GOP primary runoff two years ago. Warren recently launched his own PAC to support conservative candidates in the state. Democrats spent big on South Carolina's 2020 Senate race — more than \$100

million — but Jaime Harrison still lost by 10 points. It was a reminder of how difficult the Palmetto State has become for the party. Potential Democratic candidates include former 1st District Rep. Joe Cunningham and former state Rep./2018 lieutenant governor nominee Mandy Powers Norrell, both of whom lost re-election last year, and state Sen. Mia McLeod, who delivered Democrats' response to McMaster's "State of the State" address last month. Solid Republican.

SOUTH DAKOTA. Kristi Noem (R), elected 2018 (51%).

Noem's hands-off handling of the coronavirus pandemic has made her a nationally polarizing figure, and she is widely believed to have her eye on the 2024 presidential election. But there's little evidence she's in trouble back home, though she recently came under fire for a story about the use of state resources, including a plane, for personal travel. The first-term governor won a narrow victory in 2018 over Democrat Billie Sutton, who was considered by Democrats to be one of that cycle's best candidates. If Sutton were to run again, he might be able to put this race on the map, but it's not clear he will; the former state Senate minority leader is still grieving after the loss of his newborn daughter last year. Trump won the state by 26 points in November. Solid Republican.

TENNESSEE. Bill Lee (R), elected 2018 (60%).

In 2018, Democrats thought they could draw an inside straight by running Nashville Mayor Karl Dean against conservative Rep. Diane Black. But Black lost the GOP primary to Lee, who cruised to victory as Democrats' other prized recruit, former Gov. Phil Bredesen, flopped in the Senate race. In 2020, the DSCC couldn't even get their preferred candidate, James Mackler, through his primary. Lee isn't vulnerable in a general election, and nobody is champing at the bit to primary him. Solid Republican.

TEXAS. Greg Abbott (R), elected 2014 (59%), 2018 (56%).

Abbott entered 2021 with an eye-popping \$40 million in the bank, a war chest that will likely scare off any serious internal or external opposition. State GOP chairman/former Florida Rep. Allen West has talked about launching a primary challenge to Abbott from the right, but Republicans view the Tea Party star, who has in recent days talked up the possibility of Texas seceding, as all hat and no cattle.

Continued on page 8

Continued from page 7

After two cycles of swinging and missing, national Democrats are wary that there's real opportunity in this race, especially with more appealing targets elsewhere on the map. Former Rep./2018 Senate nominee Beto O'Rourke has talked about running, though Republicans believe he made himself an easy opponent due to the stances he took during his 2020 presidential run. Democrats also mention Rep. Joaquin Castro, who recently had a star turn as one of the House impeachment managers charging the case against former President Trump, and his brother, former Housing Secretary/2020 presidential candidate Julián Castro, as potential candidates who could help stem the party's losses among Hispanic men in the state. But most Democrats now believe Texas is still several cycles away from being truly competitive. It's not yet clear if the catastrophic power failures that swept through the state this past week will upend that calculus, but gubernatorial races often come down to whether voters believe the incumbent has committed a fireable offense, so it will be Democrats' task to make the events of this week stick to Abbott. For now, this race is still Solid Republican.

VERMONT. Phil Scott (R), elected 2016 (53%), 2018 (55%), 2020 (69%). Scott, a liberal Republican and former stock car driver, seems to defy political gravity in the Green Mountain State, and if he chooses to seek a fourth term, he'll win it. If he doesn't, Republicans don't have anyone serious to replace him and the race would tilt more in Democrats' favor. Lt. Gov. Molly Gray, state Attorney General T.J. Donovan, Burlington Mayor Miro Weinberger, and 2016 gubernatorial nominee Sue Minter could all run if Scott decides not to run. Unless that happens, this race is Solid Republican in a state where Trump barely cracked 30 percent.

VIRGINIA. Open; Ralph Northam (D), term-limited. 2021 election (full analysis in the Jan. 22 issue). Former Gov. Terry McAuliffe is the early frontrunner for the Democratic nomination, but he shouldn't be seen as a sure thing. In addition to McAuliffe, the field includes Lt. Gov. Justin Fairfax, state Sen. Jennifer McClellan, state Del. Lee Carter, and former state Del. Jennifer Carroll Foy. While McAuliffe has an initial fundraising and polling lead, party strategists say the primary could get more interesting if the field consolidates behind either Carroll Foy or McClellan, either of whom would be the first Black woman governor in history.

On the Republican side, former state House Speaker Kirk Cox, state Sen. Amanda Chase, former Carlyle Group co-CEO Glenn Youngkin, 2013 lieutenant governor candidate Pete Snyder, and former Trump official Sergio de la Pena are running. The GOP nomination is set to be decided via convention, rather than primary, but Chase, who was recently censured by the state Senate, is suing the party to force a statewide vote. If Cox, Youngkin, or Snyder win the nomination, they will try to use school closures as a wedge issue to win back the suburban voters that have fled the Virginia GOP in recent years. Republicans start out at a clear disadvantage here. Likely Democratic.

WISCONSIN. Tony Evers (D), elected 2018 (49.5%). Republicans view Evers as one of Democrats' weakest incumbents, and believe that the state has moved in their direction over the past decade. Former Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch, who was on the ticket with GOP Gov. Scott Walker that lost re-election to Evers and Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes two years ago, is well-liked among the party establishment and the

grassroots, and is seen to have the inside track to the GOP nomination, though Politico recently reported that former RNC chairman/former Trump chief of staff Reince Priebus is exploring a run. Priebus hasn't been directly involved in Wisconsin politics since leaving his job as state party chairman in 2011, but he would be a credible contender with a wealth of personal and fundraising connections. If he were to snag an endorsement from Trump, who fired him in 2017, that would bolster his primary case. 2018 Senate candidate Kevin Nicholson and Waukesha County Executive Paul Farrow may look at running as well. Aspiring candidates are also waiting for GOP Sen. Ron Johnson to announce whether he's running for re-election. Rep. Mike Gallagher and former Rep. Sean Duffy are both looking at both the governor's race and the Senate race (if Johnson doesn't seek a third term). And there's always the small but real possibility that Johnson could decide to run for governor instead, upending the GOP primary in that race. Battleground.

WYOMING. Mark Gordon (R), elected 2018 (67%). Gordon, the former state treasurer, can run for another term; if he does, he'll win in this state where Trump won 70 percent of the vote. Wyoming Republicans seem most focused on punishing Rep. Liz Cheney for opposing Trump in a state where Biden couldn't crack 27 percent. Solid Republican. IE

Candidate Conversation



Courtesy: Nelson Campaign

Tom Nelson (D)

Wisconsin Senate — Rating: Battleground

Interview Date: Feb. 8, 2021 (via Zoom)

Date of Birth: March 3, 1976; St. Paul, Minn.

Education: Carleton College (1998); Princeton Univ. (2004, Masters of Public Affairs)

Elected Office: Outagamie Cty. Executive (2011-present); state Assembly (2005-2011); Lt. Gov. nominee (2010); 8th Congressional District nominee (2016)

Current Outlook: Nelson is a credible candidate in what will likely be a competitive Democratic primary. Milwaukee Bucks executive Alex Lasry is running and state Treasurer Sarah Godlewski is likely to join them. State Attorney General Josh Kaul and Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes are possible candidates as well. One of them will face GOP Sen. Ron Johnson or run in a competitive open seat if he does not seek re-election. Even without the specific parameters, this will be one of the most important races in the country that will decide control of the Senate.

Evaluation: Nelson is an unapologetic progressive candidate who is unafraid of his connection to Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders. The connection hasn't hurt him in his state races (a fact he mentions frequently) but it's still not clear how it could play in a state that Joe Biden won narrowly. Nelson isn't the most charismatic candidate (albeit our interview was virtual), and he seems most comfortable getting lost in the weeds of policy. But that isn't necessarily a liability in a state that embraced a policy wonk for governor.