

# Inside Elections

with

Nathan L. Gonzales

Nonpartisan Analysis

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## West Virginia House: Musical Chairs

By Jacob Rubashkin

After outperforming expectations in 2020, Republicans can taste the House majority. But they're guaranteed to lose a seat in West Virginia and will have to gain a district elsewhere on their way to 218 seats.

In the Senate, West Virginia is as powerful as it has been since the death of legendary Sen. Robert Byrd, with Sen. Joe Manchin wielding veto power over the Democratic agenda in the evenly split chamber and Sen. Shelley Moore Capito emerging as a leader among the moderate Republican bloc.

It is a different story in the House, where the Mountain State is poised to lose one of its three seats in this year's reapportionment process.

The loss of a House seat has become something of a tradition in West Virginia, where the population today is less than it was in 1950. From 1910 to 1960, the state had six seats in the House. Since then, it has lost a seat after three out of six censuses, and according to estimates from political consulting firm Election Data Services, it is slated to lose another seat next year. That would leave West Virginia with just two representatives, the smallest delegation in the state's 158-year history.

With three incumbent representatives but just two seats to run in, the state could see a high-stakes game of musical chairs in 2022, with the potential for its first member vs. member primary in 30 years.

Once a Democratic stronghold, West Virginia is now one of the most Republican states in the country. No matter which incumbent is the odd one out, it will be a lost seat for the national GOP in a cycle when they are just five seats short of the majority.

### The Lay of the Land

West Virginia's political transformation — a case study of Democrats' collapse among the White working class — is almost unparalleled in its degree and speed. From the Great Depression to the Great Recession, the state was locked down by Democrats, who controlled the state legislature from 1933 to 2015 and held a majority of the state's House delegation for all but four years from 1933 to 2011. Just three men, all Democrats, represented the state in the U.S. Senate between 1958 and 2010, and voters returned the same Democrats to the state's constitutional offices for decades-long tenures. Incumbent Governor Jim Justice is just the third person since 1932 to win the state's top job running as a Republican — even he won his first election as a Democrat before switching parties in 2017.

That same state was won by Donald Trump, 69-30 percent, in 2020 (his second-largest victory in the country), and 69-26 percent in 2016 (his largest victory). Mitt Romney carried it by a slightly narrower 62-35 percent margin in 2012, and John McCain eked out a 13-point victory, 56-43 percent, in 2008.

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## 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.)  
Leahy (D-Vt.)  
Murray (D-Wash.)  
Padilla (D-Calif.)  
Schatz (D-Hawaii)  
Schumer (D-N.Y.)  
Van Hollen (D-Md.)  
Wyden (D-Ore.)

#### Solid Republican (16)

AL Open (Shelby, R)  
MO Open (Blunt, R)  
OH Open (Portman, 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.)

## CALENDAR

<b>April 24</b>	Louisiana's 2nd District Special Election Runoff
<b>May 1</b>	Texas' 6th District Special Election
<b>May 8</b>	Virginia Republican Gubernatorial Convention
<b>June 1</b>	New Mexico's 1st District Special Election
<b>June 8</b>	Virginia Democratic Gubernatorial Primary
<b>Aug. 3</b>	Ohio's 11th District Special Election Primary

# Report Shorts

## Florida's 20th District

The death of Democratic Rep. Alcee Hastings, who represented parts of Broward and Palm Beach Counties for more than 28 years, has set off a large scrum for this solidly Democratic seat that Joe Biden carried by 55 points. The declared candidates already include state Sen. Perry Thurston, state House

Minority Leader Bobby DuBose, Broward County commissioners Dale Holness and Barbara Sharief (who was running for the seat before Hastings' death), former state Rep. /former Palm Beach County

Commissioner Priscilla Taylor, and former 20th District candidate Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick, who won 30 percent against Hastings in last year's Democratic primary. State Rep. Omari Hardy, tagged as a rising progressive star within the party, could run as well. Another up-and-comer, state Sen. Shevrin Jones, said he will not run.

No date has been set for the special election yet. The timing is up to the discretion of GOP Gov. Ron DeSantis, who has not indicated when he plans to call the election. Broward County Supervisor of Elections Joe Scott, a Democrat, sparked anger among his party when he suggested DeSantis set the election for Jan. 11, 2022, with the all-important Democratic primary on Nov. 2, 2021 — that would leave the seat vacant for nearly nine months. Scott later walked back those comments; he and Palm Beach County election supervisor Wendy Link have since endorsed a Nov. 9 general election with a Sept. 14 primary.



Alcee Hastings

Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call

Executive Angela Alsobrooks is leaning toward not running, while former nonprofit executive / author Wes Moore, a Rhodes Scholar who served with the Army's 82nd Airborne in Afghanistan, is leaning toward a run. A source with knowledge of the situation tells *Inside Elections* Moore is working with top Democratic consulting firm SKDK on the race.

On the Republican side, state Commerce Secretary Kelly Schulz announced her candidacy while Lt. Gov. Boyd Rutherford said he is not running. Hartford County Executive Barry Glassman will not run for governor and is instead running for state comptroller. The race is a top takeover opportunity for Democrats.

## New York's 1st District

GOP Rep. Lee Zeldin announced his campaign against Democratic Gov. Andrew Cuomo and the prospects for the congressman's open seat are unclear. The Empire State will lose at least one district through reapportionment, and potentially two, which means some districts could be dramatically redrawn. The U.S. Census Bureau is scheduled to release final reapportionment totals by the end of this month.

In its current form, the 1st District had a Republican bent. Democrats consistently targeted Zeldin for defeat but the district remained loyal to President Donald Trump and Republicans. But, again, it's not necessarily the district that will be in place for the 2022 elections.

## Ohio's 15th District

GOP Rep. Steve Stivers' surprising announcement that he is resigning his seat on May 16 to become the CEO of the Ohio Chamber of Commerce means the Buckeye State will soon have two congressional vacancies (the other being HUD Secretary Marcia Fudge's 11th District). Just two candidates have officially declared for the race — state Sen. Bob Peterson and newly elected state Rep. Brian Stewart, both Republicans — but they won't likely have the field to themselves.

President Donald Trump carried this district by 14 points in 2020, barely unchanged from his 15-point victory in 2016, so it does not start as particularly competitive — though that could change depending on the circumstances of the race. While Republican Gov. Mike DeWine has not announced a schedule, state law requires special elections to be held on the "first Tuesday after the first Monday in May, August, or November." With Stivers not resigning until May, that means the most likely outcome is an Aug. 3 primary and Nov. 2 general election, the same timeline as the 11th District race.

IE

## Maryland Governor

Former US Secretary of Education John King became the third major Democrat to announce his candidacy to succeed term-limited GOP Gov. Larry Hogan. Former Prince George's County Executive / 2018 gubernatorial candidate Rushern Baker also announced — somewhat unexpectedly — that he would make another run for the state's top office. He lost the Democratic primary to Ben Jealous in 2018, 40-29 percent. Longtime state Comptroller Peter Franchot has been running for a year. According to Maryland sources, Prince George's County

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# Taking Stock of Initial NRCC and DCCC Targets

By Jacob Rubaskin

The 117th Congress has only been in session for a few months, but that has not stopped the parties from laying the groundwork for the 2022 midterm elections.

The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee recently released a list of 22 GOP-held or open seats Democrats plan to target in 2022. The move comes two months after the National Republican Congressional Committee put out its initial list of 47 Democratic-held seats it intends to contest next year.

Together, the two lists give us the first sense of what the House battlefield will look like in November of next year.

A quick word of caution: this is a redistricting cycle, which means there is a lot of uncertainty when it comes to House races. A dozen or so states will gain or lose seats in the reapportionment process, and even states that do not see a change in the number of seats will have to redraw existing lines to account for a decade of population shifts. Some of those changes will be significant, forcing members to run in unfamiliar districts, in districts that have a more aggressive partisan lean, or even against their own colleagues.

But as my colleague Nathan Gonzales recently wrote, the 2012 cycle shows there is still some predictive power in initial target lists even during redistricting years.

More importantly, the target lists provide us a window into the thinking of Washington decision-makers in both parties, and oftentimes what politicians *think* is the case is just as important as what is *actually* the case because the former will guide their behavior.

## By the Numbers

Republicans are on offense. After a 2020 that blew past expectations, the GOP needs just a net gain of five seats to take back the House. At 47 seats, the GOP list is more than twice as long as its Democratic counterpart, reflecting the party's numerous paths back to the majority. With the president's party losing 30 seats on average over the past 25 midterm elections, Republicans have the luxury of exploring electoral opportunities across the map; by releasing such a long initial list, the GOP is signalling serious optimism at the start of the cycle. (In 2017, ahead of the last midterms, the DCCC released a list of 59 GOP-held target seats; Democrats ended up winning 37 of the 59 listed, and four

others not originally on the list.)

Democrats, meanwhile, begin on their heels. At 22 seats, their list is shorter than the 33 targets the DCCC laid out at the beginning of the 2020 cycle, despite the party holding fewer seats now than they did then.

With just a five-seat majority, Democrats are more likely to focus on holding the line by protecting vulnerable incumbents than they are to try and expand the map further into Republican territory, at least at this point in the cycle and knowing how midterms historically play out. The party has also released an initial list of 33 "Frontliners," incumbents who Democrats consider to be most vulnerable. All 33 also appear on the NRCC target list.

The NRCC list includes all seven Democrats currently representing districts carried by Donald Trump in the 2020 election, based on an analysis of data from *Daily Kos Elections*. It also includes 16 Democrats who represent districts that Trump carried in the 2016 but did not carry in 2020.

Again, there is no guarantee that the partisanship of these districts will remain consistent after the lines are redrawn. But looking at past presidential performance helps explain why many of these districts are listed, and in an era of increased partisanship, there's a significant correlation between presidential and congressional performance.

Republicans already hold the only two districts Trump lost in 2016 but won in 2020 (Florida's 26th and Texas' 23rd), but the NRCC list does include six Democrats who represent districts in which Trump improved on his 2016 margin despite still coming up short.

The DCCC list comprises the nine Republicans who represent districts won by Joe Biden in 2020, and the two Republicans from districts Hillary Clinton won in 2016 but Trump won in 2020. It also includes nine members whose districts trended away from Trump between 2016 and 2020 but were still carried by the then-president, shifts that ranged from marginal (Trump's edge in Iowa's 2nd District fell 0.1 percent) to severe (Trump won Missouri's 2nd District by 10.28 points in 2016 and by just 0.2 points in 2020).

Both lists also include Arizona's 2nd District. Democrat Ann Kirkpatrick, the current representative, is not running for re-election.

## New Frontiers

Trump's surprising gains among Hispanic voters in 2020 have made congressional Republicans bullish about several seats not previously considered competitive.

In Texas, the GOP has its sights set on three traditionally Democratic seats in the Rio Grande Valley: the 15th, 28th, and 34th districts, all of which moved at least 15 points toward Trump in 2020, and all of which are Hispanic-majority seats.

The NRCC also lists California's 3rd District, which is 30 percent Hispanic and trended slightly toward Trump in 2020, as well as Illinois' 17th and Wisconsin's 3rd, White working class districts that were not considered competitive until 2020, when they were unexpectedly close.

Democrats are targeting several suburban seats long considered Republican territory, including Arizona's 6th (the Phoenix suburbs), Indiana's 5th (Indianapolis suburbs), Missouri's 2nd (St. Louis suburbs), and Texas' 24th (Dallas-Fort Worth suburbs). All were targeted seats in 2020 where Democrats fell short, but Biden improved considerably on Clinton's margins, by 6 points (Arizona's 6th), 10 points (Indiana's 5th and Missouri's 2nd), and 12 points (Texas' 24th).

*Continued on page 4*

## DCCC Initial Takeover Targets

CD	INCUMBENT	CD	INCUMBENT
AZ-06	David Schweikert	NE-02	Don Bacon
CA-21	David Valadao	NY-02	Andrew Garbarino
CA-25	Mike Garcia	NY-22	Claudia Tenney
CA-39	Young Kim	NY-24	John Katko
CA-48	Michelle Steel	OH-01	Steve Chabot
FL-26	Carlos Gimenez	PA-01	Brian Fitzpatrick
FL-27	Maria Elvira Salazar	PA-10	Scott Perry
IA-01	Ashley Hinson	TX-23	Tony Gonzales
IA-02	Mariannette Miller-Meeks	TX-24	Beth Van Duyne
IN-05	Victoria Spartz	UT-04	Burgess Owens
MO-02	Ann Wagner		



Continued from page 3

## Notable Omissions

The DCCC target list did not include five of the 14 seats the party lost last year.

Some of those omissions are understandable. For instance, Minnesota's 7th voted for Trump in 2020 by nearly 30 points.

But two — South Carolina's 1st and Oklahoma's 5th — stand out.

In South Carolina, freshman Democrat Joe Cunningham lost to Republican Nancy Mace by just 1 point, and Trump's margin fell by more than 7 points from 2016. In Oklahoma, freshman Democrat Kendra Horn lost to Republican Stephanie Bice by 4.2 points, and Trump's margin of victory collapsed from 13 percent in 2016 to just 5 percent in 2020.

South Carolina's 1st is also the only one of either party's top 10 closest losses of 2020 not to make an appearance on a target list.

Moreover, despite Biden putting in the best performance for a Democratic presidential nominee in Texas in decades, the Lone Star State is only lightly represented, by Texas' 23rd (a swing seat Democrats spent much of 2020 thinking they had a clear advantage) and 24th (won by Biden). The party may be feeling a bit burned from 2020, when they targeted eight districts in Texas (along with the state's Senate seat and electoral votes) but failed to win any of them.

Another answer to those omissions may be in redistricting...

## Ready for Redistricting

The districts previously represented by Horn and Cunningham are in states where Republicans have full control of the redistricting process; the new GOP incumbents are liable to receive help from their state legislatures in the form of more favorable lines.

Conversely, New York's 11th District — where Republican Nicole Malliotakis unseated freshman Rep. Max Rose — and New Mexico's 2nd — where Republican Yvette Herrell unseated freshman Rep. Xochitl Torres Small — are in states where Democrats oversee redistricting. Depending on how heavy a hand the Democratic state legislatures operate with, those districts could become very competitive down the line.

For now, Democrats appear content to wait and see how the redistricting process turns out before listing out more speculative targets.

Republicans, smelling blood, are not as hesitant to call their shots. Some members listed as Republican targets will likely only be vulnerable in the event that their seats are redrawn substantially.

Deborah Ross, the newly elected congresswoman from North Carolina's 2nd District, won her 2020 race by 28 points, 63-35 percent, while Biden carried her district by 30 points, 64-34 percent. Even in a bad environment for Democrats, that is not a competitive seat — as currently drawn. But Republicans control the redistricting process in North Carolina, which is slated to gain a seat. Ross's inclusion on the list is an indication national Republicans expect her to be drawn into a more competitive district.

It's a similar story for Dean Phillips, the DFL representative from Minnesota's 3rd District. Though the 3rd has Republican DNA, it voted for Clinton by 9 points and for Biden by 19 points. Phillips won in 2018 and 2020 by 11 points. Control of redistricting is split between Democrats and Republicans in Minnesota, which is expected to lose a seat in Congress. So Phillips' inclusion is either a bet that his new, larger district will contain more Republican voters, or it's a sign that the GOP can't quite let go of a seat that was red for half a century before

swinging hard away from them.

In addition to North Carolina's 2nd and Minnesota's 3rd, the NRCC lists as targets 13 other districts Biden carried by double digits.

It's not impossible for Republicans to win double-digit Biden seats, especially in a favorable national environment (though they currently don't hold any that voted for Biden by more than 11 points).

Just three of the 15 targeted seats are in states where Democrats control the redistricting process. Five of the 15 are in states where Republicans control the process, and the remaining seven are in states with bipartisan or independent redistricting commissions. Their inclusion suggests that Republicans believe the districts could get drawn more favorably.

## Closing Thoughts

A lot can — and will — happen in the 18 months between now and Election Day 2022. But campaigns and parties don't have the luxury of waiting around to see what the national environment is going to look like next November.

Because this is a redistricting cycle, the initial target lists should be taken with a shaker's worth of salt. Some, perhaps even many, of the highlighted seats will not be recognizable in a year. But that doesn't mean the lists are useless.

They are indicators of where both parties see the political winds blowing, where their recruitment efforts are going to be focused, and who will be on the receiving end of the increasingly large sums of money campaigns and committees are raising, even in the off-years. **IE**

## NRCC Initial Takeover Targets

CD	INCUMBENT	CD	INCUMBENT
AZ-01	Tom O'Halleran	NJ-05	Josh Gottheimer
AZ-02	Open (Ann Kirkpatrick)	NJ-07	Tom Malinowski
CA-03	John Garamendi	NJ-11	Mikie Sherrill
CA-10	Josh Harder	NV-03	Susie Lee
CA-45	Katie Porter	NV-04	Steven Horsford
CA-49	Mike Levin	NY-03	Tom Suozzi
CT-05	Jahana Hayes	NY-18	Sean Patrick Maloney
FL-07	Stephanie Murphy	NY-19	Antonio Delgado
FL-13	Charlie Crist	OH-13	Tim Ryan
GA-06	Lucy McBath	OR-04	Peter DeFazio
GA-07	Carolyn Bourdeaux	OR-05	Kurt Schrader
IA-03	Cindy Axne	PA-07	Susan Wild
IL-06	Sean Casten	PA-08	Matt Cartwright
IL-14	Lauren Underwood	PA-17	Conor Lamb
IL-17	Cheri Bustos	TX-07	Lizzie Fletcher
KS-03	Sharice Davids	TX-15	Vicente Gonzalez
ME-02	Jared Golden	TX-28	Henry Cuellar
MI-08	Elissa Slotkin	TX-32	Colin Allred
MI-11	Haley Stevens	TX-34	Filemon Vela
MN-02	Angie Craig	VA-02	Elaine Luria
MN-03	Dean Phillips	VA-07	Abigail Spanberger
NC-02	Deborah Ross	WA-08	Kim Schrier
NH-01	Chris Pappas	WI-03	Ron Kind
NJ-03	Andy Kim		

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Democrats lost their last U.S. House seat in the state in 2014, the same year the party lost control of both houses of the state legislature after 82 years of dominance. Last year, the last remaining Democratic constitutional officer, 24-year incumbent Treasurer John Perdue, lost re-election, leaving Manchin as the last remaining statewide elected Democrat.

The rural, mountainous state's demographics help explain the shift. According to the American Community Survey, West Virginia is the third-whitest state, at 92 percent non-Hispanic White. Just 21 percent of the population has a bachelor's degree or higher, and the state's median household income of \$48,850 ranks 49th out of 50 states, ahead of just Mississippi. West Virginia is aging — at 42.9 the median age is nearly four and a half years older than the nationwide median — and the state has lost an estimated 68,000 residents over the past decade, a 3.7 percent drop in population.

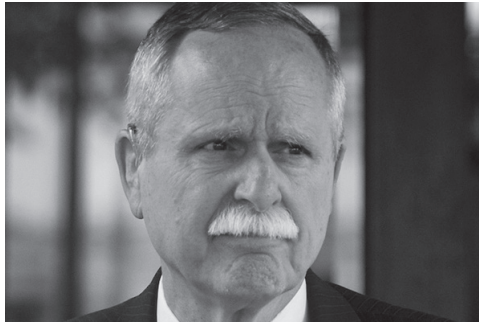
West Virginia is rich with fossil fuels, especially coal. It produces the second-most coal of any state in the country and employs the most coal miners of any state, and the state's fortunes have tracked closely with the industry. The population peaked in 1950 at just over 2 million, at the height of the coal boom. It declined steadily until the domestic energy boom brought back business in the 1970s. Since peaking again at 1.95 million residents in 1980, the state has trended steadily downward.

Today, the state is so desperate for new blood that it is offering \$12,000 in cash to anyone with a job who moves there.

## The Incumbent: 1st District

David McKinley, 74, is the most senior member of West Virginia's House delegation. He arrived in Washington, D.C. in 2011 after beating Democratic state Sen. Mike Oliverio — who defeated incumbent Democrat Alan Mollohan in the primary — by just 1,440 votes.

McKinley is a 7th-generation West Virginian and hails from Wheeling, in the state's Northern Panhandle, where he was born and raised, and where he founded an architecture and engineering firm in 1981. McKinley, who graduated from



David McKinley

Purdue in 1969 with a degree in civil engineering, is one of two licensed Professional Engineers in Congress (19 House members are listed as engineers by the House Clerk).

Prior to serving in Congress, McKinley spent 14 years in the state legislature, from 1980 to 1994, and four years as chairman of the state Republican Party, from 1990 to 1994, at a time when the GOP was still an endangered species in West Virginia.

In 1996, McKinley ran for governor but placed third in the GOP primary behind eventual winner Cecil Underwood and astronaut Jon McBride. Since then, McKinley's name has been mentioned in connection to several statewide races, most recently the Senate contests in 2014 and 2018, and the 2016 gubernatorial race, though he's never again tried to make the jump to statewide office.

Since winning a hotly contested GOP primary 35-27 percent in 2010 over now-Secretary of State Mac Warner, McKinley has not faced a

competitive primary, and that year's nailbiter over Oliverio was the only time McKinley won less than 62 percent in a general election. Last year, the 1st District voted for Donald Trump, 68-30 percent.

In Congress, McKinley serves as the ranking member on the Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change.

His campaign team includes Rising Tide Media Group's Jonathan Poe, Meeting Street Insights pollster Rob Autry, direct mail consultant Martin Baker of Political Ink, and general consultant Thomas Midanek of Prime Media Partners.

## The Incumbent: 2nd District

Alex Mooney, 49, is the youngest member of the state's delegation. Born in Washington, DC to a Cuban-American mother and Irish-American father, and raised in Frederick Co., Md. (which borders Jefferson Co., W.Va.), Mooney comes from a political family: both his uncle, Xavier Suarez, and his cousin, Francis Suarez, have served as mayor of Miami.



Alex Mooney

Mooney first ran for office as a Dartmouth student in 1992, placing seventh out of seven for a state House seat in Grafton, New Hampshire. After graduating in 1993, Mooney returned to Maryland, where he worked as a staff assistant

to western Maryland Rep. Roscoe Bartlett ("basically his driver," in Mooney's own words) and later for the House Republican Conference.

In 1998, Mooney defeated incumbent Maryland state Sen. John Derr in the GOP primary 63-37 percent, a result *The Washington Post* pinned on the issue of abortion: Derr was pro-choice, Mooney pro-life.

Mooney was re-elected in 2002 and 2006, before being defeated in 2010. That year he took a new post as chairman of the state GOP. In 2012, Mooney flirted with challenging Bartlett, his old boss, in a primary, but did not follow through; Bartlett went on to lose to Democrat John Delaney in the general election in a redrawn district Democrats made more Democratic.

In 2013, shortly after coming under fire for a disappointing 2012 election cycle, Mooney resigned his state GOP post and — rather than announce a 2014 challenge to Delaney, as many expected him to do — moved across the border to Charles Town, West Virginia to run for the House seat left open by Rep. Shelley Moore Capito, who had launched her Senate bid.

Mooney won a crowded primary with 36 percent, defeating former state delegate/US International Trade Commissioner Charlotte Lane, the establishment favorite; former state Sen. Steve Harrison; and future state Del. Ken Reed, among others.

He went on to defeat former state Democratic Party chairman Nick Casey 47-44 percent in the general election. Since then he has only faced marginal opposition, winning the 2016 general election 58-42 percent, in 2018 (54-43 percent), and in 2020 (63-37 percent). In 2020, Trump carried the 2nd District, 65-33 percent. It was his weakest district of the three.

West Virginia Republicans expect Mooney to run for Senate in 2024, for the seat currently held by Manchin.

Mooney's campaign team includes media consultant Ben Yoho of the Strategy Group Company, polling firm Public Opinion Strategies,

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and general consulting from Cold Spark Media and Targeted Creative Communications, the latter of which also does direct mail.

## The Incumbent: 3rd District

Carol Miller, 70, is the most junior member of the delegation, first winning election to Congress in 2018, when she was the only Republican woman among the chamber's 89-member freshman class.

Though she ran as a bison-farming outsider — her slogan was "I'll cut the bull from politics" — Miller has a long political pedigree.

Her father, Samuel Devine, spent 22 years as a congressman from Ohio and was chairman of the House Republican Conference when he retired in 1980.

Miller made her first run for office in 2004, losing a race for a state House seat in

Huntington by just 2 points. Two years later, she ran for the same seat, this time winning by less than a percent. She went on to win re-election five times, rising to the rank of House Majority Whip in 2017.

In 2018, when Rep. Evan Jenkins chose to run for Senate rather than seek re-election to the 3rd District, which occupies the southern third of the state, Miller entered the Republican primary to succeed him, joining a crowded field that included state Dels. Rupie Phillips, Marty Gearhart, and Rick Snuffer, and former state GOP chairman Conrad Lucas. The personally wealthy Miller largely self-funded her primary bid with a loan of \$200,000.

She narrowly won that race with 24 percent of the vote. Her 1,604 vote margin above second-place finisher Phillips was powered by her dominance in her home county, Cabell, one of just three of the district's 18 counties she carried.

Her general election contest against Democratic state Sen. Richard Ojeda attracted national attention after Ojeda went viral with a powerful campaign video. Public polling showed a highly competitive race (despite the district having voted for Trump, 73-23 percent, in 2016), and outside groups aligned with each candidate poured in a combined \$3 million. Miller ultimately won by a wide 13-point margin, 56-43 percent. In 2020, she won re-election, 71-29 percent.

In Congress, she sits on the Ways and Means Committee, and the Select Committee on the Climate Crisis.

Miller's campaign team includes general consultant Chip Englander, whose firm 1892, LLC handles polling and direct mail, and media consultant Andy Seré of Prime Media Partners.

## Back to the Drawing Board

The state's three congressional districts resemble a slice of ice cream cake: three layers, stacked one on top of another, north to south. The map has looked largely the same since 1992, when West Virginia lost its fourth seat.

When the state legislature convenes to draw new maps later this year, local sources expect the result to be a northern district and a southern district, a configuration seen as much more likely than an eastern district and a western district.

The northern district would stretch from the Northern Panhandle,

through the Interstate 79 corridor (both currently in the 1st District) and out through the Eastern Panhandle (currently in the 2nd District).

The southern district would encompass the entire bottom half of the state, including the major population centers of Huntington (currently in the 3rd District) and the state capital Charleston (currently in the 2nd District).

In effect, the 1st and 3rd districts (the top and bottom layers of the cake) would remain intact, and each would absorb half of the 2nd District. Because the 3rd District is less populous, it would absorb slightly more than half of the 2nd District in order to hit a target population of roughly 908,000, per Census estimates.

Sources close to the legislature say that the north-south configuration is more compact than an east-west map, and preserves communities of interest by placing the two panhandles together in one district, and Huntington and Charleston together in the other. It would also keep the coal country intact in the south, and would parcel out the state's two flagship universities — West Virginia Univ. and Marshall — between the two districts.

The West Virginia constitution prohibits mapmakers from dividing counties between congressional districts, which constrains the legislature but makes it easier to envision what the new districts could look like.

## Odd One Out

Though Mooney's district would likely be split evenly between the two new districts, Republican observers say it is far more likely he runs in the new northern district. Mooney lives in Charles Town, located at the tip of the Eastern Panhandle, and Republicans consider the Panhandle to be his political base. He is weaker in the southwest portion of the district, significantly underperforming Trump in 2016 and 2020 outside of the Panhandle, and barely winning the non-Panhandle counties in his 2018 re-election campaign despite winning by 11 points overall.

That would leave Miller with the entire southern district to herself.

Though Miller is the most junior of the three, she also has the closest ties to Republicans currently serving in the state legislature, is the only woman in the House delegation, has a spot on the influential Ways and Means Committee, and was recently selected as the National Republican Congressional Committee's recruitment chair for the 2022 cycle.

## Should I Stay or Should I Go?

The biggest question hanging over 2022 is whether McKinley decides to seek another term. Those around him say he has not yet made up his mind whether to retire, and may take a long time to do so (the filing deadline in West Virginia is January 29, 2022).

Reasons why he may retire include age and health: the congressman will turn 76 in the first few months of the next Congress, and has been open about his struggle with otosclerosis, a disorder that causes hearing loss. McKinley is also an ardent preservationist and has spent the last decade maintaining his family's historic mansion, the Johnson Camden McKinley House in Wheeling, and may want to retire there permanently.

Reasons for running again include a chance at being in the majority and the ability to help set the energy agenda — important for fossil-fuel rich West Virginia — as a subcommittee chairman.

McKinley raised a paltry \$67,000 in the first quarter of 2021, but his campaign team says that is not necessarily reflective of his thinking toward 2022. McKinley has raised a little over \$1 million per cycle over the past decade. He is also personally wealthy, with assets listed between \$3.8 million and \$9.6 million in 2018, and has spent his own money before (including \$670,000 in 2010).

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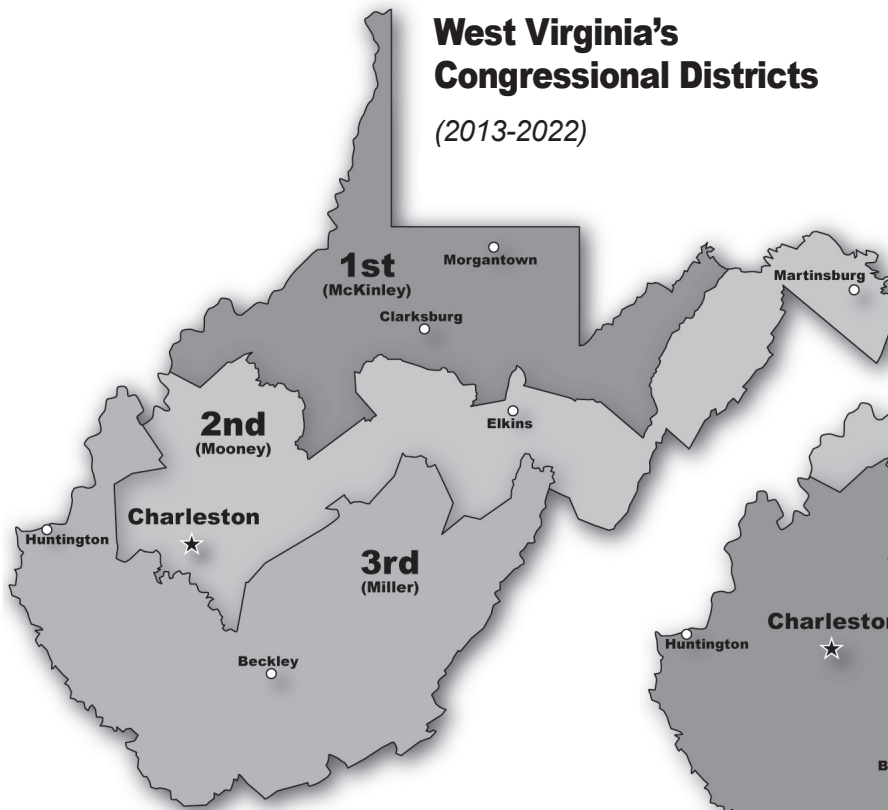
Carol Miller

Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call



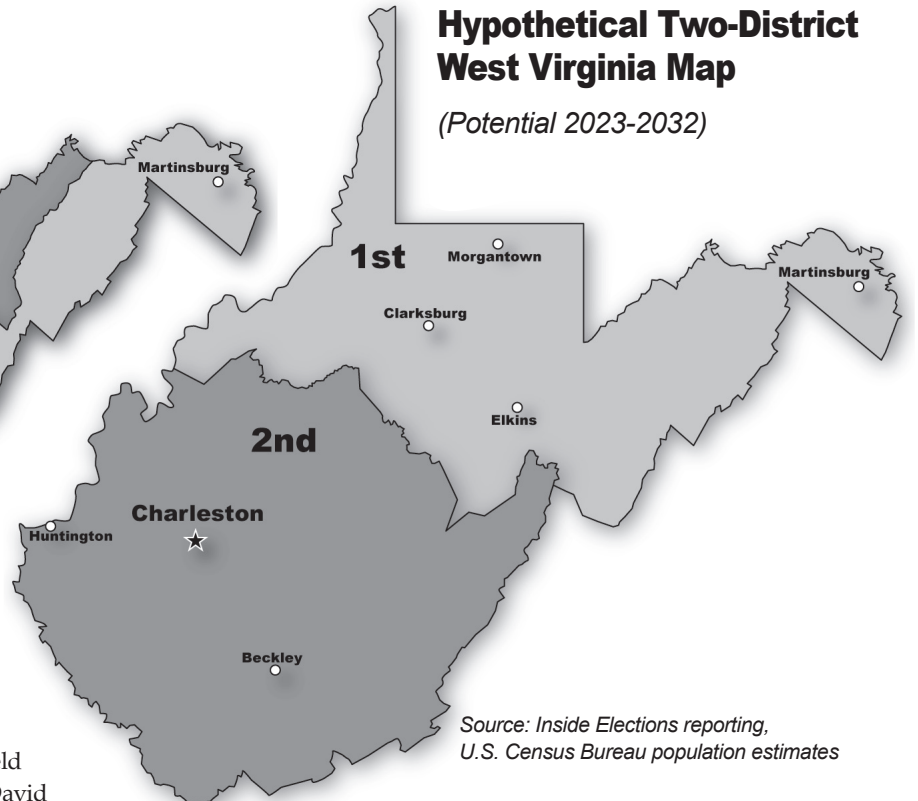
## West Virginia's Congressional Districts

(2013-2022)



## Hypothetical Two-District West Virginia Map

(Potential 2023-2032)



Source: Inside Elections reporting,  
U.S. Census Bureau population estimates

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If McKinley bows out, that may not necessarily clear the field for Mooney in the northern district. One local source named David H. McKinley, Rep. McKinley's son and a Wheeling businessman, as a potential candidate, as well as state Del. Ken Reed, the wealthy pharmacist who placed second to Mooney in the 2014 GOP primary and now represents Berkeley County in the legislature.

But with Mooney looking likely to mount a Senate run in 2024, potential challengers may wait until the seat is open, rather than running against an incumbent this cycle.

### How it (Might) Play Out

The last member vs. member primary in West Virginia was in 1992, when Reps. Alan Mollohan and Harley O. Staggers met in the Democratic primary for the newly drawn 1st District (which resembles today's iteration). While Staggers held his own in the six eastern counties that had also been in his old district, Mollohan had the benefit of retaining the entirety of his old district, and his performance there led him to a 62-38 percent victory.

If both Mooney and McKinley run, West Virginia could see a similar situation in 2022, with a new 1st District comprising the entirety of the old 1st District and some of the old 2nd District.

But the similarities largely end there. Although the new district would only include some of Mooney's old territory, much of it would be his home base of the Eastern Panhandle, the fastest-growing area in the state. Staggers only took six counties (from which he won 38 percent of his total votes the previous year) with him to the new 1st District, while the lion's share of his old territory went to the new 2nd District. Mooney will retain his best-performing areas.

Mooney also enters the cycle with a significant financial advantage (whereas Staggers was outspent 2-to-1). Mooney reported \$2.4 million in the bank on March 31, compared to McKinley's \$400,000. While

Mooney's \$143,000 first quarter haul will not break records, it was also twice as large as McKinley's. Mooney has also historically raised more money per cycle, brushing up against \$2 million in 2018 and 2020.

With Mooney well-positioned in the Eastern Panhandle, and McKinley running strong in the Northern Panhandle (where his family has been for generations), the geographic battle for this is likely to come down to the I-79 corridor. That's a geographically and politically diverse area of the state that includes both populous Monongalia County, home of WVU and one of the few areas in the state that is both growing in size and trending Democratic, as well as conservative Marion and Harrison Counties (which includes Clarksburg). While much of the northern I-79 corridor is already in McKinley's district, local Republicans say the Wheeling-based congressman is less strong there (especially with the influx of new residents in Monongalia).

Washington and West Virginia Republicans describe both Mooney and McKinley as ideologically aligned conservatives, with one longtime West Virginia operative saying both are strong on the top issues of the state: "God, guns, and babies."

But there is daylight between the two when it comes to political style, and those differences could shape a potential primary clash.

Though he arrived in the Tea Party wave of 2010, McKinley has eschewed some of the more confrontational tactics of his peers, instead focusing on constituent services and energy policy. He has also cultivated a relationship with organized labor, most notably the United Mine Workers of America. Last year, he joined up with Democratic Rep. Kurt Schrader of Oregon to co-write a clean energy bill, calling climate change "the greatest environmental and energy challenge of our time."

Mooney, unlike McKinley, is a member of the House Freedom

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Caucus, and West Virginia Republicans say that Mooney's penchant for ideological purity and skepticism toward bipartisanship is a noticeable difference from McKinley.

On January 6, 2021 Mooney joined with 137 of his House GOP colleagues to object to the certification of Pennsylvania's electoral votes. McKinley was one of just 64 House Republicans who voted against the Pennsylvania objection.

In the wake of the January 6 insurrection, neither McKinley nor Mooney voted to impeach President Donald Trump. However, while McKinley said in a statement that "President Trump bears responsibility" for the attack on the Capitol (as did others in politics and the media, he added), Mooney placed the blame squarely on the people who actually stormed the building itself.

In the 2016 primary, neither man supported Trump initially. Mooney endorsed Sen. Ted Cruz in January of that year, while McKinley declined to endorse a candidate but in April said if he had to vote for one, "[John] Kasich would probably be my guy."

Those differences would likely be the foundation of Mooney's campaign against McKinley, who he would attempt to portray as an out-of-touch Republican from a bygone era, while positioning himself as the true conservative fighter in the race. "Do you want someone who is a champion, fighting against the liberals in Washington and New York, or do you want a nice guy?" asked one source close to Mooney, telegraphing a potential campaign message.

One Republican who has worked with Mooney describes him as a break from the "Good Old Boys" mold of congenial West Virginia politicians. Mooney, he says, sees a political aspect in everything he does. That could be an advantage in an increasingly partisan GOP primary electorate, said that Republican. But it also means Mooney has focused less on constituent services and in-district relationships — a potential weakness for him that was echoed by several other Republican observers.

Mooney could also see support from the Club for Growth, says one longtime West Virginia strategist, noting that Mooney has an 85 percent lifetime score from the group while McKinley has a much lower 51 percent.

McKinley, in turn, would run on his deep West Virginia roots, making an explicit contrast with the transplant Mooney, as well as focusing on his constituent services and presence in the community, and his long-standing positive relationship with the fossil fuel industry. McKinley's team also points to his high ratings from conservative interest groups such as the NRA, the Family Research Council, and National Right to Life as evidence that he is the most conservative representative. One Republican also said questions about Mooney's campaign finance practices — as documented by *Roll Call*'s Chris Marquette last year — could come up.

At its core, a McKinley vs. Mooney matchup is a generational contest. McKinley is an older breed of West Virginia Republican — from an era when the party "held its meetings in a phone booth," joked one GOP strategist, and from a region that has seen its influence in the state decline over the last half century. Having dealt with the state's permanent Democratic majority in the 20th century, he views cross-aisle relationships as fundamental to governing.

Mooney represents a younger, less parochial generation of Mountain State Republicans, who have come of age during the GOP ascendancy in the state and are less likely to see strong relationships with Democrats as necessary. He is a newcomer, but that is something he shares with many other residents of the Eastern Panhandle, one of the few places in the state that is growing both in population and in political power.

## Report Shorts

### Texas' 6th District

Early voting has begun in the special election to succeed the late Rep. Ron Wright, who died after being hospitalized with Covid-19 earlier this year. There are 23 candidates vying for the Fort Worth-area seat; all candidates will appear on the same ballot, with the top two vote-getters advancing to a runoff.

The anti-tax Club for Growth waded into the race last week, dropping \$160,000 in independent expenditures against state Rep. Jake Ellzey, one of the 11 Republicans running. According to reports filed with the FEC this week, Ellzey is the race's top fundraiser, with \$400,000 in the bank on April 11, followed closely by former Trump administration official Brian Harrison, who had \$383,000 (and who has loaned his campaign \$285,000). The top fundraising Democrat was nonprofit executive Shawn Lassiter, who raised \$322,255 and had \$121,189 in the bank on April 11. Susan Wright, the widow of Rep. Ron Wright, reported an underwhelming \$286,331 raised, the fourth highest among GOP candidates, and \$128,211 in cash on hand.

A poll conducted by GOP polling firm Meeting Street Insights for the *Washington Free Beacon* found a tight race at the top, raising the potential that two Republicans advance to the runoff, if no Democrat finishes in first or second place. The election is May 1, but more than half of the vote could be cast early.

### The Bottom Line

The full picture of West Virginia's 2022 House races will not be clear until several questions are answered.

The first — and most important — is the shape of the districts. While most Republicans *Inside Elections* spoke to believe the north-south configuration is the most likely, redistricting can be an unpredictable process, and the Census Bureau has not delivered even the top-level reapportionment numbers to the states, let alone the more granular block-level data; an east-west configuration could result in different outcomes. The state-level numbers will be released by the end of April. The block-level data should arrive by September 30.

The second is whether McKinley seeks a seventh term, a decision he may not make until much later this year. That could be the difference between a costly member vs. member primary and a more straightforward post-redistricting election under new lines.

The third, raised by some West Virginia operatives, is whether Mooney, with an eye toward the 2024 Senate race, foregoes a 2022 run entirely, choosing to focus on a statewide campaign instead of running an expensive contested congressional primary for a district he hopes to vacate in a few years. But that appears unlikely, according to people who know Mooney and say he doesn't shy away from fights. Two weeks ago, Mooney filed paperwork to create a new campaign committee at the FEC. The name: Mooney for Congress 2022.

West Virginia is a prime example of the uncertainty of a redistricting cycle. Three members who normally wouldn't have to worry about re-election are going to have to introduce themselves to new voters in redrawn districts. And while Republicans can normally count on three seats out of West Virginia in their path to the majority, they'll only be able to get two over the next decade.

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