

# Inside Elections

with  
**Nathan L. Gonzales**  
Nonpartisan Analysis

AUGUST 6, 2021

VOLUME 5, NO. 15

This issue brought to you by



## North Carolina Senate: Tar Heel Hullabaloo

By Jacob Rubashkin

Republican Sen. Richard Burr's decision to retire rather than seek a fourth term gives Democrats a much-needed opportunity to offset potential losses elsewhere, during a midterm cycle in which literally every Senate seat is a majority-maker.

Though Democrats have not won a Senate race in North Carolina in 13 years, Burr's retirement creates a rare open seat in an evenly divided state, and the party already has several strong candidates who have thrown their hat in the ring, including one who would make history.

On the Republican side, the race to succeed Burr is a window into the direction of the Biden-era GOP. Former President Donald Trump has already picked his preferred candidate, but that didn't clear the field. Instead, voters will have to decide between a relatively new Trump-endorsed candidate, or a former governor who has been the face of the North Carolina GOP for more than a decade.

### The Lay of the Land

In 2008, Barack Obama became the first Democrat to carry North Carolina in a presidential election since Jimmy Carter in 1976. Obama won the state by 0.3 points (49.7-49.4 percent) that year, while Democrat Kay Hagan unseated GOP Sen. Elizabeth Dole by a decisive 9-point margin (53-44 percent).

But since then, Democrats have failed to win a single presidential or Senate contest. In 2010, Burr beat back state Secretary of State Elaine Marshall, 55-43 percent. In 2012, Obama failed to repeat his success, falling to Mitt Romney 50-48 percent. In 2014, Hagan lost a narrow race to state House Speaker Thom Tillis, 49-47 percent. In 2016, Trump bested Hillary Clinton by a 50-46 percent spread, while Burr turned back former state Rep. Deborah Ross, 51-45 percent.

And in 2020, Trump carried the state by a narrow 50-49 percent margin over Joe Biden, while Tillis completed a come-from-behind win over the scandal-plagued former state Sen. Cal Cunningham, 49-47 percent.

The one bright spot for Democrats over the past decade has been the state's gubernatorial races. After GOP Gov. Pat McCrory became the face of the state's "bathroom bill," which restricted transgender people from using public bathrooms that corresponded to their gender identity, Democrats made him a top target in 2016, and he was defeated that year by state Attorney General Roy Cooper, 49-48.8 percent. In 2020, Cooper won a second term by a larger 52-47 percent margin over Lt. Gov. Dan Forest.

As is the case across the country, Democratic strength in North Carolina is now largely concentrated in urban and suburban areas, with

*Continued on page 6*

## 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>Aug. 12</b>	Census Bureau releases data for redistricting
<b>Sept. 14</b>	California Gubernatorial Recall Election
<b>Nov. 2</b>	Virginia & New Jersey Gubernatorial Elections
<b>Nov. 2</b>	Ohio's 11th & 15th Special General Elections
<b>Nov. 2</b>	Florida's 20th District Special Election Primary
<b>Dec. 13</b>	Texas Candidate Filing Deadline
<b>Dec. 17</b>	North Carolina Candidate Filing Deadline

# Meet Three New (or Likely New) Members of Congress

*Three House special elections in the last two weeks produced one new lawmaker and two more party nominees who are likely to join him this fall. And with the House so evenly divided, literally every seat and every vote matters.*

## Mike Carey (R) Ohio's 15th District

Carey, 50, had a long career lobbying for the coal industry, including a 13-year stint as the president of the Ohio Coal Association, and was most recently the vice president for government affairs at ACNR, the fourth-



Courtesy Carey Campaign

Mike Carey

largest coal company in America. On Tuesday, Carey topped a crowded GOP primary field with 37 percent, propelled by the endorsement of former President Donald Trump. It was actually Carey's fourth run for office — the first three were all unsuccessful. In 1996 and 1998, he lost close contests for the state House to future Democratic U.S. Rep. Charlie Wilson, by 5 points and then by 7 points. And in 2007, he ran a brief campaign against U.S. Rep. Zack Space, a Democrat, in Ohio's 18th District before dropping out.

Carey is the significant favorite to win the Nov. 2 special general election in a district that Trump won by 14 points (56-42 percent) in 2020 and 15 points (55-40 percent) in 2016. There just isn't much initial evidence (macro or micro) that Democratic nominee/state Rep. Allison Russo starts as anything but a significant underdog.

The 15th District includes the southern portion of Columbus and a block of counties to the state capital's southeast stretching to Athens; it also stretches to include Clinton County to the southwest.

## Shontel Brown (D) Ohio's 11th District

Brown, 45, is a second-term member of the Cuyahoga County Council, and since 2017 has served as the chairwoman of the Cuyahoga County Democratic Party. She previously served on the Warrensville city council, winning her first election in 2011 by seven votes. A 2012 graduate of Cuyahoga Community College (with an AA in business management), Brown runs a printing and marketing company, and is the first Black woman to serve as Cuyahoga Democratic chairwoman.

On Tuesday, Brown defeated former state senator/former Bernie Sanders spokeswoman Nina Turner 50-44 percent with support

from Hillary Clinton, House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn and the Congressional Black Caucus Political Action Committee. She was also



Courtesy Brown Campaign

Shontel Brown

endorsed by local politicians, including Cuyahoga County Executive Armond Budish, 2018 gubernatorial nominee Richard Cordray, and the mayors of Akron, Shaker Heights, and Bedford.

Brown is the significant favorite to win the Nov. 2 special general election in a district that Joe Biden won with 80 percent in 2020 and Hillary

Clinton won with 81 percent in 2016. This gerrymandered Northeast Ohio district encompasses most of the city of Cleveland east of the Cuyahoga River as well as the inner suburbs east of Cleveland, and is connected by a thin line of precincts south down to Akron.

## Jake Ellzey (R) Texas' 6th District

Ellzey, 51, was sworn in to the House on July 30 after his special election victory on July 27. He defeated fellow Republican Susan Wright, whose husband's death necessitated the election, and who had Trump's endorsement.

Ellzey is a retired Navy fighter pilot who was awarded two Bronze Stars for service in Iraq and Afghanistan and subsequently became a commercial airline pilot. He ran for the 6th District seat in 2018 and narrowly lost the open GOP primary to Ron Wright 52-48 percent in the runoff, an unexpectedly strong showing after he trailed Wright 45-22 percent in the primary's first round. In 2020, Ellzey won his seat in the Texas state House 76-24 percent against a Libertarian candidate (he had run for the seat in 2014, placing third in the GOP primary).



Courtesy Ellzey Campaign

Jake Ellzey

Carey and Ellzey's success are yet more evidence that just because someone loses a race, doesn't mean they can't win one in the future. **IE**

Inside  
Elections

with

Nathan L. Gonzales

Nonpartisan Analysis



Nathan L. Gonzales  
Editor & Publisher  
nathan@insideelections.com  
@nathanlgonzales



Jacob Rubashkin  
Reporter & Analyst  
jacob@insideelections.com  
@jacobrubashkin

Ryan Matsumoto  
Contributing Analyst  
ryan@insideelections.com

Bradley Wascher  
Contributing Analyst  
bradley@insideelections.com

Robert Yoon  
Contributing Reporter & Analyst  
robert@insideelections.com

@InsideElections  
facebook.com/InsideElections

Will Taylor  
Production Artist  
will@insideelections.com

Stuart Rothenberg  
Senior Editor  
stu@insideelections.com

1140 3rd Street, N.E., Washington, 20002 • 202-546-2822

Copyright 2021, Inside Elections LLC. All rights reserved.

# Montana House: Missoula's Moment

By Jacob Rubashkin

For the first time in 30 years, Montana is poised to send not one but two people to the House of Representatives. That's because the state grew 9.6 percent over the last decade, more than the national average and enough to earn back its second congressional seat in the decennial reapportionment process conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau.

National Democrats are clinging to a five-seat majority in the House, and are staring down not just the unfavorable historical trends of midterm elections, but also a redistricting season in which Republicans control the drawing of more congressional districts across the country.

But the party sees a glimmer of hope in Montana and its newly minted second seat — somewhat paradoxically, given how much once-dominant Democrats have struggled to compete in the state recently.

Because Montana's districts are drawn by a commission and not by the GOP-controlled legislature, and because the state's Democratic voters are geographically concentrated, a second seat may be just what Democrats need to regain a toehold in Big Sky Country. And at a moment when every single seat matters, neither party is letting any remotely competitive races escape their attention.

## The Redistricting Commission

Responsibility for drawing the state's new congressional lines falls to a five-member independent commission.

Each party leader in the state House and Senate appointed a member of the commission. Those four — two Republicans and two Democrats — must then pick a fifth person to serve as the commission's chairperson.

In the event that the four cannot agree on a fifth member, the state Supreme Court picks a chairperson instead. That's what happened this cycle, not once but twice. In 2019, after the commission deadlocked, the court appointed former state Commissioner of Higher Education Sheila Stearns as chairwoman. But Stearns stepped down at the end of 2020 for health reasons, and after the commission deadlocked a second time, the court appointed former University of Montana law professor and tribal attorney Maylinn Smith as the replacement chairwoman.

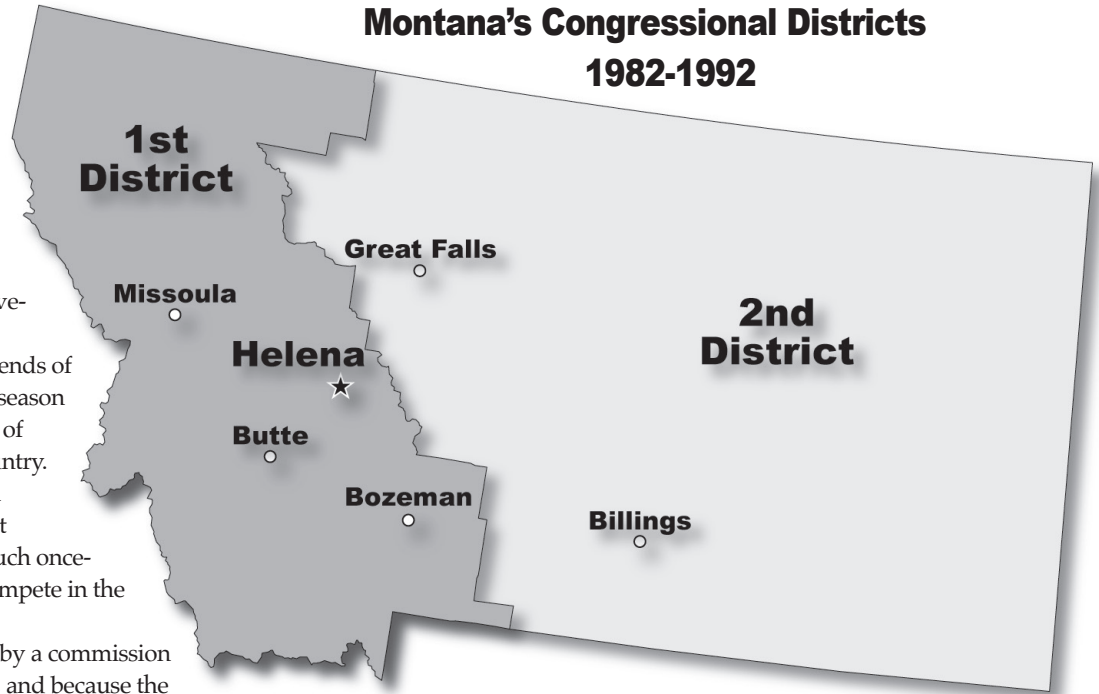
Smith's selection has drawn the ire of Republicans in Montana and in Washington, DC who point to her past donations to Democratic candidates as evidence she is biased against the GOP.

A majority of the seven-person Montana Supreme Court was either appointed by a Democratic governor or elected with backing from Democratic interests, but Smith's selection received unanimous support, including from the justices appointed by Republican governors or elected with support from GOP interests.

## The Redistricting Process

The Census Bureau has said that it will deliver the block-level data necessary for redistricting to the states on August 12. From the time the

## Montana's Congressional Districts 1982-1992



commission receives the data, it has 90 days to produce a congressional map. If the Census Bureau adheres to its schedule, that means the final map will be filed no later than November 10.

In late July, the commission adopted the criteria it will use for congressional redistricting.

The two congressional districts must be as equal in population as possible, compact, contiguous, and must not violate the Voting Rights Act.

But the commission also adopted several discretionary criteria, or "goals," that had been the topic of much debate. The three most notable goals are that "no plan may be drawn to unduly favor a political party," that "the commission shall attempt to minimize dividing cities, towns, counties and federal reservations between two districts when possible," and that "the commission may consider competitiveness of districts when drawing plans."

The Democratic members had argued that minimizing the division of existing political subdivisions should be discretionary rather than mandatory, an argument they won. The two Democrats had also pushed for competitiveness as a mandatory criteria, but the commission compromised by making it discretionary.

## The Lay of the Land

While the exact boundaries of the new district will not be known until November, Democrats and Republicans alike expect the state to be divided in a manner roughly similar to how it was for much of the 20th century, when Montana had two districts: an eastern district and a western district.

GOP Rep. Matt Rosendale, the state's at-large representative, lives in Glendive, in Eastern Montana. He is expected to run in the

*Continued on page 4*



*Continued from page 3*

eastern district, making the western seat an open race. All of the other announced candidates come from Western Montana and have indicated they will compete for the open seat rather than challenge Rosendale. There is no requirement for candidates to live within their district, only within the state.

Population shifts within the state over the last 40 years mean that the maps of the last century, which largely followed the Continental Divide, cannot simply be pressed back into duty. Explosive growth in western cities such as Bozeman, Missoula, and Helena, and in counties such as Flathead, mean that the old lines would result in an overpopulated western district and underpopulated eastern district. According to the Census, Montana's population in 2020 was 1,084,225, meaning that each congressional district must have as close to 542,112 residents as possible.

Still, the consensus expectation is that an east-west split is far more likely than a north-south split, especially given the commission's criteria of compactness and its goals of keeping communities of interest together and respecting existing geographic boundaries. Most likely, the western district will be anchored by Missoula, the state's second-largest city and a Democratic stronghold, and will include Democratic Deer Lodge and Silver Bow counties. In 2018, Sen. Jon Tester's raw vote margin in Missoula County was larger than his margin statewide, underscoring the county's importance to any Democratic candidate.

One major unknown is how the commission will approach Gallatin County (Bozeman), which has nearly tripled in size since 1980 and lies at the edge of the Continental Divide. Gallatin has a history of voting for down ballot Democrats, including for Gov. Steve Bullock by 10 points in the 2020 Senate race and Tester by 21 points in 2018 (it voted for President Donald Trump by 4 points in 2020). But because Bozeman has grown so rapidly, the county may end up split between the two districts.

## The Republicans

The biggest name in the race thus far is former Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, who also held Montana's at-large congressional seat for a little over two years, from 2015 to 2017.

Albert Olszewski, a surgeon and former state legislator on the verge of becoming a perennial candidate, is also running.

Zinke, 59, was born in Bozeman and raised in Whitefish, in the northwest corner of the state. A 1984 graduate of the University of Oregon (where he was the starting center for the Ducks football team), Zinke joined the Navy after college and served as a Navy SEAL for 23 years from 1986 to 2008 and rising to the rank of commander.

Zinke was awarded several commendations including two Bronze Stars, and he led a high profile mission capturing a notorious Bosnian Serb war criminal in 1998, but his career was also tinged by an episode in which he was found to have misused travel expenses, which the *New York Times* later reported hindered his advancement in the last decade of his service.

After retiring from the Navy, Zinke flipped a Whitefish-based state Senate seat in 2008, defeating Democrat Brittany MacLean, 55-45 percent. Four years later, he joined the gubernatorial ticket of businessman Neil Livingstone. The two finished fifth in the GOP primary with 9 percent.

In 2014, Zinke won a narrow victory in the GOP House primary to replace Rep. Steve Daines, who was running for Senate. With 33 percent of the vote, he finished just ahead of state Senate minority leader Corey Stapleton (29 percent), and state Sen. / future Rep. Rosendale (28 percent), powered by strength in Western Montana (Flathead, Lewis and Clark, and Missoula counties). He won the general election, 55-40 percent, over

John Lewis, a former aide to Sen. Max Baucus.

In 2016, Zinke won a second term, defeating state superintendent of education Denise Juneau, 56-41 percent, but resigned just a few months into his term when he was appointed Secretary of the Interior by President Trump.

Zinke fast became one of Trump's more controversial cabinet secretaries, not only for his decisions on reducing the size of several national monuments, but also because of the multitude of ethics investigations (as many as 18) into potential financial conflicts of interest, improper travel expenses, Hatch Act violations, and other issues.

At the end of 2018, Zinke either resigned from or was pushed out of (depending on who you ask) the administration. He later said that he left



Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

**Ryan Zinke**

because he could not afford the legal fees associated with the various investigations into him, which he maintains were politically motivated.

After leaving the administration, Zinke joined cryptocurrency investment firm Artillery One. He

announced his bid for Congress in June of this year, after Montana was awarded a second congressional seat, and quickly received an endorsement from Trump.

Olszewski, 58, is an orthopedic surgeon from Kalispell, Montana. His first foray into politics was as the running mate of gubernatorial candidate Jim Lynch in 2012. Lynch and Olszewski placed sixth in that GOP primary, behind Livingstone and Zinke.

He won a narrow GOP primary victory for a state House seat in 2014, 52-48 percent, and an easy general election victory, 78-22 percent. Two years later he upgraded to a state Senate seat, winning a Flathead County constituency, 72-28 percent.

In 2018 he sought the GOP nomination to take on Sen. Jon Tester, but finished in last place with 19 percent of the vote, behind nominee Matt Rosendale, former judge Russell Fagg, and businessman Troy Downing.

And in 2020, Olszewski ran for governor but fared no better, placing a distant third behind eventual winner Rep. Greg Gianforte and state attorney general Tim Fox.

## The Democrats

Three Democrats have already announced their candidacies, while several more still could jump in. Two of the state's most prominent Democrats, former Gov. Bullock and former Lt. Gov. Mike Cooney, have ruled out running.

State Rep. Laurie Bishop, former Olympic rower Monica Tranel, and nonprofit executive Cora Neumann, who briefly ran for Senate in 2020, are all running.

Bishop, 51, has represented Livingston (Park County) in the state House since 2017. A Rochester, NY-born 1992 graduate of Syracuse University, Bishop moved to Montana in 1996 and, after running a bike shop for a few years, began a career in youth development with the state's Office of Public Instruction. She's now the director of the Montana Afterschool Alliance.

*Continued on page 5*

*Continued from page 4*

In 2016, Bishop challenged GOP state Rep. Debra Lamm on a platform of increasing funding for education and infrastructure. She defeated Lamm, 52-47 percent as Trump carried the district, 48-43 percent, over Hillary Clinton.

In 2018, Bishop faced former state Rep. Dan Skattum, who had briefly represented a neighboring district. She won, 58-42 percent.

Four years after she ousted Debra Lamm, Bishop was challenged by Joe Lamm, Debra's husband and the chairman of the Park County GOP. Bishop won, 56-44 percent.

Bishop was the first Democrat to announce her candidacy for the new House seat. Even if her home in Park County, which is to the east of Gallatin County, is drawn into the eastern district, Bishop has said she will run in the Missoula-anchored western district.

Bishop's campaign is already highlighting her record as a state legislator (the only one in the field thus far), including her work on Medicaid expansion and a bill she passed requiring insurers to cover mental health costs at parity with physical health. Bishop will also look to cut a contrast with the rest of the field by emphasizing that she comes from a more rural part of the state than do Tranel and Neumann.

A major challenge for Bishop will be fundraising. State legislative candidates in Montana can only accept individual contributions up to \$180 per person, and Bishop has never spent more than low five-figures on her races, so she does not have experience raising the kind of cash needed to compete at a federal level.

Bishop is working with Eichenbaum Skinner Strategies for paid media, pollster Amy Levin of Breakthrough Campaigns, Moore Campaigns for direct mail, and FogLamp for digital media.

Tranel, 55, launched her campaign with a splashy video highlighting her experience rowing for Team USA at the 1996 and 2000 Olympic Games.

One of ten siblings, the Wyoming-born Tranel grew up on a ranch outside of Billings and attended Gonzaga University in Spokane before receiving her law degree from Rutgers University-Camden in 1991.

Tranel then competed at the top tier of rowing, winning several medals with Team USA at world championships in the early 1990s, and rowing for Team USA in Atlanta in 1996 (finishing 4th) and Sydney in 2000 (finishing 12th).

In 2001, Tranel began working as a staff attorney for the Montana Public Service Commission, and in 2004 she ran as a Republican to represent a southwestern district (including Butte and Bozeman) on the Public Service Commission. She lost in the primary to Edward McCrone, 55-45 percent.

Tranel moved to Washington, DC to work for Montana's Republican Sen. Conrad Burns as a legislative counsel in 2005. When she returned to Montana she founded her own law firm focusing on energy issues and consumer protection; her campaign highlights a case she won preventing Montana provider Northwestern Energy from passing along millions of dollars in upgrade costs to consumers.



**Monica Tranel**

*Courtesy Tranel Campaign*

In 2015, Tranel ran for a seat on the Helena City Commission, narrowly losing by a 0.73 percent margin. In 2020, Tranel again sought a seat on the Public Service Commission, this time for a district spanning the northwestern corner of the state and including Missoula, and as



**Laurie Bishop**

*Courtesy Bishop Campaign*

a Democrat. She defeated 22-year-old activist Daniel Carlino in the primary, 77-23 percent, but narrowly lost the general election to GOP state Sen. Jennifer Fielder, 52-48 percent.

Tranel's campaign has focused on her legal work in

consumer advocacy, and her ability to speak to voters who used to cast ballots for Democrats but no longer do. Former Gov. Brian Schweitzer has endorsed her candidacy and cut a digital ad for her in which he praises her work ethic as a rower and lawyer. Schweitzer's support could be an important validator in a Democratic primary for the former Republican.

Tranel's campaign team includes media consultants Jon Vogel and Mike Reilly of MVAR, and pollster Zac McCrary of Anzalone Liszt Grove. Jason Bresler and Judith Wallner of the Strategy Group are handling direct mail.

Neumann, 46, is a nonprofit director from Bozeman. She was a leading contender in the 2020 Democratic primary for Senate until Bullock made his last-minute entry into that race, prompting Neumann to drop out and endorse the sitting governor.

Born in British Columbia, Canada, Neumann moved with her family to Bozeman as an infant after her father was killed in a lumber mill accident. She graduated from the University of New Mexico in 1998, and began graduate studies at Columbia University in 2001, receiving a Masters of Public Health in 2003. From Columbia she entered a PhD program at Oxford, which took her to southeast Asia for several years of research.

In 2008, as a student, Neumann founded the Global First Ladies Alliance in conjunction with the RAND Corporation; the group provides support to first ladies around the world, with an emphasis in Africa. She also worked from 2012 to 2013 in the State Department, and from 2013 to 2015 as the director of policy for Care.com in Washington, DC.

After completing her PhD in international development in 2015, Neumann moved back to Bozeman and founded several nonprofits, including one in 2020 that facilitated Covid-19 response efforts among Native communities.

In her 2020 Senate campaign, Neumann raised a respectable \$644,000 before dropping out, and had \$93,000 left over that she has since transferred to her House campaign account. That gives her an early financial advantage over her opponents, who are starting from zero.

On the campaign trail, Neumann often discusses loss and tenacity, drawing a connection between her experience losing her father at an early age and later her brother to a brain aneurysm, to the hardships and impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Montanans.

But she'll also have to parry attacks on her Montana credentials, given that she only recently moved back to the state after spending two and half decades on the coasts and overseas.

*Continued on page 6*

*Continued from page 5*

Neumann's general consultant on the race is Meredith Kelly of Declaration Media, who also worked on the 2020 Senate campaign.

Whitney Williams, a 2020 gubernatorial candidate and business consultant with an impeccable political pedigree — her father Pat represented Montana in Congress for 18 years and her mother Carol is a former state Senate majority leader — has expressed interest in running. Williams ran a well-regarded but unsuccessful campaign for governor in 2020, losing to Cooney 55-45 in the Democratic primary, and proved to be a solid fundraiser.

While she hasn't made any apparent moves toward running since her initial comments this spring, Williams is worth keeping an eye on and would be a formidable contender.

Tom Winter, a 35-year-old former state legislator from Missoula, could also run. Winter ran for the U.S. House in 2020. His good looks, Martha McKenna-produced videos, and backing from progressive group Our Revolution helped him amass an online following and raise \$374,000, but he was steamrolled by 2018 nominee/former state Rep. Kathleen

Williams (no relation to Whitney), who won the primary 90-10 percent.

While Kathleen Williams had advantages as a returning candidate who had lost by just 4 points in 2018, Winter's poor showing is enough to view a potential 2022 run with some initial skepticism.

## The Bottom Line

Armed with an endorsement from Trump and facing lackluster opposition, Zinke is the clear favorite for the GOP nomination in the new district. But the picture for Democrats is far less clear, with an unsettled field and several credible candidates running.

Just five seats separate Republicans from the House majority. And not only are GOP legislators in charge of drawing 189 districts compared to Democrats' 77, most of the new seats awarded during reapportionment are in states controlled by Republicans: Texas, North Carolina, and Florida.

So Democrats are looking for any silver lining when it comes to redistricting, and Montana is one of the few they may find. While the commission process, undertaken for the first time in 40 years, adds a layer of uncertainty.

IE

*Continued from page 1*

nearly half of Biden's votes coming from the six most populous of the state's 100 counties.

In the state's two most populous counties, Wake and Mecklenburg, Biden posted the best performances for a Democrat since the 1940s; he won Wake 62-36 percent, a margin 13 points better than Obama's in 2008 (when Obama won the state), and Mecklenburg 67-32 percent, 10 points better than Obama's margin in 2008. But Republicans' increased strength in rural areas, especially in the western half of the state, has allowed the GOP to maintain its slight edge in statewide races.

## The Republicans

Three major candidates are vying for the GOP nomination: former Gov. Pat McCrory, Rep. Ted Budd, and former Rep. Mark Walker. North Carolina native Lara Lea Trump, the wife of Eric Trump and the daughter-in-law of the former president, flirted with a run for much of the first half of the year but said in June that she would not be a candidate.

McCrory, 64, served one term as governor from 2013 to 2017, and previously was the longest-serving mayor of Charlotte (he was in office from 1995 to 2009). This is his fourth statewide run over the last 15 years. In addition to his successful 2012 campaign for governor (when he walloped Lt. Gov. Walter Dalton 55-43 percent) and his unsuccessful re-election campaign in 2016 (when he lost to Cooper despite Trump and Burr winning), he also was the GOP nominee for governor in 2008. That year, he lost to Lt. Gov. Bev Perdue, 50-47 percent, outperforming Dole but underperforming John McCain at the top of the ticket.



Pat McCrory

Courtesy McCrory Campaign

A 1978 graduate of Catawba College in Salisbury, North Carolina, McCrory went to work for Charlotte-based Duke Energy straight out of college, and worked in a variety of positions including as a lineman, recruiter, and engineering trainer. Because Charlotte government was then a part-time job, McCrory stayed on at Duke when he was elected to the city council in 1989 and in 1995 when he was elected mayor.

Running every two years, McCrory won all his races with ease, never falling below 56 percent of the vote.

In 2008, McCrory was a late entrant into a sleepy GOP primary for governor, in which he faced state Sen. Fred Smith, attorney Bill Graham, and former state Supreme Court Justice Bob Orr. McCrory entered the race as the favorite and never relinquished his lead, winning by 9 points, powered by massive margins in the Charlotte media market. He would go on to lose to Perdue in the general.

McCrory made clear he intended to run again in 2012, and took 83 percent of the vote in the GOP primary that year. He faced Dalton in the general election and won by 12 points. The election was seen as a repudiation of the deeply unpopular Gov. Perdue (who chose not to run for a second term) and McCrory's victory gave the GOP full control of the state government for the first time since Reconstruction.

While in office, McCrory rose to national prominence when the state legislature passed the "Public Facilities Privacy & Security Act," otherwise known as HB2 or the "Bathroom Bill," which precluded localities from passing anti-discrimination statutes protecting LGBT people, and prohibited transgender people from using public bathrooms that corresponded with their gender identity.

The law sparked backlash not just from Democrats but from the business community nationwide, with PayPal and several other companies scrapping plans to expand into the state. The NBA pulled the 2017 All-Star Game from Charlotte, and the NCAA stripped the state of hosting duties for seven championships in 2016.

Four-term state attorney general Roy Cooper — a vocal opponent of the law — challenged McCrory in 2016 in one of the most closely watched gubernatorial contests of the cycle. Cooper prevailed by 10,277 votes, making McCrory the first governor to lose re-election in North Carolina since 1850.

*Continued on page 7*



*Continued from page 6*

In a remarkable bit of foreshadowing, McCrory refused to concede to Cooper and instead alleged voter fraud, specifically in Durham County, where a batch of votes counted shortly after midnight gave Cooper a lead he would not relinquish. McCrory and his allies in state and local party organizations would go on to allege fraud in 50 of the state's 100 counties. Only after several unsuccessful lawsuits and a recount of Durham's votes did McCrory acknowledge his defeat a month after the election.

Since leaving office, McCrory has hosted a top-rated morning radio show on WBT, a Charlotte-area station, commenting on national and local issues.

McCrory is working with veteran Republican consultant Paul Shumaker (who previously advised Tillis's and Burr's campaigns), media consultants Brad Todd and Jordan Shaw (a former Tillis campaign manager) of OnMessage Inc., pollster Glen Bolger of Public Opinion Strategies, and Campaign Inbox for digital consulting.

Budd, 49, is in his third term representing North Carolina's 13th District in Congress. Born in Winston-Salem, Budd scored an early coup in the race when he received a surprise endorsement from Trump at the state GOP convention in June.

A 1994 graduate of Appalachian State University in Boone, NC who also has degrees from Dallas Theological Seminary (Th.M., 1998) and Wake Forest (MBA, 2007), Budd owns and runs ProShots, a gun shop and shooting range in Forsyth County.

After the state Supreme Court ordered the state's congressional districts to be redrawn in early 2016, 13th District GOP Rep. George Holding chose to run in the new 2nd District instead, leaving the new 13th District up for grabs.

Budd, who had never run for office before, was one of 17 GOP candidates in the primary for the new district. His campaign received a massive boost when he was endorsed by the anti-tax Club for Growth, which spent nearly \$300,000 on TV ads supporting his candidacy and made him the only candidate whose name was on the airwaves. In the end, Budd won 6,340 votes in a low-turnout contest, good for 20 percent of the total and nearly double the second-place finisher. (Because the race was held on an abbreviated schedule due to the late redistricting, the state's usual 30 percent threshold for outright victory was waived.)

In the general election, Budd defeated former Guilford County Commissioner Bruce Davis 56-44 percent as Trump carried the district 53-44 percent.

In 2018, Budd faced a well-funded challenge from attorney Kathy Manning. Despite being outspent \$4.2 million to \$2.4 million, Budd prevailed 52-46 percent. Two years later, after another court-ordered redistricting, Budd's district became much more Republican and he was easily re-elected over Democrat Scott Huffman, 68-32 percent.

In Congress, Budd is a member of the Freedom Caucus, was one of the signatories on the Texas lawsuit that aimed to contest Biden's victory in 2020, and voted not to certify Biden's Electoral College victories in Arizona and Pennsylvania.

Budd is working with longtime North Carolina consultant Jonathan Felts, media consultant Casey Phillips of RedPrint Strategy, pollster Rob Autry of Meeting Street Insights and Martin Baker and Ben Mitchell of Political Ink for direct mail.

Former Rep. Mark Walker, 52, served three terms in Congress, from 2015 to 2021. Due to the two court-ordered mid-decade redistricting

processes, Walker represented a different configuration of the 6th District in each term.

The Alabama-born son of a preacher, Walker moved to North Carolina and found success as a car salesman after dropping out of college in Houston, eventually returning to college after he decided to join the ministry himself. After graduating Piedmont Baptist College in 1999, he spent time as a pastor in Florida before returning to North Carolina, eventually settling as the minister of music at Lawndale Baptist Church in 2008.



Caroline Brehman/CQ Roll Call

**Ted Budd**

In 2014, 30-year incumbent Howard Coble retired from Congress, setting off a scramble to fill his Republican-leaning seat. Walker, who had never held elected office before, was one of nine candidates to run including the

undisputed frontrunner, Rockingham County District Attorney Phil Berger Jr., whose father, Phil Berger Sr., happened to be the state Senate president pro tem.

Berger led the first round of balloting with 34 percent to Walker's 25 percent. Despite Berger's financial advantage and political pedigree, Walker pulled off a stunning upset in the runoff, winning 60-40 percent. In the general election, Walker defeated Democrat Laura Fjeld 59-41 percent.

In 2016, Walker's district was redrawn to be more compact. In his first re-election campaign, he handily defeated former Alamance County Democratic Party Chairman Pete Glidewell, 59-41 percent, as Trump carried the district 56-41 percent.

In 2018, Walker faced 27-year-old Deloitte consultant Ryan Watts, who he beat 57-43 percent.

After 2018, Walker's district was redrawn again, this time as a Solid Democratic seat anchored in Greensboro. He then considered launching a Senate primary challenge to Tillis from the right. At that time, Walker had support from the Club for Growth, which went as far as to commission a poll showing him competitive with Tillis in an effort to coax him into the race. After a year of flirting with a bid, Walker said in late 2019 he wouldn't challenge Tillis or move to another district and attempt to stay in Congress.

In Congress, Walker was the chairman of the conservative Republican Study Committee from 2017 to 2019, and also served in GOP leadership as the vice chairman of the House GOP Conference from 2019 to 2021.

Walker was the first candidate to announce his 2022 bid, in December of 2020. His general consultant is Jeff Roe of Axiom Strategies, which will also handle paid media.

## The Republican Primary

Republicans in and around the race generally see McCrory and Budd as the main contenders.

Walker was the first to enter the race and had a four-month head start in fundraising, but was not able to make as large a financial splash as he had hoped. While he raised a respectable \$370,000 in the final month of 2020, he pulled in just \$208,000 in the first quarter of 2021,

*Continued on page 8*

*Continued from page 7*

and \$206,000 in the second quarter, a downward trend that doesn't portend well.

While Walker reported the most money in the bank of any GOP candidate on June 30 (\$926,000), he also began the race with \$572,000 left over from his congressional runs.

As the first to announce, Walker also had some high-profile backers, including former acting White House Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney, 11th District Rep. Madison Cawthorn, and rising GOP star Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina.

But Walker's campaign was dealt a potentially fatal blow when Trump endorsed Budd. Walker had anticipated that the former president would support him, based on a conversation they had in the Oval Office back in 2019 when Walker was considering a primary run against Tillis.



Mark Walker

Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call

Adding insult to injury for Walker, the Club for Growth — which had pushed Walker to run in 2020 — endorsed Budd as well.

Walker had been hoping to capitalize on support from evangelicals and other conservative Republicans, a constituency he shares with the ideologically similar Budd, who also shares Walker's geographic base in the Piedmont Triad. But the one-two punch of the Club and Trump backing Budd complicated that path.

It also elevated Budd from a second tier contender to a top tier competitor alongside McCrory, who entered the race as the polling favorite and who benefits from much higher name recognition owing to his three previous statewide runs.

Both McCrory and Budd released internal surveys that show McCrory with a substantial early lead. An April 6-8 poll of likely GOP primary voters by Public Opinion Strategies for the McCrory campaign showed the former governor in front with 48 percent, followed by Walker with 13 percent and Budd (who had not yet entered) with 9 percent. A June 9-10 poll of likely GOP primary voters by Meeting Street Insights for the Budd campaign found McCrory ahead with 45 percent, followed by Budd with 19 percent and Walker with 12 percent.

It is rare for a campaign to release an internal poll showing the candidate trailing by 26 points. But Budd's poll served two functions. First, it showed that Budd had already started to separate from Walker after officially entering the race and receiving Trump's endorsement the week before the poll was in the field. Second, the poll included a subsequent question in which voters were told that Trump had endorsed Budd (only 20 percent of voters polled were initially aware). After hearing that, the poll shows Budd surging to a 19-point lead, 46-27 percent, over McCrory, with Walker at 8 percent.

McCrory is already making an electability argument, that he is the only candidate capable of keeping the seat in GOP hands, a line that the outgoing Burr picked up on when he recently expressed his support for the former governor. McCrory's case is that only he can win over suburban voters who have drifted away from the GOP. His allies go as far as to say that losing out on Trump's endorsement will allow him

to distance himself from the highly polarizing former president in a general election.

As in his previous contested primary in 2008, McCrory will look to build up a big advantage in the Charlotte area. In 2008, he won 80 percent of the vote in Mecklenburg County. His margin there, 27,834 votes, made up more than half of his 45,975-vote statewide edge. He also won at least 72 percent of the vote in each of the six surrounding counties.

McCrory's detractors say the electability argument is a weak one, because the former governor has lost two statewide races before, including once when he benefited from Trump winning the state by 3 points at the top of the ticket.

And there's still a lot of skepticism within the state's business class of McCrory's ability to win back those suburban voters who rejected him last time over the bathroom bill.

The Club for Growth has already begun spending in the race. The group spent \$60,000 on TV ads during the Olympics attacking McCrory over an economic incentives package McCrory's government gave to a Chinese-owned company in 2013 (even implying that McCrory's cash went toward helping China develop the coronavirus, an extraordinary charge on multiple levels).

The Club's financial support comes at an important time for Budd, who posted a modest fundraising haul in the second quarter of the year: just \$700,000, plus \$250,000 out of his own pocket. While the initial buy was small, the Club has pledged more than \$5 million to support Budd. That air cover will help Budd close the gap between him and McCrory, who raised \$1.2 million from April through June.

Budd entered the race with \$1 million left over from his congressional runs, which provides him with a financial cushion. But he'll need to pick up the fundraising pace so he can communicate the Trump endorsement to more voters. With three major media markets, all of which are among the top 50 largest nationwide, and a scattering of smaller but important markets such as Greenville-Spartanburg in the west, North Carolina is an expensive place to advertise.

Some McCrory allies believe that Budd is too extreme for DC Republicans to tolerate as the party's nominee, and suggest that groups such as the McConnell-aligned Senate Leadership Fund could intervene against Budd. But SLF — while reserving the right to change its stance — has made clear it has no plans to get involved.

It is not immediately obvious why Budd would draw in McConnell allies. Though he is quite conservative and has been supportive of Trump's post-election activities, that puts him in line with the mainstream of the GOP. In 2020, SLF only intervened in one open GOP Senate primary, in Kansas against Kris Kobach, a frontrunner for the nomination. Kobach had just suffered an embarrassing defeat in the 2018 gubernatorial election, which left Republicans in Washington skeptical he could win a Senate race. While it's still early, there is little sign party leaders feel that way about Budd.

## The Trump Factor

One question hanging over this primary is how determinative Trump's endorsement is in a GOP primary. Not a year after his loss to Biden, and the Jan. 6 insurrection, the former president has re-solidified his hold on the party and stockpiled more than \$100 million across several fundraising vehicles with an eye toward 2024.

But while party leadership in Congress and at the RNC has made clear their fealty to Trump, it is less clear what voters themselves think,

*Continued on page 9*



*Continued from page 8*

especially now that the former president is less visible in the headlines and banned from nearly every social media platform. And perhaps more importantly for Republicans heading into 2022, it's not at all clear that Trump's political strengths are transferable to other Republicans, even those who carry his imprimatur.

The recent special election in Texas' 6th District saw a Trump-backed candidate lose to another Republican. While that contest was not restricted to the GOP primary electorate, the result reflected poorly on Trump's ability to get his candidates over the finish line. The Texas 6 race perked the ears of not only those around Trump, but also McCrory allies eager to show that it's possible to win without his nod. Trump's endorsed candidate prevailed in Tuesday's GOP primary in Ohio's 15th District, albeit with 37 percent. But the victory is enough to sideline talk of Trump's demise within the Republican Party.

The North Carolina Senate primary, currently scheduled for March 8, will be the first Senate primary of the 2022 election cycle. So it will be the first test of a Trump-backed candidate not in a special election but in a fully-fledged GOP primary race, and could set the tone for subsequent GOP primaries where Trump is officially involved.

## The Democrats

The three major Democratic candidates are former state Supreme Court Chief Justice Cheri Beasley, state Sen. Jeff Jackson, and former state Sen. Erica Smith. Beaufort Mayor Rett Newton is also running but is not expected to be a factor in the race.

Beasley, 55, recently finished a term as chief justice of the North

Carolina Supreme Court, where she oversaw the administration of the state's judicial system. She was appointed chief justice by Gov. Cooper in 2019, and was the first Black woman to serve in the role.

Born in Chicago, Beasley is a 1988 graduate of Douglass College at Rutgers-New Brunswick University in New Jersey; she received a JD from University of Tennessee Law School in 1991, and later received an LLM degree from Duke Law School in 2018.

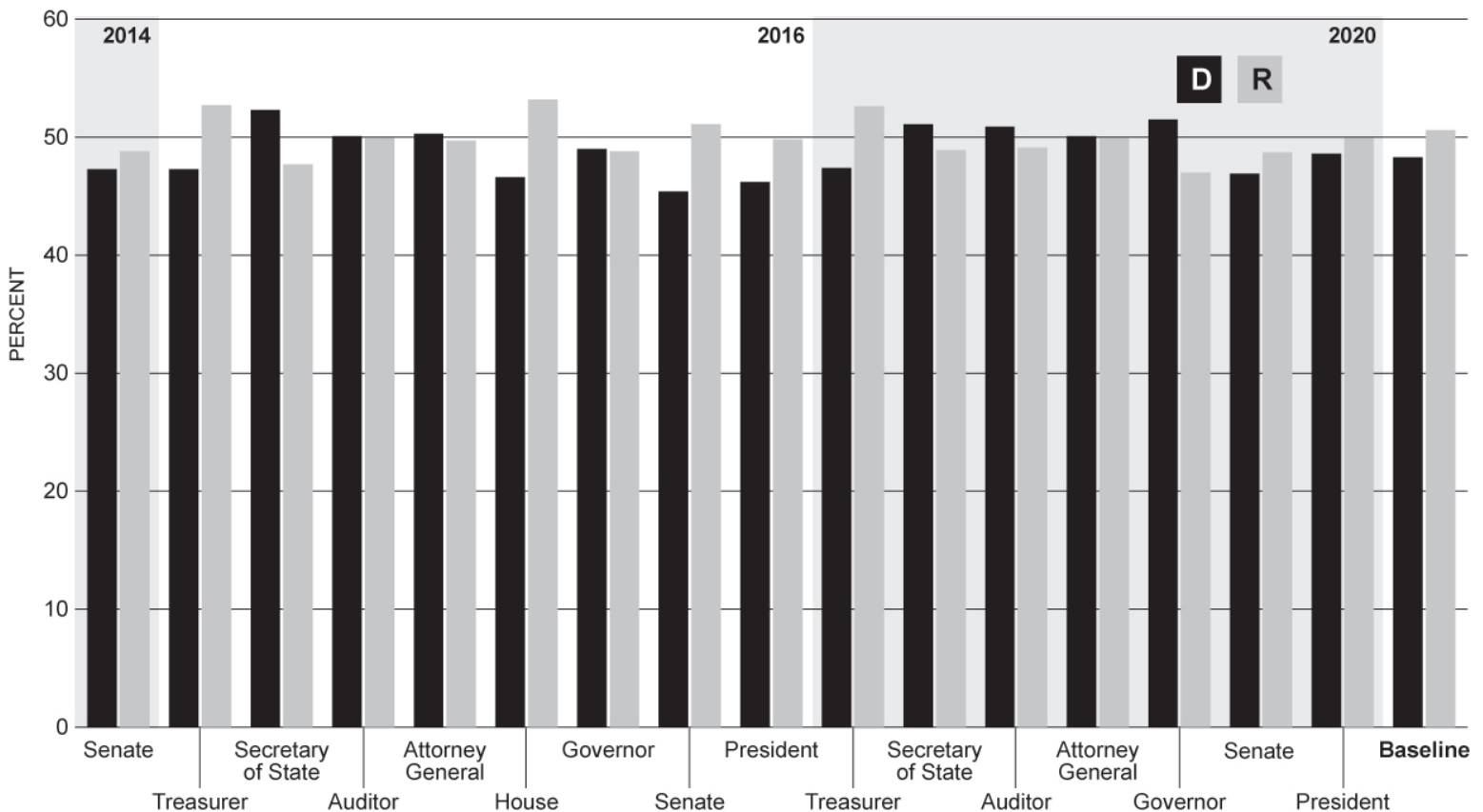
After graduating law school, Beasley moved to Cumberland County (Fayetteville), where she worked as a public defender from 1994 to 1999, when she was appointed to a judgeship in the 12th Judicial District by Gov. Jim Hunt. In 2002, she was elected judge in her own right, defeating Republican Mike Boose 64-36 percent in a nonpartisan election and was unopposed for re-election four years later.

In 2008, she ran for a position on the state Court of Appeals; in that officially nonpartisan statewide election, she defeated incumbent Doug McCullough (a Republican), 57-43 percent. In 2009, she was appointed by Gov. Perdue to the state Supreme Court. When she ran for that seat in her own right in 2014, she won a nailbiter over Republican-backed Mike Robinson in the officially nonpartisan race, eking out a 5,410-vote victory, a margin of 0.2 percent.

In 2019, Beasley was appointed by Cooper to be the court's chief justice. In 2020, she stood for election as chief justice, but was defeated by Republican Paul Newby by an excruciatingly small margin of 401 votes, out of 5.4 million votes cast. Despite her loss, Beasley won more votes across the state than either Tillis or Cunningham in the Senate race, and also outperformed Biden.

*Continued on page 10*

## Statewide Election Results in North Carolina



*Continued from page 9*

Following her defeat, she joined the appellate practice at McGuireWoods law firm in Raleigh as a partner.

Beasley's campaign team includes media consultants Adam Magnus, Elisabeth Pearson, and Lauren Passalacqua of Magnus Pearson, and polling by Global Strategy Group. Deliver Strategies is handling direct mail, and Gambit Strategies and Aisle 518 are handling digital. Beasley's manager and finance director both recently decided to leave the campaign.

Jackson, 38, has represented the Charlotte area in the state legislature since 2014. He was the first to launch his campaign for Senate, in late January of 2021, and had previously considered running against Tillis in 2020.

A Chapel Hill native, Jackson was a student at Emory on 9/11 and enlisted in the Army Reserves the following year. After graduating in 2004, he deployed to Afghanistan for a year as a member of a psychological operations team.

Upon returning, Jackson, who also received a Masters in Philosophy from Emory, attended University of North Carolina School of Law, receiving a JD in 2009, and joined the National Guard's JAG corps.

Jackson worked as an assistant district attorney in Gaston County, west of Charlotte, from 2011 to 2014. That year, Charlotte Mayor Patrick Cannon resigned after being indicted on bribery charges, and state Sen. Dan Clodfelter was appointed to take his place. Jackson threw his hat in the ring as a potential replacement for Clodfelter in the state senate and was selected by local leaders to fill the seat.

Soon after arriving in the state House, Jackson developed a knack for going viral with his passionate floor speeches, including one in 2014 excoriating Republicans over a secretive budget bill, and again in 2015 after he was the only legislator to show up during a snowstorm.

After winning unopposed in 2014, Jackson defeated Republican Bob Diamond, 68-32 percent, in 2016, as Hillary Clinton carried the seat, 68-28 percent. In 2018, Jackson's district was redrawn to be more Democratic, and he defeated Republican Nora Trotman, 78-20 percent.

In 2019, Jackson met with then-Minority Leader Chuck Schumer to discuss running against Tillis, but came away unimpressed with national Democrats. In audio leaked later that year, Jackson recalled telling Schumer he wanted to do 100 town halls in 100 days, and that Schumer told him he would not do that but would instead spend all his time in a "windowless basement" raising money. Jackson chose to seek re-election instead. After his district was redrawn yet again, this time to be more competitive, he prevailed over businesswoman Sonja Nichols, 55-41 percent.

Jackson's campaign team includes consultant Doug Wilson, media consultant Mark Putnam of Putnam Partners, pollster Mike Bocian of GBAO, and digital consulting by Dan McNally of Wavelength Strategy. Joe Hansen and Michelle Gajewski of AMHC are doing direct mail.

Smith, 51, was born at Fort Bragg in Fayetteville to a military family. She recently concluded six years in the state Senate, representing part of the northeast corner of the state that includes her home in Northampton County.

After graduating from North Carolina A&T State University with a degree in mechanical engineering, Smith worked as an engineer for Boeing in Washington state until 1997. While working in the DC area as a patent examiner for the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, she received a Masters in Divinity from Howard University (2000).

Smith moved back to North Carolina in 2003 and began work as a math teacher and an ordained Baptist pastor. In 2014, after six years on

the Northampton County Board of Education, Smith launched a primary challenge to state Sen. Clark Jenkins. Despite raising little money, Smith, who ran on a platform of higher teacher pay, defeated Jenkins by 8 points, 48-40 percent.

After running unopposed in the 2014 and 2016 general elections, Smith's district was redrawn to include conservative Beaufort County, making it much more competitive. In 2018, she defeated Republican Chuck Earley, 54-46 percent.

In 2020, Smith ran for U.S. Senate and faced the DSCC-endorsed Cunningham in the Democratic primary. Seeing an opportunity to give DC Democrats heartburn, the Mitch McConnell-aligned super PAC Senate Leadership Fund spent \$3 million on advertising supporting Smith, who they viewed as too liberal to win statewide, and attacking Cunningham as too moderate for Democratic primary voters. In response, Schumer-aligned Senate Majority PAC spent more than \$10 million boosting Cunningham during the primary. In the end, Smith won 35 percent of the vote, finishing well behind Cunningham's 57 percent.

Smith is working with Middle Seat for paid media.

## The Democratic Primary

Publicly, Democrats say they are happy that a competitive primary is taking shape, and that whichever nominee emerges will be the best standard-bearer for the party in the general election.

But Democratic sources in Washington, DC and North Carolina say that Beasley begins the race as the frontrunner, with Jackson as a



Courtesy Beasley campaign

**Cheri Beasley**

serious contender but still an underdog. Democratic operatives are largely dismissive of Smith, whose 2020 performance they write off as a result of \$3 million in outside meddling from GOP groups looking to cause trouble in the Democratic primary.

Smith also entered July with just \$55,000 in the bank, which does not help her case for credibility.

Beasley is the only candidate in the field to have won statewide before, and also has the potential to make history as just the third Black woman ever to serve in the U.S. Senate, and the first Black woman and Black person to be a senator from North Carolina.

Democratic operatives anticipate the primary electorate to be as much as 60 percent female and 40-plus percent Black, which several sources say gives Beasley a structural advantage as the most prominent Black woman running. Barring any major stumbles, one longtime North Carolina Democratic operative said, Beasley should be able to lock down the vast majority of the Black vote and effectively cut off any opponents' path to the nomination.

Private polling indicates that Beasley begins the race with slightly higher name ID than Jackson, and her campaign is confident that her profile as a longtime jurist will appeal to voters tired of partisan squabbling. She also posted a strong fundraising quarter, pulling in \$1.3 million through the end of June. That's roughly the same amount that Jackson raised in *his* first quarter in the race, from January through April.

*Continued on page 11*

*Continued from page 10*

Jackson's numbers fell off in the second quarter, however, when he only raised \$719,000. Though he ended June with slightly more money in the bank than Beasley (\$864,000 to her \$833,000), the trend line should worry him.

But Jackson should not be discounted. Democrats in the state speak highly of his ability to connect with voters in person and his talents as a speaker on the stump. They also say his online presence, including Facebook and Twitter followers, is far more robust than Beasley's.

And while Jackson bears some resemblance to 2020 nominee Cal Cunningham — both are young, white, telegenic state legislators and lawyers with military experience — that framing minimizes Jackson's political skills, says a longtime North Carolina Democratic consultant not working on this race. The longtime consultant also noted that Cunningham's demographic profile was not what caused him to lose his race, but rather the late-breaking sex scandal.

For Jackson's part, his wife Marisa told *Axios* that "people ask him countless times a day if he's cheated on me," and that she "laughs at the thought."

Jackson has been relying on his campaigning chops to build up momentum in the early stages of the race, embarking on a 100-county tour across the state that has garnered big crowds and lots of local press coverage.

While barnstorming can be an effective tactic to raise your profile (just ask Texas Democrat Beto O'Rourke, to whom one North Carolina Democrat favorably compared Jackson), it's probably not enough on its own to win a heavily contested election. Jackson will need to find a way to turn that energy on the ground into fundraising dollars if he wants to compete with Beasley and her well-heeled allies at EMILY's List and other national groups. The next fundraising quarter (ending Sept. 30) will be his moment to show that he can hang tough.

With little daylight between Beasley and Jackson on policy, the primary is shaping up to be a contest of personality and presentation.

Both Beasley (the trailblazing justice with the gravitas of 20 years on the bench) and Jackson (the charismatic millennial legislator making politics accessible and even fun again) have compelling cases to make on that front. But there are also potential pitfalls for both.

This is Beasley's first time running as a partisan politician. After two decades steadfastly avoiding taking stances on issues except in the narrow contexts of her judicial opinions, Beasley will now have to develop clear positions on a whole host of partisan topics and be able to communicate them convincingly to voters. Numerous Democrats cautioned there will be a learning curve as Beasley transitions to partisan politics, and noted that the former justice has not been on the campaign trail nearly as much as Jackson has.

For Jackson, he will have to overcome perceptions that he is more of a show horse than a workhorse. Democratic sources say his reputation among fellow state legislators is less than stellar and that there is an opening for Beasley and her allies to contrast his rhetoric with his accomplishments. Already, Beasley's allies are circulating a *Charlotte News & Observer* article noting that Beasley has received donations from several Democratic state legislators while Jackson has received none. For his part, Jackson points to the much higher proportion of in-state contributions he has received compared to Beasley.

The Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee is not endorsing in this primary, a change from previous years when the DSCC endorsed early in the state's Senate primaries. But Beasley's hiring choices offer

clues as to the party establishment's preference. Beasley's team includes a former DSCC deputy executive director (Matt Canter), a former DSCC deputy political director / former Democratic Governors Association executive director (Pearson), and the most recent DSCC communications director (Passalacqua).

## How It Plays Out

The consensus among Democrats and Republicans working on Senate races is that North Carolina's contest is the third most competitive race on the map, after Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. Though Republicans have not lost a federal race in 14 years, their victories have largely been narrow, and the open seat creates more of an opportunity for Democrats.

As will be the case in all of next cycle's competitive Senate contests, a lot will depend on the national environment in the fall of 2022.

Democrats in the state are burned by the close calls of the last decade but see opportunity in the rare open seat. They also view both McCrory and Budd as weak opponents.

Democrats see Budd's actions after the 2020 election — signing on to the Texas lawsuit and objecting to the Electoral College certification after the Jan. 6 insurrection — as disqualifying for a statewide candidate, in addition to seeing him as too ideologically conservative.

And while it's true that recent GOP statewide winners (Burr, Tillis, and McCrory) have not come from the right wing of the party, Trump also won the state twice. So it's clear that being the "Trump" candidate is not disqualifying.

The more pressing question is if Budd can turn out the entire Trump coalition in a year when Trump is not on the ballot. Republicans have kept winning the state despite losing ground in the most populous counties because of outstanding turnout and margins in rural areas.

Budd's campaign points to his victory in 2018 over Manning as evidence that he can put together a broad coalition and win in a tough environment.

McCrory is already trying to nationalize the race; his campaign's introductory video begins with a discussion of how the Senate is split 50-50, and North Carolinians have a chance to take away the deciding vote from Vice President Kamala Harris. It is not surprising McCrory is framing the race that way, because 2016 showed that a race centered on local issues is one he could lose, even in a favorable national environment.

Both Beasley and Jackson would make compelling general election candidates, and it may in fact play into Democrats' favor that there is a contested primary between them — at least if they both keep to their promises about not engaging in negative campaigning.

Beasley still needs time to develop into a legislative candidate. If she is the nominee, she will have to appear solid on the issues of the day, and running against Jackson will push her in that direction.

Jackson needs to prove that he can translate town halls, big crowds, and social media followers into dollars and eventually votes. His campaign cites Jason Kander, Pete Buttigieg, and Stacey Abrams as role models, but all three of those candidates lost. A hard-fought primary against Beasley would help him prove viability.

In 2020, the North Carolina Senate race was among the most expensive races in the nation, with \$299 million in total spending (candidates, party committees, outside groups). Operatives in both parties working on the 2022 race believe that the candidates themselves will match or exceed the amounts raised by Tillis (\$26 million) and

*Continued on page 12*



Continued from page 11  
Cunningham (\$52 million) in 2020. And with so few competitive races on the map, it seems likely at this point that outside spending will rival the marks set in 2020 as well.

The Bottom Line

The Senate battlefield in 2022 is a historically narrow one. Despite being just one seat away from the majority, Republicans begin with a limited number of pickup opportunities, in Georgia, Arizona, New Hampshire and Nevada. And in two of those, Georgia and Arizona, the party is already running into recruitment headwinds.

That means the GOP cannot afford many losses of its own if it wants to retake the upper chamber. So holding the open seat in North Carolina is crucial to the party’s goal.

For Democrats hoping to prove that the party’s recent victories in Georgia were not flukes but harbingers of renewed Democratic strength in the South, finally winning a North Carolina seat after 14 years of trying, and potentially with a Black woman leading the ticket, would be a powerful statement.

And for former President Trump, the GOP primary will be an early test of just how powerful his endorsement still is now that he is out of office and banned from social media. As he looks toward a potential 2024 presidential run, the successes or failures of his chosen candidates could affect how the rest of the party, including other presidential contenders, treats him moving forward.



California Governor Recall: Taking It Seriously

By Nathan L. Gonzales

When it comes to the political fallout from the coronavirus, most politicians have the luxury of time. But not Gavin Newsom.

The Democratic governor of California is facing a potential recall on Sept. 14, while the vast majority of elected officials at the federal, state, and local level don’t have to face voters for months, or even years. They have time for the physical, social and economic situation of their states, cities, or districts to get better because of, or in spite of, their actions.

Newsom isn’t vulnerable because California is getting less Democratic. He’s vulnerable because the unique circumstances of the recall election provide more uncertainty in turnout. The recall is a two-question process. The first question is simply whether to recall Newsom. If a majority of voters vote “yes,” then a replacement is chosen in the second question.

The bottom line is that if Democrats turnout at the same level as Republicans, Newsom will prevail. But if Republicans turn out dramatically and disproportionately more than Democrats, then the governor is in more serious trouble.

The fundamentals of the race remain the same from three months ago when we wrote about the race. According to polling, Newsom is in better shape than Gray Davis, the Democratic governor who was recalled in 2003. California is significantly more Democratic than it was 18 years ago. And Republicans don’t have a celebrity or super star candidate, such as Arnold Schwarzenegger, who voters know and can attract attention to the cause.

Republicans are laying everything at Newsom’s feet, from coronavirus spikes to lockdowns to homelessness to crime to wildfires, with the goal of getting a majority of voters to fire him even if there isn’t a credible alternative.

Limited polling consistently showed the recall failing by a single-digit margin until a recent SurveyUSA poll, which showed the recall winning with 51 percent and by an 11-point margin. The weeks ahead will determine whether that was an outlier or identified a trend.

For now, some GOP strategists are skeptical that enough Democrats are turning against Newsom, as they did to Davis in 2003, for the recall to be successful. All voters will receive a ballot in the mail, which should help Democrats. And the governor should also enjoy a significant spending advantage in the final weeks. Democrats are cautious but confident.

There’s no question that this is a serious situation for Newsom, but there isn’t enough evidence yet that the unique circumstances are overcoming the partisanship of the state. We’re maintaining our Likely Democratic rating for now.

If Republicans happen to pull off the recall and one of their own wins the second question, the new governor will immediately be an underdog for re-election in 2022. Democrats will have the advantage in a normal race with closer to normal turnout in a Democratic state.

2022 Governor Ratings

Battleground

Democratic-held (6)	Republican-held (5)
Kelly (D-Kan.)	AZ Open (Ducey, R)
Mills (D-Maine)	DeSantis (R-Fl.)
Whitmer (D-Mich.)	Kemp (R-Ga.)
Sisolak (D-Nev.)	MD Open (Hogan, R)
PA Open (Wolf, D)	Sununu (R-N.H.)
Evers (D-Wisc.)	
Solid Democratic (10)	Solid Republican (15)
Newsom (D-Calif.)	Ivey (R-Ala.)
Polis (D-Colo.)	Dunleavy (R-Alaska)
Lamont (D-Conn.)	AR Open (Hutchinson, R)
HI Open (Ige, D)	Little (R-Idaho)
Pritzker (D-Ill.)	Reynolds (R-Iowa)
Walz (D-Minn.)	Baker (R-Mass.)
Lujan Grisham (D-N.M.)	NE Open (Ricketts, R)
Cuomo (D-N.Y.)	Noem (R-S.D.)
OR Open (Brown, D)	DeWine (R-Ohio)
McKee (D-R.I.)	Stitt (R-Okla.)
2021 RACES	McMaster (R-S.C.)
Likely Democratic	Lee (R-Tenn.)
CA Recall (Newsom, D)	Abbott (R-Texas)
VA Open (Northam, D)	Scott (R-Vt.)
Solid Democratic	Gordon (R-Wyo.)
Murphy (D-N.J.)	