

Inside Elections

with

Nathan L. Gonzales

Nonpartisan Analysis

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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

Oct. 26	World Series Begins
Nov. 2	Virginia & New Jersey Gubernatorial Elections
Nov. 2	Ohio's 11th & 15th Special General Elections
Nov. 2	Florida's 20th District Special Election Primary
Dec. 13	Texas Candidate Filing Deadline
Dec. 17	North Carolina Candidate Filing Deadline
Jan. 11	Florida's 20th District Special General Election
Feb. 13	Super Bowl LVI

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Missouri Senate: Show Me the Nominee

By Jacob Rubashkin

Republicans need to gain just a single seat to regain the Senate majority, but they have limited takeover opportunities and can't afford to lose any of their own seats because of self-inflicted problems. Missouri has the potential to become a flashpoint for the GOP next year, with major implications for control of Congress.

With the U.S. Senate evenly divided 50-50, President Joe Biden's ability to pass legislation and make appointments to administration positions and judgeships hangs on a single vote. While the GOP is only growing more confident about its chances to win the House majority next year, the 2022 Senate map presents the party with a challenge.

There are just four vulnerable Democratic seats, all in states won by Biden last year. And there are also four vulnerable GOP-held seats, two of which are also in states won by Biden in 2020. And 2018, when Democrats rode a wave to the House but dropped two Senate seats, demonstrated that even a strong political environment doesn't always translate across chambers.

The last thing the GOP needs as they try to thread that needle is for another state that should be an easy hold to come onto the battlefield.

But that's a real possibility in Missouri, where Sen. Roy Blunt's surprise retirement opened a potential path for disgraced former Gov. Eric Greitens to be the GOP nominee. Greitens' extensive personal baggage, stemming from a whirlwind of accusations of sexual assault and financial impropriety that forced him out of office in 2018, have Republicans worried that the solidly Republican Show Me State could become a serious headache, drawing much-needed resources away from other races and even imperiling their chances at a majority.

While this race isn't on the battlefield now, it is still worth watching.

The Lay of the Land

Once a quintessential swing state, Missouri has trended sharply Republican in recent years. After being the closest state at the presidential level in 2008, voting for John McCain by just a few thousand votes, the state went for Mitt Romney in 2012, 54-44 percent, and decisively for Donald Trump in 2016 (56-38 percent) and 2020 (56-41 percent).

Missouri's Democratic Senate candidates have a recent history of overperforming the top of the ticket. In 2012, GOP nominee Todd Akin's comments about "legitimate rape" powered Sen. Claire McCaskill to a 15-point victory, 55-39 percent, even as President Barack Obama lost soundly at the top of the ballot.

In 2016, even as Hillary Clinton lost by 18 points, Democratic state Secretary of State Jason Kander ran an unexpectedly close race against Blunt,

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Candidate Conversation



Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call

Tiffany Smiley (R)

Washington Senate —
Rating: Solid Democratic

Interview Date: Sept. 20, 2021

Date of Birth: April 18, 1981;
Kennewick, Wash.

Education: Columbia Basin
College; Whitworth Univ. BSN

Elected Office: None; First run for office

Current Outlook: Smiley is the frontrunner for the GOP nomination but faces a difficult race in the general election. The last time a Republican won a Senate race in Washington was 1994, when Smiley was 13 years old, and the state has been solidly Democratic at the presidential level in recent years as well. That doesn't mean that it can't be competitive in the right conditions. In 2010, a great year for Republicans, Sen. Patty Murray eked out a six-point victory over a strong GOP opponent. For this race, Smiley has locked up institutional support from the state and national GOP, so it looks like she has a clear path to the general election via the state's top-two primary system. But she'll start as a serious underdog even if the cycle continues to sour for Democrats, given the state's partisan lean and Murray's lack of scandal or major missteps.

Evaluation: Smiley has an engrossing story of overcoming adversity alongside her husband Scotty, who was blinded in a suicide bombing in Iraq while serving in the Army, and who went on to become the first active-duty blind Army officer, motivational speaker, and triathlete. Smiley gave up a career as a nurse to become a veterans' advocate, and though she's never run for office before, she knows her way around DC, having met with then-President Donald Trump at the White House to discuss the VA, and addressing the National Prayer Breakfast in 2018. Smiley was at her best when discussing her personal story. But she repeatedly declined to acknowledge that Joe Biden won the 2020 presidential election and consistently focused on the future and her own race when discussing what impact Trump might have. She likely understands the challenge of running in a state Trump lost by 19 points. Smiley looks like the type of candidate Republicans need in place to take advantage of a GOP wave, if one develops.

Maine 2: Survivor Series

By Jacob Rubashkin

Three years later, Republicans still aren't convinced Rep. Bruce Poliquin lost re-election in 2018. But the former GOP congressman from Maine is running again and is a key piece of the GOP path to retake the House.

Republicans need a net gain of just five seats to win back the majority in the House of Representatives. The party out of power has picked up 30 House seats, on average, over the last 25 midterm elections, meaning that the GOP is both historically favored to win back the House, and has a large margin for error.

At the top of the list of immediate GOP targets are the seven districts President Donald Trump carried in 2020 that are currently held by a Democrat. While that number could fluctuate slightly during the redistricting process, most of those seats will remain top of mind for Republicans looking for low-hanging fruit.

Maine's 2nd District is the first of those seven. It cast its one electoral vote for Trump, who won 52-45 percent over Joe Biden, but also returned Democratic Rep. Jared Golden to Washington, DC for a second term representing the most strongly pro-Trump district in the country to be held by a Democrat.

Democrats look at Golden as proof that their party can still hold on in Trump territory if they are a strong fit for their district, and say that Golden winning even as many of his colleagues in more Democratic districts lost speaks to his resilience.

Republicans see Trump's repeat victory and Golden's narrow 6-point win in 2020 as a sign that the district is ripe for the taking, and they have already landed their preferred candidate in Poliquin.

GOP operatives are feeling better about the national environment than they have in a long time. After bracing for a midterm backlash in 2018 and worrying about Trump weighing down their candidates in 2020, Republicans are excited about Biden's slipping job approval rating and the infighting among congressional Democrats that has imperiled passage of Biden's signature infrastructure and reconciliation bills.

While it's too early to say what the national environment will look like in a year, both history and the current data indicate it won't be particularly favorable for Democrats, and that means this seat, and others like it, will be top battlegrounds in the fight for House control.

The Lay of the Land

Maine's 2nd District begins at the edge of the Portland and Augusta metropolitan areas and extends northward through the rest of the state.

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It is the second-most rural and fifth-whitest district in the country, according to CityLab and the American Community Survey, respectively, and just 25 percent of district residents have a bachelor's degree (compared to the 33 percent national average).

Trump's 7-point win here in 2020 was smaller than his 10-point victory in 2016 over Hillary Clinton, 51-41 percent, but he increased his overall share of the vote. It's a sign that after two decades as a consistent Democratic presidential vote, the 2nd has shifted toward the GOP since 2012, when Barack Obama carried it by 9 points, 53-44 percent.

The district has also trended red down ballot. It voted for GOP nominee Shawn Moody, 48-45 percent, in the 2018 gubernatorial race (Moody lost statewide by 7 points). And it was the engine behind Sen. Susan Collins' surprise win in the 2020 Senate race. Her 24-point thrashing of Democratic nominee Sara Gideon in the 2nd, 58-34 percent, more than made up for her 4-point loss in the 1st District.

True to its independent nature, the district also cast its ballots for Sen. Angus King (an independent who caucuses with the Democrats) in 2018, giving him 49 percent to Republican Eric Brakey's 40 percent and Democrat Zac Ringelstein's 8 percent.

Redistricting

Although Democrats control both houses of the Maine legislature and the governorship, state law requires a two-thirds majority to pass a new congressional map, and the Democratic majority is not that large.

However, given minimal population shifts, the process still shouldn't be too messy or complicated. The 2nd District needs to gain about 23,000 residents, and the only place they can come from is the 1st District.

Both the Democratic and Republican sides of the legislative redistricting committee have produced draft congressional maps, and the only way in which they differ is on the town of Waterville in Kennebec County, the one county split between the two districts.

Both plans would make the district more Democratic, but only slightly. Per calculations from the *Cook Political Report with Amy Walter*, the GOP-drawn 2nd would have voted for Trump by 7 points, while the Democratic-drawn 2nd would have voted for Trump by 6 points.

Whether the two parties take their already-similar maps and come to an agreement, or if the state Supreme Court has to step in and draw the maps, the fundamental Republican lean of the district — and the competitiveness that brings — is highly unlikely to change.

The Democratic Incumbent

The 39-year-old Golden is used to being apart from the crowd. A Marine veteran who dropped out of college after 9/11 and deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan (he later graduated from Bates College in Lewiston, where he still lives), Golden worked as a staffer to Republican Sen. Susan Collins — now detested among the Democratic base — before running for the state legislature in 2014. He won election and re-election in 2016 by wide margins, and in 2018 turned his attention to Poliquin, then in his second term.

That closely watched race was the first ever federal election decided by instant runoff ranked choice voting, a system implemented by Maine voters in 2016. Golden received 2,171 fewer votes than Poliquin in the initial round of balloting, but after several minor-party candidates were eliminated and their votes reallocated, Golden came out narrowly ahead by 3,509 votes. Poliquin initially refused to accept the result and sued to have the ranked choice process overturned, but eventually conceded.

In Congress, Golden sits on the Armed Services and Small Business committees. He has one of the more idiosyncratic voting records of any Democrat, voting against the party line on some high profile measures. He did not support Nancy Pelosi in either of her elections for speaker.



Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

Jared Golden

He split his votes on the first impeachment of Trump in 2020, but voted yes on the single article during the second impeachment in 2021.

In 2021, he went against party lines on a vote to advance a gun control bill, and voted against final

passage of the American Rescue Plan, the \$1.9 trillion economic stimulus package addressing the coronavirus pandemic (he said it spent too much money). In both cases, he was the sole Democrat to vote no. Golden is also one of the nine Democrats who banded together to stymie Democratic leadership's plans to tie passage of the bipartisan infrastructure deal and the larger reconciliation bill together.

Golden is returning his same campaign team from last cycle, including manager Margaret Reynolds, media consultant Ian Russell of Beacon Media, pollster Mark Mellman of Mellman Group, and Alan Moore of Moore Campaigns for direct mail.

The Republican Challenger

Poliquin, 67, represented the 2nd in the House for four years, from 2015 to 2019, before being ousted by Golden. His early entrance into the race gives Republicans a strong candidate and helps them avoid another messy primary like the one in 2020.

The Andover and Harvard-educated Poliquin had a successful career in investment management before making his first foray into politics in 2010, when he ran for the GOP nomination for governor. Poliquin spent more than \$700,000 of his own money on the race but finished in sixth place, with 5 percent, behind eventual winner Paul LePage and four other candidates.

After Poliquin campaigned for LePage in the general election, which the Republican narrowly won, LePage took the unusual step of endorsing Poliquin for state treasurer, a position elected by the state legislature.

In 2012, Poliquin ran for the U.S. Senate to replace retiring Republican Olympia Snowe, and placed second in the GOP primary behind state Secretary of State Charlie Summers, 30-23 percent. Summers went on to lose to King, and Poliquin was passed over for another term as treasurer after Democrats regained control of the state legislature.

In 2014, when 2nd District Rep. Mike Michaud ran for governor, Poliquin ran for the seat. He defeated a more moderate opponent in the GOP primary in a minor upset, 57-43 percent, and faced Democratic state Sen. Emily Cain in the general election. Though the district was initially targeted by Republicans, the NRCC cut its ad buy in the final weeks, indicating a lack of confidence in Poliquin's chances. He won still by 5 points, 47-42 percent.

Poliquin faced Cain again in 2016, winning by a more substantial 55-45 percent margin. In 2018, he lost to Golden, becoming the first-ever federal candidate to lose a ranked-choice election as well as the first

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incumbent to lose in Maine's 2nd District in a century.

Poliquin's general consultant is Brent Littlefield, who ran Poliquin's previous races and is also the general consultant for LePage's comeback gubernatorial campaign.

State Sen. Trey Stewart, a 27-year-old from northern Maine, had been running for the nomination but dropped out in deference to Poliquin. State Rep. Mike Perkins, in his third term representing a district outside of Waterville, is running as well, but at the moment that's a campaign in name only. He raised just \$8,000 in his first three months as a candidate, has no website, and Republicans in DC don't view him as a factor.

How It Plays Out

Last cycle, this race was one of several that began as a consensus top tier race, but had largely moved off the map by the summer of 2020. Republicans were unimpressed with their nominee, Dale Crafts. All of the public polling, and private polling from both sides of the aisle, showed Golden with a double-digit lead throughout September and October, and the race was triaged by the NRCC, the GOP-aligned Super PAC Congressional Leadership Fund, and the DCCC.

But as was the case in districts across the country, the final result was much closer, with Crafts falling short by just 6 points. That outcome renewed GOP interest in this district and made it a top target heading into 2022. In particular, Republicans say Golden's win took some of the shine off of the incumbent because of how close Crafts came despite waging an underwhelming, underfunded and outmatched campaign. (While the result was narrower than expected, Golden also turned in one of the biggest overperformances compared to the presidential result of any competitive House race in the country.) Golden did 13 points better than Biden in the 2nd.

Outside groups have already started advertising, a potential sign of more to come. The GOP-aligned American Action Network spent \$86,000 on a spot attacking Golden over inflation and congressional Democrats' \$3.5 trillion reconciliation spending proposal, part of what AAN says is a \$350,000 investment in the district. The advocacy group Patients for Affordable Drugs Now has spent \$14,000 on a spot thanking Golden for supporting Medicare drug price negotiation, and the anti-tax Club for Growth recently spent \$8,000 on an ad attacking Golden on inflation.

Though those buys are small, they signal early interest from major players. AAN's sister organization, Congressional Leadership Fund, has poured \$5.2 million into the district over the past two cycles. Patients for Affordable Drugs Now's affiliated PAC spent more than \$1 million against Poliquin in 2018. And the Club for Growth spent more than \$500,000 in the 2nd in 2020, though all in the GOP primary.

For Republicans, those outside groups may have to do the heavy lifting for a while longer, as the Poliquin campaign seems content to lay low until next year. Golden is already advertising on Facebook, where

he's fundraising off of his status as the Democrat with the reddest district, and his support for the labor-friendly PRO Act; Golden's team sees labor as a top issue in the district, and ran ads last cycle focusing on workers at nearby Bath Iron Works.

Democrats believe Golden, who looks younger than his 39 years and whose tattooed forearms feature prominently in campaign materials, cuts a strong contrast to the older Poliquin and his background in financial services, especially given the blue collar nature of the district. And voters should expect to see plenty of photos of a gun-toting Golden overseas in fatigues over the next year.

Republicans counter by saying Golden is now a politician, not an outsider, and that even in 2018, in a strong national environment for Democrats, Poliquin still finished ahead of Golden on the initial ballot.

In fact, many Republicans still speak as if Poliquin were the true winner of the 2018 contest and that Golden made it to Congress on a technicality. While it's true Poliquin outpaced Golden in the first round, the first round of a ranked-choice voting process isn't an exact apples-to-apples comparison with a traditional election given that voters have the opportunity to vote strategically for a minor party candidate.

While we don't know just what the national environment will look like a year from now, it will almost certainly not be as favorable for Democrats as in 2018, which gives Republicans hope in districts such as this one. Biden's sagging job approval numbers and the glacial pace of Democrats' legislative agenda in Congress have the GOP feeling as good as they have in years.

Golden raised \$1 million over the first six months of the year and ended June with \$784,000 in the bank. Democrats are confident that he'll be able to outraise Poliquin and press his advantage in all three of the district's media markets, especially with the concurrent gubernatorial contest driving up advertising rates for all candidates.

Poliquin has proven his fundraising capability, raising \$3.4 million in the 2016 cycle and \$4.2 million in 2018, but he'll likely have to do a bit more in 2022 to pace with Golden, who raised more than \$5 million in each of his races. Poliquin is also personally wealthy, but since the 2010 gubernatorial contest has not dipped significantly into his own pocketbook to fund his races.

The Bottom Line

For Democrats, Golden's race is a test of whether a politician's "brand" is still enough to overcome partisanship.

There are fewer and fewer examples of this around the country.

The trendline does not bode well for politicians whose survival rests on their profile and personality. However, it's important to remember that as those ranks dwindle, what it means to outperform the partisanship of a competitive district changes too.

In 2008, the Democrat who represented the reddest district at the presidential level was Mississippi Rep. Gene Taylor, whose district voted for John McCain by 35 points even as it voted for Taylor by 50 points, an 85-point spread. In 2016, that Democrat was Minnesota Rep. Colin Peterson, whose 7th District voted for Trump by 31 points and Peterson by 6 points, a 37-point spread.

In 2020 it was Golden, with a 13-point spread. And Peterson lost handily.

So by the numbers, Golden's task is a lighter lift than the edge cases of previous years. All he has to do is hold a district his party's presidential nominee lost by 7 points. Once upon a time, that was routine. Next year, Golden's survival may hinge on if it's even still possible.



Bruce Poliquin

Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

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losing by just 3 points, 49-46 percent, and Democratic state Attorney General Chris Koster only lost the gubernatorial contest to Greitens 51-46 percent. Kander's performance was a bright spot for Democrats, while Koster, who led Greitens in polling for the entire race, was a disappointment.

Democrats continue to slowly press their advantage in the urban and suburban parts of the state, but without regaining a foothold or even staunching the bleeding in the more rural "outstate" region between Kansas City and St. Louis, the party's path to victory is hazy at best.

They can't even be optimistic about Nicole Galloway's 2018 win for state auditor, the only statewide Democratic victory since 2012. Galloway was an incumbent and had a 50-to-1 spending advantage over her deeply flawed opponent. And she just lost soundly to Gov. Mike Parson in the 2020 gubernatorial race, 57-41 percent, putting in a weaker performance than Biden did at the top of the ticket.

The Republicans

Four Republicans are running competitive campaigns: Greitens, the former governor; Eric Schmitt, the current state attorney general; and Reps. Vicky Hartzler and Billy Long.

A fifth, Mark McCloskey, is a personal-injury lawyer who rose to prominence after he and his wife waved guns at Black Lives Matter protesters marching near their house. Republican sources say he's not in contention to win and that his run is largely self-promotional.

Greitens, 47, is a St. Louis native with a political resume that could have been made in a lab. A 1996 Duke graduate who won both the prestigious Truman and Rhodes scholarships and received a PhD from Oxford in 2000, Greitens had a decorated career as a Navy SEAL in the early 2000s that included deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee attempted to recruit Greitens, a lifelong Democrat, to run for Congress in the 9th District in 2010.

In 2016, Greitens ran for governor as a Republican, saying he had grown disillusioned with the Democratic Party. In a nasty Republican primary, Greitens beat out businessman/2012 Senate candidate John Brunner, Lt. Gov. Peter Kinder, and former state House Speaker Catherine Hanaway with 35 percent of the vote. That November, he defeated Koster, the state attorney general, 51-46 percent, in a minor upset.

Greitens' career began to unravel in January 2018 when it emerged that he had an affair with his hairdresser who also accused him of blackmailing her with intimate photos and sexually assaulting her in his basement. He was indicted on a felony charge invasion of privacy that February. In April a GOP-led committee in the state legislature released a 24-page report detailing four witnesses' descriptions of Greitens' behavior and finding them credible. In May, the state House began impeachment proceedings against the governor. Also in May, prosecutors dropped the felony charge because they could not locate the photo at the center of the blackmail allegation.

Greitens admitted the affair but denied the other accusations. However, after the charges were dropped the state House continued toward impeachment, and Greitens also faced a felony charge over campaign finance violations in the 2016 election. In June, Greitens resigned in exchange for prosecutors dropping that charge.

Since then, both the prosecutor and lead investigator on the invasion of privacy charge have been disciplined for misconduct regarding that case, and a 2020 Missouri Ethics Commission report did not find

evidence of campaign finance wrongdoing by Greitens. The former governor has taken to claiming the MEC report totally exonerates him even though it does not deal with the blackmail or assault allegations.

Greitens was the first to announce his campaign but has trailed in fundraising, raising just \$464,000 over the first six months of the year, the smallest sum of any major party candidate, and had just \$134,000 in the bank on June 30. Republicans say he has struggled to recruit to his campaign team, which is led by Dylan Johnson, a recent college graduate who previously worked as an advance associate in the Trump White House. But GOP mega-donor Richard Uihlein has already seeded a pro-Greitens super PAC with \$2.5 million, which will help Greitens make up the difference.

Schmitt, 46, is from the St. Louis suburbs and is in his third year as state attorney general. A Truman State (BA) and St. Louis University (JD) graduate, Schmitt served two terms in the state Senate representing parts of St. Louis County, winning his first race in 2008, 55-45 percent, and his second term in 2012 unopposed.

In 2016, he ran unopposed for the GOP nomination for state treasurer, and defeated Democratic state Rep. Judy Baker 56-39 percent in the fall. Two years later, when Josh Hawley left for the U.S. Senate, Parson appointed Schmitt to replace him as attorney general, and in 2020, Schmitt easily won a term in his own right, 59-38 percent, over Democrat Rich Finneran.

In the state Senate, Schmitt was a more moderate Republican, according to several GOP legislators who served with him, a reflection of his swingy suburban district. In the wake of the shooting of Michael

Brown in Ferguson, Schmitt played a key role in passing self-described "social justice reforms" that reformed local police practices on ticket writing and responding to petty offenses.

As attorney general, Schmitt has



Courtesy, Schmitt Campaign

Eric Schmitt

positioned himself at the forefront of the GOP response to the Biden presidency and perceived Democratic overreach. He has launched lawsuits against the Biden administration on vaccine mandates, local school districts on masking rules, and even sued the Chinese Communist Party over the coronavirus pandemic. He also signed onto the Texas lawsuit last year that sought to overturn the presidential election.

Schmitt's team includes general consultants Jeff Roe and Nick Maddux of Axiom Strategies, which is also handling direct mail, paid media by Terry Nelson of FP1, and polling by Chris Wilson of WPAi.

Hartzler, 60, has had the longest political career of any candidate running. The Harrisonville farmer and former educator is the only woman in the race after Rep. Ann Wagner passed on a bid. Hartzler graduated from University of Missouri and University of Central Missouri, and first won a state House seat in 1994, 61-39 percent. She easily won two more terms, by 38 and 34 points, and left the legislature in 2000.

In 2010, she returned to politics, winning the GOP primary in the 4th District 40-30 percent over state Sen. Bill Stouffer and several others. In the general election, she faced 32-year incumbent Democrat Ike Skelton,

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the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee. Hartzler had cultivated a reputation as a strong social conservative and was a leader in the passage of a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage in Missouri, the first of its kind in any state, and attacked Skelton as catering to the “extreme agenda items of the gay movement.” Buoyed by the GOP wave, Hartzler unseated Skelton, 50-45 percent.

In her five re-election campaigns since, Hartzler has never won by less than 25 points or received less than 60 percent of the vote.

In Congress, Hartzler sits on the Armed Services and Agriculture committees.

Hartzler’s general consultants are Hawley consultant Timmy Teepell and Brad Todd of OnMessage, which is also handling paid media and polling. HSP Direct is doing direct mail.

Long, 66, has represented the southwest corner of Missouri since 2011, when he succeeded the Senate-bound Blunt, and now hopes to replace Blunt again. The Springfield native attended but did not graduate from the University of Missouri, instead embarking on a career as an auctioneer.



Billy Long

Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call

Long emerged from an 8-person GOP primary field in 2010, edging out state Sen. Jack Goodman, 37-29 percent, and won the general election 63-30 percent.

Long has never had a competitive general election; his closest race came in 2012 when he won by 33 points. But he has faced a primary challenge every cycle this decade, and although no opponent has ever come close to unseating him, he has never received more than two-thirds of the GOP primary vote.

In Congress, Long serves on the Energy and Commerce Committee. In 2018, he used his auctioneering skills to drown out a protest by conservative provocateur/2020 Florida 21st nominee Laura Loomer during a committee hearing with Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey.

Long had \$560,000 in his campaign account on June 30. His campaign team includes media consultant Larry Weitzner of Jamestown Associates, and pollster Kellyanne Conway, the former Trump senior adviser.

Rep. Jason Smith represents southeast Missouri’s 8th District and is the biggest remaining question mark in the field. Earlier in the year, he brought on former Trump campaign manager Bill Stepien, and he also went to Trump Tower to chat with the former president. But if Republicans take back the House, he’s in line to chair the Budget Committee or even make a run at the Ways and Means chairmanship, which is open because of the retirement of Rep. Kevin Brady. That’s a lot to give up for a race you don’t know you can win.

The Republican Primary

Missouri’s primary election is not until Aug. 2, a late date that is helpful to the non-Greitens candidates in the race, according to GOP sources.

The former governor has led in almost all of the limited early polling, and he entered the race with a name recognition advantage and a core group of supporters who believe that he did nothing wrong and was set

up by the establishment/George Soros/the shadowy powers that be.

The path for Greitens is straightforward: hold onto the 25-30 percent of dedicated support and hope that the other 70-75 percent of the vote splits evenly between the other candidates.

But Greitens also faces a hard cap on his support, Missouri GOP sources say. And the longer the other candidates have to relitigate his numerous vulnerabilities and introduce themselves to voters, the more likely it is one can emerge as a serious alternative.

Both Schmitt and Hartzler are going to make the case that they’re the best bet to beat Greitens. Schmitt begins with a bit of an edge, according to the limited polling that shows him running close behind or even with Greitens. He’s run two previous statewide campaigns and is the field’s top fundraiser over the first six months of the year, pulling in \$1.3 million and ending June with \$1.1 million in the bank. He also benefits from the steady stream of earned media around the lawsuits he has filed as attorney general.

But even though Schmitt has tried to position himself as *the* guy who can stop Greitens, he hasn’t scared away all competitors.

He has vulnerability on China, specifically his work as a state senator to secure tax breaks for a Chinese company looking to expand into St. Louis. While his recent lawsuit against the Chinese Communist Party gives him an easy response to attacks that he’s soft on China, his opponents will still press him on that effort and other elements of his legislative record.

Hartzler’s case rests on cutting the strongest contrast to Greitens and the rest of the field, as the only female candidate, only candidate from rural Missouri, and the only farmer (cattle, hogs and row crops). She ended June with the most cash on hand of any candidate (\$1.4 million), but doesn’t have the national reach of Greitens or the DC connections of Schmitt and will have to bulk up her fundraising so she can effectively introduce herself to voters statewide.

Hartzler’s campaign sees her well-documented stances on social issues such as gay marriage and abortion as a major asset, especially among the socially conservative primary electorate and with court cases in Texas and Mississippi bringing abortion back into the headlines. But she doesn’t have the best relationship with institutional conservative players such as the Senate Conservatives Fund or the Club for Growth. Her lifetime Club rating is just 66 percent, middling for a Republican and second-lowest among Missouri’s Republican members. She also never joined the hardline House Freedom Caucus, though she is a member of the conservative Republican Study Committee.

Further back in the early polling is Long, who Republicans in the state see as angling most publicly for a Trump endorsement. He announced his candidacy on Tucker Carlson’s Fox News show and talks a lot about his personal friendship with the former president. But he’s not well known outside of his district and has never been a strong fundraiser.

Republicans in DC have been sounding the alarm bells about Greitens to anyone who will listen. And for some Republicans in Missouri it’s a question of when and how outside groups such as SLF, SCF, or the Club get involved in the race.

The party faced a similar situation in Kansas in 2020, when it feared that former state secretary of state Kris Kobach, who had just lost the 2018 gubernatorial election, would be the GOP nominee for Senate and put the seat in jeopardy. Through an affiliate, SLF spent more than \$3 million against Kobach in the final month of the GOP primary, accusing him of having ties with white nationalists and warning he would give the seat away to Democrats. (He finished second with 26 percent.)

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Like Kansas, Missouri has an August primary, which means that even if SLF or other outside groups move against Greitens, it might not be until next summer. But if Minority Leader Mitch McConnell believes that Greitens would cost Republicans the seat and with it the majority, there's history to suggest he or his allies will go after him. Greitens may have even made such a move a bit easier to stomach when he recently announced he supported McConnell's ouster and wouldn't vote for him for leader.

Hanging over all this is the prospect of a Trump endorsement, which would be a game-changer for whomever receives it. All four major Republicans have been actively seeking a nod from the former president, including by hiring his associates as a way of wooing him.

While Trump is reportedly being warned against endorsing Greitens by Hawley and others, it's not obvious whom he will endorse, or if he will weigh in at all. Of Schmitt, Hartzler, and Long, it's Long who seems to gain the most from the nod. GOP sources note that Long was one of Trump's earliest backers in Congress and say he has the strongest personal relationship with the former president.

But that might not be enough to snag an endorsement. If Long isn't able to show he's in a position to win first, then Trump, who cares a lot about endorsing the winning candidate, might look elsewhere, to either Hartzler or Schmitt.

At this stage, Greitens has to be considered the frontrunner, but there's nearly a year before this primary takes place.

The Democrats

The Democratic primary field is more notable for who isn't running than for who is. Nearly all of the state's most notable Democrats have ruled out a run.

McCaskill, Kander, Koster, former state secretary of state/2010 Senate nominee/current GSA administrator Robin Carnahan, former state Treasurer Clint Zweifel, and former Gov. Jay Nixon have all ruled out runs. Galloway, the only Democrat to win statewide recently, is not running either.

The top two candidates are former state Sen. Scott Sifton and Marine veteran Lucas Kuncie, and they offer contrasting profiles for Democratic voters.

Sifton, 47, has a traditional background: Kansas City born, Truman State, Michigan Law School, nine years on a school board in the St. Louis County suburbs, two in the state House, and eight in the state Senate, representing swingy suburban districts.

This is his third and most serious run for statewide office, following brief flirtations with the attorney general race in the 2016 cycle and the gubernatorial race in 2020.

Sifton's general consultant is Eric Hyers. His team also includes media consultant Mattis Goldman of Three Point Media, pollsters Molly Murphy and Kevin Akins of ALG, and direct mail consultants Jeff Gumbinner and Gabby Adler of GDA Wins.

Kuncie, a 38-year-old Marine veteran and Cole County native, cuts a different profile. The Yale and Mizzou Law School graduate joined the Marine Corps in 2007 and served for 13 years on active duty, including deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, and stints at the Pentagon. He now works for the American Economic Liberties Project, an anti-monopoly nonprofit that is part of the Omidyar Network, funded by major Democratic donor Pierre Omidyar.

In 2006, while still in law school, Kuncie ran for a Jefferson City-area state House seat as a self-described "pretty conservative Democrat." He

lost to the incumbent Republican, 56-44 percent and in 2022 he's running as an unabashed economic populist with progressive social views.

Kuncie's campaign team includes media consultants Bill Hyers, Kaitlin Fahey, and Anne Wakabayashi of The Win Company, pollster Jason



Vicky Hartzler

McGrath of GBAO, and direct mail by Adnaan Muslim and Ally Letsky of Deliver Strategies.

One potential major entrant is Kansas City Mayor Quinton Lucas, known locally as "Mayor Q." He's a former law professor

with an inspiring life story who would be the first Black statewide elected official in Missouri history. While Democrats acknowledge that Lucas would be a strong national grassroots fundraiser, party insiders are skeptical that he'll throw his hat in the ring.

Also running are 2020 6th District nominee/community college professor Gena Ross, medical device company CEO Spencer Toder, Air Force veteran Jewel Kelly, and LGBTQ activist Tim Shephard, but none are expected to be competitive.

The Democratic Primary

Kuncie begins the primary with a financial edge. He raised \$910,000 in the first six months of the year and had \$324,000 in the bank at the end of June, compared to \$502,000 raised and \$101,000 in the bank for Sifton.

That may be a result of Kuncie's substantial online operation. He amassed more than 40,000 Twitter followers to Sifton's 13,000, and has parlayed his background as a Marine into national TV appearances on Afghanistan.

Democrats in the state say Kuncie is a more energetic speaker and campaigner than Sifton, who current and former elected officials described as uninspiring on the stump, and that it's an advantage for Kuncie that he comes from Jefferson City rather than Kansas City or St. Louis.

But Sifton is well-versed in local politics and has racked up endorsements from lots of local Democratic politicians. Voters, however, rarely know who their local elected officials are, so Sifton will have to turn those endorsements into dollars first. He also has a strong track record on abortion rights that he plans to highlight in comparison to Kuncie, who was pro-life in his previous run for office but now says he is pro-choice. Sifton led a filibuster in the state Senate against an abortion restriction in 2014.

Kuncie, for his part, is focusing on his economic anti-corporate message and his "Marshall Plan for the Midwest," so much so that his stances on social issues like legal marijuana (he's for it), Black Lives Matter ("the frontline of the fight for human rights") and the LGBTQ rights Equality Act, are tucked away behind a "more issues" button on his website.

But Kuncie's major vulnerability may not be on the issues but rather that he's been away from the state for over a decade serving in the Marines and only just moved back to Missouri to run in this race. He didn't vote in either the 2018 or 2020 elections.

Ultimately Democrats will have to choose if they want a known,

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less-exciting quantity (Sifton) or an untested but more dynamic candidate with a higher ceiling (Kunce).

The General Election

Strategists in both parties agree that the only situation in which the general election is competitive is if Greitens is the Republican nominee. If any of the other candidates win the GOP primary, it is difficult to see how Democrats seriously compete, especially given the national environment, the state's partisan lean, and the low rate of crossover voting. Just six senators currently represent states won by the opposite party's presidential nominee in the last election.

The former governor's unique baggage has Republicans seeing shades of 2012, when Akin blew what was a top pickup opportunity.

If Greitens is the nominee, Democrats will try to make the race about his behavior, arguing that he lacks the integrity to be a senator and weaponizing the litany of accusations against him in paid media and tapping into a nationwide network of donors galvanized by the prospect of Greitens in the Senate.



Eric Greitens

Courtesy Greitens Campaign

Even with Greitens as the nominee, it's not clear how much of a shot the Democratic nominee would have. In 2018, Democrats had a strong national environment and record turnout on their side, and McCaskill still lost to Hawley despite what some Republicans saw as a lackluster effort on his part.

Hawley did not have nearly the baggage Greitens does, and in fact had made a name for himself clashing with the then-governor. But the national environment in 2022 will almost certainly be worse for Democrats than 2018. At present, Biden's approval is the lowest of his presidency. The downward trend should worry Democrats, as midterms are often a referendum on the president, and voters take out their displeasure with the president (who isn't on the ballot) on candidates of his party.

It doesn't help Democrats that the Senate is evenly divided, so any Republican Senate candidate — Greitens or otherwise — can credibly argue that their seat is a majority-maker or breaker. Despite voters' personal distaste with Greitens, the question will be if that outweighs their displeasure with Biden and Democratic control of government.

The Bottom Line

Even though Republicans need a net gain of just a single seat for the majority, they don't have a lot of room for error. Looking nationwide, there are no easy takeovers for the GOP, so they need all of their resources focused on offense, not on defense.

Greitens' nomination wouldn't automatically put the seat in peril considering the significant GOP lean of the state. But it could force Republicans to spend money holding onto an otherwise solidly Republican seat, when it could be spending in Arizona, Georgia, New Hampshire, or Nevada. For now, all eyes are on the GOP primary in Missouri.

IE

Statewide Election Results in Missouri

