

# Inside Elections

with

Nathan L. Gonzales

Nonpartisan Analysis

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## First-Time Candidates Enter the Ring in Key House Race

By Jacob Rubashkin

BLOOMFIELD TOWNSHIP, MI — By the time the main event began, the packed high school gym was almost too hazy to see the fighters in the ring. But for the hundreds of men and handful of women at Brother Rice High School, the boxing at Boxing Night was a secondary attraction at best, after the chance to enjoy beer, the company of old friends, and more cigars than any public school has seen (or smelled) in several decades.

One attendee was there for all that, plus more: a chance at an improbable congressional victory. As boxers from the University of Michigan whaled on fighters from nearby colleges, 32-year-old Robert Lulgjuraj spent the early February Friday night gladhanding his way through the crowd. His goal, to drum up support for an underdog bid for the GOP nomination in Michigan's 10th District.

Smoke-filled rooms: not just the stuff of campaign lore.

Lulgjuraj looked at home in a Brother Rice Warriors quarter zip as he mingled by trays of pasta salad and cold cuts. But the gym was far from home turf for the former Wayne and Macomb County assistant prosecutor, who faces another Brother Rice alumnus, Army paratrooper Mike Bouchard, in the August 4 primary.

Brother Rice sits just outside the 10th District but its student body draws from across the region, and the school has produced its fair share of Southeast Michigan luminaries. Lulgjuraj and Bouchard overlapped at the Catholic school, even playing on the football team together. The school also counts among its products Bouchard's father, longtime Oakland County Sheriff Mike Bouchard, and the man leaving the 10th District to run for governor, Rep. John James.

At one point in the evening, former St. Louis Cardinals shortstop Andrew Sohn stopped by to ask Lulgjuraj how his campaign was going and wish him luck.

Lulgjuraj may need it. Despite entering the race months later, Bouchard begins with a clear advantage thanks to his name and political connections.

After 28 years as sheriff, eight years in the legislature, and statewide

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## 2026 House Ratings

### Toss-Up (2D, 8R)

AZ 1 (Open; Schweikert, R) IA 1 (Miller-Meeks, R) OH 1 (Landsman, D) TX 34 (Gonzalez, D)  
AZ 6 (Ciscomani, R) MI 7 (Barrett, R) PA 7 (Mackenzie, R) VA 2 (Kiggans, R)  
CO 8 (Evans, R) NY 17 (Lawler, R)

### Tilt Democratic (6D, 2R)

CA 13 (Gray, D)  
CA 45 (Tran, D)  
CA 48 (Issa, R)  
NE 2 (Open; Bacon, R)  
NM 2 (Vasquez, D)  
NY 4 (Gillen, D)  
TX 28 (Cuellar, D)  
WA 3 (Perez, D)

### Tilt Republican (2D, 6R)

CA 22 (Valadao, R)  
MI 10 (Open; James, R)  
NC 1 (Davis, D)  
NJ 7 (Kean Jr., R)  
OH 9 (Kaptur, D)  
PA 8 (Bresnahan, R)  
PA 10 (Perry, R)  
WI 3 (Van Orden, R)

### Lean Democratic (11D)

CA 21 (Costa, D) NY 3 (Suozi, D)  
FL 23 (Moskowitz, D) VA 7 (Vindman, D)  
IN 1 (Mrvan, D)  
MI 8 (McDonald Rivet, D)  
NH 1 (Open; Pappas, D)  
NJ 9 (Pou, D)  
NV 1 (Titus, D)  
NV 3 (Lee, D)  
NY 19 (Riley, D)

### Lean Republican (4R)

IA 3 (Nunn, R)  
MI 4 (Huizenga, R)  
PA 1 (Fitzpatrick, R)  
VA 1 (Wittman, R)

### Likely Democratic (8D)

CA 6 (Open; Bera, D) OH 13 (Sykes, D)  
CA 25 (Ruiz, D) PA 17 (Deluzio, D)  
CA 47 (Min, D)  
NH 2 (Goodlander, D)  
MN 2 (Open; Craig, DFL)  
NV 4 (Horsford, D)

### Likely Republican (2D, 9R)

AK AL (Begich, R) ME 2 (Open; Golden, D)  
AZ 2 (Crane, R) TN 5 (Ogles, R)  
CO 5 (Crank, R) TX 15 (De La Cruz, R)  
FL 7 (Mills, R) TX 35 (Open; Casar, D)  
FL 13 (Luna, R) WI 1 (Steil, R)  
IA 2 (Open; Hinson, R)

|                     | GOP | DEM |
|---------------------|-----|-----|
| Solid               | 190 | 185 |
| Likely/Lean/Tilt    | 23  | 27  |
| Total               | 213 | 212 |
| Toss-up             | 10  |     |
| Needed for majority | 218 |     |

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

## CALENDAR

|                 |                                                     |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| <b>March 3</b>  | Texas, North Carolina, Arkansas Primaries           |
| <b>March 10</b> | Mississippi Primaries                               |
| <b>March 10</b> | Georgia's 14th District Special Election            |
| <b>March 17</b> | Illinois Primaries                                  |
| <b>April 16</b> | New Jersey's 11th District Special General Election |

# Report Shorts

**Arizona Governor.** Karrin Taylor Robson suspended her campaign leaving two Republican congressmen, Andy Biggs and David Schweikert, to battle for the GOP nomination. Biggs is regarded as the frontrunner with President Donald Trump's support. But Schweikert is making the case that his experience in competitive general elections is valuable in trying to knock off Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs. Arizona is a swing state and Hobbs is not particularly dynamic, but in this environment and with the relatively late July 21 primary, the governor will start the general election with the advantage.

**Florida's 20th District.** Luther Campbell became the latest Democrat to announce a primary challenge to Rep. Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick. Campbell recently left his football coaching job at Miami's Edison High School but is probably best known as rapper "Uncle Luke" of 2 Live Crew, which became popular and controversial in the 1990s for their obscene lyrics. The congresswoman might benefit from another challenger helping divide her detractors. But she's in serious legal trouble and under investigation for financial improprieties, first reported by *Inside Elections* more than three years ago. Solid Democratic.

**Georgia's 14th District Special.** President Trump endorsed Lookout Mountain District Attorney Clayton Fuller in the special election to replace Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, who resigned in early January. Fuller is one of two dozen candidates running in the all-party jungle primary on March 10, in a field that also includes state Sen. Colton Moore and former Paulding County Commissioner Brian Stover. The race is likely to go to an April 7 runoff, but Republicans will hold the seat. Solid Republican.

**Iowa Senate.** Military veteran Nathan Sage dropped out of the race and endorsed state Rep. Josh Turek. Sage was an early entrant into the race against GOP Sen. Joni Ernst but had struggled to maintain that momentum. Democratic strategists believe Turek, a state representative and former Paralympian, has the most upside, but he still has to navigate a primary against state Sen. Zach Wahls. The winner will face GOP Rep. Ashley Hinson, who entered the race and consolidated support when Ernst declined to run again. Iowa is one of the six states that could decide the Senate majority. Likely Republican.

**Maine Senate.** Republican Sen. Susan Collins officially announced she's running for re-election. For months, GOP strategists expected her to

run again, but she waited until longer than usual to publicize her plans. Collins has destroyed her past opponents but is still vulnerable as an elected Republican in a Democratic-leaning state and will have to deal with running in a midterm year with an unpopular Republican president in the White House. Before they can focus on Collins, Democrats have a competitive primary between Gov. Janet Mills and Graham Platner. We rate Collins as the slight favorite based on her prior performances, but that might understate her vulnerability. Tilt Republican.

**New Jersey's 7th District.** Somerset County Commissioner Sara Sooy dropped out and endorsed Navy veteran Rebecca Bennett. But there are a handful of other Democrats still in the race including physician Tina Shah and businessman Brian Varela. The winner of the June 2 Democratic primary will take on GOP Rep. Tom Kean Jr. in a very competitive race. Tilt Republican.

**New Jersey's 11th District Special.** Analilia Mejia, a former Bernie Sanders staffer and progressive leader, won an upset victory in the Democratic special election primary to replace Miki Sherrill, who resigned to become governor. Mejia rode a wave of organizing power to a 2-point win over former Rep. Tom Malinowski, who began the race as the frontrunner but faced stiff opposition from AIPAC and other pro-Israel groups, who in turn backed a third candidate, former Lt. Gov. Tahesha Way, who placed a distant third. Mejia still has to beat Randolph Mayor Joe Hathaway in the April 16 special general election before being sworn in. Mejia also needs to win the regularly-scheduled primary on June 2. But there's been significant efforts to unify around her, including Malinowski offering his support. Solid Democratic.

**Virginia Redistricting.** A statewide referendum is set for April 21 on a Democratic-drawn congressional map that could help the party gain as many as four additional seats. GOP Reps. Rob Wittman (1st District), Jen Kiggans (2nd), John McGuire (5th) and Ben Cline (6th) are all at risk of losing under the new lines. With the current map, Kiggans is extremely vulnerable, Wittman is on the outskirts of the battleground and McGuire and Kline are not at risk. The commonwealth's supreme court is scheduled to decide the validity of the new map after the statewide vote. If implemented, the new map would bolster Democrats' effort to regain the House majority. Democrats redrew the map in response to Republicans' redistricting efforts in Texas and other Republican states.

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# Texas: Republicans, Democrats Face Critical Early Primaries

By Patrick Svitek

The Texas primary feels bigger than ever. While the November elections are still eight months away, more than a dozen consequential primaries in the Lone Star State are rapidly approaching.

At the top of the ticket, a longtime Senate incumbent, Republican John Cornyn, is struggling to win renomination in a primary dominated by questions about President Donald Trump's influence and the broader evolution of the GOP. Democrats are also grappling with an identity crisis in their own primary for Senate.

But farther down the ballot, the competition is just as intense. The Trump-backed redrawing of the state's House district boundaries, which touched off a national redistricting war, added five new seats that Republicans expect to pick up. Those have attracted crowded and competitive GOP primaries, full of well-known names and high-profile endorsers from Trump on down. Nine members of the delegation are not seeking reelection, also fueling packed primaries in some cases.

And Cornyn is not the only incumbent feeling the heat. Several sitting House members are confronting serious challenges, either due to redistricting or the shifting political winds inside their parties — or both.

Candidates who do not receive a majority of the March 3 primary vote in Texas must advance to a runoff against the No. 2 finisher, meaning even the Trump-backed frontrunners in many of these primaries are spending the homestretch working hard to clear 50 percent. The runoff is May 26.

## Republican Senate Primary

Cornyn is fighting for his political life — and a fifth term in the Senate — after a career in politics that goes back to the 1980s. His two most serious challengers are state Attorney General Ken Paxton and Rep. Wesley Hunt from the Houston area, who made a relatively late entrance to the race in October.

Despite eight figures in spending on his behalf, Cornyn has remained well below the threshold needed to avoid a runoff in public and private polling. His allies are preparing for a runoff against Paxton where they expect to spend even more to highlight Paxton's long history of personal scandals.

Since becoming attorney general in 2015, Paxton has weathered state and federal securities fraud charges, a 2023 impeachment trial in the state Senate and allegations of infidelity. His wife, state Sen. Angela Paxton, filed for divorce in July last year. He has often decried his scandals as political witchhunts and capitalized on his relationship with Trump to persevere politically.

Trump has remained neutral in the primary despite intense lobbying by all three candidates. Cornyn has argued he is the best candidate to keep the seat red in the general election. Paxton has staked his candidacy on being more loyal to Trump through the years. And Hunt has presented himself as a mix between the two — a staunch Trump ally who can also win in November.

Hunt is a wild card. While he has consistently polled behind Cornyn and Paxton, multiple outside groups have trained their fire on him ahead of the primary, suggesting they believe it is possible he could advance to the runoff.

There are five other candidates on the ballot, none of them as well-known as Cornyn, Paxton or Hunt.

## Democratic Senate Primary

Texas Democrats are experiencing something rare in recent history: a statewide primary featuring two well-known, well-funded elected officials. Vying for the Democratic nomination for Senate are Jasmine Crockett, a congresswoman from Dallas, and James Talarico, a state representative from Austin.

They have been enticed by not only a favorable midterm environment

for Democrats nationally, but also the prospect of facing the scandal-scarred Paxton in the general election.

Crockett upended the primary by filing on the last possible day in December, prompting Talarico's main competition,



Courtesy Talarico Campaign

James Talarico

former Rep. Colin Allred, to drop out. Crockett is leaning into her national profile as a Trump antagonist and promising to turn out new voters, dismissing questions about her ability to win in the red state given her record of verbal diatribes against Republican officials and their supporters.

Talarico, a minister-in-training, is looking to match his party's energy of the moment with faith-themed stump speeches denouncing the ultra wealthy and GOP policies. But Talarico, who is white, has had to contend with racial sensitivities in the primary that came to the fore earlier this month when Allred excoriated Talarico over an allegation that he had called Allred a "mediocre Black man"; Talarico called the allegation a "mischaracterization."

Crockett entered the primary with higher name ID and has led in polls, though Talarico's allies are echoing doubts about her electability and pushing hard to tilt the primary in his favor. One pro-Talarico super PAC has already spent at least \$5.4 million boosting him and attacking Crockett.

There is a third candidate on the primary ballot who is lesser-known, Houston-area businessman Ahmad Hassan.

## Vulnerable House Republican Incumbents

**2nd District.** Rep. Dan Crenshaw (R) has long clashed with some fellow Republicans in Washington, including the far-right Freedom Caucus, but avoided serious primary challenges back home. That seems to have changed this time as he faces state Rep. Steve Toth, the most viable of three opponents.

Crenshaw and his allies attacked Toth early on and have not let up, criticizing him over the lonely votes he has cast in the Legislature as a conservative rebel. Toth has hit back with accusations that Crenshaw wants "more Muslim immigrants," citing his support for a 2021 bill to increase special immigrant visas for Afghans who worked for the U.S. government.

While national and statewide Republicans have waded into many of the notable Texas primaries, they have mostly kept out of this one. Crenshaw is the rare House Republican from Texas who is running for re-election and does not have Trump's endorsement.

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Toth does carry the support of at least one familiar name outside Texas: Tucker Carlson, the former Fox News host who has long feuded with Crenshaw.

**23rd District.** Rep. Tony Gonzales (R) is in a rematch with Brandon Herrera, a gun rights activist who came within 400 votes of unseating Gonzales in the 2024 primary runoff. Gonzales has a record of sometimes bucking his party at key moments, including when he voted for the 2022 gun safety law that was partly a response to the Uvalde school shooting in his West Texas district.

The big difference between the 2024 primary and this one is that Trump stayed neutral two years ago and is now backing Gonzales. Herrera responded to Trump's December endorsement of Gonzales by saying the incumbent "has betrayed Trump before, and he will again."

While Gonzales has been less of a GOP maverick in recent months, he has still had to contend with fresh scrutiny in the latest primary. The San Antonio Express-News reported Tuesday that Gonzales had an extramarital affair with a staffer who died after setting herself on fire last year. Herrera called on Gonzales to resign over the revelation, while Gonzales declined to answer questions about it, even though he previously denied allegations of an affair.

## Vulnerable House Democratic Incumbents

**18th District.** Longtime Democratic Rep. Al Green chose to seek re-election here last fall after Republicans transformed his 9th District into a safely red seat. But his decision put him on a collision course with whomever won a special election for the 18th District under its current lines – a victory claimed last month by former Harris County Attorney Christian Menefee.

On first glance, the primary reflects the generational divide roiling the Democratic Party: Green, 78, is more than twice as old as Menefee. But Green has stayed ahead of his party's desire for a more aggressive posture toward Trump, regularly agitating for his impeachment and interrupting his 2025 speech to a joint session of Congress.

Both public and private polling has given Menefee a big lead, reflecting his strength among voters in the new district who come from the district he currently represents. Perhaps sensing an opportunity to solidify Menefee's chances, a super PAC aligned with the cryptocurrency industry is spending \$1.5 million in the final weeks to defeat Green.

**33rd District.** Redistricting turned Democratic Rep. Julie Johnson's Dallas-area seat into a Republican stronghold, prompting her to seek re-election nearby in the bluer 33rd District. Thanks to a flurry of events before the filing deadline, Johnson now faces Allred in a nasty intraparty battle clouded by questions of gender and ethics.

Allred joined the House primary at the last minute after ending his Senate bid to make way for Crockett. Johnson quickly criticized Allred's decision to upend her primary, saying "women should never be treated as placeholders for men who fail to advance."

Allred has gone hard at Johnson for trading stocks while in Congress,

seeking to tie her to "Washington corruption" in a TV ad. Johnson has emphasized she started divesting her portfolio nearly a year ago and has signed on to legislation to ban trading by lawmakers.

**29th District.** Democratic Rep. Sylvia Garcia, one of the first two Latinas to represent Texas in Congress, is seeking re-election in a redrawn district in Houston that remains Hispanic-majority but has almost doubled in Black population. She has drawn two Black challengers, most notably former state Rep. Jarvis Johnson.

Johnson has argued the race is an opportunity for Black voters to reclaim some of the representation they lost overall when Republicans pushed through the latest map.

Garcia has worked to show she has powerful support in the Black community, rolling out endorsements from the Congressional Black Caucus and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, who is Black.

## Redrawn Seats with Competitive Republican Primaries

**9th District.** Nine Republicans are on the ballot for this suburban Houston seat, which Republicans morphed into a bastion of GOP voters. But the primary has come down to two contenders in particular: state



Courtesy, Mealer Campaign

Alex Mealer

Rep. Briscoe Cain and Alex Mealer, who is best known for waging a tight 2022 race for county judge (akin to a chief executive) of Harris County, which is home to Houston.

Cain boasts the support of GOP Gov. Greg Abbott and

a long list of state and federal lawmakers who have gotten to know him from a high-profile tenure in Austin. Mealer has the support of ubiquitous Houston businessman Jim "Mattress Mack" McIngvale, but also key national backers in Ohio Rep. Jim Jordan and the Club for Growth. Those DC ties helped her land a late endorsement from Trump, who backed her Monday, on the eve of early voting.

While much attention has centered on Cain and Mealer, the field features at least one other name familiar to Republicans in Washington: former Texas Rep. Steve Stockman. He was convicted in 2018 of defrauding charitable donors and misusing campaign money; Trump commuted his prison sentence in 2020.

**32nd District.** Republicans redrew this seat in the Dallas area to be a surefire pickup opportunity, and it has attracted a crowded nine-person field enticed by the opportunity.

The candidate to overcome, however, has become Jace Yarbrough, an Air Force veteran and well-known lawyer for conservative causes who ran a spirited race for state Senate in the region two years ago. Yarbrough has stacked up endorsements from Trump, House Speaker Mike Johnson and Abbott, as well as the Freedom Caucus.

Yarbrough's path to avoiding a runoff does not appear easy, however. He is up against at least two serious self-funders: Ryan Binkley, a longshot candidate in the last presidential election, and Paul Bondar, who waged an attention-grabbing — but unsuccessful — bid for Congress in Oklahoma in 2024, trying to unseat powerful GOP Rep. Tom Cole.

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Julie Johnson

Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call

*Continued from page 4*

**34th District.** Republicans redrew this seat, which is held by Democratic Rep. Vicente Gonzalez, to be one that Trump would have carried by 10 points in 2024. If they can pick it up, it would further expand their reach into South Texas, where they have been aggressively targeting Hispanic voters under Trump.

The primary has centered on two Floreses — no relation: Mayra Flores and Eric Flores. Mayra Flores became nationally known when she won a prior configuration of the seat in a 2022 special election. She tried to win a full term in the seat later that year — and again in 2024 — but came up short both times. Eric Flores is an Army veteran and lawyer who is newer to electoral politics.

Mayra Flores seemed well-positioned in the primary until Trump

endorsed Eric Flores in December, despite backing Mayra Flores in her past campaigns. Mayra Flores reacted angrily, accusing the president of backing a “Biden DOJ appointee pretending to be MAGA.”

Eric Flores has since seen more consolidation of support, including from House GOP leaders, Abbott and some former rivals who dropped out after Trump’s endorsement.

**35th District.** A very crowded GOP field has assembled for this redrawn district anchored in San Antonio. Republicans reconfigured it to be a seat that Trump would have won by 10 points in 2024, prompting the Democratic incumbent, Greg Casar, to instead seek re-election in the more Democratic-friendly 37th District in Austin.

Still, Democrats believe the 35th District is winnable in the current environment. The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee added the seat to its target list after redistricting, suggesting it was part of a “dummymander” that would backfire on Texas Republicans.

Two of the leading candidates in the 11-person GOP primary field are John Lujan, a moderate state representative who is a veteran of battleground races for the state House, and Carlos De La Cruz, an Air Force veteran and brother of South Texas GOP Rep. Monica De La Cruz. Trump took sides in the primary Monday, endorsing De La Cruz.

Also running is Jay Furman, who ran against nearby Democratic Rep. Henry Cuellar in 2024 and got 47 percent of the vote with little national backing.

## Open Seats with Competitive Republican Primaries

**10th District.** Ten Republicans are vying to succeed retiring GOP Rep. Michael McCaul in his mostly rural district stretching from Austin to outside Houston. It remains a Republican stronghold after the latest round of redistricting in Texas.

The clear frontrunner is Chris Gober, a longtime go-to lawyer for Texas Republicans specializing in campaign finance and election law. His national profile grew significantly in 2024 after he represented the super PAC that Elon Musk used to boost Trump.

Gober has just about every major endorsement a Texas primary candidate could want: Trump, Speaker Johnson and other House GOP leaders, Gov. Abbott, Sen. Ted Cruz and the Club for Growth.



Eric Flores

*Courtesy Flores Campaign*

**19th District.** Seven Republicans have lined up to replace Rep. Jodey Arrington (R), chairman of the House Budget Committee, after he decided not to seek re-election. The district is one of the reddest in the country and would have given Trump three-quarters of the vote in the 2024 election under the latest boundaries.

There is no obvious frontrunner and Trump has not gotten involved yet, but some candidates have made waves with other big-name endorsements. Abbott, who has long been focused on Hispanic outreach in Texas, has endorsed Abraham Enriquez, the head of Bienvenido US, a conservative group that works to mobilize Latino voters. Cody Campbell, the billionaire booster of Texas Tech University who has become known for reshaping its football program, has endorsed Lubbock businessman Tom Sell.

Other candidates include Jason Corley, a Lubbock County commissioner, and “Fat” Matt Smith, the owner of a well-known West Texas roofing company who hails from Abilene.

**21st District.** A dozen Republicans are running to take the place of GOP Rep. Chip Roy, who is giving up his seat to run for state attorney general. The Republican-friendly district stretches west from the bustling Austin-San Antonio corridor into the rural Hill Country.

The candidate to beat is Mark Teixeira, a former professional baseball player who played for the Texas Rangers and the New York Yankees. He has been endorsed by Trump, Abbott, Johnson and the Club for Growth. Teixeira also has self-funded his campaign with at least \$2.5 million.

Teixeira’s competitors hope they can force him into a runoff with allegations that he is a conservative neophyte and a carpetbagger. His campaign website says he moved back to Texas in 2021. One of his better-known opponents is Trey Trainor, a Trump appointee to the Federal Election Commission who stepped down in the fall to run for the seat.

**38th District.** Ten Republicans are angling to succeed Hunt in his safely Republican district in suburban Houston. It was a bit of a free-for-all until Monday, when Trump backed Jon Bonck, a mortgage broker who already had the support of Sen. Cruz and national conservative groups including the Club for Growth and Turning Point Action. Bonck has also raised over \$700,000 and added \$330,000 in loans to himself.

Other notable candidates include Shelly deZevallos, a Houston business leader who has long been involved in the state and local party. She has a more locally focused endorsement list and has leaned into being a presidential appointee during Trump’s first term.

## Honorable mentions

**22nd District.** GOP Rep. Troy Nehls (R), one of Trump’s most vocal allies in the state’s congressional delegation, is retiring here and has anointed his identical twin brother, former Fort Bend County constable Trever Nehls, to succeed him. Trever Nehls has secured Trump’s endorsement and faces only one little-known opponent in the primary. The suburban Houston district favors Republicans.

**15th District.** National Democrats recruited Tejano star Bobby Pulido to flip this seat held by GOP Rep. Monica De La Cruz (R) — and show that the party can win back Hispanic voters in South Texas. But he first has to get through a Democratic primary against emergency room physician Ada Cuellar, who has run a serious campaign and positioned herself to the left of Pulido.

**8th District.** Jessica Steinmann, a former staffer in the first Trump administration and Cruz’s office, is the favorite to replace retiring GOP Rep. Morgan Luttrell (R) in his solidly red district north of Houston. She has stood out from five rivals in the Republican primary with

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Continued from page 5  
endorsements from Cruz, Luttrell, Abbott and some House GOP leaders. Trump endorsed her Monday.

Statewide Primaries

**Attorney General.** The Texas attorney general’s office is a longtime stepping stone to higher office and nerve center for the conservative legal movement nationwide. With incumbent Ken Paxton running for Senate, the office is open for the first time since 2014, and four ambitious Republicans are jockeying for it, with Trump looming large.

Republican Congressman Roy is seen as a likely bet to make the May runoff if no candidate gets a majority of the Republican primary vote. He entered the race with enviable name ID from his time in Washington, where he has become known as a conservative agitator who has occasionally gotten crosswise with Trump. He has sought to counteract his tensions with Trump by running ads that show the president complimenting him last year during a Texas stop, saying Roy is “not easy, but he’s good.”

Roy’s top opponent is arguably state Sen. Mayes Middleton, a formidable self-funder who is known for championing hot-button conservative proposals in the Legislature such as restricting transgender college athletes.

The other candidates running are state Sen. Joan Huffman, a more moderate Republican from Houston, and Aaron Reitz, a former Paxton staffer who gave up a Trump appointment at the Justice Department to return home for the race. Paxton has endorsed Reitz, though polls show he remains one of the lesser-known candidates statewide.

There are three candidates on the Democratic side of the race: Nathan Johnson, a state senator from Dallas; Joe Jaworski, the runner-up in the 2022 primary for attorney general; and Tony Box, an attorney from Dallas. The GOP nominee will be favored in the general, but much like in the U.S. Senate race, Democrats are hoping a bruising Republican primary could give them an opening.

**Governor.** State Rep. Gina Hinojosa, who has represented a solidly blue district in Austin since 2017, is the favorite for the Democratic nomination against GOP Gov. Greg Abbott (R), who is seeking a fourth term. While Democrats see opportunity in the Senate race, they are less bullish about unseating Abbott, a veteran of competitive statewide elections who has over \$100 million cash on hand.

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2026 House Open Seats

| District | Outgoing Member        | 2024 Results | 2024 Presidential | 2026 Rating       |
|----------|------------------------|--------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| AL-01    | Barry Moore, R         | 78%          | Trump 77%         | Solid Republican  |
| AZ-01    | David Schweikert, R    | 52%          | Trump 51%         | Toss-up           |
| AZ-05    | Andy Biggs, R          | 60%          | Trump 60%         | Solid Republican  |
| CA-06    | Ami Bera, D            | New lines    | Harris 53%        | Likely Democratic |
| CA-11    | Nancy Pelosi, D        | New lines    | Harris 82%        | Solid Democratic  |
| CA-14    | Eric Swalwell, D       | New lines    | Harris 65%        | Solid Democratic  |
| CA-26    | Julia Brownley, D      | New lines    | Harris 56%        | Solid Democratic  |
| CA-38    | Linda Sanchez, D       | New lines    | Harris 55%        | Solid Democratic  |
| FL-02    | Neal Dunn, R           | 62%          | Trump 59%         | Solid Republican  |
| FL-16    | Vern Buchanan, R       | 60%          | Trump 57%         | Solid Republican  |
| FL-19    | Byron Donalds, R       | 66%          | Trump 64%         | Solid Republican  |
| GA-01    | Buddy Carter, R        | 62%          | Trump 58%         | Solid Republican  |
| GA-10    | Mike Collins, R        | 63%          | Trump 60%         | Solid Republican  |
| GA-11    | Barry Loudermilk, R    | 67%          | Trump 61%         | Solid Republican  |
| IA-02    | Ashley Hinson, R       | 57%          | Trump 54%         | Lean Republican   |
| IA-04    | Randy Feenstra, R      | 67%          | Trump 65%         | Solid Republican  |
| IL-02    | Robin Kelly, D         | 68%          | Harris 66%        | Solid Democratic  |
| IL-04    | Jesus Chuy Garcia, D   | 68%          | Harris 73%        | Solid Democratic  |
| IL-07    | Danny Davis, D         | 83%          | Harris 81%        | Solid Democratic  |
| IL-08    | Raja Krishnamoorthi, D | 57%          | Harris 53%        | Solid Democratic  |
| IL-09    | Jan Schakowsky, D      | 68%          | Harris 68%        | Solid Democratic  |
| KY-06    | Andy Barr, R           | 63%          | Trump 57%         | Solid Republican  |
| LA-05    | Julia Letlow, R        | 63%          | Trump 67%         | Solid Republican  |
| MA-06    | Seth Moulton, D        | Unopposed    | Harris 59%        | Solid Democratic  |
| MD-05    | Steny Hoyer, D         | 68%          | Harris 66%        | Solid Democratic  |
| ME-02    | Jared Golden, D        | 50%          | Trump 54%         | Likely Republican |
| MI-10    | John James, R          | 51%          | Trump 52%         | Tilt Republican   |

| District | Outgoing Member          | 2024 Results | 2024 Presidential | 2026 Rating       |
|----------|--------------------------|--------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| MI-11    | Haley Stevens, D         | 58%          | Harris 57%        | Solid Democratic  |
| MN-02    | Angie Craig, DFL         | 56%          | Harris 51%        | Lean Democratic   |
| NE-02    | Don Bacon, R             | 51%          | Harris 52%        | Tilt Democratic   |
| NH-01    | Chris Pappas, D          | 54%          | Harris 51%        | Lean Democratic   |
| NJ-12    | Bonnie Watson Coleman, D | 61%          | Harris 61%        | Solid Democratic  |
| NV-02    | Mark Amodei, R           | 55%          | Trump 56%         | Solid Republican  |
| NY-07    | Nydia Velazquez, D       | 78%          | Harris 72%        | Solid Democratic  |
| NY-12    | Jerrold Nadler, D        | 81%          | Harris 81%        | Solid Democratic  |
| NY-21    | Elise Stefanik, R        | 62%          | Trump 60%         | Solid Republican  |
| PA-03    | Dwight Evans, D          | Unopposed    | Harris 88%        | Solid Democratic  |
| SC-01    | Nancy Mace, R            | 58%          | Trump 56%         | Solid Republican  |
| SC-05    | Ralph Norman, R          | 64%          | Trump 61%         | Solid Republican  |
| SD-AL    | Dusty Johnson, R         | 72%          | Trump 63%         | Solid Republican  |
| TN-06    | John Rose, R             | 68%          | Trump 67%         | Solid Republican  |
| TX-08    | Morgan Luttrell, R       | New lines    | Trump 63%         | Solid Republican  |
| TX-09    | Al Green, D              | New lines    | Trump 59%         | Solid Republican  |
| TX-10    | Mike McCaul, R           | New lines    | Trump 58%         | Solid Republican  |
| TX-19    | Jodey Arrington, R       | New lines    | Trump 75%         | Solid Republican  |
| TX-21    | Chip Roy, R              | New lines    | Trump 60%         | Solid Republican  |
| TX-22    | Troy Nehls, R            | New lines    | Trump 58%         | Solid Republican  |
| TX-30    | Jasmine Crockett, D      | New lines    | Harris 73%        | Solid Democratic  |
| TX-32    | Julie Johnson, D         | New lines    | Trump 58%         | Solid Republican  |
| TX-35    | Greg Casar, D            | New lines    | Harris 75%        | Likely Republican |
| TX-38    | Wesley Hunt, R           | New lines    | Trump 60%         | Solid Republican  |
| WA-04    | Dan Newhouse, R          | 52%          | Trump 59%         | Solid Republican  |
| WI-07    | Tom Tiffany, R           | 64%          | Trump 58%         | Solid Republican  |
| WY-AL    | Harriet Hageman, R       | 71%          | Trump 72%         | Solid Republican  |

\*Note: Some outgoing Members are running in other districts

Continued from page 1

runs for Senate and governor, his father is among the best-known Republicans in the state. Sheriff Bouchard began organizing support for his son's campaign months before he returned from his latest deployment, helping establish a super PAC and securing endorsements from former Gov. John Engler and former state Attorney General Bill Schuette.

A recent poll from the Bouchard campaign found him leading the primary field, 37 percent to 8 percent, with 51 percent undecided. A third candidate, attorney Justin Kirk, clocked in at 3 percent but isn't expected to be as much of a factor in the race.

Lulgjuraj's allies dismiss the result as an artifact of name recognition, and argue that the upstart's candidacy will activate new voters in the primary, especially in the district's close-knit Albanian community. The 10th has the fifth-largest Albanian community of any district in the country, and the largest outside of New York City. It's also home to the largest number of another Catholic minority, the Chaldeans, who comprise 3 percent of the district.

"If you ran an independent poll, Bouchard might even be up just from name ID alone," said state Rep. Joe Aragona, who represents Macomb County in the state House and has endorsed Lulgjuraj.

Aragona, who considered running for the 10th himself, also said he believed polling would underestimate Lulgjuraj because it wouldn't account for lower propensity Albanian voters in the primary.

"With Rob on the ballot, none of them, whether they're center, center left, right-left, or even far right in their political nature," he said, "none of them are going to forget to vote."

Neither have they forgotten to donate. Lulgjuraj has raised more than \$1 million since entering the race in July, largely from

Albanian communities, and ended December with \$765,000 in cash-on-hand, the most of any candidate in the race.

Bouchard raised a respectable \$550,000 in his first two months of the race, and an allied super PAC pulled in an additional \$255,000 through the end of the year. But \$200,000 that Bouchard raised is earmarked for the general election, leaving him with closer to \$350,000 in money he can spend on the primary, compared to Lulgjuraj, who had more than \$650,000 in primary cash to spend.

On a Thursday night in Warren, Bouchard stood up in front of a few dozen current and retired police officers at a Fraternal Order of Police lodge to introduce himself.

Soft-spoken and measured, and in a quarter-zip of his own, Bouchard spoke briefly about his support and respect for law enforcement, his time in the Army's 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions and experience in Iraq, and his belief in Trump's foreign policy. He stressed that he was running to restore common sense to Washington, DC. "If a Democrat brings me a solution, I'll work with them," he told the crowd.

Despite the setting, Bouchard avoided mentioning his father in his brief stump speech. Afterward, he told *Inside Elections* that he was running his own race. "I'm running on my experience and what I'm going to do for this district," said the former paratrooper.

But the sheriff loomed large over the evening, as attendees came up to the younger Bouchard to tell him how much they admired his father and to gossip about when the 27-year incumbent might finally retire. One woman stopped on her way out to remark on how much the candidate resembled his namesake — and to offer to put up a Bouchard yard sign even though she wasn't sure she lived in the district. After some geographical back and forth with the candidate, the newly minted supporter realized that not only did she live in the district, but so did her daughter and several extended family members. She left with signs for all of them.

As the event cleared out, the lodge's vice president Pete Warack said he liked what he had heard from Bouchard, but wanted to see more of the candidate. "He said the right things, but saying the right things and doing them are different," Warack told *Inside Elections*. He expressed hope

that Bouchard would return to the lodge over the summer when temperatures would be warmer and more members would be present.

Swapping his policeman's cap for a pundit's hat, Warack made an additional point: the name ID



Michael Bouchard

advantage Bouchard brought to the race, he said, could be insurmountable in the primary. Outside, two attendees enjoying cigars agreed. One of them, who declined to share his name due to his sensitive position, said he was all in for Bouchard. He hadn't heard of anyone else running.

Lulgjuraj has framed his bid around his blue collar upbringing and deep Macomb County roots, to the extent one ally told *Inside Elections* they anticipated a "nationalist" campaign — the nation being Macomb. Lulgjuraj, the son of a waitress and maintenance man who fled Communism, sees a compelling contrast between his story and that of Bouchard, who grew up in a well-off town outside the district in Oakland County.

"Just because your father's a politician, that doesn't mean that you're ready to legislate, that you're ready to be a congressperson," Lulgjuraj told *Inside Elections*, "and I thank the family for their service, but I am the best qualified academically, resume-wise, and my strong MAGA conservative values to represent this district well, and I'm from here."

Bouchard bristled at the notion that he wasn't suited to represent the

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Robert Lulgjuraj

## Inside Elections Podcast

Nathan, Jacob and expert guests discuss the latest election news in a nonpartisan, data-driven and accessible way.

**Episode 65:** Nathan, Jacob and Gabby Birenbaum of the Texas Tribune break down the key upcoming primaries, including the fates of vulnerable incumbents such as GOP Sen. John Cornyn and a handful of House members.

**Episode 64:** Nathan, Jacob and Ryan Faircloth of the Star Tribune discuss the ICE surge in the Twin Cities and the impact on Minnesota's key elections.

**Episode 63:** Nathan, Jacob and Jonathan Martin of Politico offer their bold House, Senate, governor and presidential predictions for 2026 and beyond.

*Continued from page 7*

10th, which only includes a small piece of Oakland County.

"I've lived in this district for years," he told *Inside Elections*. "I go to church in the center of this district, I worked in the south of this district, my gym's in the north of this district, and I spend most of my summers on the east part of this district. I know this district extremely well, and I spend all my time here."

State Rep. Ron Robinson, who represents a swing district in Macomb County, told *Inside Elections* he didn't think Bouchard would be hamstrung by his upbringing. "Though he has come from Oakland County, he's been around," said Robinson, "he's well versed in the needs and what's going on here in Macomb County."

Still, Robinson opted to back Luljguraj in the primary. "I like his passion, and he's connecting with a lot of people," he said, "and he pretty much is the American dream."

Winning the primary won't be the end of the story for either Bouchard or Luljguraj. Michigan's 10th is a top Democratic target, and the party is sorting through its own primary between Pontiac Mayor Tim Greimel, former prosecutor Christina Hines, and former Commerce Department attorney Eric Chung.

After two cycles in which Democrats were saddled with former Macomb County Prosecutor Carl Marlinga as their nominee, the party is excited to compete for the open seat with a new candidate. Though Marlinga was universally known in the district, he struggled to fundraise, had personal baggage, and was largely ignored by outside groups in his two losses against James.

Even as both potential GOP nominees stare down a competitive general election, neither feels pressure to put any distance between themselves and Trump, who finished ahead of Kamala Harris 52-46 percent in 2024 but whose popularity has sagged since taking office a year ago.

"I am going to be lockstep in line with the president's agenda and this administration's agenda," Luljguraj told *Inside Elections*, "and that's exactly what the voters in this district want."

"I think he's doing an incredible job," concurred Bouchard, who

couldn't name any areas where he disagreed with Trump. "He's putting our country first, and I think we need more people who are willing to help him put this country first."

Both candidates singled out crime and the cost of living as priorities, and are focusing their appeal on the "salt of the earth" voters of the district. Each claims a connection to the auto industry as well: Luljguraj's grandfather worked the line at Chrysler, Bouchard's at General Motors.

And both men relay deep appreciation for their Catholic faith and the education they received at Brother Rice.

"I've developed a pretty strong faith and belief in God from a young age, and that's carried with me in everything that I've done," Bouchard told *Inside Elections*. "I remember some pretty tough moments in Iraq, and it was pretty comforting to have the faith I have," he said.

"I'm a faithful candidate," Luljguraj told *Inside Elections*, "and I really do believe that the reason why this country has been as successful as it was, it's rooted in virtue, rooted in character, rooted in Christian values."

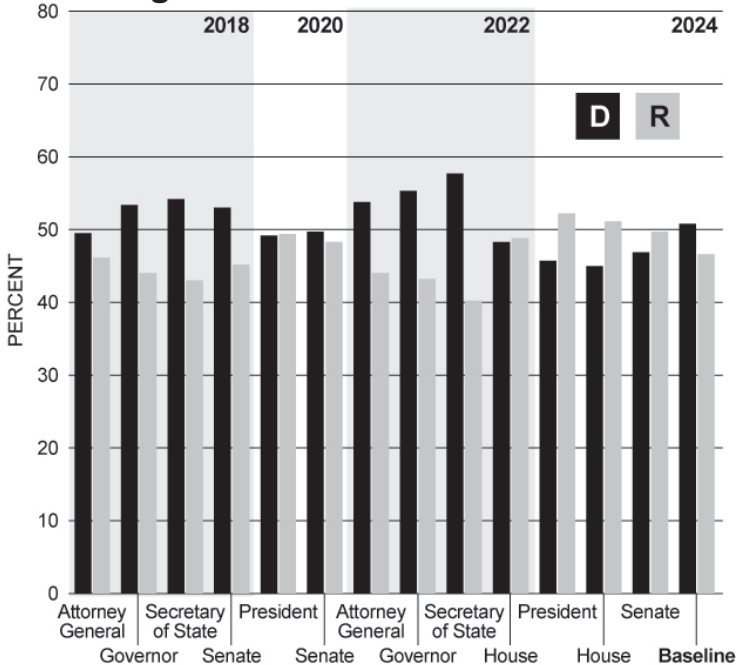
As he considered running for Congress last year, Luljguraj said, he turned to a higher power. "The first person I called was my priest," he told *Inside Elections*.

Did he receive his blessing?

"Even better — he gave me \$1,000. How's that for a character reference?"

IE

Statewide Election Results  
for Michigan's 10th District



| 2026 Governor Ratings                                                              |                           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Toss-up (4D)                                                                       |                           |
| KS Open (Kelly, D)                                                                 | WI Open (Evers, D)        |
| MI Open (Whitmer, D)                                                               | Hobbs (D-Ariz.)           |
| Tilt Democratic                                                                    | Tilt Republican (2R)      |
|                                                                                    | GA Open (Kemp, R)         |
|                                                                                    | Lombardo (R-Nev.)         |
| Lean Democratic                                                                    | Lean Republican           |
| Likely Democratic (5D)                                                             | Likely Republican (1R)    |
| ME Open (Mills, D)                                                                 | IA Open (Reynolds, R)     |
| NM Open (Lujan-Grisham, D)                                                         |                           |
| MN Open (Walz, DFL)                                                                |                           |
| Hochul (D-N.Y.)                                                                    |                           |
| Shapiro (D-Penn.)                                                                  |                           |
| Solid Democratic (9D)                                                              | Solid Republican (15R)    |
| CA Open (Newsom, D)                                                                | AK Open (Dunleavy, R)     |
| CO Open (Polis, D)                                                                 | AL Open (Ivey, R)         |
| Green (D-Hawaii)                                                                   | FL Open (DeSantis, R)     |
| Healey (D-Mass.)                                                                   | OH Open (DeWine, R)       |
| Kotek (D-Ore.)                                                                     | OK Open (Stitt, R)        |
| Lamont (D-Ct.)                                                                     | SC Open (McMaster, R)     |
| McKee (D-R.I.)                                                                     | TN Open (Lee, R)          |
| Moore (D-Md.)                                                                      | WY Open (Gordon, R)       |
| Pritzker (D-Ill.)                                                                  | Abbott (R-Texas)          |
|                                                                                    | Ayotte (R-N.H.)           |
|                                                                                    | Huckabee Sanders (R-Ark.) |
|                                                                                    | Little (R-Idaho)          |
|                                                                                    | Pillen (R-Neb.)           |
|                                                                                    | Rhoden (R-S.D.)           |
|                                                                                    | Scott (R-Vt.)             |
| Takeovers in Italics, # moved benefiting Democrats, * moved benefiting Republicans |                           |