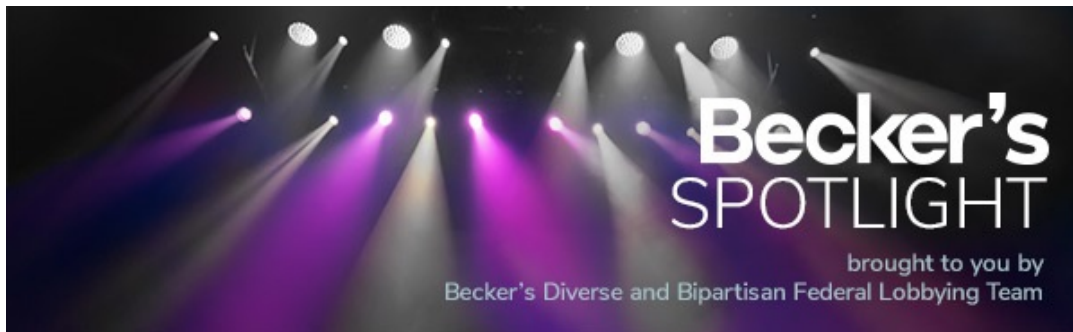


Becker's Spotlight: Top 2020 House Races to Watch

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By: Anthony Bedell, Steven J. Blattner, Carissa Faña, Omar Franco, Bert Gómez, Alfonso Lopez, Clarence Williams, Amanda L. Wood



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After two years of unified Republican control of the White House and both chambers of Congress following the 2016 election, Democrats reclaimed a significant majority of the 435 voting seats in the House of Representatives in the 2018 midterm elections. Republicans held an impressive 59-seat majority after the 2016 elections but could not hold it. Democrats successfully regrouped for the midterms and rode a “blue wave” all the way to a 36-seat majority following the 2018 election.

Following a spate of retirements and resignations over the last two years, the party split in the House of Representatives for the 116th Congress is currently D+35 with Democrats holding 232 House seats and Republicans holding 197 seats. There are also currently five vacancies in the House and one Independent member of Congress (one being Michigan’s Justin Amash – who is retiring) that left the Republican party in July of 2019. Though Democrats proved capable of successfully turning a 59-seat deficit into a solid majority in 2018, the odds of a similar swing in 2020 favoring House Republicans is increasingly unlikely. FiveThirtyEight, data analyst Nate Silver’s polling aggregation website, has modeled more than 40,000 simulations and found that Democrats retain control

of the House in roughly 95% of those simulations. Further, FiveThirtyEight's model gives Democrats an 80% chance of holding between 222 and 253 seats following the November elections, for a likely range of D+9 to D+71.

An election night trending towards the higher end of FiveThirtyEight's projected range of outcomes would almost certainly result in victory for former Vice President Joe Biden over President Donald Trump as well as Democrats making significant inroads towards reclaiming a majority in the Senate, if not winning it outright. As recently demonstrated in the Republican-controlled 115th Congress of the first two years of the Trump Administration, a unified governing coalition comes with a mandate to enact the majority party's agenda. Republicans in 2017 used that mandate to successfully pass the major tax reform legislation they have long sought. Democrats' ability to enact significant legislation addressing the party's top priorities in the House - including health care, climate change, infrastructure, criminal justice reform - will come down to the strength, size, and composition of its membership.

In addition to speculating about the top legislative priorities of the upcoming 117th Congress, examining certain down ballot House races can also help to contextualize the Presidential election and certain Senate elections. The selection of House races below will be important to understand as Election Day approaches as they are among the most likely to determine the size of the House majority and are likely to provide some insight as to where things stand for the Presidential election.

South Carolina 1: Rep. Joe Cunningham (D)* vs. State Rep. Nancy Mace (R)

In 2018, Joe Cunningham became the first Democrat to represent South Carolina's 1st Congressional District (CD) since 1986, winning the election by less than two points, a major upset. The seat was last held by former Republican governor Mark Sanford who lost the primary election to a Trump-backed candidate. This seat was R+22 in 2016, Sanford's last victory in the district, and President Trump won the district by 13 points. If Republicans are to pull off an historic upset and take back the House, they will need to win here. This is one of the GOP's best pick up opportunities.

It appears Cunningham has the upper hand financially entering the final stretch. Per recent public campaign filings, Cunningham has raised approximately \$4.2 million this cycle and still has \$3 million in cash on hand. Mace has raised around \$1.9 million in total and has less than half of that remaining in the bank. Cunningham's moderate tendencies seem to have solidified support in the district. There have not been many polls conducted for this race. However, a DCCC-funded poll of 400 likely voters conducted October 5-7 shows Cunningham up 13 points.

Nebraska 2: Rep. Don Bacon (R)* vs. Kara Eastman (D)

In a rematch from the 2018 election, Republican Rep. Don Bacon and Democratic social worker and non-profit executive Kara Eastman face off for Nebraska's second CD. Bacon first won the seat in 2016, defeating incumbent Democrat Brad Ashford by a single point, while Donald Trump won this district by two points. In 2018, Bacon edged out Eastman by two points to retain his seat.

Bacon has out fundraised Eastman (\$2.2 million to \$1.5 million) and has more in the bank for the final stretch (\$1 million+ vs. less than half a million). Polling conducted by Sienna College/The New York Times in late September showed Bacon ahead by just two points. Nearly all polls conducted on the race show a very close contest.

This race is of note because Nebraska, like Maine, does not allocate its electoral votes at the presidential level on a winner-take-all basis. Instead, two of Nebraska's five electoral votes go to the statewide popular vote winner and the popular vote winner in each of its three CDs receives an electoral vote. In 2016, Trump won all five electoral votes. This CD is Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden's best opportunity to pick up an extra electoral vote. While a single vote may not initially seem significant, there are several possible election night outcomes where a single electoral vote can be the difference. For example, if Biden retains all the states Hillary Clinton won in 2016 while flipping Wisconsin, Michigan, and Arizona (all states where Biden is leading in the polls), the electoral college would be tied at 269-269. If instead, Biden flips Pennsylvania and Michigan, he would trail Trump by just two electoral votes. The result in Nebraska could also break or make a tie in the Electoral College, an unprecedented - yet not impossible - outcome in modern political history.

Maine 2: Rep. Jared Golden (D)* vs. former State Rep. Dale Crafts (R)

Freshman Congressman Jared Golden's first re-election campaign comes in a busy year further up the ticket with both the Presidential and Senate races on the ballot. The Senate race in particular will have a significant impact on this race. If Republicans rally around Senator Susan Collins and drive turnout, it may be enough to oust Golden. In 2016, Trump and former Rep. Bruce Poliquin (ME-R-2) both carried this district by two points. 2018 was the first year Maine used ranked-choice voting, wherein voters can select their top two choices. After the initial round of vote tallying, Poliquin, with 46.3% of the vote, held a lead of less than one percentage point over Golden, however in Maine, a candidate must secure 50% of the vote to win so ranked-choice voting procedures were implemented. On a second tally that removed the lowest vote-getters from the running and reallocated those votes to whomever was selected as that voters' second choice, Golden beat Poliquin by just over one point.

The fundamentals favor Golden to this point. He has raised significantly more money than Crafts (\$2.9 million to less than \$400K) and still has over \$2 million in the bank. Golden has also led by double digits in eight of ten polls taken on this race.

In addition to its use of ranked-choice voting, Maine splits its electoral votes at the presidential level in the same manner as Nebraska. Just by holding serve in a CD where a Democrat is favored and well-funded, Democrats can add one more vote to Biden's electoral vote total. One possible nightmare scenario: Biden wins all of Clinton's states from 2016 and flips Pennsylvania, North Carolina, NE-2, and ME-2, leading to the dread tied Electoral College that sends the presidential election to the House.

Texas 21: Rep. Chip Roy (R)* vs. former State Sen. Wendy Davis (D)

Chip Roy, a freshman member of Congress and former Chief of Staff to Senator Ted Cruz, faces former State Senator and Democratic candidate for governor of Texas, Wendy Davis. Davis has strong name recognition in the state, entering the national political consciousness in 2013 with a thirteen-hour-long filibuster on the Texas Senate floor to block a bill containing highly restrictive abortion regulations. The district, though still leaning Republican for now, is trending away from the GOP. In 2016, this seat was R+21 and carried by Trump by 10 points. In 2018, following an open Republican primary, Roy won the general election by just three points.

Financially, the candidates are about even. Roy has raised \$4.2 million this cycle, with \$2.4 million in cash on hand. For her part, Davis has raised \$4.4 million for this election and still has \$2.9 million in cash on hand. While three polls taken between July and September show the candidates within one point of each other, most election forecasters and experts expect Roy to prevail in a close race. A Democratic win in this district would likely mean Texas is in play at the presidential level. Roy remains a favorite due to his incumbency. However, there are a trio of House races in Texas without incumbents seeking re-election that may be more likely to flip to the Democrats.

Open Texas seats: CD 22, CD 23, and CD 24

With the impending retirements of Congressmen Pete Olson (R-TX-22), Will Hurd (R-TX-23), and Kenny Marchant (R-TX-24), Democrats are hoping to increase their House majority in deep red Texas. The most likely of these districts to flip is CD 23, currently held by moderate Republican Will Hurd. Hurd was the only Texas Republican to represent a district on the border with Mexico and won the seat by a single point in both 2016 and 2018. Clinton carried this district by four points in 2016 as well. Democrat and former Air Force intelligence officer Gina Ortiz Jones ran against Hurd in 2018 and is the favorite in this race. The Republican challenger is Navy veteran Tony Gonzalez. Ortiz Jones has fundraised Gonzalez (\$4.1m to \$1.2m) and has the backing of the DCCC.

Texas 24, Marchant's North Texas district, is the next most likely to change hands. Marchant won the seat by 17 points in 2016 with Trump winning by six. In 2018, Marchant margin of victory fell to just three points. Notably, Beto O'Rourke won this district in his 2018 challenge for Ted Cruz's senate seat. The

2020 election pits Republican Beth Van Duyne, the former Mayor of Irving, Texas, against former school board member Candace Valenzuela. Van Duyne is a much more experienced politician compared to Valenzuela, who would bring a different socioeconomic perspective than most members of Congress. Neither candidate has a significant advantage in cash on hand but outside groups and both national parties' political arms are spending heavily on the race, making it close a toss-up. The turnout of the growing segment of college-educated women in this suburban district may determine the outcome.

Demographic changes in the Houston suburbs of Fort Bend County have put the traditionally Republican 22nd district in play for Democratic challenger Sri Kulkarni, a former US Foreign Service Officer who ran against Olson in 2018 and lost by just five points. In 2016, Trump carried the district by eight points while Olson cruised to a 19-point victory in former House Majority Leader Tom DeLay's old district. Olson announced his retirement less than one year after seeing a 12-point decrease in his margin of victory. Kulkarni has over \$1 million in cash on hand, while his opponent, former Fort Bend County Sheriff Troy Nehls, has less than \$30,000 for the final three weeks of the election. Most analysts still classify this race as a toss-up with a slight Republican lean.

New Mexico 2: Rep. Xochitl Torres Small (D)* vs. former State Rep. Yvette Herrell (R)

Two years after a narrow, two-point upset victory in the general election, Xochitl Torres Small will once again face Yvette Herrell in New Mexico's 2nd CD. The district was previously represented by Republican Steve Pearce who won by 26 points in 2016. Trump carried the traditionally Republican district by 10 points that year as well. This seat represents a golden opportunity for Republicans to cut into the Democratic majority, though most analysts still view Torres Small as the slight favorite, recent polling has the race tied.

Herrell has the support of former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee and White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows but less than \$400K in the bank. Torres Small has raised over \$4.6 million for this election cycle and still has \$3.9 million in cash on hands. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has also made a point of trying to protect this seat. Additionally, Democrats have outspent Republicans 4 to 1 on ads in the critical Albuquerque television market.

New York 22: Rep. Anthony Brindisi (D)* vs. former Rep. Claudia Tenney (R)

This race is another 2018 rematch, with a slight reversal of roles. Two years ago, Tenney, who won a five-point victory in 2016, was a freshmen incumbent fending off a challenge from Brindisi. This time around, Brindisi will be on defense in a district Trump won by 16 points the last time he was on the ballot. Despite the one poll of this race that has been conducted shows Brindisi with a nine-point lead, Republicans view this as a pickup opportunity due to an expected bump coming from Trump at the top of the ticket.

The NRCC and Congressional Leadership Fund have spent more than \$8 million on ads boosting Tenney, who only has \$600k in the bank. For their part, Democrats do not appear content to let the seat go without a fight. Brindisi has raised over \$3.5 million this cycle and still has \$2.8 million in cash on hand. Brindisi has also reserved \$1.6 million in television ads for the final stretch compared to just \$200K for Tenney.

Iowa 3: Rep. Cindy Axne (D)* vs. former Rep. David Young (R)

This is yet another 2018 rematch pitting a freshmen Democrat against the Republican member of Congress they first beat to earn their seat. In 2018, Axne edged out Young by less than 2 points in a major swing for the district. Young had won by 14 points in 2016. Trump also won this district in 2016, by 4 points. This race is almost certain to be extremely close when all the votes are counted but FiveThirtyEight's recent forecasting models show it moving further in Axne's direction as we approach November, designating her the favorite. An August poll by Monmouth also showed Axne leading by 6-11 points depending on turnout.

Young has the backing of both of Iowa's Senators, Chuck Grassley and Joni Ernst, as well as Governor Kim Reynolds. He also has approximately \$1.4 million in cash on hand to carry him to Election Day. Axne has raised just under \$4 million this election cycle and still has roughly \$3 million in the back for the final weeks of the election.

Florida 26: Rep. Debbie Mucarsel-Powell (D)* vs. Mayor Carlos Gimenez (R)

This will likely be a very closely contested race in a swing district located in a swing state. In 2016, this district split the ticket: Clinton won by 16 points over Trump, but incumbent Carlos Curbelo, a moderate Republican, cruised to a 12-point victory. Mucarsel-Powell rode the blue wave of 2018 to a two-point victory to defeat Curbelo and faces the Mayor of Miami-Dade County in Gimenez in a district encompassing much of southwest Miami-Dade. In the four Congressional races since this district's creation in 2012, it has been won twice by Democrats (Joe Garcia in 2012, Mucarsel-Powell in 2018) and twice by a Republican (Curbelo in 2014 & 2016). A large victory called early, however unlikely, for Mucarsel-Powell could portend a Biden win in Florida if he can run up margins in South Florida.

Per the most recent filings, Mucarsel-Powell has raised \$3.9 million this cycle, with \$2.8 million in cash on hand. Gimenez lags in fundraising with less than \$1 million left in the bank but has been aided by a flood of outside money. The Miami-Ft. Lauderdale television market has been flooded with ads supporting or opposing both candidates. The Biden and Trump campaigns are also spending heavily in this market.

