



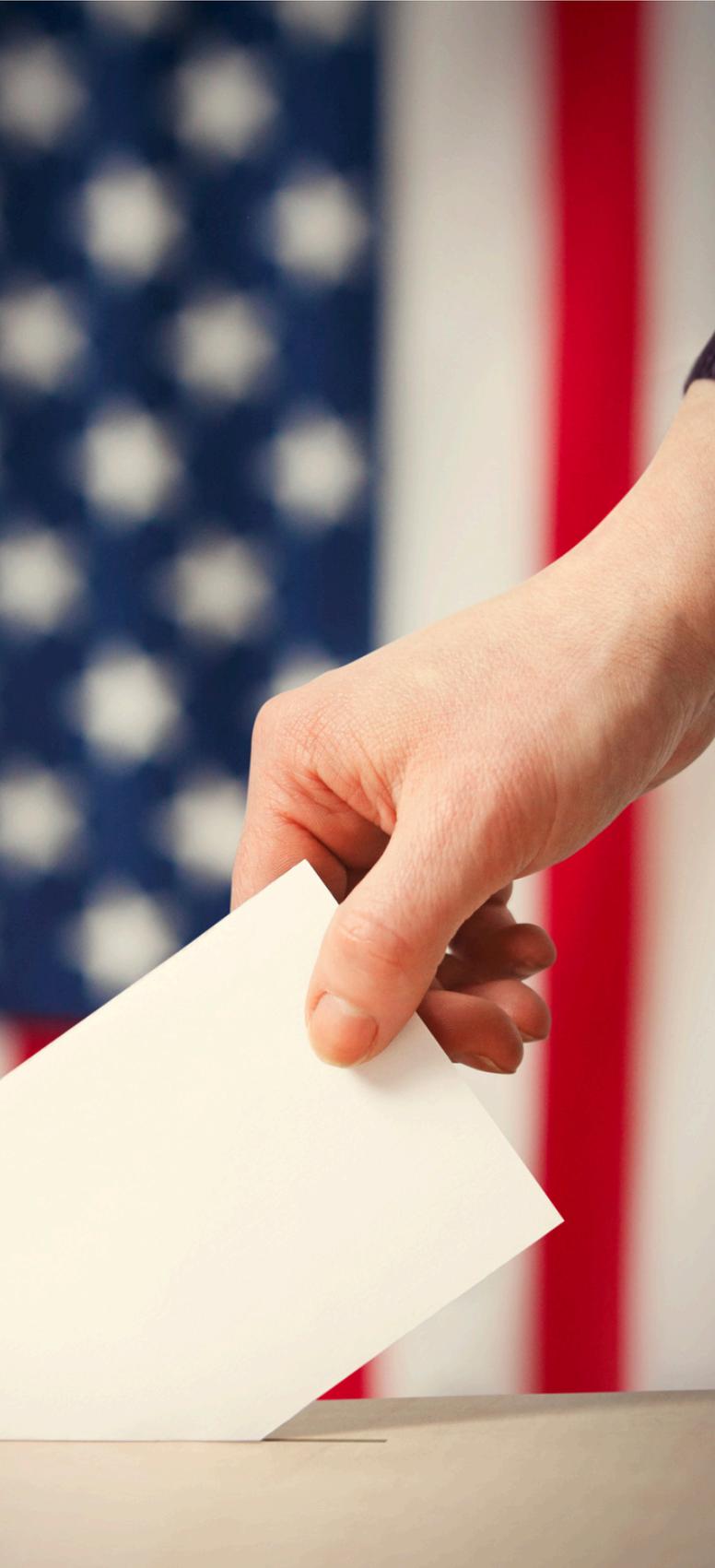
2024

# OPEN SEAT CANDIDATE RESEARCH



PREPARED BY CENTER FORWARD



*Executive Summary*

## PURPOSE

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The purpose of the Open Seats Project was to research candidates in open-seat primaries across the country in the 2024 cycle. By analyzing dozens of candidates, we were able to detect trends in campaign themes and governing philosophies. Over the course of multiple election cycles, we hope to evolve our assessments so that they serve as a predictor of an effective legislator. Such information would support the mission of Center Forward while better informing American voters who believe in the importance of bipartisanship and a functional government.

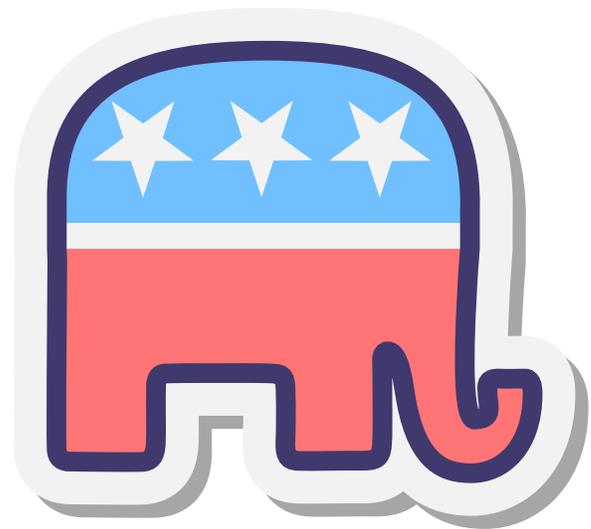
As a non-profit focused on convening pragmatic Members of Congress, Center Forward believes voters would benefit from an understanding of what makes legislators productive and/or pragmatic. By studying Republican and Democratic candidates in open-seat primaries, we can better analyze philosophies about governing before individuals enter Congress.

## METHODOLOGY

In determining which seats to include in the Open Seats analysis, the following methodology was employed to evaluate both the candidates and congressional districts. This research was conducted between February 8, 2024 and March 12, 2024. Therefore, any seats with primaries in or before March 2024 were excluded.

### District Information:

- The “Partisan Voting Index” is a measurement of how partisan a U.S. congressional district or state is. This measurement was taken from the Cook Political Report.
- Primary dates and voter statistics were pulled via the Secretaries of State and State Elections websites.
- Ballotpedia was used to determine historical primary turnout.



## METHODOLOGY: CANDIDATE INFORMATION

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- Candidates were determined viable subjects for review based on a variety of factors including, but not limited to, fundraising, media coverage, electoral history and local input.
- To determine the inclusion of candidates from each congressional district, the Federal Election Commission (FEC) website and Politics1.com, an online directory of statewide and federal candidates were referenced. In some instances, connections with individuals in the states with knowledge of the candidates were utilized.
- To gather biographical information, occupation/employer and social media handles, individual campaign websites, LinkedIn and news searches through Google were sourced.
- Regarding position statements, a focus was placed on bipartisan indicators in information provided on campaign websites. Where that messaging was limited, social media and news coverage was used to supplement the research. For Republican candidates, if he/she served in the state legislature, the American Conservative Union rating was researched.
- In gathering relevant news coverage, researchers used news sourced via Google and Lexis-Nexis, limited to the last two years for the most recent and relevant information. A focus was placed on each candidate's level of partisan ideology and willingness to work in a bipartisan manner. Other factors such as effectiveness or partisan rank were added.
- Campaign finance information was determined using OpenSecrets and FEC databases.
- Endorsements and polling information were pulled from campaign websites, news coverage and internet searches.

# SUMMARY

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The initial objective of this study was to research the feasibility of identifying the most pragmatic candidates for open seats in Congress, irrespective of their party affiliations. Given the increasing polarization within the political landscape, the aim was to explore whether there were discernible patterns or indicators as to what would make a candidate a more effective legislator.

Upon analysis, a significant portion of messaging employed by both Republican and Democratic candidates exhibited notable consistency. With a few exceptions, the study revealed a lack of clear indicators for identifying the most pragmatic candidate at this point in the election process. This ambiguity appears to stem from candidates on either side endeavoring to cater to their respective bases.

Furthermore, the research underscored the contextual nature of electoral politics, often contingent upon the environment and the specific opponent in each race. Consequently, the strategies and messaging employed by candidates during the pre-primary stage of the race are not necessarily reflective of how candidates may govern post-election. The influence of redistricting also emerged as a significant factor, exacerbating the partisan nature of districts and limiting the ability of serious centrist contenders to emerge from both parties.

This research highlights the complexities inherent in identifying pragmatic candidates for open seats in Congress as candidates head into their primaries in hyper-partisan districts. The prevailing political dynamics, coupled with the effects of years of gerrymandering by both parties, posed significant challenges. However, as candidates emerge from their primaries, it is likely a nuanced understanding of the political landscape of each district, indicators of what will make a candidate an effective legislator will become more evident.

## MAJOR THEMES/TRENDS

- The impact of redistricting and the gerrymandering of districts is palpable when looking at the research. For the most part, only in those districts not overwhelmingly Republican or Democratic do you see viable candidates on both sides of the aisle emerge.
- At this stage in the race, with very few open seats that are truly competitive, there are no clear public indicators as to what will make a candidate an effective legislator. It is likely a combination of factors; however, it is clear the majority of candidates are running to appeal, almost exclusively, to their respective bases ahead of the primaries.
- How a candidate runs their campaign at this point in the election cycle is not necessarily indicative of how he/she will govern.
- For the most part, public polling is limited at this point in the election cycle. However, there is no shortage of endorsements for candidates on both sides of the aisle.
- While Republican primary candidates tend to tout their support of Trump and/or his policies, Democratic candidates tend to talk more about the issues divorced from President Biden and his bipartisan accomplishments over his term in office.

## ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

### Top Issues:

- Top issues for Democrats in primaries tend to focus on affordable health care and women's right to choose, workers' rights, the economy/inflation, affordable education and preserving democracy.
- The common themes among Republican primary candidates are border security, fighting "woke" initiatives, crime and fiscal responsibility. While fiscal responsibility tends to go in and out of popularity depending on the election cycle, it is possible the high rate of inflation has driven candidates to talk more about this kitchen table issue.
- It is notable that both Republican and Democratic candidates tend to talk about inflation and the economy, an indication that kitchen table issues impacting Americans' daily lives are still very much on the ballot this cycle.
- Genuine and earnest use of the words 'invest,' 'building on progress,' and 'revitalizing broadband infrastructure' in everyday language seem to indicate a candidate's priorities are grounded and less ideological.

## ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

### **MAGA:**

- While many Democratic candidates across the board talk about MAGA, more pragmatic leaning Democrats tend to use that messaging in reference to preserving democracy, as opposed to a more social issue lens.

### **Women's Health:**

- Whereas reference to reproductive rights previously would have been a significant indicator of a more progressive candidate, with opinion changes post-overturning of Roe v. Wade, that sentiment is found more across the board among Democratic candidates.

### **Endorsements:/Party Affiliation:**

- While many candidates do not have significant endorsements to report at the time this research was conducted, it is still relatively early. However, the company you keep is a good indicator of ideology level. Some candidates who have endorsements from Bernie Sanders, Congressional Progressive Caucus (or specific members of the caucus – Crockett, Jayapal, etc.) and the Working Families Party tend toward the far left of the spectrum. Other candidates have endorsements from groups with more middle of the road leanings – Blue Dog Coalition, New Democrat Coalition and New Politics.

- At the time this research was conducted, Donald Trump became the de facto nominee for the Republican party, which inherently led to his endorsement of more down ballot candidates.

## ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

### **Endorsements:/Party Affiliation (continued)**

- A large number of Republican candidates tout their support for Donald Trump and/or his policies, particularly as it pertains to the border crisis and the “woke” agenda on the left. This could reflect the former President’s popularity among his base and the candidates’ efforts to appeal to likely primary voters.
- A Presidential nominee’s endorsement is the most important in a GOP primary, but it is not always indicative of the partisan leanings of the candidates who receive those endorsements.
- Most candidates who have received endorsements from national PACs are candidates tied to specific racial affinity groups or military groups – groups with clear indicators.
- Ratings from third party groups may be misleading when determining whether a candidate, if elected, will put aside partisan politics to get things done.
- Most Republican primary candidates who are leading contenders either served at the state or federal level.

### **Military/Defense:**

- All candidates with military/national defense backgrounds leaned heavily into how their experience informs their candidacy.
- Many of these candidates present themselves as more centrist and are members of groups like VoteVets. While the organization isn’t known for being ideological (beyond the Democratic party), its candidates are often more moderate.

## CONCLUSION

While the research and analysis did not fully achieve its initial objective of identifying the most pragmatic candidates for open seats during the early stages of the electoral process, it does contribute to current understanding. It also paves the way for potential additional research going forward.

For example, a retrospective analysis post-general election to evaluate how candidates govern compared to their campaign activity would offer valuable insights into whether there is alignment between their electoral strategies and actual approach to governing. Another productive exercise would be to conduct similar research following the primary elections to assess any potential shifts in messaging or action that may indicate whether a candidate is more pragmatic.

The research conducted lays a solid foundation for future studies and establishes a dataset and methodology for evaluating candidate messaging and activity. This, combined with additional research at different points in the electoral process, would enable the identification of patterns and trends associated with the actions of pragmatic candidates and elected officials.

## DISTRICT SUMMARIES

### Open Seat: AZ-03

Cook PVI: D+24

Primary Date: August 8th, 2024

Arizona's 3rd congressional district, open for the first time since 2014 due to Rep. Ruben Gallego's (D) decision to run for the Senate, has boiled down to a two-way race between former Arizona Democratic Party Chair and former State Senator Raquel Teran and Phoenix City Council member Yassamin Ansari.

Given the heavily Democratic leanings of Arizona's 3rd district, both candidates tout their support for Democratic priorities such as organized labor, climate action and reproductive rights for women. Notably, alongside her support for these issues, Teran highlights her ability to build coalitions of Democrats and Republicans to take on "Donald Trump" and "far-right extremist bullies."

Candidates:

[Yassamin Ansari \(D\)](#)

[Raquel Teran \(D\)](#)

### Open Seat: AZ-08

Cook PVI: R+10

Primary Date: August 8th, 2024

The heavily Republican 8th district of Arizona is being vacated by retiring Rep. Debbie Lesko (R), who has left the seat open for the taking by several two-time candidates in the state. Blake Masters, Abe Hamadeh and Ben Toma are all conservative hardliners vying for the seat, with Hamadeh securing former President Trump's official endorsement, although Masters boasted the endorsement in his failed bid for the Senate against Mark Kelly last cycle. While Toma does talk about his ability to bring Republicans together, all three candidates exhibit mostly partisan rhetoric, with Hamadeh including on his website elements of election denialism: "What we witnessed in the 2020 and 2022 election should never happen again."

Candidates:

[Abe Hamadeh \(R\)](#)

[Blake Masters \(R\)](#)

[Ben Toma \(R\)](#)

## DISTRICT SUMMARIES

### Open Seat: CO-03

Cook PVI: R+7

Primary Date: June 25th, 2024

Following Democrat Adam Frisch's narrow loss to political firebrand Rep. Lauren Boebert (R) in 2022, there has been a national spotlight on Colorado's 3rd congressional district. Frisch, a Democrat endorsed by the Blue Dog Coalition, will likely face one of three Republican candidates in this traditionally red district. With the exit of Rep. Boebert from the race, Republicans Ron Hanks, Jeffrey Hurd and Stephen Varela are all vying for the Republican nomination, with Hurd being one candidate who has openly commented on the need for a representative who is "committed to consensus-building and has a proven track record of being part of the solution, not creating more problems."

Candidates:

[Adam Frisch \(D\)](#)

[Ron Hanks \(R\)](#)

[Jeff Hurd \(R\)](#)

[Stephen Varela \(R\)](#)

### Open Seat: CO-04

Cook PVI: R+13

Primary Date: June 25th, 2024

Colorado's 4th congressional district has been one of the most watched of the cycle with Rep. Ken Buck's (R) surprise resignation announcement and Rep. Lauren Boebert's (R) subsequent entrance into the race, abandoning the 3rd district she currently serves. There are four republican candidates vying for this overwhelmingly republican district, including Rep. Boebert who has the endorsement of former President Donald Trump.

Candidates:

[Lauren Boebert \(R\)](#)

[Deborah Flora \(R\)](#)

[Jerry Sonnenberg \(R\)](#)

[Peter Yu \(R\)](#)

## DISTRICT SUMMARIES

### Open Seat: CO-05

Cook PVI: R+9

Primary Date: June 25th, 2024

Colorado's 5th congressional district, now open due to the retirement of Rep. Doug Lamborn, is considered a reliably safe Republican seat. The two primary candidates fighting to win June's primary are Dave Williams, chairman of the Colorado Republican Party, and Jeff Crank, a podcaster and executive with the Koch network's Americans for Prosperity. Crank qualified for the primary ballot by petition while Williams recently won the party's top-line designation.

Candidates:

[Jeff Crank \(R\)](#)

[Dave Williams \(R\)](#)

### Open Seat: DE-AL

Cook PVI: D+7

Primary Date: September 3rd, 2024

Delaware's at-large seat is a solidly Democratic congressional district being vacated by Rep. Lisa Blunt Rochester (D) in her bid for the U.S. Senate. The top contenders are Democrats Sarah McBride and Eugene Young, although some polls show McBride with as much as a 20-point lead over her primary opponent. If elected, McBride would be the first openly transgender member of Congress.

Candidates:

[Sarah McBride \(D\)](#)

[Eugene Young \(D\)](#)

## DISTRICT SUMMARIES

### Open Seat: GA-03

Cook PVI: R+18

Primary Date: May 21st, 2024

Georgia's ruby red third congressional district became an open seat with the retirement of Rep. Drew Ferguson (R), who is currently serving his fourth term in Congress. Brian Jack, who served as the final White House political director under President Trump, has all but been anointed the heir apparent in this highly conservative district.

Candidate:

[Jack Brian \(R\)](#)

### Open Seat: IN-03

Cook PVI: R+18

Primary Date: May 7th, 2024

With Rep. Jim Banks (R) vacating his seat representing Indiana's 3rd district to run for the U.S. Senate, there is no shortage of Republican candidates in line to take this place. One of the most conservative districts in the country, candidates tend to take more partisan views than their counterparts in more competitive races.

Candidates:

[Wendy Davis \(R\)](#)

[Tim Smith \(R\)](#)

[Marlin Stutzman \(R\)](#)

[Andy Zay \(R\)](#)

## DISTRICT SUMMARIES

### Open Seat: IN-06

Cook PVI: R+19

Primary Date: May 7th, 2024

After three terms in office, Rep. Greg Pence (R), brother of former Vice President Mike Pence, announced he would not seek a fourth term, leaving the very Republican district open for the taking. There are currently a number of candidates vying for the Republican nomination, with four standing out: Jamison Carrier, Jeff Raatz, Jefferson Shreve and Mike Speedy.

Candidates:

[Jamison Carrier](#) (R).

[Jeff Raatz](#) (R).

[Jefferson Shreve](#) (R)

[Mike Speedy](#) (R).

### Open Seat: IN-08

Cook PVI: R+19

Primary Date: May 7th, 2024

Indiana's 8th congressional district boasts a crowded field of republicans looking to take the seat currently held by Rep. Larry Bucshon (R). Another ruby red district in the Hoosier state will see a host of candidates running in the Republican primary, including former Rep. John Hostettler, who held the seat from 1995 through 2007.

Candidates:

[John Hostettler](#) (R).

[Dominick Kavanaugh](#) (R).

[Mark Messmer](#) (R).

## DISTRICT SUMMARIES

### Open Seat: MD-02

Cook PVI: D+11

Primary Date: April 23rd, 2024

We refrained from analyzing candidates within specific districts due to their lack of viability according to our predefined criteria.

### Open Seat: MD-03

Cook PVI: D+10

Primary Date: April 23rd, 2024

After nine terms in office, Rep. John Sarbanes (D) announced his retirement, leaving the heavily Democratic district open for the taking. A slew of Democratic candidates have stepped forward, including two state senators, a military veteran and former U.S. Capitol Police Officer.

Candidates:

[Juan Dominguez \(D\)](#)

[Harry Dunn \(D\)](#)

[Sarah Elfreth \(D\)](#)

[Clarence Lam \(D\)](#)

### Open Seat: MD-06

Cook PVI: D+2

Primary Date: April 23rd, 2024

In his exit from the House for his run for the U.S. Senate, Rep. David Trone (D) has left a slew of Democratic contenders for the seat in his wake. With a Cook PVI of D+2, it is seemingly one of the more competitive districts up for grabs, but three Democrats have emerged as frontrunners in the race.

Candidates:

[April McClain Delaney \(D\)](#)

[Tekesha Martinez \(D\)](#)

[Joe Vogel \(D\)](#)

## DISTRICT SUMMARIES

### Open Seat: MI-07

Cook PVI: R+2

Primary Date: August 6th, 2024

With the exit of Rep. Elissa Slotkin (D) from Michigan's 7th congressional district for her race for the U.S. Senate, candidates on both sides of the aisle have emerged in this competitive house seat. Curtis Hertel, a state senator who has garnered the endorsement of the national Democratic Party and a slew of labor groups, and Tom Barrett, an Army Reserve Officer who has the endorsement of U.S. House of Representatives Speaker Mike Johnson and Republican Majority Whip Tom Emmer.

Candidates:

[Curtis Hertel \(D\)](#)

[Tom Barrett \(R\)](#)

### Open Seat: MI-08

Cook PVI: R+1

Primary Date: August 6th, 2024

Michigan's 8th Congressional District recently saw the retirement of six-term Democratic Rep. Dan Kildee, opening a competitive seat in the battleground state. With such a closely divided electorate, several candidates on both sides of the aisle have emerged to make this one of the most highly watched races of the 2024 cycle. Dow Chemical Company executive Mary Draves and Ex-USCIS Official and Ex-TV news anchor Paul Junge have thrown their hats in the ring on the Republican side, and State Senate Kristen McDonald Rivet has emerged on the Democratic side with the endorsement of the New Democrat Coalition.

Candidates:

[Kristen McDonald Rivet \(D\)](#)

Mary Draves (R) – announced candidacy in April 2024, does not have a website yet

[Paul Junge \(R\)](#)

## DISTRICT SUMMARIES

### Open Seat: MN-03

Cook PVI: D+8

Primary Date: August 13th, 2024

With the retirement of Rep. Dean Phillips (D), this suburban Twin Cities' 3rd Congressional District will likely remain in Democratic hands, with the emergence of a frontrunner in the race, State Sen. Kelly Morrison. Phillips has lamented that Congress has not met the moments when it could have practiced "a brand of optimistic politics that repairs relationships and improves people's lives. As a practicing physician, Morrison has focused her campaign on lowering drug costs, improving maternal health care and improving public safety, touting her support for legislation providing \$300 million in aid to local law enforcement.

Candidates:

[Kelly Morrison \(DFL\)](#)

### Open Seat: MO-03

Cook PVI: R+16

Primary Date: August 6th, 2024

After serving this solidly Republican Congressional District since 2009, Rep. Blaine Leutkemeyer (R) announced his retirement, leaving the field open for several candidates to take his place representing the areas to north, south and west of St. Louis. With this open seat certainly to remain in Republican hands, three top candidates have emerged.

Candidates:

[Mary Elizabeth Coleman \(R\)](#) - suspended campaign in March 2024

[Bob Onder \(R\)](#)

[Kurt Schaefer \(R\)](#)

## DISTRICT SUMMARIES

### Open Seat: MT-02

Cook PVI: R+16

Primary Date: June 4th, 2024

After a failed Senate campaign, which he suspended after a number of Republicans – including former President Donald Trump – endorsed his primary opponent, Rep. Matt Rosendale (R) resumed his race for the House before announcing his retirement soon thereafter. This has left the ruby red Republican Congressional District open, and a number of conservative candidates have emerged.

Candidates:

[Elsie Arntzen \(R\)](#)

[Troy Downing \(R\)](#)

[Denny Rehberg \(R\)](#)

### Open Seat: ND-AL

Cook PVI: R+20

Primary Date: June 11th, 2024

Rep. Kelly Armstrong's (R) announcement that he would vacate his House seat for the governor's race has left his heavily Republican Congressional District open for the taking. Several candidates have emerged on the right in this seat that will certainly remain in GOP hands.

Candidates:

[Rick Becker \(R\)](#)

[Tom Campbell \(R\)](#) – suspended campaign in March 2024

[Julie Fedorchak \(R\)](#)

### Open Seat: NH-02

Cook PVI: D+2

Primary Date: September 10th, 2024

Rep. Annie Kuster (D) announced that she would not run for reelection after the data was collected for this project.

## DISTRICT SUMMARIES

### **Open Seat: NJ-03**

Cook PVI: R+2

Primary Date: June 4th, 2024

We refrained from analyzing candidates within specific districts due to their lack of viability according to our predefined criteria.

### **Open Seat: NY-26**

Cook PVI: D+9

Primary Date: June 25th, 2024

After 19 years, Rep. Brian Higgins (D) announced he would be retiring this heavily Democratic Congressional District serving Buffalo and Western New York. Higgins cited growing dysfunction in Congress as his primary reason for vacating the seat. State Senator Tim Kennedy has emerged as the Democratic Party favorite in the race, highlighting his support for a woman's right to choose and strengthening the nation's gun laws.

Candidates:

[Tim Kennedy \(D\)](#)

### **Open Seat: OR-03**

Cook PVI: D+22

Primary Date: May 21st, 2024

With Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D) retiring after nearly 30 years serving this overwhelmingly Democratic Congressional District, progressive candidate Susheela Jayapal (D) has emerged as the frontrunner in the race. Jayapal has secured endorsements from national progressive leaders in this open seat that will almost certainly remain in Democratic hands.

Candidates:

[Susheela Jayapal \(D\)](#)

## DISTRICT SUMMARIES

### **Open Seat: SC-03**

Cook PVI: R+21

Primary Date: June 11th, 2024

The retirement of Rep. Jeff Duncan (R), who was originally elected to Congress in 2010 as part of the Tea Party wave that gave Republicans control of the House, has left his seat open. Several conservative candidates have emerged in the race for this heavily Republican Congressional District in South Carolina.

Candidates:

[Sheri Biggs \(R\)](#)

[Kevin Bishop \(R\)](#)

[Stewart Jones \(R\)](#)

### **Open Seat: UT-03**

Cook PVI: R+13

Primary Date: June 25th, 2024

With Rep. John Curtis (R) vacating this heavily Republican seat to run for the Senate seat Mitt Romney is leaving at the end of the year, a slew of candidates announced their candidacy. Roosevelt Mayor and businessman Ron Bird has emerged as the frontrunner with a significant fundraising edge.

Candidates:

[Ron "JR" Bird \(R\)](#)

## DISTRICT SUMMARIES

### Open Seat: VA-07

Cook PVI: D+1

Primary Date: June 18th, 2024

Rep. Abigail Spanberger's (D) exit from the House to run for the governor's office in Virginia has left his seat open in what will surely be one of the most competitive races of the 2024 cycle. Candidates have emerged on both sides of the aisle to compete for the opportunity to represent this evenly divided Congressional District in the northern part of the state.

Candidates:

[Eugene Vindman \(D\)](#)

[Derrick Anderson \(R\)](#)

[Cameron Hamilton \(R\)](#)

[Bill Moher \(R\)](#)

### Open Seat: WA-05

Cook PVI: R+8

Primary Date: August 6th, 2024

Several Republican candidates have emerged in the highly contested race to replace Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R), who has represented the swath of eastern Washington in the House for nearly two decades.

Candidates:

[Michael Baumgartner \(R\)](#)

[Brian Dinsel \(R\)](#)

[Jacquelin Maycumber \(R\)](#)

## DISTRICT SUMMARIES

### Open Seat: WA-06

Cook PVI: D+6

Primary Date: August 6th, 2024

After announcing his retirement from Congress, Rep. Derek Kilmer (D) promptly offered his endorsement of Hillary Franz, Commissioner of Public Lands, in Washington's 6th Congressional District. Franz has consolidated support among Democratic groups in this Democratic leaning open seat.

Candidates:

[Hilary Franz \(D\)](#)

### Open Seat: WI-08

Cook PVI: R+10

Primary Date: August 13th, 2024

After announcing that he would vacate his seat after serving in the House since 2017, Rep. Mike Gallagher (R) left this Republican leaning seat open. Without a special election on the horizon due to Wisconsin State law, several candidates have emerged in the Republican field to fill the vacancy come November.

Candidates:

[André Jacque \(R\)](#)

[Roger Roth \(R\)](#)

### Open Seat: WV-02

Cook PVI: R+2

Primary Date: May 14th, 2024

With Rep. Alex Mooney's (R) announcement that he would run for the Senate, several candidates have emerged in this Congressional District which will almost certainly remain in Republican hands.

Candidates:

[Riley Moore \(R\)](#)

[Chris Walker \(R\)](#)