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SPOTLIGHT

Power Ranking Bracketology

Not all seats can make the cut.

By James A. Downs

Not every race has the privilege of appearing on *Hotline's* Power Rankings, which ranks the country's 20 races most likely to flip. Like college basketball's March Madness, in which some teams come up just short of the big dance, a handful of races narrowly missed the cut for inclusion on the initial list.

Their exclusion reflects a small but competitive battlefield that is likely to evolve over the several months before the election.

Here are the first four out.

WA-03: Rep. Marie Gluesenkamp Perez (D) has established an independent brand during her first two sessions in Congress. Following her narrow win in 2022, she increased her margin to 4 points as she faced Republican Joe Kent for the second time. Gluesenkamp Perez won't face Kent again, but despite it being a historically red seat, it's one of the few that shifted left in 2024. She's emerged as one of the best Democratic fundraisers, and she does not currently have an opponent.

AZ-01: Each cycle, Democrats gear up to defeat Rep. David Schweikert (R), and each year they come up short. Schweikert has been a perennial candidate on this list but starts the cycle on the outside looking in because of his ability to survive. Democrats had a crowded primary last year, and it's shaping up to be another large field. The state's August primary does not help either. Schweikert will always be vulnerable in the swingy Scottsdale area, but he's proven to be ironclad.

PA-08: President Trump's performance in Pennsylvania helped Rep. Rob Bresnahan (R) get over the finish line last year, but the Scranton-area district had been shifting right for some time. Bresnahan hasn't made it easy for himself, racking up several negative headlines over his stock trades despite campaigning to ban members from doing so. Still, the district went to Trump by more than 8 points, and it'll be a tough lift for Dems back into this seat—especially with former Rep. Matt Cartwright (D) passing on a bid.

NY-04: Long Island has been shifting right over the last few cycles, but round two proved more fruitful for Rep. Laura Gillen (D), who got over the finish line despite Trump carrying the district. Gillen faces a few headwinds: The freshman reelection campaign is hard and Gov. Kathy Hochul (D), whose unpopularity was an obstacle for Democrats in 2022. But in a year likely more favorable to Democrats, Gillen may have a slight advantage.

— *James A. Downs*

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Quote of the Day

" Well, darlings ... The curtain falls, the spotlight dims, and the rhinestones are packed. ... I may be leaving the stage (for now), but trust me legends never truly exit. " — Expelled Rep. George Santos' (R-NY) final missive before reporting to prison, X, 7/24.

HOTLINE LATEST EDITION

Mark Kelly to visit Michigan

By Erika Filter

DEMOCRATS: Democratic Donors Frustrated with DNC

"Many Democratic donors are frustrated, and some feel they have not gotten enough outreach from the DNC this year."

- **INFIGHTING PERSISTS.** "Some in the party question" DNC Chair Ken Martin's "leadership and would have preferred a chair with deeper relationships with big donors: A rival candidate, former Wisconsin Democratic Party chair Ben Wikler, had more donor ties and was backed by" LinkedIn co-founder Reid Hoffman and megadonor George Soros's PAC. (*Washington Post*)
- **WE DON'T DESERVE THIS.** Former DNC vice chair David Hogg's PAC Leaders We Deserve "has yet to deliver in many ways on its ambitious promise to shake up the Democratic Party establishment with an infusion of money and attention lavished on a new generation of liberal candidates."
- **WHERE'S THE MONEY.** Hogg pledged his group "would spend \$20 million to challenge 'out-of-touch, ineffective' older House Democrats in 2026 primaries. Three months after his promise, the group has made little progress toward that goal." (*Washington Post*)

REPUBLICANS: Trump Selects Joe Gruters as RNC Chair Replacement

In his Truth Social post endorsing RNC Chair Michael Whatley for Senate in North Carolina, President Trump also endorsed Florida state Sen. Joe Gruters (R) to take the helm at the RNC. (Truth Social) "Gruters is a Trump ally who has served in the Florida Senate since 2018 and as RNC treasurer since earlier this year. Gruters has clashed with Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis (R), who was a bitter rival of Trump

during the 2024 presidential primary." (*The Hill*)

WHITE HOUSE: Trump Touts Golf Properties in Scotland

"Using this week's presidential overseas trip" to Scotland, "with its sprawling entourage of advisers, White House and support staffers, Secret Service agents and reporters—to help show off Trump-brand golf destinations demonstrates how the president has become increasingly comfortable intermingling his governing pursuits with promoting his family's business interests."

- **THIS IS FINE.** "The White House has brushed off questions about potential conflicts of interest, arguing that" President Trump's "business success before he entered politics was a key to his appeal with voters." (AP)

2028 WATCH: Mark Kelly to Visit Michigan

Sen. Mark Kelly (D-AZ) "will travel to Michigan on Friday with his wife," former Rep. Gabby Giffords (D-AZ), for a town hall in the suburban-Detroit area Rep. John James (R-10) represents.

- **RUMORS.** "The swing state trip may ... stoke talk of the Arizona Democrat's future ambitions, after he was on" former Vice President Kamala Harris' shortlist of potential running mates. (*Semafor*)

HOTLINE LATEST EDITION

Trump endorses two Michaels in open Senate races

By Nicholas Anastácio

ENDORSEMENT ROUNDUP: Trump, NRSC Endorses Michael Whatley in North Carolina

President Trump confirmed his endorsement of RNC Chairman Michael Whatley's campaign to replace retiring Sen. Thom Tillis (R-NC) in a Truth Social post. (Truth Social)

- **ALL THE LOVE.** The NRSC also endorsed Whatley's Senate bid on Thursday. NRSC Chairman Tim Scott called Whatley "a strong America First conservative who will be a champion for North Carolina in the U.S. Senate." (release)
- **MICHIGAN.** The president endorsed 2024 nominee Mike Rogers (R) to replace retiring Sen. Gary Peters (D), signaling the former congressman's glidepath to the Republican nomination. Trump intervened to steer Rep. Bill Huizenga (R-04) away from the GOP primary. (Truth Social)
- **FLORIDA.** Trump endorsed Sen. Ashley Moody (R) ahead of next year's special election. The senator was appointed to the seat by Gov. Ron DeSantis (R), who ran against Trump in the 2024 presidential primaries with Moody's support. (Truth Social)

FLORIDA: Moms for Liberty Opponent Eyes Moody Challenge

Former Brevard County School Board member Jennifer Jenkins (D) is considering a challenge against Sen. Ashley Moody (R) in next year's special election. Jenkins is the founder of Educated. We Stand, a political committee that seeks to weaken conservative influence in education policy and combat groups like Moms for Liberty.

- **PAST VICTORY.** Jenkins unseated Moms for Liberty co-founder Tina Descovich on the Brevard County School Board before she founded the group during a 2020 nonpartisan election.
- **DÉJÀ VU.** Jenkins previously considered challenging Sen. Rick Scott (R) in 2024. Scott ultimately faced 2024 nominee Debbie Mucarsel-Powell (D), defeating the former congresswoman by roughly 13 points.
- **DEM INTERESTED.** 2025 FL-06 nominee Josh Weil (D) is the only Democrat in the race and retired Army Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Vindman (D) is considering a bid. (*Florida Phoenix*)

GEORGIA: Brian Kemp Privately Backs Derek Dooley, Pushes Competitor Out

Gov. Brian Kemp (R) is working behind the scenes to push former Tennessee football coach Derek Dooley's (R) campaign against Sen. Jon Ossoff (D). Kemp privately told Reps. Buddy Carter (R-01) and Mike Collins (R-10), along with Insurance Commissioner John King (R), that he wouldn't support their campaigns.

- **ONE OUT, ONE REMAINS.** King dropped out of the race shortly after the meeting with Kemp, deciding to run for reelection instead. Carter pledged to remain in the race, saying: "Politicians don't elect our Senators—the people of Georgia do."
- **ONE TO THREE.** Collins and Dooley are expected to enter the race soon as Carter remains alone in the GOP primary at the moment. (*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*)
- **MEANWHILE.** Duty and Honor, a PAC affiliated with the Democratic-aligned Senate Majority PAC, is launching a \$1.5 million ad buy boosting Ossoff on air. The 30-second spot said the senator is "working to lower costs for Georgia," touting he voted against the OBBB because it would "cut health care and give tax cuts to billionaires." (*Punchbowl News*)

KANSAS: Marshall Town Hall Attendee Becomes Dem Challenger

Attorney Anne Parelkar (D) attended a chaotic March town hall hosted by Sen. Roger Marshall (R) in Oakley, questioning the senator about the efficiency of reducing the federal workforce's size. Marshall said she was being fed misinformation. Parelkar filed on Thursday to run against him next year. (*Hotline* reporting)

- **PARTY SWITCH.** Parelkar, identifying herself as a registered Republican at the time, told HPPR that she drove five hours from Overland Park to attend the town hall meeting.
- **SENATOR'S CLAIM.** Marshall initially claimed the raucous attendees at the town hall were "paid Democratic operatives," later backtracking and saying he didn't have "firsthand evidence." (*Topeka Capital-Journal*)
- **HOTLINE ANALYSIS.** A Democrat hasn't won a Senate seat in Kansas since 1932. President Trump won the state by 16 points last year, and Marshall won the seat by roughly 11 points in 2020. Parelkar has an interesting start but a lot of work to do.

NORTH CAROLINA: Dem Nomination Within Roy Cooper's Grasp

Former Gov. Roy Cooper's (D) expected run for Senate could clear the Democratic primary for the open seat. Former Rep. Wiley Nickel (D) "has already begun exploring a bid for district attorney in Wake County." (*Semafor*)

- **GOP FOCUS.** The NRSC is out with a digital ad that paints Cooper as a "yes to Democrats and the far left." The ad points to the Democrat's support for former President Biden and former Vice President Kamala Harris—both failed to win the Tar Heel State during their presidential runs. (*Punchbowl News*)

TEXAS: Ken Paxton's Troubles Accumulate

State Attorney General Ken Paxton (R) is facing further scrutiny as he challenges Sen. John Cornyn (R).

- **SAVING MONEY.** Paxton and his wife, state Sen. Angela Paxton (R), inaccurately declared three houses as their primary residence, enabling the soon-to-be divorced couple to pay low interest rates and collect a homestead tax break on two of the homes.
- **CONSEQUENCES.** "It is a federal and state crime to knowingly make false statements on mortgage documents."
- **JUXTAPOSITION.** President Trump has accused Sen. Adam Schiff (D-CA) and New York Attorney General Letitia James (D) of mortgage fraud. Paxton weighed in on the investigation of James, telling supporters that he hoped "she's actually held accountable." (AP)
- **IGNORING STAFF.** Paxton has also "grown increasingly reliant on pricey private lawyers to argue cases on behalf of the state, rather than the hundreds of attorneys who work within his office." (*Texas Tribune/ProPublica*)
- **NOT THE DELEGATION'S FAN.** Republicans aren't rallying behind Rep. Wesley Hunt's (R-38) potential Senate bid. "Senior Senate and Trumpworld sources, along with members of the Texas delegation, told *NOTUS* they've become annoyed with Hunt and his efforts to undermine Cornyn."
- **CORNYN'S FIRST.** Rep. Jake Ellzey (R-06) is supporting Cornyn's reelection, becoming the senator's first endorsement from the Texas congressional delegation. (*NOTUS*)

HOTLINE LATEST EDITION

<i>Hotline</i> releases first Power Rankings of the cycle

By James A. Downs and Amelia Monroe

RACE FOR THE HOUSE: Assessing the Battlefield

Hotline released its first power rankings of the cycle, which tracks the seats most likely to flip. Republicans have a three-seat majority and must defy history in order to hang on to the chamber. Rep. Don Bacon's (R-NE 02) open seat is the clear No. 1 on the list. Several freshman lawmakers make the list as well, underscoring the difficulty of a candidate's first reelection campaign.

- **FAMILIAR FACES.** Reps. Jared Golden (D-ME 02), Marcy Kaptur (D-OH 09), and David Valadao (R-CA 22)—all perennial targets—again make the list.
- **OPEN SEATS.** In addition to Bacon's seat, the open MI-10 also appears.

- **READ ALL ABOUT IT.** Read the full list here. (*Hotline* reporting)

REDISTRICTING ROUNDUP: Hearings Begin in Texas

“Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries and his political team have been looking into all possible options to pursue redistricting in states with full Democratic control.” Democrats face more problems than Republicans because over the years more blue states have established independent redistricting commissions while red states have not.

- **BY THE NUMBERS.** Illinois, Maryland, and Oregon do not have commissions but there are only five House Republicans across the three states, so the gains could be limited. Some states would need a change in their constitutions, most often accomplished by ballot initiative, which could run into timing issues. Others, like New York, could try to pursue redistricting through the courts. (*Punchbowl News*)
- **NOT A HUGE APPETITE.** “The first hearing on the plan to redraw Texas' congressional boundaries got under way Thursday with no proposed new map for the public to comment on and no compelling reason to scrap the plan enacted just four years earlier, other than the fact that Gov. Greg Abbott (R) ordered it up in the special legislative session.”
- **IN THE ROOM.** State Rep. Cody Vasut (R), who chairs the Legislature's redistricting committee, said he did not ask for a remapping. He said they would adhere to the Voting Rights Act with any new districts. “Vasut said no map will be filed until after the public hearings in Houston on Saturday and in Arlington on Monday are completed.” (*Austin American-Statesman*)

IOWA 04: Business Man Invests in Feenstra's Seat

Entrepreneur Ryan Rhodes (R) announced his bid for Congress, to fill Rep. Randy Feenstra's (R) seat, who filed paperwork to run for governor. Rhodes is a minority party candidate, representing the state's Tea Party, a right-leaning political group.

- **THE FIELD.** Rhodes joins a crowded field, taking on three Republican and Democratic candidates, including Siouxland Chamber president Chris McGowan (R) and state Rep. Matt Windschitl (R). (KCAU)

MICHIGAN 10: One Democrat Drops From Crowded Primary Race

Military veteran Tripp Adams (D) officially conceded his bid for Congress in the race to replace Rep. John James (R), who is running for governor. Adams' withdrawal comes amid mental health struggles in the wake of the United States exiting Afghanistan in 2021.

- **ADAMS SAYS.** “Throughout my life, I have been committed to serving others. ... While this service has been the greatest honor of my life, I must acknowledge that it has taken a significant personal toll on me and my family.” (X)
- **STATE OF THE RACE.** Despite Adams' exit the Democratic primary stays crowded. The race will include former Biden administration official Eric Chung (D), Pontiac Mayor Tim Greimel (D), former special victims prosecutor Christina Hines (D), and Army veteran Alex Hawkins (D). There is no Republican candidate that has confirmed a bid.
- **RIGHT ON TIME.** *Hotline* ranked this seat as the No. 19 seat most likely to flip.

NEBRASKA 02: Eye Surgeon Eyes Seat

Retired eye surgeon Mark Johnston (D) launched a bid to succeed retiring Rep. Don Bacon (R). Johnston owned and operated a surgery center for 20 years and he said he's volunteered on several congressional and presidential campaigns.

- **THE FIELD.** Johnston joins a burgeoning Democratic field to replace Bacon: Navy veteran Kishla Askins (D), state Sen. John Cavanaugh (D), political operative Denise Powell (D), and Douglas County District Court Clerk Crystal Rhoades (D). On the Republican side, Omaha City Councilor Brinker Harding (R) and former state Sen. Brett Lindstrom (R) are running. (*Omaha World-Herald*)
- **TIMELY.** The Omaha seat was named the No. 1 district likely to flip by *Hotline*.

TENNESSEE 07 SPECIAL: State Sets Special

State officials announced the timeline to replace former Rep. Mark Green (R), who resigned this week. The special primary will take place on Oct. 7, while the general election will be held on Dec. 2.

- **THE FIELD.** The race has drawn a crowd, including three Democratic state lawmakers and two Republicans, in addition to other Republican officials. State Reps. Bo Mitchell (D), Aftyn Behn (D), and Vincent Dixie (D) are running. State Reps. Lee Reeves (R) and Jody Barrett (R) are also in the race. Former General Services Commissioner Matt Van Epps (R) scored the Green endorsement. (AP)

TEXAS 15: State Superstar Contends With Swinging Latino Vote

Musician Bobby Pulido (D), a Tejano music star, is eyeing the race against Rep. Monica De La Cruz (R) and formed an exploratory committee as he considers a run. De La Cruz is the only Republican in the state that Democrats are targeting, but Republicans' ploy to redraw district boundaries could put the seat out of reach.

- **LATINO SHIFT.** If Pulido confirms his bid, he'll have to withstand the rightward shift among Latino voters. The Latino vote was a pivotal part of cementing De La Cruz's win. In 2022, De La Cruz was elected as the district's first Republican representative by an 8-point margin. Her margin swelled to 14 points in 2024.
- **HEATING UP.** If Pulido opts for a run he'll face emergency physician Ada Cueller (D) in the primary. However, Pulido has powerful allies among the Democratic party, including influential Latino lawmakers: Sen. Ruben Gallego (D-AZ), Rep. Joaquin Castro (D-20), and former Rep. Filemon Vela (D-TX). NRCC spokesperson Zach Bannon said he was confident that De La Cruz would hold the seat, regardless of Pulido's decision. (*Texas Tribune*)

HOTLINE LATEST EDITION

Badger State faces open gubernatorial race after Tony Evers declines run for a third term

By Abby Turner

ALASKA: Mary Peltola Hints at Change Coming to Governorship

Former Rep. Mary Peltola (D) “took to social media Wednesday night attacking” Gov. Mike Dunleavy (R) “for using ‘extremist politics’ and hinting at a change coming to the state’s governorship next year.” Peltola has not formally announced a run for governor, but Democrats in the state see her as a strong candidate to run for the open seat. (KTUU)

- **IN THE REPUBLICAN FIELD.** State Sen. Shelley Hughes (R) is the seventh Republican to enter the race to succeed term-limited Dunleavy. (*Anchorage Daily News*)

MICHIGAN: Jocelyn Benson Doubles Fundraising Record Set by Whitmer

Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson’s (D) campaign announced she raised over \$3.5 million since launching her campaign in January and had \$2.4 million on hand. Her campaign said she more than doubled the fundraising record set by Gov. Gretchen Whitmer (D) in the Democratic primary in 2018. (release)

- **ON THE INDEPENDENT BID.** Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan’s (I) campaign said it raised more than \$3.2 million in six months and had \$2.3 million on hand. The campaign said it raised \$1.4 million of that haul in the last 30 days. (release)

NEW JERSEY: Mikie Sherrill Chooses Centenary College President as Running Mate

Rep. Mikie Sherrill (D-11) selected Centenary College President Dale Caldwell (D) as her running mate. Caldwell is a Methodist pastor, former school board member, and former president and CEO of the United States Tennis Association who has “a long history of government service.” (*New Jersey Globe*)

- **ON ZOOM.** “A virtual meeting of the New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission on Thursday” to select sponsors for gubernatorial debates “was interrupted by a ‘Zoom bomb’ of pornographic, racist and antisemitic images and audio,” an incident that “is being investigated by the Division of Criminal Justice” in the state. (*Politico*)

NEVADA: Catherine Cortez Masto Endorses Aaron Ford in Democratic Primary

Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto (D) endorsed state Attorney General Aaron Ford (D) in his challenge to unseat Gov. Joe Lombardo (R). He will face Washoe County Commissioner Alexis Hill (D) in the primary, and potentially former Gov. Steve Sisolak (D) if he runs again. (KTVN)

OKLAHOMA: Two More Republicans Enter Race to Succeed Stitt

Former state Sen. Jake Anthony Merrick (R) and mechanical contractor Kenneth Sturgell (R) both joined the Republican primary field to succeed term-limited Gov. Kevin Stitt (R). Others in the field include state House Speaker Charles McCall (R), state Attorney General Gentner Drummond (R), and former state Sen. Mike Mazzei (R). (KGOU)

SOUTH CAROLINA: Ralph Norman to File Paperwork for Gubernatorial Bid

Rep. Ralph Norman (R-05), “among the most conservative Republicans in the U.S. House,” is expected to file candidacy paperwork to run for governor today.

- **NOT RIDING WITH TRUMP.** “Unlike several of his fellow candidates, he’s not expected to seek the endorsement of the Republican whose backing in South Carolina GOP politics matters most:” President Trump.
- **BUT OTHERS ARE.** State Attorney General Alan Wilson (R), Lt. Gov. Pamela Evette (R), and Rep. Nancy Mace (R-01), who is expected to announce her campaign soon, have all “touted their ties to Trump.” (AP)

WISCONSIN: Evers Will Not Seek Third Term, First Democrat Jumps in the Race

Gov. Tony Evers (D) announced he will not seek a third term, “setting off a scramble to replace the two-term Democrat in the battleground state’s first open race for governor in 16 years.”

- **ALREADY IN.** Former Navy SEAL Bill Berrien (R) and Washington County Executive Josh Schoemann (R) are already running, but “the open race is sure to attract several Democratic and Republican candidates.”
- **WHO IS INTERESTED.** Democrats who may jump in include state Attorney General Josh Kaul (D), Secretary of State Sarah Godlewski (D), and former Lt. Gov. Mandela Barnes (D). Former Gov. Scott Walker (R), who Evers defeated in 2018, appeared to tease another possible run. (AP)
- **FIRST DEM ENTERS.** Lt. Gov. Sara Rodriguez (D) “is the first Wisconsin Democrat to announce a campaign for governor, launching her candidacy less than 24 hours after” Evers’ announcement.
- **ALREADY ON VIDEO.** Rodriguez introduced herself in an announcement video, touting her experience working in the healthcare industry and her entry into politics in the state assembly. She added that “we’ve got a real shot at flipping the state legislature,” where Republicans hold the majority in both chambers. (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*)
- **JUMPING IN SOON.** Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley (D) said “he is preparing to enter the race for governor” in the coming weeks. (WISN)
- **HOTLINE ANALYSIS.** Evers’ decision not to seek a third term is just the beginning of what will be a high-stakes election cycle for Wisconsin Democrats. With newly redrawn legislative maps giving them a shot at flipping the state Legislature, Democrats will field through a crowded slate of candidates to pick a nominee who can not only win the governor’s seat but deliver turnout down the ballot.

OVERLOOKED

Breaking the Glass Ceiling

By Amelia Monroe

Rep. Mikie Sherrill (D-NJ 11) tapped a Methodist pastor, Dale Caldwell as her running mate in the upcoming gubernatorial primaries. On the other side of the aisle, 2021 nominee Jack Ciattarelli (R) selected Morris County Sheriff James Gannon as his lieutenant governor. The lieutenant governor is the second-highest position in a state, serving a similar purpose to the Vice President, where they preside as acting governor in the event of the state leaders absence, vacancy, or incapacitation. The position's adoption varies across the country, with five

states—Arizona, Maine, New Hampshire, Oregon, and Wyoming—forgoing the job altogether. New Jersey only recently joined the party, adding the lieutenant governor job in 2010. If Caldwell or Gannon were to be on the winning ticket in 2026, they would be the first male lieutenant governor in the state.