

**ELECTION FORECASTER:**

# Oregon congressional races are tightening

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Three open congressional seats in Oregon are less firmly in Democratic control, according to a report on Friday.

The day also saw a GOP legislative candidate find an innovative ad strategy and the biggest little political party in the state issue its candidate list.

The Cook Political Report, a top national election forecaster, on Friday reported that it was now rating three open congressional

seats in Oregon as less of a lock for Democrats in November. The races are key to which party will control the U.S. House of Representatives after the Nov. 8 election. Democrats currently hold a 220-210 majority, with five vacancies. The party of a new president has lost seats in the first midterm after the presidential election in the past 100 years, with the exception of 1934 (amid the Great Depression) and 2002 (after the 9/11 terrorist attacks).

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## Election

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The softening of the outlook for Democratic wins in Congress is part of a nationwide trend that The Cook Political Report, as well as other top political forecasters such as FiveThirtyEight and the Center for Politics at the University of Virginia, say reflects voter dissatisfaction with President Joe Biden and Congress for their handling of a record increase in inflation. Oregon Democrats say the forecasts do not take into account the deeply conservative GOP candidates who won the primaries, particularly following the U.S. Supreme Court ruling overturning *Roe v. Wade* abortion rights. The GOP candidates, Democrats say, will not appeal to swing voters in a traditionally Democrat-tilting state.

The Cook Report on Friday moved:

- The 4th Congressional District rating from “likely Democratic” to “leans Democratic.” The retirement of longtime U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Springfield, created an open seat in the district, which includes Eugene, Corvallis and Roseburg. Labor Commissioner Val Hoyle dropped her reelection campaign to run for Congress instead. She was endorsed by DeFazio and won the Democratic primary. She now faces Alek Skarlatos of Roseburg, who has been the recipient of national GOP financial aid after giving DeFazio the closest race of his career in 2020. Though the new political maps were drawn to make the district easier for a Democrat to win, national GOP groups have continued to heavily finance Skarlatos’ second bid.

- The 6th Congressional District moved from “likely Democratic” to “leans Democratic.” Oregon was awarded a sixth congressional district for 2022 due to its population growth. The district, with no incumbent, was placed in the Salem area. Rep. Andrea Salinas of Lake Oswego won the Democratic primary and faces Republican Mike Erickson. In order to create the 6th district, the 5th district was pushed east and realigned to run from Portland, over the Cascades, to Bend.

- The 5th Congressional District had already been moved from “leans Demo-

*Oregon’s largest minor party has rolled out its list of 51 nominees for the 2022 election. The Independent Party of Oregon, which counts 137,790 registered voters, mostly cross-nominated Democrats, including U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon. Republican Sen. Bill Kenemer and a few other exceptions made the list.*

cratic” to “toss-up” following the May 17 primary defeat of incumbent U.S. Rep. Kurt Schrader, D-Canby, by Terbonne attorney Jamie McLeod-Skinner.

During redistricting, majority Democrats in the Legislature drew political maps that were opposed by Republicans. Kyle Kondik of the University of Virginia Center for Politics was among independent analysts who said the maps were drawn in a way to ensure that Democrats would likely win five of the six seats, including the new 6th district around Salem. Two districts — the 1st Congressional District in Northwest Oregon held by U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici, D-Beaverton, and the 3rd Congressional District centered on Portland held by U.S. Rep. Earl Blumenauer, D-Portland — are considered overwhelmingly Democratic seats. The 2nd Congressional District seat of U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, is prohibitively Republican. It takes in nearly all of Eastern, Central and Southwestern Oregon.

### Legislative candidate spends big for fair sponsorship

Bend Republican Michael Sipe took an unusual campaign advertising step in his bid for state House District 53. Along with the usual digital ads on Facebook and television commercial buys, Sipe paid \$25,000 to be one of the title sponsors of the Deschutes County Fair & Rodeo, which began Wednesday and runs through Sunday.

Sipe is seeking to win the seat currently held by Rep. Jack Zika, R-Redmond. Major population growth and an influx of Democratic voters have shrunken and changed the demographics of the district. It has gone from favoring Republicans to a slight Democratic tilt, according to maps filed with the Oregon Legislature last fall. Zika opted not to run for reelection. Sipe will face Bend attorney Emerson Levy, the Democratic nominee, in November. Levy ran a strong race against Zika in

2020 before the district was shorn of Republican enclaves such as Sunriver.

### Candidates crossing over

The Oregon Secretary of State’s Office has reported that 10 candidates for the Legislature have qualified as write-ins for the November general election. The largest number are officeholders or candidates of one party who received enough write-in votes to also be listed with another party. Rep. Bobby Levy, R-Echo, can also be listed as a Democrat on the ballot. Same for Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane, Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner, and Rep. Christine Goodwin, R-Canbyville. Flipping the political cross-pollination the other way is Sen. Floyd Prozanski, D-Eugene, who qualified to also receive the Republican line under his name.

### Independent Party lineup is in place

Oregon’s largest minor party has rolled out its list of 51 nominees for the 2022 election. The Independent Party of Oregon, which counts 137,790 registered voters, mostly cross-nominated Democrats, including U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon.

Republican Sen. Bill Kenemer and a few other exceptions made the list.

“We cross-nominated two other Republicans, Mark Owens in House District 60, who is unopposed in any case, and John Velez in Senate District 13,” said Andrew Kaza, an Independent Party board member from Sisters.

Owens’ district is the largest by area in the state, taking up most of the southeastern quarter of Oregon and stretching from the Idaho border to southeastern Deschutes County. Alistair Firmin, a Republican running in House District 38, was also added to the Independent Party nominee list.

The nomination allows candidates to list both their original party and the Independent Party of Oregon on the November ballot.

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