Texas House: Emerging Battlegrounds

By Leah Askarinam

Democrats didn’t win every competitive House race in Texas in 2018, but they picked up two Republican seats. And some strategists are talking about The Lone Star State being the next Orange County, Calif., where Democrats organized to pick up four seats in 2018 after decades of Republican control.

It’s too early to know exactly what the 2020 political landscape will look like, including the fights for the House, Senate and presidency. But it’s clear that Texas will be part of the conversation.

In 2018, House Republicans were on defense across the country. Looking ahead, however, after losing 40 seats, 2020 offers more opportunities for the GOP to play offense, considering 31 Democrats now represent districts that Donald Trump carried in 2016.

But 2018 House results highlighted new vulnerabilities too, namely GOP-held seats in the suburbs. If Democrats target House districts that they narrowly lost in 2018, Texas will be a battleground state in their fight to hold the majority. Texas is home to six of the 25 districts nationally that Democrats lost by five points or less. And in 10 Texas districts, Republicans won with less than 55 percent.

The demographic and geographic profiles of those 10 districts offer hope for Democrats, especially after the party’s success in the suburbs in 2018. Those 10 districts are anchored by the state’s major cities — Houston, Dallas, Fort Worth, San Antonio, and Austin. These districts are also highly educated: four fall within the top 50 congressional districts in the country in terms of the share of residents with a bachelor’s degree or higher. And five are majority-minority districts.

Even though he lost statewide, Democratic Rep. Beto O’Rourke carried three of the 10 districts that Republicans narrowly held, and he came within about 5 points of carrying the remaining seven, according to calculations by J. Miles Coleman.

But the DNA of these districts doesn’t entirely explain why so many Texas districts hosted such close races. The political environment in Texas was unique in 2018. In his campaign to defeat Sen. Ted Cruz, O’Rourke spent $80 million (through Nov. 26), bolstering Democratic turnout. And given that the House majority was within reach, Democratic activists across the country donated en masse to U.S. House candidates. Ahead of 2020, the question is whether Texas will see another large-scale, statewide investment from a Democratic Senate or presidential candidate — and, if that candidate is someone other than O’Rourke, whether the enthusiasm he generated is replicable.

Texas would be a major investment for a Democratic presidential nominee, requiring significant spending in the state’s expensive Dallas

Continued on page 3
Iowa’s 4th District: A King Without a Kingdom?

By Nathan L. Gonzales

GOP Rep. Steve King of Iowa prevailed in a close general election in 2018, but he could face competitive primary and general election races in 2020.

State Sen. Randy Feenstra didn’t mention King by name when he announced his candidacy on Jan. 9 but plans to challenge the eight-term congressman in the GOP primary. Feenstra is from Hull (population 2,309), in Sioux County, approximately an hour north of Sioux City, in the northwest corner of the state. King lives in Crawford County, in the southwest corner of the district.

“Today, Iowa’s 4th District doesn’t have a voice in Washington, because our current representative’s caustic nature has left us without a seat at the table,” Feenstra said in a release. “We don’t need any more sideshows or distractions, we need to start winning for Iowa’s families.” King is facing bipartisan criticism for comments and tweets about white nationalism.

Typically, Members face primary challenges from ideological opponents who argue that the incumbent is not conservative (or not liberal) enough. That might be a difficult strategy for Feenstra considering King has supported President Trump 92 percent of the time, according to FiveThirtyEight. But Feenstra’s message appears to be about effectiveness. It’s similar to the blueprint Republican Roger Marshall used to defeat Rep. Tim Huelskamp 58-42 percent in the 2016 GOP primary in Kansas’ 1st District. Huelskamp’s actions and prickly personality got him removed from the Agriculture Committee. Major groups such as the Kansas Farm Bureau, National Association of Wheat Growers, National Cattlemen’s Beef Association and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce eventually endorsed Marshall.

Huelskamp won his 2014 primary by just 10 points, so there was evidence of vulnerability before he lost. King, on the other hand, won his 2018 primary with 75 percent, so it’s not a clean comparison. But King’s situation seems to be worsening by the day.

The state party is neutral in the primary. “As we are in all legitimate primary contests, the Republican Party of Iowa will remain neutral in this race,” said state party chairman Jeff Kaufmann. “The good people of the fourth district will have the ultimate say.”

National Republican Congressional Committee Chairman Tom Emmer told The Hill the committee was unlikely to get involved in the primary. Protecting incumbents is normally the priority for campaign committees.

In 2018, NRCC Chairman Steve Stivers called some previous comments from King inappropriate and the committee declined to spend late in the congressman’s competitive general election race.

Both of Iowa’s Republican senators, Chuck Grassley and Joni Ernst (who is up for re-election), condemned King’s comments as well. Democratic Rep. Bobby Rush of Illinois introduced language on Monday for the House to formally censure King. Even White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders called King’s comments “abhorrent.”

What’s not immediately clear is if politicians condemning King hurts him in a Republican primary. Being attacked by the political establishment isn’t always harmful, and King represents a district that is more than 91 percent white, according to U.S. Census data. But now that King has been stripped of his committee assignments, he could fall into the Huelskamp trap. It’s also not clear whether Feenstra is up to the challenge. He’s a serious legislator who was first elected to the state Senate in 2008 and is chairman of the powerful Ways and Means Committee, which oversaw massive tax cuts in the state last year, according to The Des Moines Register. And Matt Leopold, former political director for Gov. Kim Reynolds, was listed as the contact on Feenstra’s campaign announcement. But Feenstra, an instructor at Dordt College, has never faced an opponent for the legislature.

King’s status and the primary result have general election consequences. The congressman won re-election by just 3 points, 50-47 percent, over Democrat J.D. Scholten in a district Trump won 60-33 percent in 2016. The district should not be competitive, but if King is nominated again, it would be a takeover opportunity once again for Democrats.
InsIdellections.com

January 18, 2019

Texas 2nd District: Live From Houston

By Leah Askarinam

Saturday Night Live helped make Republican Dan Crenshaw a national figure before he was elected to Congress. But some GOP strategists had already identified him as a rising star. The 2nd District had key components that made it a Democratic takeover opportunity in 2018: an open seat in a majority-minority district that circles around Harris County, from the west to the north of Houston. Plus, the district saw an 11-point drop in the margin for GOP presidential candidates between 2012 and 2016. Rice Univ. is at the edge of the district in the southeast, and 41 percent of residents have a bachelor’s degree or higher (10 points higher than the national average), including half of the non-Hispanic white population (15 points above average), according to the Census American Community Survey’s 2017 five-year estimates.

Rep. Ted Poe, first elected in 2004, announced his retirement a year ahead of the 2018 election, resulting in a crowded and expensive primary battle. One candidate, GOP donor and activist Kathaleen Wall, spent $6.2 million in personal funds on her primary campaign. But she finished third in the initial primary. Crenshaw placed second with 27 percent, qualifying for the runoff alongside state Rep. Kevin Roberts. In the May runoff, Crenshaw received 70 percent, winning the GOP nomination.

While Republicans sorted out who would become their nominee, Democrats were confident that Todd Litton would win his primary. Litton ended up receiving 53 percent in the five-way March primary, avoiding a runoff, but facing under-funded opponents; the most any other Democrat spent on the primary was $101,000.

The DCCC added the 2nd District to its broad list of targets in September, two months before Election Day, though strategists had been excited about Litton’s profile in the Houston-based district for months. Crenshaw, meanwhile, developed a national profile in the closing weeks of the election.

The weekend before the general election, Crenshaw’s name and photo were part of a Saturday Night Live Weekend Update sketch, when Pete Davidson mocked Crenshaw for his eyepatch. Crenshaw appeared on a subsequent show with Davidson after the election, accepting his apology and explaining that he lost his eye in Afghanistan during his third combat tour when he was hit with an IED.

While the Saturday Night Live controversy took the air from the last few days of the campaign, one local Democrat believes that it wasn’t the main cause of Crenshaw’s victory.

Continued on page 4
The Incumbent

A U.S. Navy SEAL, Crenshaw received two Bronze Stars, the Purple Heart, and the Navy Commendation Medal with Valor for his service. After his injury, and two additional deployments, he was medically retired, and received his Master’s in Public Administration at Harvard.

Republicans believe that Crenshaw, a 34-year-old who speaks Spanish, has begun to develop his own brand. He told Roll Call that he was interested in assignments in the Homeland Security and Armed Services committees.

The Democrats

Litton hasn’t ruled out running for the seat again in 2020. A former member of the Texas Lyceum, Litton was born in Houston, and has degrees from Univ. of Texas Law School and Rice Business School. After leaving Enron in 2001, Litton has primarily worked with nonprofits, including leading C Change Consulting to help community organizations collaborate.

If Litton chooses to run, he wouldn’t necessarily clear the field, though no other Democratic names have surfaced yet.

Texas 3rd District: A Second Chance at a First Impression

By Leah Askarinam

At least one Republican expects that this race will not become competitive at all, while Democrats rank it further down their list of possible targets in Texas. Taylor was prepared for a tough race given the demographics of the district, and Burch never became a national star. This race could be one to watch in 2020.

How It Plays Out

Crenshaw has had more success than most GOP freshmen at creating a national platform, and he’s publicly said that he’s looking to create common ground between Democrats and Republicans. His measured response on SNL helped him stand out as a young, charismatic politician who could deliver a joke on air while calling for unity.

Crenshaw overperformed Sen. Ted Cruz, who carried the district 50-49 percent in the 2018 election. Crenshaw, meanwhile, won his race 53-46 percent. Of Texas’s GOP freshmen, Crenshaw may have the strongest profile, though he has yet to establish a voting record in Congress.

It’s hard to imagine that Democrats won’t take a hard look at this seat in 2020. Litton raised $1.5 million last cycle, a bit less than Crenshaw’s $1.9 million. But since 2018 was his first bid for office, Litton may be more successful in a second run.

One Republican strategist theorized that O’Rourke’s percentage in the district was Democrats’ ceiling (49 percent), while Democrat Lupe Valdez’s performance in the governor race was the Democratic floor (43 percent). Even if there are components of the district’s demography and geography that could draw Democratic optimism, Crenshaw will enter the race as the favorite in 2020.

The Incumbent

Taylor is a retired Marine and a real investment banker, who has a bachelor’s degree and MBA from Harvard Univ. Taylor first ran for Congress in 2006, when he challenged Democratic Rep. Chet Edwards’ seat in the 17th District (Waco). He fell short in that race but received national attention as an Iraq war veteran running for office. Taylor served in the state House from 2011-15 and in the state Senate from 2015-18.

Taylor, who considered himself the most conservative member of the Texas state legislature, ran for Congress in 2018 with an endorsement from the Club for Growth.

The Democrats

Raised in Collin County, Lorie Burch attended Trinity Univ. in San Antonio before moving to Washington, D.C. to receive a law degree from George Washington Univ. When she moved back to Plano in 2004, Burch started her own law practice and became active in working with community organizations.

Burch raised $318,000 for her 2018 race — a modest sum compared to the big fundraising numbers other Democratic candidates around the country were raising. Sources believe she is likely to run again, while other potential Democratic names have surfaced.

How It Plays Out

One Republican expects that this race will not become competitive at all, while Democrats rank it further down their list of possible targets in Texas. Taylor was prepared for a tough race given the demographics of the district, and Burch never became a national star. This race could be one to watch in 2020.
Texas 7th District: Culberson Cut Down by Fletcher

By Leah Askarinam

At the beginning of the 2018 cycle, some Republicans were concerned that GOP Rep. John Culberson wasn’t ready for a competitive re-election fight. He ramped up his campaign and still lost to Democrat Lizzie Pannill Fletcher by 5 points.

The Harris County, Houston-area based 7th District was one of the top-tier Democratic Texas targets in 2018 — and one of the most high-profile primaries, when the DCCC stepped in to help nominate what it thought was a viable candidate. The demographics of the district — including a college town, highly-educated voters, and a growing non-white population — seemed to work in favor of Democrats, especially given that Hillary Clinton carried the district in 2016. Mitt Romney, by comparison, received 60 percent in 2012.

Fletcher was positioned to take advantage of the opportunity by raising $6.2 million and with an endorsement from EMILY’s List (along with help from its independent expenditure arm, WOMEN VOTE!). Culberson, after a slow start, had turned his campaign around by summer, but ultimately fell short on Election Day. Culberson spent $3.5 million on his campaign.

The Incumbent

Before being elected to Congress, Fletcher was a Houston-based attorney, becoming the first woman partner at Ahmad, Zavitsanos, Anaipakos, Alavi & Mensing in 2015. She faced a competitive Democratic primary when she ran for the 7th District, but defeated Laura Moser in the runoff, 67-33 percent.

The race gained some national attention because of the DCCC’s effort to prevent Moser from winning the party nomination. The committee thought her disparaging comments about living in Texas and husband’s consulting connections would be a liability in a general election. But Moser and her allies perceived their effort as an attack on progressive Democrats. Fletcher, who has been described as moderate, has said she does not support single-payer health care.

The Republicans

State Rep. Sarah Davis has been mentioned as a potential challenger, as a Republican who supports abortion rights. State Sen. Charles Schwertner had also been mentioned as a potential candidate, though recent allegations of inappropriately texting a graduate student could deter him from running. Former State Rep. Marsha Farney, who lost her most recent election to a Tea Party candidate, has also been mentioned as a potential candidate who could use personal funds for her campaign.

How It Plays Out

Turnout in 2018 looked closer to a presidential election than a typical midterm in the 7th District, according to calculations by Dave Wasserman of the Cook Political Report. Given the attention surrounding the Texas Senate race, one Republican strategist expressed doubt that the 2018 result was not strictly a referendum on President Trump, meaning that the presidential race might not inspire the same turnout that pushed Fletcher over the edge. And, even with Rep. Beto O’Rourke on the ballot boosting turnout and a polarizing Republican president in the White House, Fletcher won by just 5 points.

In a wealthy, formerly-red district, Republicans could end up nominating a self-funder, or a well-connected local Republican. One Republican strategist expressed optimism that Republicans will have a deep bench to choose from, considering the number of Republican residents in those districts.

But Democrats point to a longer-term trend of the district turning blue, and believe that Trump on the ballot will hurt the 7th District GOP nominee in 2020. Plus, Harris County elected a Democratic County Clerk in 2018, ousting a Republican, which could have ramifications for the 7th District. Democrats believe that higher turnout benefits their party, and the new clerk has already started to introduce initiatives to make voting easier.

Texas 10th District: Closer Margins, Higher Spending?

By Leah Askarinam

GOP Rep. Mike McCaul is one of the five wealthiest members of Congress, but that doesn’t mean he’s invincible. In 2018, the congressman had one of his closest re-election races in years.

The 10th District stretches from Travis County in the west, to Harris County in the east, crossing over a handful of rural counties. The Democratic base is in the west, near Austin, while the portion of Harris County that falls into the 10th district includes Republican-leaning suburbs.

President Donald Trump carried the 10th District 52-43 percent in 2016 after Mitt Romney carried it 59-39 percent in 2012. McCaul wasn’t a top-tier Democratic target in 2018, though there had been rumblings about the opportunity among strategists. Mike Siegel, who spent $475,000 on his campaign, received 47 percent; McCaul, who spent $1.8 million, received 51 percent. And, according to calculations by J. Miles Coleman, Democratic Senate candidate Beto O’Rourke carried the district by two-tenths of a percentage point, while Democratic gubernatorial candidate Lupe Valdez trailed by 10 points.

Continued on page 6
The Incumbent

McCaul emerged from an eight-candidate GOP primary in 2004 and defeated a Libertarian candidate in the general election. (There was no Democratic nominee.) Before running for Congress, McCaul was a federal prosecutor for the Justice Department and state deputy attorney general to then-Texas Attorney General John Cornyn. He also led the Joint Terrorism Task Force under the U.S. Attorney’s office in Austin. In 2018, Roll Call reported that McCaul was the fifth wealthiest member of the 115th Congress, with a net worth of $113 million. His wife is the daughter of the founder of San Antonio-based Clear Channel Communications.

McCaul enters the 116th Congress as the ranking member of the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs after previously serving as the chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security.

The Democrats

Civil Rights Lawyer Mike Siegel is likely to run again, though it’s also possible that other Democrats will join the primary. Before his law career, Siegel was a public school teacher in Houston through Teach for America. He co-founded an education nonprofit organization. If Siegel does run again, he may have more fundraising success in the event the district gets more attention.

How It Plays Out

Despite the narrow margin in 2018, one Democratic strategist put the 10th District last on a list of potential 2020 targets at this point in the cycle. But Democrats received 70 percent in the portion of Travis County that falls into the district, providing some Democrats with a glimmer of hope. Democratic House candidates previously received 60 percent in 2016 and 55 percent in 2014.

It’s expected that McCaul will enter the 2018 race with a more focused campaign. And given his personal wealth, McCaul shouldn’t have too much trouble keeping up with Democratic fundraising. In his first run for Congress in 2004, for example, he loaned his campaign nearly $2 million. But this is a race Republicans can’t take for granted.

Texas 21st District: Democrats Testing Austin’s Limits

By Leah Askarinam

After more than 30 years in Congress, Republican Lamar Smith decided to call it quits and more than a dozen Republicans jumped into the race to replace him. The 21st District includes parts of Bexar County that lean Republican and a Democratic base in Travis County, along with a handful of rural counties, including Gillespie. In the 2018 Senate race, Democratic Rep. Beto O’Rourke came up short by a tenth of a point against Sen. Ted Cruz. When Smith announced he wouldn’t run for re-election in 2018, a crowd of 18 Republican hopefuls entered the race for what was perceived to be a relatively safe seat. But Chip Roy stood out from the field for his previous work for Cruz (as the Senator’s former chief of staff) and his endorsement from the Club for Growth. Democrats, meanwhile, were elated about their candidate, Joseph Kopser, a veteran who founded a tech business.

Democrats’ plan for the district, which stretches from San Antonio to Austin, was to boost turnout in Travis County and offset losses in Bexar County, while over performing in the counties in between and to the west, toward the 23rd District. Kopser received 76 percent in Travis County and 48 percent in Bexar County, but sustained heavy losses in the rest of the district.

The Democrat

Texas Democrats believe that Kopser, who could run again, was one of the strongest Democratic candidates on the ticket. But he ended up needing to spend resources early on an expensive primary runoff. For the cycle, Kopser raised $3.2 million and spent about half on his primary race.

Kopser is a West Point graduate who completed Ranger School. He later graduated from Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government and taught politics at West Point. He volunteered to serve in Iraq in 2004. When he returned, he worked for the office of the Army’s Chief of Staff at the Pentagon. In 2012, he built his own company, RideScout, and President Barack Obama named him a White House Champion of Change. He later sold the company to Daimler AG.

How It Plays Out

Democrats still believe Kopser is a strong candidate who has learned his lessons after a competitive primary. In terms of the raw number of votes, Kopser received more than any other Democratic House nominee in Texas, followed by Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson and Colin Allred. One Democratic strategist also believes that Roy has yet to create a brand that would deter potential Democratic challengers from jumping in the ring, unlike 2nd District Rep. Dan Crenshaw. It’s also possible that he faces a challenge from another Republican. Business owner Jenifer Sarver, for example, who placed fifth in the 2018 GOP primary, is open to running again.

Given its proximity to major urban centers, at least one Republican strategist believes that the 21st District will move in the direction of the 7th and 32nd, becoming more competitive. Another source believes that Roy’s associations with Cruz and the Club for Growth could hurt in a district that’s becoming less safe for the GOP. Roy could choose to align himself closer to Cornyn, however, who’s less polarizing, is running for re-election and comes from San Antonio, where he also has a fundraising base.
Texas 22nd District: The Not-So-Secret Race

By Leah Askarinam

Toward the end of the 2018 cycle, there were whispers about sleeper races and Democrat Sri Preston Kulkarni was often one of them. But GOP Rep. Pete Olson was never a top-tier target.

Previously represented by Rep. Tom DeLay, the 22nd District includes a significant non-white population (it’s a majority-minority district) and largely affluent suburbs, including Sugarland and Pearland, south and west of Houston. The district is home to a large Asian-American population (18 percent), including Indian-Americans and Pakistani-Americans. And it’s the third most highly-educated district in Texas, with 45 percent of adults holding a bachelor’s degree or higher.

Recent election results reflect the change in voting behaviors among white, suburban Republican, Chamber-of-Commerce-type conservatives who don’t approve of President Donald Trump. Republican presidential performance plummeted in 2016. Trump carried the district by 8 points after Mitt Romney carried it by 25 points.

The district includes suburbs in southern Houston, including a small part of Harris County. Most of the district falls in Fort Bend County, however, which Hillary Clinton carried in 2016, marking the first time a Democratic presidential nominee won that county since at least 1992.

The Incumbent
After receiving a law degree from Univ. of Texas, Olson joined the Navy in 1988, and was an aviator during Operation Desert Storm. He arrived in Washington to serve with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, eventually becoming chief of staff to Sen. John Cornyn. Olson ran for Congress in 2008 against Democratic Rep. Nick Lampson, who had succeeded DeLay. Olson won that general election with 52 percent, and hovered at or above 60 percent in his re-election races, until 2018.

The Democrats
Sri Preston Kulkarni, who raised $1.6 million for his congressional race, could run again. Kulkarni is a former Foreign Service officer in the U.S. State Department who served in multiple countries, including Iraq. He also worked with New York Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, serving as an adviser on foreign policy and defense.

How It Plays Out
It’s possible that Olson faces a primary challenge from Fort Bend Sheriff Troy Nehls, a young candidate who’s seen as blunt and authentic, who could wage a credible campaign from the right. (One Republican strategist compared Nehls to Rep. Dan Crenshaw.) Veteran/helicopter pilot Joe Walz has also announced that he’d run for Olson’s seat, likely in the GOP primary. But it wouldn’t be surprising if Olson retired either, as part of the minority party, ahead of a competitive 2020 race and 2022 redistricting.

If Texas becomes a battleground, the 22nd District is perhaps most likely to host a competitive race. Democrats believe both Harris and Fort Bend counties are moving in their direction.

Texas 23rd District: Hurd on the Hill

By Leah Askarinam

Ahead of the 2018 election, there were three Texas districts that Hillary Clinton carried that also had GOP representation in the U.S. House. Now, there’s just one.

GOP Rep. Will Hurd was one of the Republicans who was prepared for a tough race in 2018. In 2016, Hurd held onto his seat by about 3,000 votes. Two years later, Hurd won by less than 1,000 votes.

The geography of the district makes it difficult to campaign, stretching across the border with Mexico, from San Antonio all the way to El Paso. Hurd’s incumbency advantage was especially important coming into the race because of the benefit of high name ID. But he’s also a savvy politician who understands that his district is trending blue. He embarked on a “bipartisan road trip” from San Antonio to Washington, DC with Democratic Senate candidate Beto O’Rourke last summer (and broadcasted their drive on Facebook Live).

The Incumbent
Hurd is a former CIA officer, working undercover in the Middle East and South Asia. When he left the CIA, he founded a cybersecurity firm (FusionX) and was a partner at a business consulting firm (Crumpton Group).

Hurd first ran for Congress in 2010, but lost the GOP runoff to Quico Canseco. Canseco went on to defeat Democratic Rep. Ciro Rodriguez but lost re-election in 2012 to Democrat Pete Gallego. Then in 2014, Canseco attempted a comeback but Hurd won the primary and defeated the Democratic congressman by 2 points.

In the 115th Congress, Hurd chaired the Subcommittee on Information Technology, under the House Committee on Oversight.
and Government Reform. He was also vice chairman of the Border and Maritime Security Subcommittee under the House Committee on Homeland Security.

The Democrats

It’s expected that Gina Ortiz Jones will run again, though she has not made any official announcements. Jones, a veteran with a resume in foreign service, was endorsed by EMILY’s List in the 2018 race. She attended Boston Univ. on a ROTC scholarship, and later attended intelligence officer school in Texas. She was deployed to Iraq in 2005, leaving the service in 2006 when her mother was diagnosed with cancer. She’s since worked in US Africa Command and the Office of US Trade Representative, and attended the US Army School of Advanced Military Studies.

Another candidate, however, has already announced she’d seek the Democratic nomination, former RT anchor Liz Wahl. Wahl resigned from the Russian-government-sponsored channel in 2014, announcing on air that she was disappointed with Russia’s actions in Crimea.

How It Plays Out

If Ortiz runs again, Democrats will start the race with some existing name ID for their candidate, an important factor considering the difficulty of introducing a candidate to such a geographically expansive district. Her 2018 bid was also her first run for Congress, so she might have more success with the experience under her belt. She raised $6.2 million, while Hurd raised $5.1 million.

One Republican strategist predicts that the race will remain a Toss-Up through Election Day, while another believes that Democrats would get more bang for their buck attacking a less established Republican like Chip Roy. But Democrats believe that if Jones can match her 2018 performance in San Antonio, she might have more luck with Hispanic counties when President Trump is on the ballot in 2020.

Texas 24th District: North Dallas Twenty-Four

By Leah Askarinam

Republican Kenny Marchant isn’t exactly a household name, but his closer-than-expected re-election race in 2018 will get him named on a few Democratic takeover target lists this cycle.

The 24th District, north of Dallas, includes part of Tarrant County, though the portion of Dallas County that falls in the district is largely the cause for Democratic optimism. In 2014, the Democratic candidate lost the portion of Dallas County that falls into the 24th District 59-38 percent. In 2016, when Jan McDowell first ran for the seat, she lost Dallas County 49-47 percent. In 2018, McDowell carried the Dallas County portion of the district 55-43 percent.

The 24th District includes Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport, ExxonMobil headquarters, and the practice facilities for the Dallas Cowboys. More than half the district is non-white, and 45 percent of adults have a bachelor’s degree or higher.

The Incumbent

Marchant was first elected to the U.S. House in 2004, previously serving as mayor of Carrollton (population 119,000) nestled north of Dallas, and as a member of the Texas House of Representatives. Prior to his career in elected office, Marchant owned a homebuilding company. In the 115th Congress, Marchant served on the House Committees on Ways and Means, and House Committee on Ethics.

The Democrat

McDowell has announced that she will run again in 2020, releasing a campaign ad on social media this week. Research scientist Allison Campolo, who ran for state Senate in 2010, is also likely to run. State Rep. Julie Johnson has been mentioned as a potential candidate, though she might want to remain in the state House considering some Democrats believe the majority will be within reach in 2020 (it’s currently 84 to 64). Dallas County Commissioner Elba Garcia, who is married to former state Rep. Domingo Garcia, has also been mentioned.

How It Plays Out

Given the minimal investment in this district at the House level in 2018, it’s likely that O’Rourke’s Senate campaign had a substantial effect on turnout, though some strategists believe that McDowell worked hard on her race despite her limited resources. Democrats are excited about movement in the portion of Dallas County in their district, and believe if they can increase turnout there, and limit losses in Tarrant, that they have a path to victory.

But Marchant is likely to take his race seriously. He is the ranking member on the House Ethics Committee, and seems unlikely to retire. One Republican believes that this will be one of the races that could be competitive, as a dense, North Dallas district, including a surge of out-of-state residents with new employers like McKesson recently announcing it would move into the district.
Texas 31st District: Doors Opening for Democrats

By Leah Askarinam

In 2018, M.J. Hegar proved that having a compelling bio, introductory video, and tremendous fundraising isn’t enough to win every district. But Democrats are hoping she takes another shot at unseating GOP Rep. John Carter.

The 31st District sits between Austin and Fort Hood, and includes Bell and Williamson counties. It includes cities such as Killeen, Round Rock and Temple, and shares Fort Hood and Dell Computers with the 25th District.

According to CityLab data, the 31st District is suburban, though less dense than the two districts Democrats picked up in 2018, the 32nd and 7th. Its population is predominantly white, and 39 percent of non-Hispanic white residents have a bachelor’s degree or higher. Overall, 34 percent of adults in the district have a bachelor’s degree or higher.

The Incumbent

Carter, an eight-term Congressman, was first elected to Congress in 2002, after serving as William County district court judge for 20 years. He attended law school at Univ. of Texas and later served as counsel in the state Legislature. He lost a race for a seat in the state House in 1980, and subsequently returned to practicing law before being appointed district judge.

Carter was the chairman of the Homeland Security Subcommittee on Appropriations in the 115th Congress.

The Challengers

Some Democrats are hoping for a rematch of the 2018 race with Hegar. An Air Force veteran who received the Distinguished Flying Cross with Valor Device, Hegar was one of the highest-profile Democratic challengers in the country after her biographical video, “Doors,” went viral among activists and donors. Physician Christine Mann, who lost the primary runoff in 2018, has also been mentioned as a potential candidate.

How It Plays Out

Plenty of Democrats would be happy to see Hegar run again. It wouldn’t be shocking, however, if she faced a Republican other than Carter in a general election. Carter was first elected nearly two decades ago, is in the minority and may not be excited about facing a well-funded challenger again. Hegar raised and spent $5 million last cycle, $3 million more than the congressman.

Texas 32nd District: Dueling for Dallas

By Leah Askarinam

As chairman of the NRCC, Texas Rep. Pete Sessions led Republicans to the majority in 2010 and eight years later he was defeated for reelection. More than a year before Election Day Sessions tweeted, “To my friends who think I’m hanging it up, as we say in #TX, Come and Take It.” Colin Allred did. But Republicans haven’t given up on the 32nd District.

The 32nd District was one of the 22 Republican-held districts that Hillary Clinton carried that Democrats picked up last cycle. The district includes wealthy suburbs in North Dallas and Southern Methodist Univ. The Richardson telecom corridor includes AT&T and Verizon.

Forty-three percent of adults in the district have a bachelor’s degree or higher, and half of the district’s population is nonwhite. CityLab designated this district “dense suburban,” putting it in the same category as the 24th, 21st, 6th, 3rd, and 2nd districts.

The Incumbent

Allred was one of the many 2018 Democratic candidates who sought elected office for the first time. Allred grew up in the district, was a linebacker for the Tennessee Titans, and subsequently a civil rights lawyer who worked in the U.S. Attorney’s office in Greenbelt, Md. He attended Baylor Univ. and received his law degree from Cal-Berkeley.

The Challengers

Phillip Huffines, who lost an expensive primary for Rep. Van Taylor’s state Senate seat, and former state Rep. Dan Branch (who also lost a 2014 primary runoff for Texas Attorney General) have been mentioned as potential candidates. Trump campaign spokesman Katrina Pierson, who challenged Rep. Pete Sessions in the 2014 GOP primary, has also been mentioned.

How It Plays Out

One Republican source believes that, while the 7th and 32nd districts are similar in terms of political lean, Allred is too liberal for his district, while Fletcher has moderated her positions. A Democratic strategist, on the other hand, believed that Allred was the stronger candidate.

There’s no sign that Republicans are willing to let this district go to Democrats without a fight. One Republican argued that Sessions was in the lead until the end of the race. New York Times polling, for example, found Allred leading 46-42 percent in an Oct. 29-Nov. 4 poll. But in a Sept. 19-24 poll, the Times found Sessions leading 48-47 percent.

This is the type of district Republicans probably need to win to get back to the House majority. But it won’t be an easy lift.
Report Shorts

California’s 50th District. Democrat Ammar Campa-Najjar came within 4 points of defeating GOP Rep. Duncan Hunter in 2016 and announced he will seek a rematch in 2020. But there’s a chance neither man makes it to the next general election.

Hunter is under indictment and facing trial in September, and there’s a chance he doesn’t seek re-election or is otherwise pressured to vacate his office early. Campa-Najjar was endorsed by the state party in 2018 and received more votes than any other Democrat in the primary, but that was just short of 18 percent. If Hunter looks increasingly vulnerable, then other Democrats could take a look at the race.

The district, which includes part of south Orange County and stretches to east of San Diego, shouldn’t be competitive under normal circumstances. President Donald Trump won the district by 15 points in 2016. And Hunter’s re-election while being indicted demonstrates the GOP lean of the seat. But as long as the congressman is the nominee and under an ethics cloud, the seat is a takeover opportunity.

California’s 52nd District. Democratic Rep. Scott Peters was exploring a run for mayor of San Diego, but announced on Wednesday that he would seek re-election in 2020. The seat used to be competitive, but it now looks out of reach in this political environment, even if it had been an open seat.

Florida’s 25th District. Democrat Mary Barzee Flores lost her 2018 challenge to Republican Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart, but was just named Deputy Commissioner for Consumer Affairs. That doesn’t preclude her from running again, particularly because the filing deadline isn’t for more than a year. But her new duties include overseeing Florida’s concealed weapons permitting program, which could be a more attractive option than another long-shot challenge to the congressman.

Hawaii’s 2nd District. Democratic Rep. Tulsi Gabbard announced her campaign for president. She won’t necessarily have to choose between her current and aspirational office because the primary fight will likely have largely played out by the June 2020 filing deadline for re-election.

She could also draw a primary if she chooses to run for re-election. She has a reputation for being too soft on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and for past comments on same-sex marriage. Unless a missile wipes out all the Democrats in the district, the seat is not at risk of falling into GOP hands.

Kansas Senate. GOP Sen. Pat Roberts kicked off the new year by announcing he wouldn’t seek re-election, setting off what will be a crowded and raucous Republican primary.

State Treasurer Jake LaTurner, 30, didn’t waste any time and announced his candidacy. “I’m running because I think Kansas wants a conservative fighter in the United States Senate,” said Turner, a 30-year-old former staffer to former Rep. Lynn Jenkins. “That’s what I’ve done my whole career, whether I was in the state Senate or serving as the treasurer for the last year and a half, and that’s what I’ll do in the United States Senate.”

It’s essentially a “free shot” for Turner since he was just elected in 2018, doesn’t have to give up his current office, and won’t be up for re-election for another four years. But he won’t have the field to himself. A host of Republicans are considering a bid, including Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. For the general election, the race is rated Solid Republican.

New Mexico’s 2nd District. Former GOP state Rep. Yvette Herrell lost the race for New Mexico’s 2nd District in 2018 and she’s running again in 2020. Herrell gave a victory speech on Election Night 2018 but, when all the votes were counted, Democratic attorney/former congressional aide Xochitl Torres Small prevailed 51-49 percent.

Herrell, a real estate agent from Alamogordo who considered challenging the election results, is regarded as a staunch supporter of Trump (who won the district by 10 points in 2016) and in favor of building a wall between on the border with Mexico. The 2nd District includes the state’s entire southern border. Herrell attacked the new congresswoman for supporting Nancy Pelosi and her positions on border security. An 8-year-old boy from Guatemala died in Border Patrol custody in the district on Christmas Eve.

Herrell won a competitive 4-way primary with 49 percent in 2018 and it’s still too early to know whether other Republican candidates will run this cycle. The district was previously represented by Republican Steve Pearce, who ran unsuccessfully for governor. In 2018, Torres Small spent more than $4.6 million (through Nov. 26) compared to $1.3 million by Herrell.

This is the type of district Republicans need to win in order to take back the majority. But it won’t be easy. Torres Small hasn’t received as much media attention as some of her freshman colleagues, but she was a good candidate and should be a difficult incumbent to displace.

North Carolina’s 3rd District. GOP Rep. Walter Jones confirmed that he will not seek re-election in 2020. The congressman is not in good health. After more than 20 years in office, there are plenty of Republicans in the district who will take a look at an open seat.

Tennessee’s 1st District. Air Force veteran Chris Rowe announced his challenge to GOP Rep. Phil Roe, with an interesting twist. Roe, a former OB/GYN, delivered Rowe as a baby, according to the Nashville Post. Republicans aren’t at immediate risk of losing this East Tennessee district, considering President Donald Trump received 76 percent in the district in 2016.