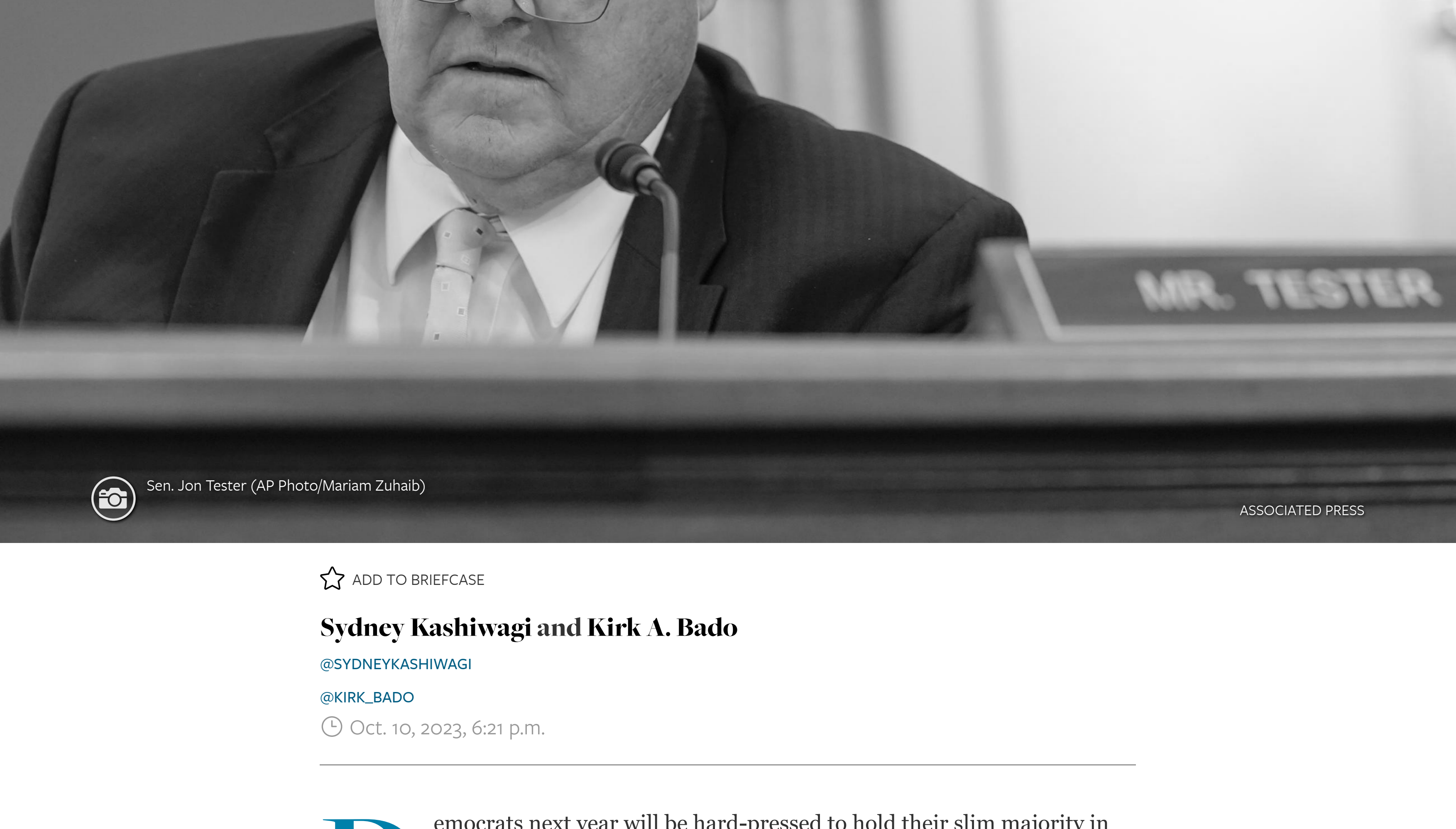


Hotline's initial 2024 Senate Power Rankings

Democrats need to defy political gravity again to keep their narrow majority.



Sen. Jon Tester (AP Photo/Mariam Zuhaili)

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Democrats next year will be hard-pressed to hold their slim majority in the Senate, playing defense in 23 seats. Republicans, meanwhile, have an advantage heading into 2024, having to defend only 11 seats and flip just two to win back control.

As it stands now, these dynamics could be tricky for Democrats to navigate. They need to defend members in three states that former President Trump carried twice—West Virginia, Montana, and Ohio—and four seats in states that he won in 2016—Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Arizona.

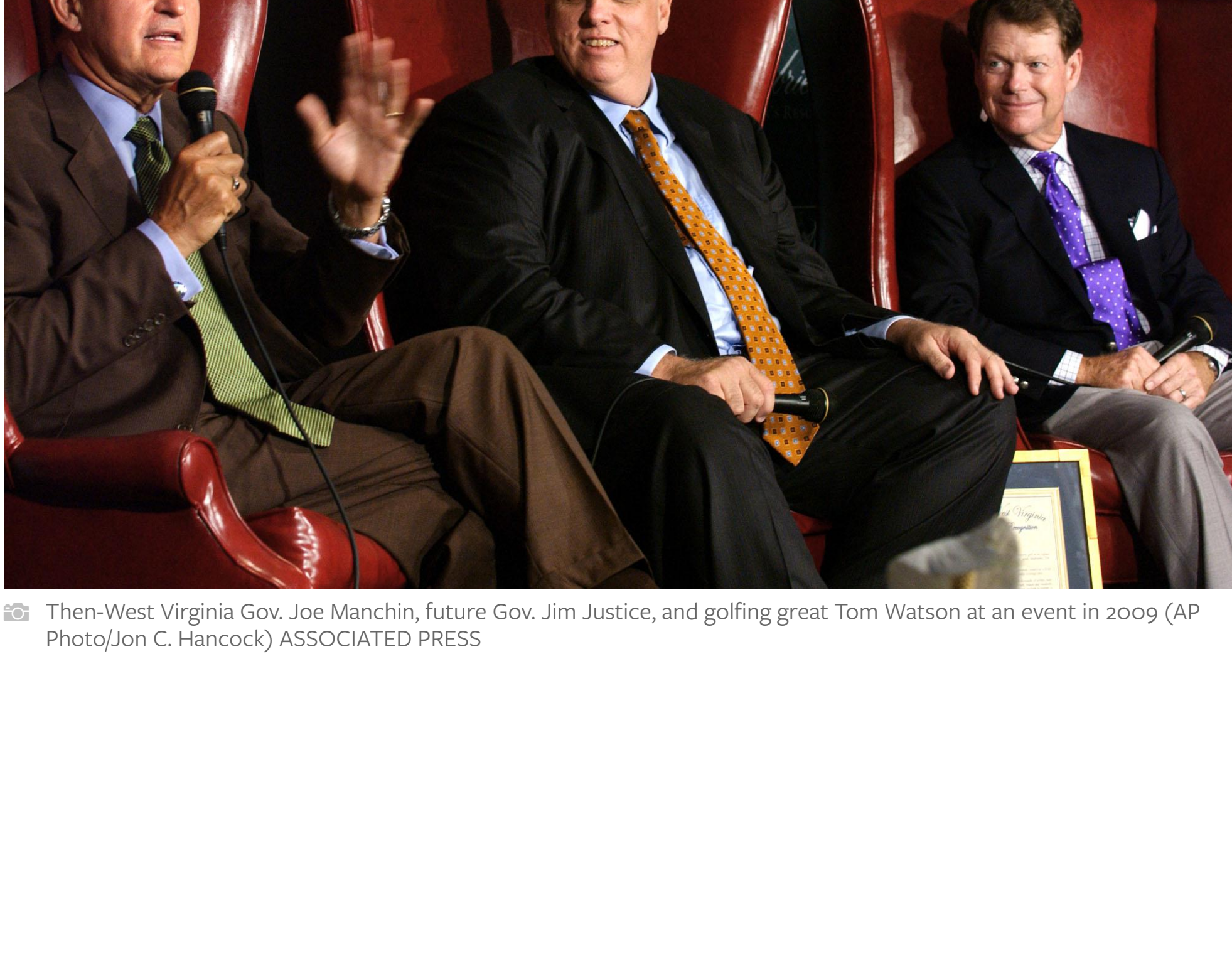
The National Republican Senatorial Committee is currently working on a two-prong strategy to try to win back the Senate: Boost candidates in primaries early on and stay on the same page as Trump so that the former president doesn't pick favorites in primaries as he did in 2022, which some Republicans say cost them the Senate.

Democrats do have one thing going for them. Messy Republican primaries are beginning to take shape in at least six states. In four of those—West Virginia, Montana, Nevada, and Michigan—the NRSC staked its claim early but has not managed to fend off MAGA candidates from challenging the party's hand-picked favorites.

However, there are many unknowns between now and Election Day. Abortion access, the economy, and crime could also help or hurt both parties along the way.

Strategists in both parties divided the Senate battlefield into three tiers. The top-tier states are West Virginia, Montana, and Ohio, states which Trump carried twice and which are home to vulnerable Democratic senators. The second tier—Pennsylvania, Nevada, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Arizona—are presidential battleground states. And the last tier—Texas and Florida—are red states Democrats are trying to flip.

These rankings of the 10 seats most likely to flip are based on conversations with operatives, strategists, campaigns, and pollsters in both parties.



Then-West Virginia Gov. Joe Manchin, future Gov. Jim Justice, and golfing great Tom Watson at an event in 2009 (AP Photo/Jon C. Hancock) ASSOCIATED PRESS

1. West Virginia: Sen. Joe Manchin (D)

Manchin is seen as Democrats' only hope at holding on to this seat. If he doesn't run for reelection, Republicans will likely flip the seat in the deep red state that Trump won twice.

Manchin has been keeping the political world guessing for months now and has said he won't make a final decision until the year's end. He is reportedly considering [three options](#): run for reelection to the Senate as an independent, run for president as a No Labels candidate, or retire from politics altogether. A recent poll conducted by the GOP-aligned Senate Leadership Fund found Gov. Jim Justice [beating Manchin](#) 49-43 percent in a hypothetical matchup if Manchin runs as an independent.

Regardless of what Manchin does, Republicans feel confident they can flip the seat as Justice and Rep. Alex Mooney fight through a messy primary. Those in the Justice orbit point to recent polling that [showed Justice beating](#) Mooney and Manchin with over 50 percent in hypothetical matchups, and Manchin narrowly beating Mooney, 45 percent to 41 percent. But political observers caution that Mooney should not be taken for granted, either. Club for Growth Action and Protect Freedom PAC raised [\\$13.5 million for Mooney](#) and have committed to spending \$10 million to support him. That money can go a long way in West Virginia's inexpensive media market.

2. Montana: Sen. Jon Tester (D)

Montana could be the most competitive race this year—which is a credit to Tester's strength as a candidate, given that Trump won the state by 16 points. Tester outran the 2020 presidential margins by 10 points during his last reelection bid in 2018 against now-Rep. Matt Rosendale, who is considering a comeback bid, much to the chagrin of Republican leaders.

The deep-pocketed Club for Growth signaled earlier this year it would support Rosendale, but the group recently [intimated](#) that its support is not a given in the race. Rosendale is not a great fundraiser, and he'll need support to mount a meaningful primary campaign against former Navy SEAL Tim Sheehy, a wealthy business owner who has the capacity to self-fund, in the primary. If Rosendale makes it through the primary, then Tester stands a much better chance of winning reelection. Even though Sheehy is a political neophyte, the NRSC and most of the GOP establishment have rallied behind him. Sheehy's impressive résumé could give Tester the toughest election of his political life. But no matter who Tester faces, one of the final remaining rural Democrats will still have a difficult time with Trump topping the ticket.

3. Ohio: Sen. Sherrod Brown (D)

Ohio is not a bellwether anymore. Trump carried the state by 8 points in 2016 and 2020, and last cycle, J.D. Vance cruised to victory over Democratic Rep. Tim Ryan in the open seat to replace retiring Sen. Rob Portman.

This cycle, a familiar crowd is running again in the GOP primary: 2022 candidates Bernie Moreno and Matt Dolan are back, as well as Secretary of State Frank LaRose. Public polling of the GOP primary has been scarce, but what has been released shows a muddled race with room for any of the three to emerge. LaRose is the only candidate who has won statewide, while Moreno and Dolan have the independent resources to self-fund their efforts. A recent Emerson College [poll](#) found Brown within the margin of error against all three GOP contenders in hypothetical head-to-head matchups.

4. Pennsylvania: Sen. Bob Casey (D)

The Casey brand has remained strong in Pennsylvania. He's won six statewide elections and beat his last Republican opponent by more than 13 points in 2018. But this time, Casey is running in a presidential year in a swing state and facing David McCormick, a wealthy self-funder back for another Senate run after finishing second in the GOP primary last cycle. McCormick has [managed to clear](#) the primary of any formidable candidates, at least for now, and the state's Republican Party united behind him [early on](#).

Even though Casey has won his [past three races](#) by an average of 13 points, Democrats still view McCormick as a strong candidate without the messy primary battles other challengers face. He can basically run a general election 14 months out from when voters head to the polls.

5. Nevada: Sen. Jacky Rosen (D)

Democratic Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto may have narrowly defeated former state Attorney General Adam Laxalt in 2022, but political observers in Nevada say that was no indication of a particular shift towards Democrats in the state.

It's also Rosen's first time running for reelection. The state has a very transient electorate thanks to the casino industry, which candidates have to constantly re-introduce themselves to. So Rosen will have to hustle to make sure those new voters know who she is.

Unaffiliated voters are now the [largest registered voting bloc](#) in the state, and the fact that they are barred from voting in primaries can make them an unpredictable group.

On the Republican side, the workings of a complicated primary are starting to take shape. The NRSC's candidate, 2022 candidate Sam Brown, is facing several Republican opponents, most notably Trump's former ambassador to Iceland, Jeffrey Ross Gunter, and Jim Marchant, the 2022 secretary-of-state nominee who won Trump's endorsement last cycle. The former president could complicate things by endorsing Gunter or Marchant. A messy Republican primary could work to Rosen's advantage because she won't have to spend as much money until one of them gets to the general election.

6. Wisconsin: Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D)

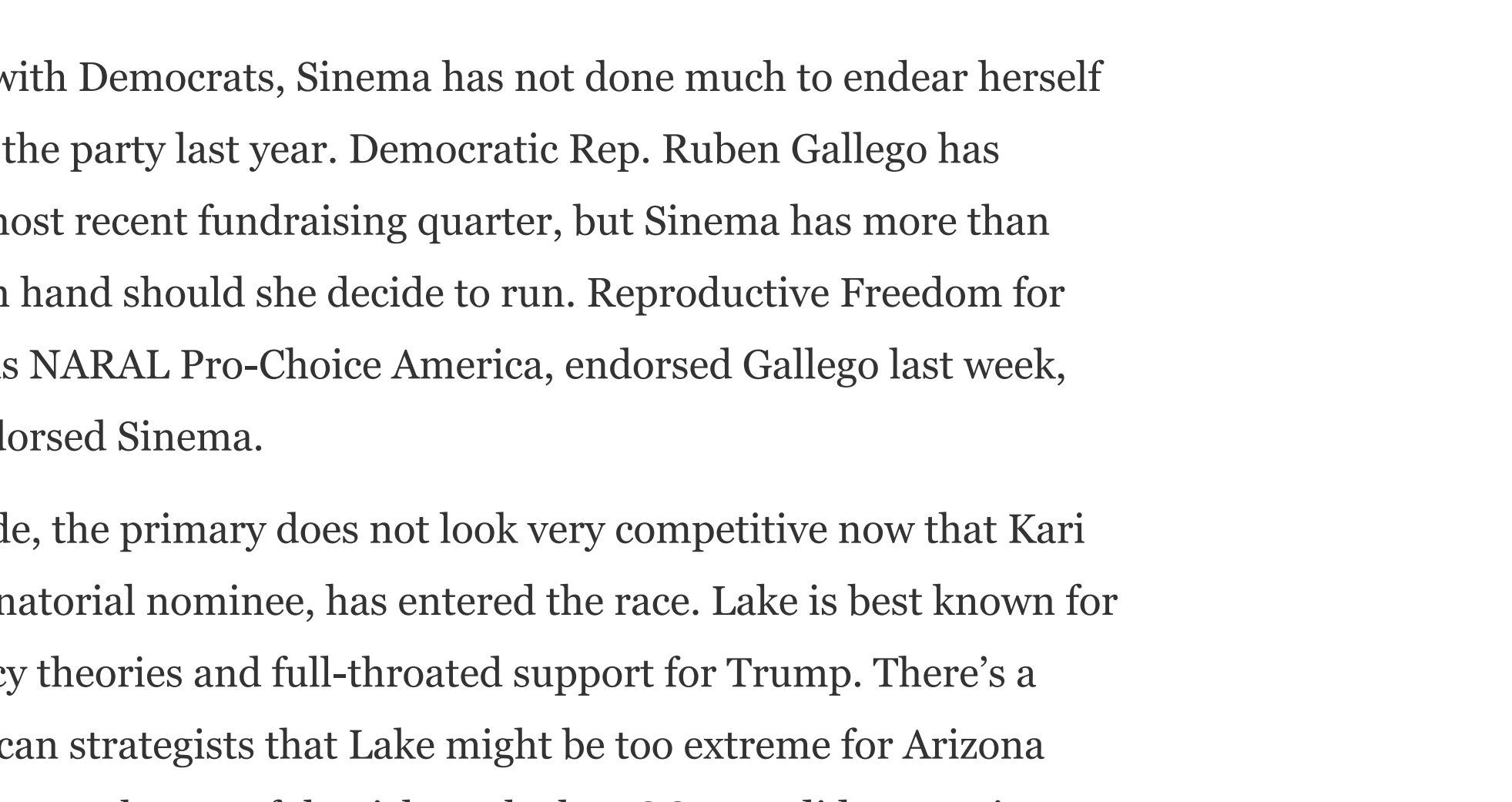
With no well-known candidates in the Republican primary yet, Baldwin is looking like she's in a good position to mount a strong bid for a third term.

Republican Reps. Mike Gallagher and Tom Tiffany passed on challenges, so party strategists are banking on real-estate executive Eric Hovde. He's now viewed as the only candidate who can raise the money and forge the political ties to bring in outside resources to mount a formidable bid against Baldwin. She is a prolific fundraiser who won her 2018 race by over 10 points.

But as Republicans hope for Hovde to run, controversial former Milwaukee County Sheriff David Clarke has not closed the door on a campaign. Clarke, with his polarizing brand, is not seen by Republicans as a formidable general-election candidate. Though Democrats are feeling good about their prospects, it remains to be seen how Trump's name potentially being at the top of the ballot would impact Republican Wisconsinites' vote.

7. Arizona: Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (I)

There are more unknowns than knowns in this race this far out from Election Day. The biggest question is whether or not Sinema runs for reelection and if she does, which party she siphons votes from more. For the purposes of this ranking, *Hotline* is defining a flip as a Republican winning the seat, because Sinema caucuses with Democrats—for now.



Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (AP Photo/Alex Brandon, File) ASSOCIATED PRESS

Even if she caucuses with Democrats, Sinema has not done much to endear herself to them since she left the party last year. Democratic Rep. Ruben Gallego has outraised her in the most recent fundraising quarter, but Sinema has more than \$10 million in cash on hand should she decide to run. Reproductive Freedom for All, formerly known as NARAL Pro-Choice America, endorsed Gallego last week, having previously endorsed Sinema.

On the Republican side, the primary does not look very competitive now that Kari Lake, the 2022 gubernatorial nominee, has entered the race. Lake is best known for her election conspiracy theories and full-throated support for Trump. There's a belief among Republican strategists that Lake might be too extreme for Arizona voters even with Trump on the top of the ticket. The last GOP candidate to win a Senate race in Arizona was Sen. John McCain in 2016, and Lake is certainly no McCain.

8. Michigan: Open (D)

Neither Democrats nor Republicans were able to avoid what could become brutal primaries for retiring Sen. Debbie Stabenow's open seat.

Democratic Rep. Elissa Slotkin got in the race early in February and raised an impressive [\\$2.8 million](#) in the latest fundraising quarter. She is facing actor Hill Harper, who entered the race over the summer, in the primary. Slotkin is seen as the front-runner in the race, but she has not faced a primary opponent since her first House run in 2018, which has allowed her to paint herself as a centrist Democrat. A progressive like Harper could push her to the left in a primary and force her to spend more.

To the right, former Rep. Mike Rogers just got into the race and so did MAGA candidate James Craig, a former Detroit police chief who was [disqualified](#) from the Republican gubernatorial primary ballot after allegations of [petition forgeries](#). Craig could occupy the more conservative lane in the race and has an opening to attack Rogers' past [critical comments](#) about Trump. Last cycle, the more moderate candidate emerged from competitive GOP Senate primaries only to struggle in the general election.

A poll from August showed [Slotkin had higher favorability](#) than Rogers and that more voters said they would vote for her over the former congressman. But more than 50 percent of those polled also did not know who she nor Rogers were.

9. Texas: Sen. Ted Cruz (R)

Cruz narrowly won reelection in 2018 by just [3 points](#) against Democrat Beto O'Rourke. This time, Cruz is running in a presidential year in a deep red state, which should help him. Yet Democrats and Republicans have mixed feelings about their prospects.

Cruz [raised the most](#) of any Republican incumbent in the last fundraising quarter, [\\$5.4 million](#). But Rep. Colin Allred, who is seen as the front-runner in the Democratic field, outraised Cruz in the last quarter with an impressive \$8.8 million haul.

Allred faces a primary opponent in [Roland Gutierrez](#), a Hispanic state senator whose district includes Uvalde, where a tragic mass shooting took place last summer. Both parties view Gutierrez as a strong candidate who could have a good shot at winning over the Hispanic vote, which O'Rourke was [unable to fully capture](#).

10. Florida: Sen. Rick Scott (R)

On paper, Scott should be much more vulnerable. He won the closest Senate race in the country in 2018, he has made enemies on both sides of the aisle, and he has never won an election by more than 1 point. But after a dismal 2022 for Florida Democrats against Republican Sen. Marco Rubio, the rightward shift of Florida might be too much for Democrats to overcome. Former Democratic Rep. Debbie Mucarsel-Powell recently launched her campaign. She will need outside investments if she has a chance of beating Scott—he's one of the wealthiest senators and hasn't been afraid to cut his campaigns a check in past races.

The best case for Democrats right now would be if Mucarsel-Powell is able to raise enough resources on her own to force national GOP groups like the NRSC and the Senate Leadership Fund to defend Scott. However, if Manchin decides against running for reelection and Democratic outside groups write off the West Virginia race, that could free up millions for the Democrats to invest in offensive targets like Florida in a play to give their narrow majority a little more breathing room. [M](#)

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