

Inside Elections

with

Nathan L. Gonzales

Nonpartisan Analysis



HeartPACTM
ACC POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE

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2022 Senate Ratings

BATTLEGROUND

Democratic-Held (4)

Cortez Masto (D-Nev.)
Hassan (D-N.H.)
Kelly (D-Ariz.)
Warnock (D-Ga.)

Republican-Held (4)

NC Open (Burr, R)
PA Open (Toomey, R)
Johnson (R-Wisc.)
Rubio (R-Fl.)

Solid Democratic (10)

Bennet (D-Colo.)
Blumenthal (D-Conn.)
Duckworth (D-Ill.)
Leahy (D-Vt.)
Murray (D-Wash.)
Padilla (D-Calif.)
Schatz (D-Hawaii)
Schumer (D-N.Y.)
Van Hollen (D-Md.)
Wyden (D-Ore.)

Solid Republican (16)

AL Open (Shelby, R)
MO Open (Blunt, R)
OH Open (Portman, R)
Boozman (R-Ark.)
Crapo (R-Idaho)
Grassley (R-Iowa)
Hoeven (R-N.D.)
Kennedy (R-La.)
Lankford (R-Okla.)
Lee (R-Utah)
Moran (R-Kan.)
Murkowski (R-Alaska)
Paul (R-Ky.)
Scott (R-S.C.)
Thune (R-S.D.)
Young (R-Ind.)

Alabama Senate: Brooks Battles Back

By Jacob Rubashkin

There are a couple of states where long-shot Democratic takeover opportunities could turn into full-blown Senate headaches for the GOP. But Alabama isn't one of them.

Sen. Richard Shelby has represented Alabama in Washington, DC for 42 years, first in the House and since 1987 in the Senate, and as both a Democrat — for the first 16 years — and then as a Republican.

When he retires at the end of next year, he will be one of several senior GOP senators bowing out of Congress after a tumultuous decade that saw the rise of the Tea Party, the takeover of the Republican Party by Donald Trump, and continued souring of relations between Democratic and Republican legislators on Capitol Hill.

While the departures of the four other retirees — Pennsylvania's Pat Toomey, North Carolina's Richard Burr, Ohio's Rob Portman, and Missouri's Roy Blunt — have created competitive open seat races, or the conditions for competitive races to develop, Shelby's exit leaves an opening in one of the most Republican states in the country.

That means the GOP primary will almost certainly determine the next senator from Alabama, and it is shaping up to be an early test of the future direction of the party.

Trump and Shelby have already found themselves on opposite sides in the primary, each backing a different credible candidate who exemplifies their view of what the Republican Party should be. The choices Alabama voters make could give us a sense of how much weight Trump's endorsement carries now that he is out of office, as well as if there is any sign that the more moderate wing of the GOP will be able to replenish its ranks in the immediate future.

The Lay of the Land

Alabama is one of the most reliably Republican states in the union. The last time the state voted for a Democratic presidential candidate was in 1976, when Georgia Gov. Jimmy Carter beat President Gerald Ford 56-41 percent. In 1980, former California Gov. Ronald Reagan defeated Carter by a slim 1-point margin, and no Democratic nominee has come close since.

In 2020, Trump defeated Joe Biden by 25 points, 62-37 percent. Trump won the state by a slightly larger 28-point margin in 2016, 62-34 percent, over Hillary Clinton.

After being shut out of the state's politics for most of the 20th century, Republicans have dominated over the past two decades. The last Democrat to serve as governor, Don Seigelman, lost re-election in 2002, and in the most recent gubernatorial election, in 2018, Gov. Kay

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CALENDAR

July 27	Texas' 6th District Special Election
Aug. 3	Ohio's 11th & 15th District Special Election Primaries
Sept. 14	California Gubernatorial Recall Election
Sept. 30	Block-level census data delivered to states
Nov. 2	Florida's 20th District Special Election Primary
Nov. 2	Virginia & New Jersey Gubernatorial Elections

Florida 20 Special: Delayed Democratic Successor

By Jacob Rubashkin

When Rep. Alcee Hastings died of cancer in April, he created a rare vacancy in a South Florida Democratic stronghold after 28 years of service. With no heir apparent waiting in the wings, a large crop of local Democrats quickly announced their candidacies to succeed the former federal judge who'd been a staple of the Florida political scene since 1970.

One person who did not move so quickly was GOP Gov. Ron DeSantis, whose responsibility it was to call a special election to replace Hastings.

Unlike in some other states, such as Ohio or New Mexico, where the special election timeline is laid out by statute, in Florida the governor has full discretion over the scheduling of the contest. DeSantis frustrated Democrats by taking a month to announce when the special election would take place, and frustrated them further when he decided that the election would take place on January 11, 2022, meaning the seat would remain vacant for 280 days from the time of Hastings' death.

That means Democrats' already narrow House majority is functionally smaller until Hastings' successor is elected early next year.

The Lay of the Land

The 20th District consists of primarily Black neighborhoods in West Palm Beach and Fort Lauderdale, connected by a vast and largely unpopulated stretch of inland Florida. In the 2020 presidential election, 30 percent of the district's votes came from Palm Beach County, while 70 percent came from Broward County (Fort Lauderdale). The southern portion of the district also extends to include Miramar, yet still all north of Miami.

The district's population is 52 percent non-Hispanic Black, 27 percent Hispanic, and 16 percent non-Hispanic white. There is a significant foreign-born population in the district, with 36 percent of residents having immigrated to America. The majority of that group (23 percent of the entire district's population) comes from the Caribbean.



Perry Thurston

Courtesy Thurston Campaign

In 2020, Joe Biden carried the 20th by 55 points, 77-22 percent. That was a slight decrease from Hillary Clinton's 62-point margin, 80-18 percent, likely due to President Donald Trump's gains among Black



Barbara Sharief

Courtesy Sharief Campaign

voters. In non-presidential races the district is similarly Democratic, voting for Democratic Sen. Bill Nelson by an 82-18 percent margin and Democratic gubernatorial nominee Andrew Gillum by a similar 82-17 percent spread

in 2018, even though both men lost statewide.

Hastings won his most recent re-election, against Republican Greg Musselwaite in 2020, by 57 points, 78-21 percent. That means the special general election is close to a foregone conclusion and makes the Democratic nomination particularly valuable.

According to *Inside Elections'* Baseline metric, Democrats have a 60-point advantage in the 20th; that means a typical Democrat would be expected to carry the district, 80-20 percent.

The Democrats

The all-important Democratic primary will take place on Nov. 2. Eleven Democrats have declared their candidacies, though in order to qualify for the ballot each must still either collect 1,168 valid petition signatures by Aug. 3, or pay a \$10,440 filing fee. The qualifying period ends on Aug. 10.

The wide field falls into three tiers. In the first tier are the five current officeholders: state Sen. Perry Thurston, state Reps. Bobby DuBose and Omari Hardy, and Broward County Commissioners Dale Holness and Barbara Sharief.

Thurston, 60, is a South Florida native and graduate of Morehouse College and University of Miami law school. His first run for office was in 1998, when he lost a Democratic state House primary to Chris Smith. He eventually won that state House seat in 2006 following a contested primary after Smith became a state Senator, and would go on to serve as

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the state House minority leader from 2012 to 2014. In 2014, he ran for the Democratic nomination for state attorney general but lost the primary to George Sheldon 60-40 percent; Sheldon went on to lose the general election by 15 points.

Thurston ran unopposed for his current state Senate seat in 2016 and beat back a primary challenger in 2020 by 33 points. His state Senate district, the 33rd, includes 49 percent of the 20th Congressional District's residents. He is being advised by local Florida consultant Christian Ulvert.

DuBose, 50, succeeded Thurston in the state House in 2014, and is that chamber's current co-minority leader. His district, the 94th includes 13 percent of 20th Congressional District residents. Most recently, in 2020, he defeated 21-year-old progressive primary challenger Elijah Manley 70-30 percent. An insurance agent by trade, DuBose graduated from the University of Florida and served on the Fort Lauderdale City Commission from 2010 to 2014. He is working with Alain Jean, a local Fort Lauderdale consultant from his previous races.

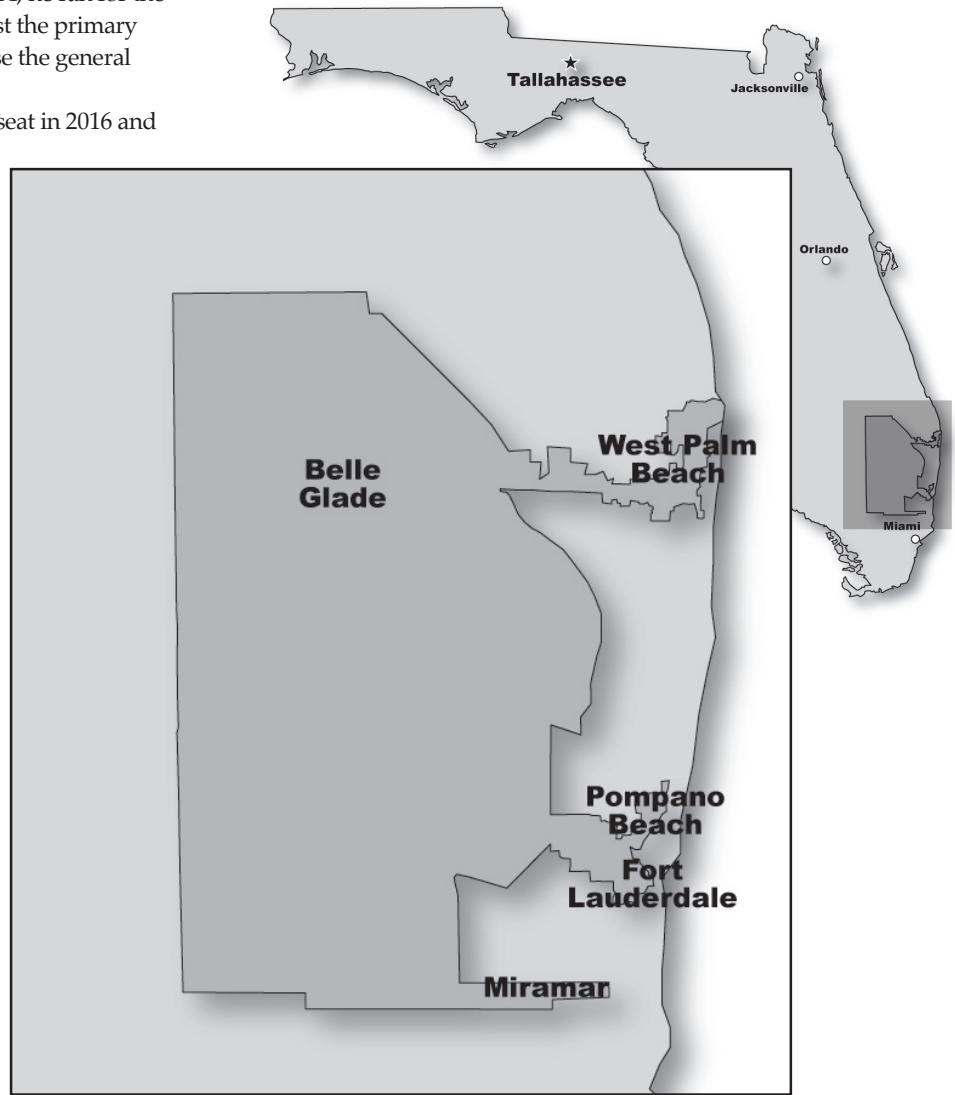
Hardy, 31, is serving in his first term in the state House, and is the only major candidate from the West Palm Beach portion of the district. A middle school civics teacher and graduate of University of Miami, Hardy has twice ousted an incumbent in Democratic primaries. In 2017, he defeated a three-term incumbent by 10 points (257 votes) to win a seat on the Lake Worth city commission, and in 2020 he defeated Al Jacquet by 17 points to win a seat in the state House.

Hardy has a sizable national following — 167,000 followers on Twitter alone — which he accrued after a clip showing him arguing with the Lake Worth mayor over shutting off overdue residents' utilities during the Covid-19 pandemic went viral, and is running as the most unapologetic progressive in the race. He's working with general consultant Maya Brown, and media consultant Kevin Cate of Catecomm.

Holness, 64, has served on the Broward County Commission since 2010, including a year as mayor from 2019 to 2020 (mayors are elected by the members of the commission). The Jamaica-born Holness is a real estate and mortgage broker, and has been in politics since 2000, when he first ran for a local city commission seat. He lost that race, and again in 2002, but was successful in 2004.

In 2008, he ran for a seat on the Broward County Commission, and despite campaigning using a photo of him next to then-Sen. Barack Obama, he placed a distant third in the primary (today, Holness's

Florida's 20th Congressional District



Dale Holness

Courtesy Dale Holness

website prominently features a photo of the candidate hugging Vice President Kamala Harris). He finally won a seat on the county commission in 2010, and has been there since, though none of his primary victories have come easy; he won by 11 points in 2010, 9 points in 2012, and just 2 points in 2016.

Holness announced his campaign with the backing of Alcee Hastings II, the late congressman's son and a local university administrator.

Sharief, 49, is the only woman in the top tier of candidates. She has served on the Broward County Commission since 2010, including two stints as mayor in 2014 and 2017, and spent a year as a local Miramar city commissioner before that. One of eight children whose father was murdered when she was a teenager, Sharief is a nurse by training, with nursing degrees from Florida International and Wilkes universities, but spent most of her career running a pediatric home health care company she founded in the early 2000s. The lucrative business — Sharief once reported a net worth between \$4 million and \$8 million — allowed her to fund her political campaigns out of her own pocket in the past. Sharief had already filed to run for this seat in 2022, before Hastings died, and had loaned her campaign \$100,000 in the first months of the year.

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In the second tier are former state Rep. Priscilla Taylor and 2018/2020 20th District candidate Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick.

Cherfilus-McCormick, 42, previously challenged Hastings in the 2018 and 2020 Democratic primaries for this seat. The Howard and St. Thomas University-educated attorney, who is now the CEO of a Miramar-based home health care company, lost to Hastings 74-26 percent in 2018, and 69-31 percent in 2020, and was already running again when Hastings died. After spending just \$68,000 over her last two runs combined, Cherfilus-McCormick has already reserved \$95,000 in television advertising over this summer. In a recent FEC filing, Cherfilus-McCormick reported that she had put \$2.3 million of her own money into her campaign which explains how she was able to put significant money on TV before any other candidate.

Taylor, 71, served five years in the state House, from 2004 to 2009, before being appointed to the Palm Beach County Commission in 2009. She served on the commission until 2016, winning two elections in her own right, in 2010 and 2012 (unopposed). An insurance agent by trade, she ran in the open 2019 mayoral race in West Palm Beach but placed third, with just 21 percent of the vote.

Businessman Matt Boswell, public speaker Elvin Dowling, labor consultant/2014 21st District candidate Emmanuel Morel, and attorney Marlon Onias are also running but are not expected to compete.

The Democratic Primary

The race begins relatively wide open, say Democrats watching the contest, with no one candidate having emerged as a clear or immediate successor to Hastings, who represented the area since the early 1990s.

To the extent that any of the top candidates begin with an advantage, Democratic



Omari Hardy announcement video

sources say it is Dale Holness, the Broward County commissioner, because of his perceived closeness with the late Hastings, his ties to the significant Caribbean-born community in the district (Holness has retained his Jamaican accent), and his relationship with the local political machine. But Democrats also stress that any advantage is slight, and that all of the top candidates begin the race relatively unknown and will have to communicate effectively to voters over the next three months.

With only a few months before the primary, strong fundraising will be integral to any campaign's success. Excluding Cherfilus-McCormick's personal money, Holness leads the field in dollars raised, \$305,000, and cash on hand, \$268,000. That's according to the latest FEC filings, which covered up to June 30.

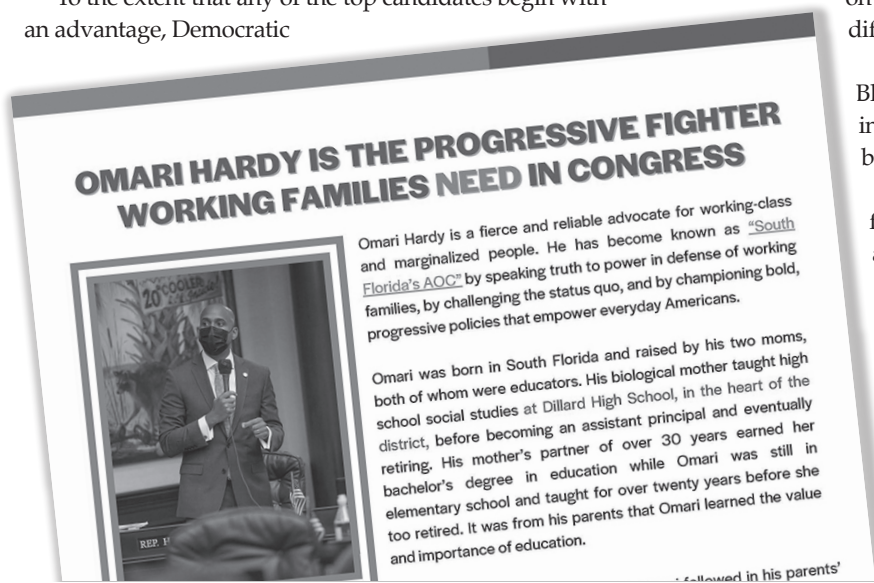
Democratic strategists say the district can be tricky to advertise in because it straddles two media markets — the prohibitively expensive Miami-Ft. Lauderdale market, and the cheaper West Palm Beach-Ft. Pierce market. Only the best-funded campaigns will be able to do broadcast TV in the Miami market, which is the lion's share of the district, meaning candidates with fewer resources will have to rely on creative cable, digital and direct mail strategies to make up the difference.

The demographics of the district, with large proportions of older Black voters, also make a layered communications strategy that involves not just cable and digital but radio and a strong community-based ground game crucial.

Local Democrats say that DuBose and Thurston, the two former floor leaders from the state legislature, share much of the same base, and that each of them being in the race harms the other's chances. Thurston, who came into the race with more political experience, was initially viewed as the stronger candidate. But he has struggled to raise money while DuBose posted an unexpectedly strong quarterly fundraising report. DuBose raised \$227,000 in the first six weeks of his campaign and reported \$202,000 in the bank on June 30, while Thurston pulled in \$180,000 in the eleven weeks between his April 19 launch and June 30 and loaned his campaign an additional \$100,000. He reported \$252,000 in the bank on June 30.

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Omari Hardy campaign prospectus



Omari Hardy is a fierce and reliable advocate for working-class and marginalized people. He has become known as "South Florida's AOC" by speaking truth to power in defense of working families, by challenging the status quo, and by championing bold, progressive policies that empower everyday Americans.

Omari was born in South Florida and raised by his two moms, both of whom were educators. His biological mother taught high school social studies at Dillard High School, in the heart of the district, before becoming an assistant principal and eventually retiring. His mother's partner of over 30 years earned her bachelor's degree in education while Omari was still in elementary school and taught for over twenty years before she too retired. It was from his parents that Omari learned the value and importance of education.

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Sharief, meanwhile, is already flexing her personal financial resources by spending \$50,000 on TV ads focusing on her health care background. She was the first major candidate to go up on TV, though most of the buy, which ran from May 18 to June 29, was on cable not broadcast. Sharief drew some ire when she filed to run prior to Hastings' death (the congressman's health concerns were well known in the district). She has already loaned her campaign \$230,000, and local Democrats say she could put several hundred thousand dollars more of her own money into the race.

As the only woman in the race's top tier, Sharief could stand to gain from the Democratic Party's recent interest in elevating women — particularly Black women — into positions of power. But that boost could be mitigated by the presence of other, less serious candidates in the race, such as Cherfilus-McCormick, who is not viewed as a serious contender yet but is spending significant sums on advertising, and Taylor, the former state legislator.

There is no love lost between Sharief and Holness, who have served on the Broward County Commission together for the past decade and have a deep rivalry. In 2014, Holness backed an unsuccessful primary challenge to Sharief. In the race for Hastings' seat, Sharief already has the backing of four of their colleagues on the commission, while Holness has the support of none. But Holness has made a point of trumpeting his endorsement from Miramar City Commissioner Max Chambers — who happens to be Sharief's ex-husband.

Hardy's campaign believes that as the only candidate from West Palm Beach, he has a better chance of consolidating those voters than do the Broward candidates, who all share similar geographic bases.

But there are a few complicating factors. Though Hardy is the only candidate from Palm Beach, just 12 percent of 20th District residents also live in his state House district, and half of his state House district sits in another congressional district. Having just won his seat in the legislature last November, he hasn't had much time to build up deep relationships to the area.

Hardy's candidacy is the contest's wild card. In addition to being



Courtesy DuBose Campaign

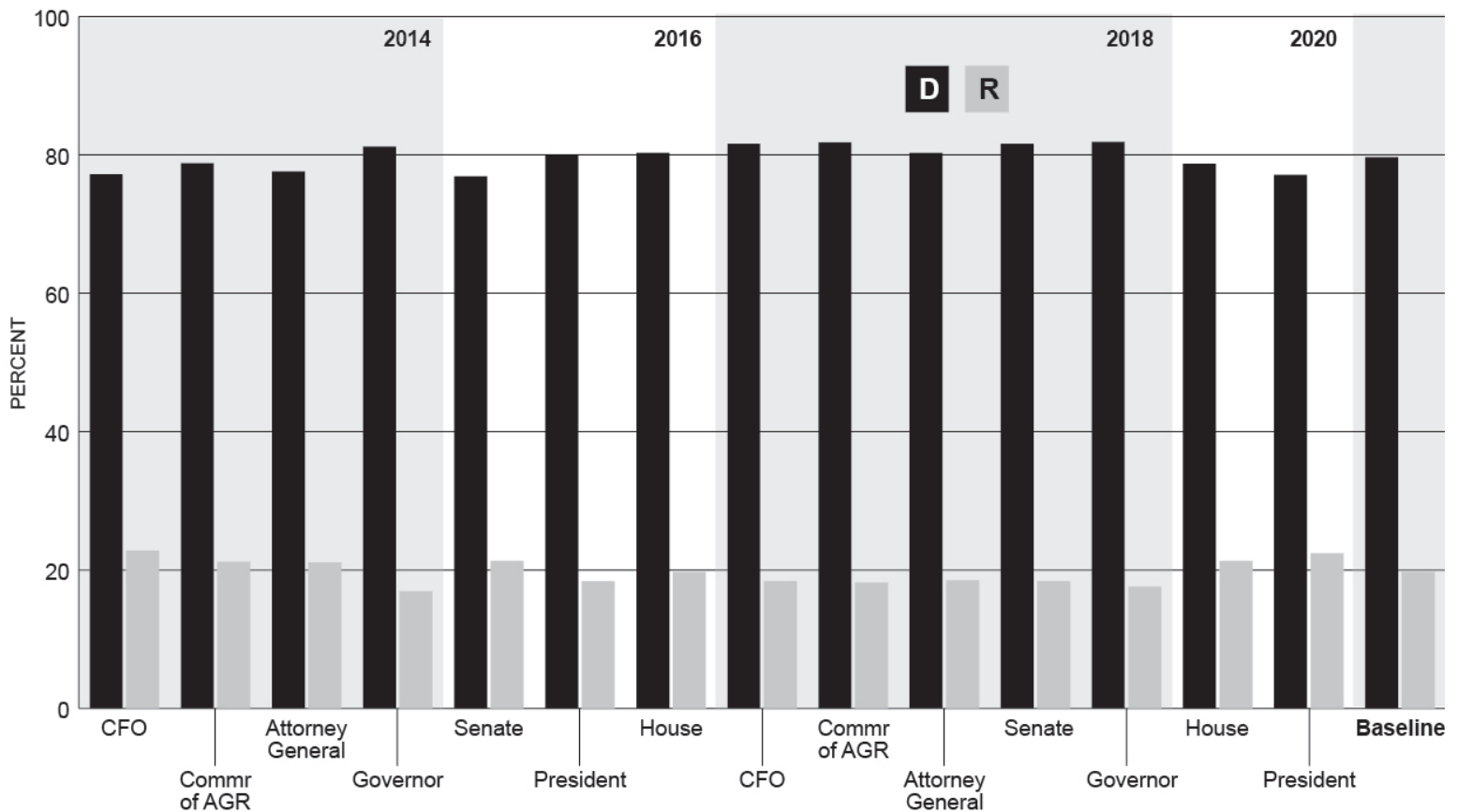
Bobby DuBose

the only Palm Beach candidate, he's also younger than the rest of the field, and comes out of a more brash, progressive insurgent wing of the party compared to the older, more establishment wing exemplified by Holness, Thurston, and DuBose.

Hardy's outspokenness and support for big-ticket progressive items such as the Green New Deal, Medicare for All, and a guaranteed income have helped him cultivate a national following online, which could help him bring in digital fundraising dollars, and it distinguishes him from the field — a necessity in any crowded race. So far, though, Hardy has struggled to raise money; he reported bringing in just \$94,840 over May and June, his first two months in the race.

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Statewide Election Results in Florida's 20th District



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There are also pitfalls to being too closely associated with the progressive wing of the party in a district more accustomed to the old school Black establishment politics of Alcee Hastings, especially in South Florida, where the s-word is “socialism.”

Hardy’s campaign has sought a balance. His announcement video makes a point of declaring that he “isn’t imitating AOC.” But a prospectus prepared by the Hardy campaign and obtained by *Inside Elections* promotes the candidate as “South Florida’s AOC.”

And while Hardy hopes to mobilize his online following to raise national grassroots money, he’ll also try to tap into a network of establishment Democratic donors. He’ll be aided by his wife, Georgette Brammer-Hardy, a former Obama administration official who also was a senior fundraiser for the Florida Democratic Party and the Democratic National Committee. So far, though, Hardy’s fundraising has been underwhelming.

One open question is whether any outside Democratic groups get involved in the race. For now, organizations including Congressional Progressive Caucus PAC, Congressional Black Caucus PAC, Justice Democrats and others are staying on the sidelines. According to Democratic sources, EMILY’s List has been involved behind the scenes, including helping the Sharief campaign bring on a more experienced consulting team. But the group has not yet endorsed a candidate. In a low turnout race with a wide field, even a small investment in paid media could be enough to boost any of the nascent campaigns. Florida does not have a runoff requirement for this kind of race, so candidates

might need as little as 25 or 30 percent of the vote to win.

Such a low threshold for victory could even play into the hands of a candidate like Cherfilus-McCormick, who appears poised to flood the race with personal funds. Democrats in the district generally consider her a less credible candidate on account of her two no-shot bids against Hastings in 2018 and 2020. But any candidate who commits that level of financial resources to their campaign needs to be taken seriously, especially in a low-turnout race without a clear frontrunner.

Florida’s “resign to run” law places additional pressure on the several candidates who currently hold office. Under the statute, candidates who

hold a state office — in this field, that would be Thurston, DuBose, and Hardy in the state legislature, and Holness and Sharief on the Broward County commission — must resign that office no later than July 31 in order to run for Congress.

Courtesy, Cherfilus-McCormick Campaign



Sheila Cherfilus-McCormick

The only public polling in the race thus far is a Public Policy Polling (D) survey released on April 16 that showed Holness in the lead with 13 percent, followed by Thurston at 11 percent, DuBose at 7 percent, and Sharief at 6 percent. The poll, which was sponsored by an unnamed Democratic consultant and first reported by *Florida Politics*, also included state Sen. Bobby Powell, who Democratic insiders do not expect to run, at 9 percent, and state Sen. Shevrin Jones, who has ruled out a run, at 3 percent. The survey did not include Hardy as an option, and 50 percent of respondents were undecided.

Democratic sources say private polling of the race paints a similar picture, with half or more voters undecided and Holness with a slight lead among voters who have a choice.

The Bottom Line

Every open seat congressional race is important, because it means sending a new lawmaker to Congress. That is doubly so for safe seats such as the 20th District, where an incumbent might be in office for decades. Hastings represented this area for 28 years.

In this Congress in particular, Democrats hold a majority of just five seats, so every vote matters, and every single member wields greater power.

As progressives attempt to build on their successes of the past two cycles, the 20th District presents an intriguing opportunity to demonstrate that they can win in more traditionally moderate Democratic areas.

For the Florida political establishment, the contest could be an organizational test run for 2022, when the entire statewide slate of offices is up for election as well as GOP Sen. Marco Rubio. Though there won’t be serious Republican opposition in the 20th District special election, the race could allow Democrats to re-engage with some of the African American, Hispanic, and immigrant communities that moved toward Trump last November and made the Sunshine State one of the few where Biden underperformed Clinton.

And for a whole swath of South Florida politicians who have been stymied in their efforts to achieve higher office, this special presents a once-in-a-generation chance to move up the ladder at a time when Democrats are on their heels statewide.



2022 Governor Ratings

Battleground

Democratic-held (6)

- Kelly (D-Kan.)
- Mills (D-Maine)
- Whitmer (D-Mich.)
- Sisolak (D-Nev.)
- PA Open (Wolf, D)
- Evers (D-Wisc.)

Republican-held (5)

- AZ Open (Ducey, R)
- DeSantis (R-Fl.)
- Kemp (R-Ga.)
- MD Open (Hogan, R)
- Sununu (R-N.H.)

Solid Democratic (10)

- Newsom (D-Calif.)
- Polis (D-Colo.)
- Lamont (D-Conn.)
- HI Open (Ige, D)
- Pritzker (D-Ill.)
- Walz (D-Minn.)
- Lujan Grisham (D-N.M.)
- Cuomo (D-N.Y.)
- OR Open (Brown, D)
- McKee (D-R.I.)

Solid Republican (15)

- Ivey (R-Ala.)
- Dunleavy (R-Alaska)
- AR Open (Hutchinson, R)
- Little (R-Idaho)
- Reynolds (R-Iowa)
- Baker (R-Mass.)
- NE Open (Ricketts, R)
- Noem (R-S.D.)
- DeWine (R-Ohio)
- Stitt (R-Okla.)
- McMaster (R-S.C.)
- Lee (R-Tenn.)
- Abbott (R-Texas)
- Scott (R-Vt.)
- Gordon (R-Wyo.)

2021 RACES

Likely Democratic

- CA Recall (Newsom, D)
- VA Open (Northam, D)

Solid Democratic

- Murphy (D-N.J.)

Continued from page 1

Ivey defeated Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox by 19 points, 59-40 percent. Democrats have been out of power for so long that the most recent Democrat to win a state office, 2008 Public Service Commissioner election winner Lucy Baxley, died in 2016.

Republicans have locked down the state's federal races as well, holding both of the state's Senate seats and a majority of its congressional delegation since 1997 — with one notable exception.

In 2014, Democrats did not even field a candidate against Sen. Jeff Sessions. In 2016, Shelby won re-election by 28 points, 64-36 percent, over Democrat Ron Crumpton.

But in 2017, in a special election to replace Sessions after he was appointed to be Trump's attorney general, Democrats scored a massive upset when former U.S. Attorney Doug Jones narrowly defeated Roy Moore, the former state Supreme Court chief justice accused of sexual misconduct against minors, by a slim 50-48 percent margin.

Jones is the only Democrat to win a statewide race in the 2010s, and only one of two Democrats in the 2010s to win more than 41 percent of the vote. He faced former Auburn Univ. football coach Tommy Tuberville in the 2020 Senate election, and lost by 20 points, 60-40 percent.

The Republicans

Four candidates are running in the Republican primary, which is scheduled for May 24.

Alabama requires a majority vote to win, so if no candidate hits 50 percent in the initial race, then the top two vote-getters progress to a runoff on June 21. The last two contested GOP Senate primaries, in 2017 and 2020, both went to runoffs.

Lynda Blanchard, the former U.S. Ambassador to Slovenia, was the first to announce her candidacy, just 10 days after Shelby said he wouldn't seek another term. She was joined by Rep. Mo Brooks in March, former Shelby chief of staff Katie Boyd Britt in June, and former U.S. House candidate Jessica Taylor in July.

Blanchard, 62, served as ambassador from 2019 to 2021 during the Trump administration. A native Alabamian, Blanchard was born in Montgomery and attended Auburn Univ., graduating with a mathematics degree in 1991.

In 1993, she co-founded B&M Management, a Montgomery-based commercial real estate firm, with her husband. She and her husband also co-founded 100X Missions (now known as 100X Development Foundation), a non-profit that financially supports Christian missions, particularly orphanages, in Africa, Eastern Europe, and Asia.

Blanchard and her husband are major GOP donors who stepped up their giving significantly during Trump's rise. The two have donated at least \$5.9 million to Republican candidates and committees since 2016, nearly \$2 million of it to the Trump Victory Fund.

In 2018, Blanchard was nominated to be Trump's envoy to Slovenia, the home country of then First Lady Melania Trump. But her nomination was not acted upon by the time Congress went out of session and was



Mo Brooks

Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

sent back to Trump. He renominated her the following year and she was confirmed by a vote of 54-40, with Democrats Kyrsten Sinema, Chris Murphy, and fellow Alabamian Doug Jones voting in favor, and Republican Susan Collins voting against.

Blanchard resigned her post when Biden took office, and announced her Senate run on Feb. 18. She had \$5.2 million in her campaign account on June 30 (including \$5.1 million of her own money). She is working with general consultants Jeff Roe and Ethan Zorfias of Axiom Strategies.

Brooks, 67, is running for the Senate for the second time. The six-term congressman from the 5th District (Northern Alabama) previously ran in the GOP primary in the 2017 special election to replace Sessions.

In that race, Brooks was buried under \$15 million in negative advertising from the Mitch McConnell-aligned Senate Leadership Fund. At the time, SLF was working to protect Sen. Luther Strange, who had been appointed to Sessions' seat and was running to complete the rest of the term. And Brooks' Tea Party proclivities did not endear him to Senate leadership either.

SLF's barrage was successful — to a point. Brooks was kept out of the runoff, placing third with just 20 percent of the vote. Instead, Strange was forced into overtime with former state Supreme Court Justice Roy Moore, who defeated him 55-45 percent in the runoff. Moore would go on to be accused by several women of sexually preying on them when they were minors, and he would lose a close race to Democrat Doug Jones.

Brooks was born in Charleston, South Carolina, and moved to Huntsville, Ala. as a child. He graduated from Duke in 1975 and University of Alabama Law School in 1978. In 1982, he began a 10-year stint in the Alabama House of Representatives. At the time, Republicans were just emerging from a century of irrelevance in the state. Brooks began as one of just eight Republicans in the 105-member chamber.

In 1996, he won a seat on the Madison County (Huntsville) Commission, winning re-election in 2000, 2004, and 2008.

In 2006, he sought the GOP nomination for lieutenant governor, placing third with 16 percent, behind future Sen. Luther Strange and



Courtesy Lynda Blanchard

Lynda Blanchard

Public Service Commissioner George Wallace Jr. — Strange would go on to lose the general election to Democrat Jim Folsom.

In 2010, Brooks ran for Congress in the 5th District. The incumbent, Democrat Parker Griffith, had switched parties in 2009 and was running as a Republican. Despite Griffith receiving endorsements from the four other Republicans in the delegation, Brooks defeated him in the primary, 51-33 percent, and went on to become the first Republican since Reconstruction to represent Northern Alabama in Congress.

Brooks beat Griffith again in the 2012 primary, 71-29 percent, and has not faced a serious challenge since.

Following the 2020 election, Brooks was the first member of Congress to state that he would object to the certification of Biden's Electoral

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College victory, based on false and unsubstantiated allegations of electoral theft. And on the morning of January 6, he gave a fiery speech at the rally on the Mall that precipitated the afternoon’s insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, urging rallygoers to “start taking down names and kicking ass.”

Brooks scored an early coup in this race when he secured Trump’s endorsement.

Britt, 37, was born in Enterprise, about 30 miles west of Dothan in southeastern Alabama. She graduated from University of Alabama in 2004, and went directly to work for Shelby in Washington, DC in the senator’s press shop.

In 2007, she moved back home to take an administrative position at Alabama, along the way marrying Wesley Britt, a former captain of the Crimson Tide football team and offensive tackle for the New England Patriots.



Katie Boyd Britt

Courtesy Britt Campaign

Britt graduated from University of Alabama law school in 2013, and worked in government relations at a Birmingham law firm until 2016, when she returned to Shelby’s office in DC as chief of staff.

After two years as chief of staff, Britt returned again to Alabama to take a post as president and CEO of the Alabama Business Council, an influential pro-business advocacy group that serves as the state’s official affiliate with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Britt entered the race with an endorsement from Shelby, her former boss and outgoing senator, and recently reported a serious fundraising haul: \$2.2 million in just 23 days.

The most recent entrant is business consultant Jessica Taylor, 36, who runs the Montgomery-based Azimuth Grants firm. She graduated from Jacksonville State University in Jacksonville, Ala. in 2006 and Faulkner University law school in 2010 after working on her degree at night. Prior to founding Azimuth, she worked in the administration of Gov. Bob Riley. Her husband, Bryan Taylor, is a former state senator and until recently was Gov. Ivey’s general counsel.

This is Taylor’s second run for office. In 2020, she ran in the GOP primary to succeed retiring Rep. Martha Roby in the 2nd District (Southeastern Alabama). During that campaign, she styled herself as the creator of the “Conservative Squad,” a collection of four Republican women running for Congress who would be the GOP’s response to the Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez-led quadriga of Democratic congresswomen.

Their splashy launch got Taylor and her fellow “squad” members — South Carolina’s Nancy Mace, Texas’ Beth Van Duyne, and Minnesota’s Michelle Fischbach — a prime appearance on “Fox & Friends,” but it wasn’t enough to get Taylor herself over the finish line. She finished third in the GOP primary with 19.9 percent of the vote, behind Jeff Coleman (38 percent) and eventual winner Barry Moore (20.4 percent, just 591 votes ahead of Taylor). Mace, Van Duyne, and Fischbach are all now in Congress.

As in her congressional run, Taylor announced her Senate bid with a splashy video produced by Cold Spark Media, this one featuring Taylor launching a rocket filled with “critical race theory,” higher taxes, and

social media icons. The video grabbed some national attention, mainly because Taylor focused most of her attacks on Vice President Kamala Harris, whose name she mispronounced several times.

The Republican Primary

As Trump’s handpicked candidate, Brooks begins the race as the undisputed frontrunner.

Not only is the former president still the most influential person in the Republican Party, and wildly popular among Republican primary voters, but as a newly minted Florida resident he’s right next door to the Yellowhammer State.

Trump is notoriously averse to long trips, which could affect how intensely he campaigns for some of his preferred candidates in further-flung locales, such as Senate hopeful Kelly Tshibaka in Alaska. But that won’t be an issue for traveling to Alabama, which is easily accessible from his home base of Mar-a-lago.

Republican sources say Trump is intent on campaigning hard for Brooks. Trump’s first scheduled rally in Alabama, a July 3 event in Mobile, fell apart at the last minute, but Republicans believe he will make it there soon.

The former president has also recorded a minute-long radio ad for Brooks praising the congressman effusively as “MAGA Mo.” And Trump recently released a long statement — through his PAC, because he has been permanently banned from Twitter — that contained personal attacks against Britt, as well as Shelby, and Minority Leader Mitch McConnell.

The big question for Brooks will be if he can raise enough money to educate voters about the Trump endorsement. The congressman has only once raised a million dollars (when he ran for Senate in 2017), and usually raises between \$500,000 and \$900,000 per cycle.

He started the race with a bit of cash (\$1.1 million) left over from previous runs, and turned in a good first full quarter as a candidate, raising \$824,000 and ending June with \$1.7 million in the bank. But



Jessica Taylor

Courtesy Taylor Campaign

he’ll need to maintain and even increase that pace if he wants to keep up with his opponents. Blanchard has considerable personal money and has loaned her campaign \$5.1 million.

Britt has already raised a record-breaking \$2.2 million in her first weeks as a candidate. But more than 40 percent of Britt’s donors gave more than \$2,000 to her campaign, including 115 donors who gave the legal maximum of \$8,700 (\$2,900 for each of the primary, potential runoff, and general elections). That will limit her ability to go back to those donors for more money later in the race.

Brooks will need to boost his name recognition and favorability in the Mobile metro area. The six-term representative’s base of support is still concentrated in the northern part of the state in Madison and Limestone counties, and he lacks strength in the south. In the 2017 primary, he actually placed fourth in Mobile and its six surrounding counties, behind not just Moore and Strange but also state Sen. Trip Pittman, who won

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just 7 percent statewide.

Mobile presents the best opportunity for non-Brooks candidates to gain a foothold in the race. Unlike in the 2020 primary, when local Rep. Bradley Byrne dominated in the area, there is no favorite son or daughter poised to take the lion's share of Mobile's votes. That's likely why Trump was planning on rallying for Brooks there.

Missing out on Trump's endorsement is a blow to any GOP primary candidate, but especially so for Blanchard, whose primary calling card is that she was Trump's pick to represent America overseas in Slovenia. In her announcement video, she declares herself "a proud member of the MAGA movement" and says she "never thought about serving in public office until President Trump asked me to."

Accordingly, Blanchard has begun attacking Brooks as a fake Trump supporter, relying on Brooks' comments from 2016 when he called Trump a "serial adulterer" and told MSNBC that "I don't think you can trust Donald Trump with anything he says." Those comments were used to great effect by SLF against Brooks in the 2017 GOP Senate primary, but it's not obvious if they are still salient, especially since Brooks has an endorsement from Trump and has made headlines over the past year for his fierce defenses of the former president.

Blanchard is also trying to tap into the latest culture war issues, accusing Brooks of taking campaign contributions from "woke corporations" such as Microsoft and Coca-Cola, and tagging him as a Washington insider and swamp creature.

For Taylor, the primary challenge will be to raise enough money to introduce herself to voters, especially outside of the southeastern portion of the state where she ran in 2020. That cycle, she raised just \$476,000, so she will have to kick into higher gear if she wants to compete in a field where she's the only candidate without either personal money or donor connections.

Alabama uses an open primary system, meaning voters can choose which party's primary they wish to participate in on Election Day (Alabama does not have party registration). That means Democratic voters or independents who don't normally vote in Republican primaries can vote in this contest, should they choose to. With no Democratic candidates in the race so far, and the state's most prominent Democratic politicians all declining to run, the GOP primary is in effect the general election for the state, and if Democrats have a preference between Republican candidates,



Jessica Taylor announcement video

the only way to express that preference is in the primary.

For a candidate such as Britt, who is likely more palatable to independents and Democratic voters than the fiery Brooks is, winning over some of those voters could broaden her electoral base.

There's some precedent for the idea: in 2014, longtime Mississippi Sen. Thad Cochran relied on Black Democratic voters to beat back a primary challenge from the bombastic state Sen. Chris McDaniel. After trailing McDaniel by 0.5 percent in the first round of balloting, Cochran won a close 51-49 percent runoff.

But unlike Cochran, who was vying for a seventh term, Britt does not have 36 years of goodwill and relationships to draw upon, and in today's polarized environment, it would be difficult to make explicit appeals to Democratic voters, as Cochran did, without turning off GOP primary voters in the process.

Republican sources say to watch how much political capital the retiring Shelby puts behind Britt. In addition to a \$9.7 million war chest he could conceivably deploy to help her, Shelby has some of those deeper relationships on account of his six terms in office. He's also shown a willingness to go against President Trump in electoral politics, famously refusing to endorse Roy Moore in 2017 and telling fellow Republicans not to vote for him either.

At the moment, it looks like the best shot any of the non-Brooks candidates have is to force Brooks into a runoff and then hope a combination of support from the business community, moderates, and Democrats, plus a financial advantage, is enough to overcome the power of a Trump endorsement.

The only public polling of the race so far was an April 26-27 survey conducted by WPAI for the anti-tax Club for Growth, which has endorsed Brooks. The poll of 509 likely GOP primary voters found Brooks with 59 percent (which would be enough to win outright and avoid a runoff), followed by Blanchard at 13 percent and Britt at 9 percent. The poll did not include Taylor, who had not announced yet. Republican sources say private polling paints a similar picture.

The poll is a useful indicator of where the race begins, with Brooks as the clear frontrunner. But it also shows how undeveloped the race is. While Brooks is known by 83 percent of GOP primary voters, just a quarter of voters had heard of Blanchard or Britt (who had not yet announced her candidacy at the time). Both will have the resources to increase their name ID over the coming nine months.

Blanchard, in particular, has already set down a marker for how

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Katie Boyd Britt announcement video

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long she thinks this race will take to develop, taking the rare step of placing \$2 million in ad buys that will not start until March of next year. While those reservations can always be canceled or altered, it's a sign she intends to be in the race for the long haul.

And while Trump's endorsement might make Brooks the early favorite, it does not make him invincible. Luther Strange had Trump's endorsement in the 2017 Senate primary and runoff, and it did not propel him to victory among the GOP primary electorate. The man who beat him, Roy Moore, had Trump's endorsement in the 2017 special general election, and he lost too.

Democrats?

Alabama Democrats received a shot of energy in 2017 when Jones became the first Democrat to win statewide elected office in nearly a decade, and the first Democrat to win a Senate race since Shelby in 1992.

But Jones got clobbered in 2020 when he ran in a regularly-scheduled election, despite being an incumbent with a 3-to-1 spending advantage over his opponent Tuberville.

He's now settled in at a high-powered DC law firm and has no interest in running next year. And the state's sole Democratic representative in Congress, Terri Sewell, ruled out a run as well.

Longtime Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox ran a well-regarded campaign for governor in 2018 and got walloped by Ivey despite a good

year for Democrats nationwide. If he runs statewide in 2022, it'll likely be for governor, not for Senate.

The Bottom Line

It is notable any time the 100-member Senate replaces an old lawmaker with a new one. That holds true even when the seat remains in the hands of the same party, as will almost certainly be the case in Alabama.

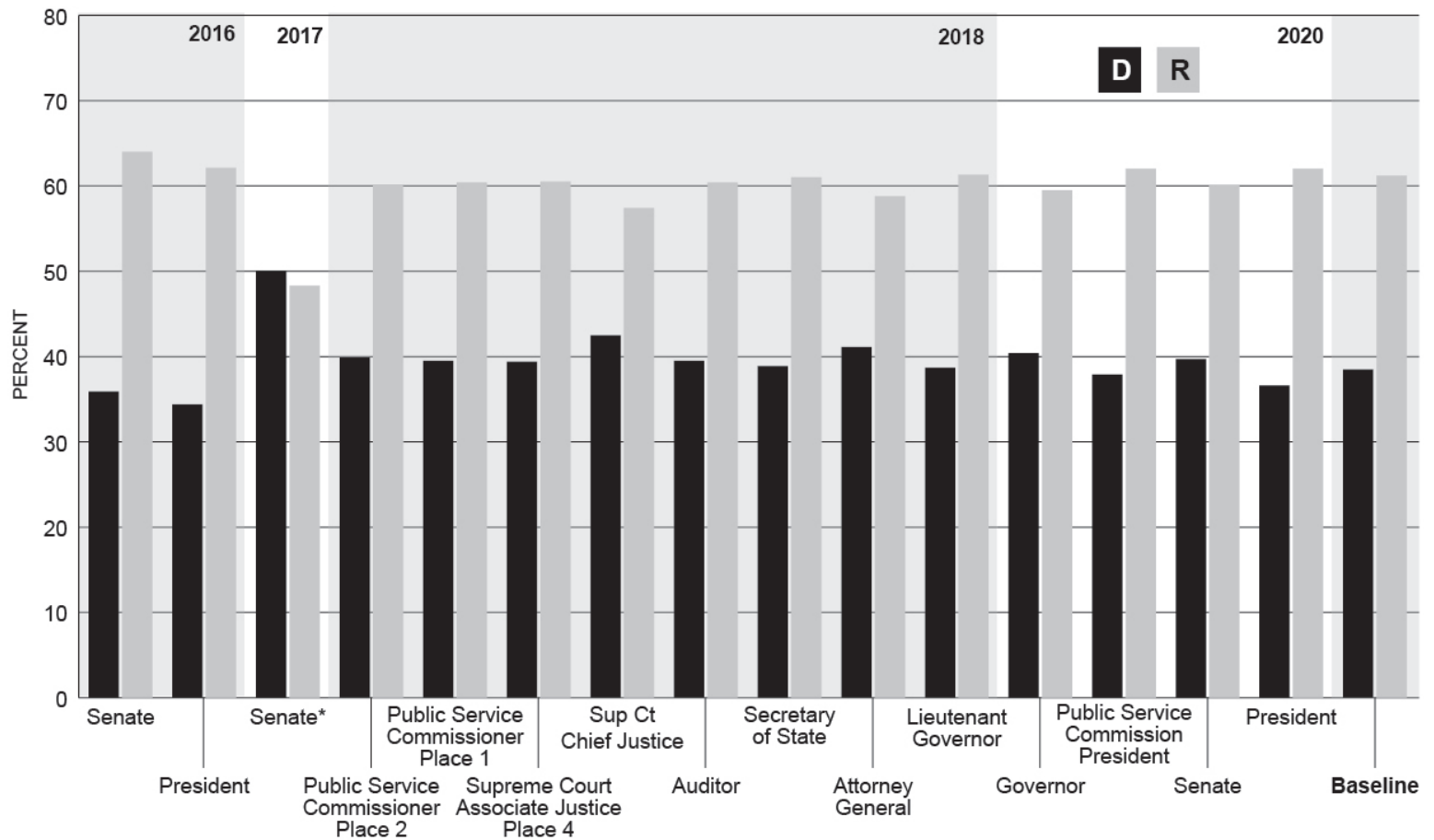
As longtime GOP senators take their bows in Washington — not just the five retiring this cycle but also Tennessee Sens. Bob Corker (2018) and Lamar Alexander (2020) and Kansas Sen. Pat Roberts (2020) — their replacements and potential successors have reflected a newer, Trump-oriented version of the Republican Party.

In the House, where all members stand for re-election every two years, the shift has been even more apparent. On Jan. 6, Brooks was a leader of 139 (out of 221) House Republicans who objected to the certification of Biden's Electoral College victory. That same day, just eight of 51 Senate Republicans objected, but Shelby voted to ratify the results.

So this race could be yet another example of the party's shift toward Trump. This primary will also be a test for Trump himself, to show that even out of the White House he can still call the shots in elections across the country. Whatever the results, the success or failure of Brooks, and other Trump-endorsed candidates, will send a message to Republican officeholders on how to navigate the former president in the lead-up to the 2022 midterms.



Statewide Election Results in Alabama



* Special Election