



# Topsail Island Shoreline Protection Commission Legislative Report

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## North Carolina 2026 Primary and General Election Preview

**December 22, 2025**

With candidate filing now complete, the 2026 election landscape in North Carolina is officially set across all three power centers that matter most to policy outcomes: the General Assembly, the federal delegation, and the courts. While it may feel like the 2024 election just concluded, the 2026 midterms are already underway, with full fields now in place. At the close of filing, 12 candidates filed for U.S. Senate (6 Democrats and 6 Republicans), 65 candidates filed for U.S. House (38 Democrats and 27 Republicans), and 10 candidates filed for statewide judicial races. At the legislative level, 112 candidates filed for the NC Senate and 263 candidates filed for the NC House, underscoring the breadth of the battlefield.

At the same time, filing results highlight where competition is and is not expected. Democrats fielded candidates in all 50 State Senate races and 118 of 120 State House seats, while Republicans fielded candidates in 45 of 50 State Senate races and 91 of 120 State House seats. Just one Republican House member is running unopposed, while five Democratic state senators and 17 Democratic House members face no opposition. These imbalances reinforce a familiar dynamic: in many districts, the primary election will be the decisive contest.

At the legislative level, Republicans enter the cycle defending a veto-proof Senate supermajority and a House caucus that is within one seat of restoring a veto-proof threshold. Democrats are targeting a narrow set of Senate districts that could break the supermajority and are aiming to expand their leverage in the House. Notably, primary pressure is significantly heavier on Republicans, with more than a quarter of GOP Senate seats and more than a third of GOP House seats featuring contested primaries, more than twice the number faced by Democrats.

On the judicial side, a small number of high-stakes races, including statewide appellate contests, are expected to draw disproportionate attention and resources given their implications for election law, redistricting, and major policy disputes. Federally, North Carolina is again positioned for national-level spending and engagement, with an open U.S. Senate seat and several top-tier congressional races that will attract outside money and shape turnout.

## **TISPC – NC Senate Overview**

### **SD-9 (Jackson – R)**

Sen. Brent Jackson, an eight-term senator, Appropriations Chair, and farmer, represents Bladen, Duplin, Jones, Pender, and part of Sampson counties. Jackson faces a Republican primary challenge from William Barbour, an actor. Despite the primary, this remains a safe Republican seat, and Jackson is expected to prevail comfortably.

## **TISPC – NC House Overview**

- HD-16, Carson Smith (R-Pender, Onslow)

Rep. Smith will face Holly Ridge Town Council Member Joshua Patti in the GOP Primary. Rep. Smith favored. The winner will face Jim Harris in the General Election, but this seat remains safe Republican.

## **Federal Races**

A range of incumbents and challengers have filed to run for the U.S. Senate and North Carolina's 14 congressional districts. Twenty-one federal primaries have emerged so far, with seven seats having both Democrat and Republican primaries (US Senate, Cong. Dist.-5, Cong. Dist.-10, Cong. Dist.-11, Cong. Dist.-12, Cong. Dist.-13, and Cong. Dist.-14), two on just the Republican side (Cong. Dist-1; Cong. Dist.-7) and five on just the Democratic side (Cong. Dist.-3, Cong. Dist.-4, Cong. Dist.-6, Cong. Dist.-8, and Cong. Dist.-9).

Interesting races to watch include the open seat for U.S. Senate, with Senator Thom Tillis deciding not to run again; Congressional District 1, which was redrawn recently from a “toss up” district to one that favors a Republican candidate; and a Democrat challenge in Congressional District 4 has made national news with Durham County Commissioner Nida Allam filing against two-term incumbent Rep. Valerie Foushee. Allam is backed by U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders.

Here's a list of the federal offices and the Democrat and Republican candidates for each:

<b><u>Office</u></b>	<b><u>Democrat</u></b>	<b><u>Republican</u></b>
<b>US Senate</b>	Roy Cooper Daryl Farrow Marcus Williams Orrick Quick Justin Dues Robert Colon	Don Brown Elizabeth Temple Michael Whatley Margot Dupre Thomas Johnson Richard Dansie Michelle Morrow
<b>Cong Dist 1</b>	Don Davis (i)*	Bobby Hanig Eric Rouse Asa Buck Ashley-Nicole Russell

		Laurie Buckhout
<b>Cong Dist 2</b>	Deborah Ross (i)	Eugene Douglass
<b>Cong Dist 3</b>	Raymond Smith Allison Jaslow	Greg Murphy (i)
<b>Cong Dist 4</b>	Valerie Foushee (i) Mary Patterson Nida Allam	Max Ganonkar
<b>Cong Dist 5</b>	Chuck Hubbard Kyah Creekmoor	Steve Giard Virginia Foxx (i) Roman Williams Jospheh Osborne
<b>Cong Dist 6</b>	Cyril Jefferson Keith Davenport Alisa Kassay Beau Blair	Addison McDowell (i)
<b>Cong Dist 7</b>	Kimberly Hardy	David Rouzer (i) David Buzzard
<b>Cong Dist 8</b>	Kevin Clark Colby Watson Jesse Oppenheimer	Mark Harris (i)
<b>Cong Dist 9</b>	Nigel Bristow Richard Ojeda Lauren Bibler Lent Carr	Richard Hudson (i)
<b>Cong Dist 10</b>	Harry Morley Ashley Bell West Caudle Marcus Pearson Ralph Scott	Pat Harrington (i) Matthew Sin
<b>Cong Dist 11</b>	Jamie Ager Paul Maddox Richard Hudspeth Zelda Briarwood Lee Whipple	Chuck Edwards (i) Adam Smith
<b>Cong Dist 12</b>	Alma Adams (i) Monaca Maye Johnson	Jack Codiga Addul Ali
<b>Cong Dist 13</b>	Paul Barringer Alexander Nicholi Frank Pierce	Brad Knott (i) Sid Sharma
<b>Cong Dist 14</b>	Brent Caldwell Lakesha Womack Ahmid Kargbo	Tim Moore (i) Kate Barr

\*(i) Incumbent

### Statewide Judicial Races

There will be contested elections in each of the four statewide judicial races on the 2026 ballot. The race for the Supreme Court of North Carolina will be a matchup between incumbent Justice Anita Earls and NC House Representative Sarah Stevens. There are two primary challenges in the race for Court of Appeals seats 1 and 3:

**Seat 1:** The Republican primary between Matt Smith, superior court judge serving Union County and Administrative Law Judge Michael Byrne. The winner will face incumbent Appeals Judge John Arrowood.

**Seat 3:** The Democrat primary to fill the open seat being vacated by Judge Allegra Collins, will match Raleigh attorney James Whalen, who worked at the Department of Justice under then AG Josh Stein and worked on the 2024 Supreme Court recount, against Judge Christine Walczyk, who has served for 18 years as a district court trial judge in Wake County.

Here's a list of the statewide judicial offices and the Democrat and Republican candidates for each:

<b><u>Office</u></b>	<b><u>Democrat</u></b>	<b><u>Republican</u></b>
<b>Supreme Court</b>	Anita Earls (i)	Sarah Stevens
<b>Court of Appeals 1</b>	John Arrowood (i)	Matt Smith Michael Byrne
<b>Court of Appeals 2</b>	Toby Hampson (i)	George Bell
<b>Court of Appeals 3</b>	James Whalen Christine Walczyk	Craig Collins

### **North Carolina General Assembly**

#### **North Carolina Senate**

Republicans hold a veto-proof supermajority in the North Carolina Senate (30–20). The path to breaking—or defending—that supermajority in 2026 is narrow and highly concentrated.

#### **The Core Battlegrounds**

The five most competitive North Carolina Senate seats heading into 2026 fall into two categories: three currently held by Republicans and two held by Democrats.

##### **Republican-held battlegrounds (3):**

- SD-7 — Sen. Michael Lee (New Hanover)
- SD-11 — Sen. Lisa Barnes (Franklin, Nash, Vance)
- SD-34 — Sen. Chris Measmer (Cabarrus)

## **Democratic-held battlegrounds (2):**

- SD-18 — Sen. Terence Everitt (Wake, Granville)
- SD-42 — Sen. Woodson Bradley (Mecklenburg)

If Democrats successfully defend Everitt and Bradley, they need to flip just one of the three Republican seats to break the Senate's veto-proof supermajority. As a result, 2026 shapes up as a defensive cycle for Senate Republicans and a highly targeted offensive cycle for Senate Democrats.

That said, Senate Republicans benefit from a broader strategic reality: Democrats and the Governor are expected to devote disproportionate resources to the NC House, where Republicans are already one seat short of a supermajority and face a much larger battlefield (roughly 15 competitive races). By comparison, the Senate map offers Democrats far fewer viable paths to success.

### Battleground Seat Context

#### **SD-42 — Sen. Woodson Bradley (D)**

Bradley defeated Republican Stacie McGinn by 209 votes (0.16%) in 2024 and we will see a rematch in 2026. While McGinn is independently wealthy and capable of self-funding, we do not anticipate the race being as close as it was in 2024. Bradley does not face a Democratic primary, and broader political conditions currently favor the incumbent.

#### **SD-7 — Sen. Michael Lee (R)**

This remains a familiar and consistently competitive battleground. Democrat Jessica Bichler is not considered a top-tier recruit, but district fundamentals ensure the race will again be competitive. In 2024, Lee defeated David Hill by 10,264 votes (8.47%), significantly outperforming expectations despite a Libertarian candidate receiving 4.05% of the vote. Lee does not face a primary opponent in 2026, allowing him to conserve resources and sit on a substantial campaign war chest heading into the general election. Lee remains a strong fit for the district, an effective campaigner, and a proven fundraiser.

### Majority Control Outlook

It is nearly mathematically impossible for Senate Republicans to lose their majority in 2026. Even in a strong Democratic wave, the chamber would likely land at 28–22, or at worst 27–23, Republican.

Breaking the supermajority, not flipping the chamber, is the true Democratic objective.

Among Republican incumbents, Sen. Lisa Barnes (SD-11) and Sen. Chris Measmer (SD-34) stand out as the most vulnerable seats on the map. Barnes is coming off a close 2024 win (2,907 votes / 2.58%) and will again be operating in a margin district where third-party votes could matter. Importantly, Barnes does not face a Republican primary, allowing her to focus exclusively on the general election. Measmer's vulnerability is more structural—he is still

relatively new to the Senate after being appointed this spring—though he is not politically uncontested, having previously served as a Cabarrus County commissioner.

## Primary Landscape

There are 15 Senate primaries in 2026:

- 11 Republican primaries
- 4 Democratic primaries

### **Key Republican Primaries**

- **SD-1 (Open Seat)**  
Sen. Bobby Hanig is the lone incumbent senator not running for re-election, instead pursuing a run for Congress and creating an open seat. Senate GOP leadership appears to favor Jay Lane, though the race remains competitive.
- **SD-5**  
Republicans Henry Hostetler and Angelene Mitchell are running to take on Democrat incumbent Senator Kandie Smith in Pitt County.
- **SD-9 — Sen. Brent Jackson**  
Faces a primary challenge but is expected to win comfortably.
- **SD-10 — Sen. Benton Sawrey**  
Has a primary challenger; no expectation of defeat.
- **SD-12 — Sen. Jim Burgin**  
Faces a primary challenge. While Burgin is not expected to lose, this contest could create unnecessary complications in what may be a tougher general election year.
- **SD-17**  
Republicans Sarah Al-Baghdadi and Shirley Johnson are competing for the GOP nomination to challenge Senate Minority Leader Sydney Batch in this Wake County district. Despite the contested primary, the district remains a safe Democratic seat.
- **SD-18**

Former Senate staffer and lobbyist-turned-attorney Chris Stock and Wake County School Board member Cheryl Caulfield are competing for the Republican nomination to challenge Sen. Terence Everitt in this highly competitive district. Caulfield enters the race with a meaningful name-recognition advantage, while Stock is expected to be more competitive on fundraising. This is a race to closely watch on primary night.

- **SD-21 — Sen. Tom McInnis**  
Faces a spirited grassroots challenge by home builder Ray Daly from the right, making this one of the more concerning GOP primaries.
- **SD-26 — Senate Leader Phil Berger**  
The most significant primary in North Carolina politics this cycle. Berger faces Rockingham County Sheriff Sam Page, a longtime rival. Berger's allies have aggressively gone on offense, including securing President Trump's endorsement. Page recently released polling showing Berger closing the gap but still trailing by 10 points

(down from 18 earlier this year). A Berger loss would fundamentally reshape the General Assembly.

- **SD-30 — Sen. Steve Jarvis**  
Senator Steve Jarvis faces a primary challenge from Eddie Gallimore from Davidson County. We do not expect Sen. Jarvis to lose this primary. It is a safe Republican seat so the General Election will not be competitive.
- **SD-34 — Sen. Chris Measmer**  
Faces former NC House member Kevin Crutchfield, who lost a primary challenge from the right last year for his house seat. This is a legitimate primary to watch.

## **Democratic Primaries**

- **SD-12**  
Democrats Jheri Hardaway, a Fox 50 accounts manager, and Tanya White Anderson are competing for the Democratic nomination to challenge Sen. Jim Burgin in this safe Republican district.
- **SD-22 — Sen. Sophia Chitlik**  
First-term incumbent Chitlik faces a serious challenge from former 2-term Durham City Council member Dedreana Freeman. This is not an ideological primary—both candidates are progressive—but Freeman is a formidable opponent.
- **SD-32 — Sen. Paul Lowe**  
Lowe has drawn a primary challenger, likely from the left. Lowe has aligned with Republicans on key votes and is closely associated with former Democratic leader Dan Blue, making this race one to monitor.
- **SD-37**  
Raygan Angel and Precinda Bjorgen are running in the Democrat primary to take on Republican Senator Vickie Sawyer in this safe Republican seat.

## **Unopposed Incumbents**

Democrats recruited candidates for all 50 districts. Republicans left 5 Democrat incumbents unopposed in very safe districts.

### **Democrats (5):**

- SD-20 — Natalie Murdock
- SD-27 — Michael Garrett
- SD-28 — Gladys Robinson
- SD-38 — Mujtaba Mohammed
- SD-39 — DeAndrea Salvador

## **The Libertarian Factor**

There are six Libertarian candidates running for NC Senate. None are viable contenders, but in close races they can act as spoilers—almost exclusively to Republicans.

- **SD-11 — Sen. Lisa Barnes**  
Barnes won her 2024 race by 2,907 votes (2.58%). A Libertarian is on the ballot, creating real risk in an otherwise marginal seat.
- **SD-18 — Sen. Terence Everitt**  
Republicans face a competitive primary to challenge Everitt, but the presence of a Libertarian makes this race extremely difficult. In 2024, the Libertarian received 3,906 votes (3.17%), while Everitt won by just 128 votes (0.11%). Absent the Libertarian, Republicans likely would have held 31 Senate seats.

## **NC House of Representatives**

### **Retirements and Open Seats**

Nine retirements have been announced among North Carolina House members, all but one from incumbent Republican members. The eight Republican retirements represent 11% of the current House Majority of 71 members, and several of the retirements represent members of House Leadership. Two of the retirements, Rep. Sarah Stevens, running for NC Supreme Court, and Rep. Harry Warren, running for Clerk of Superior Court, are running for different offices instead of the NC House.

- HD-7; Matthew Winslow (R-Franklin, Vance)  
Rep. Winslow is the current House Majority Conference Co-Chair. The Conference Chair oversees election strategy for the Conference and is considered a key member of leadership.

Real Estate Agent Cory Thornton (R) faces Mark Speed (D) in the General Election with neither having a primary. This seat is considered a lean-Republican seat, but the loss of an incumbent and political environment could make it competitive in November. Lean Republican

- HD-20; Ted Davis (R-New Hanover)  
Rep. Davis has served 7.5 terms in the NC House and Chairs the Appropriations sub-committee on Justice and Public Safety, as well as Judiciary 1.

New Hanover Commissioner Dan Scalise (R) faces New Hanover School Board member Tim Merrick (D) in the General Election. Lean Republican.

- HD-22; William Brisson (R -Bladen, Sampson)  
Rep. Brisson is a full Chairman of the powerful House Appropriations Committee that writes the NC Budget.

Former Sampson Co. Commissioner Jerol Kivett (R) faces farmer Wellie Jackson (R) in a Republican Primary. The winner will face Jimmy Melvin (D) in the General Election, but the seat remains Safe Republican.

- HD-32; Bryan Cohn (D- Granville, Vance)  
Rep. Cohn is a freshman member of the Democratic caucus.

Melissa Elliot (D) faces Curtis McRae Jr. (D) in the Democratic primary; a late retirement announcement means these filings did not happen till close to the end of filing so very little is known of the dynamics of this race yet.

Former House Rep. Frank Sossamon (R) faces Pamela Ayscue (R) in the Republican Primary. Ms. Ayscue is affiliated with the NC Educators on the Ballot Group that has been accused of party switching in Republican Primaries. Former Rep. Sossamon favored in the primary.

General Election Rating: Lean Democrat.

- HD-51; John Sauls (R -Lee, Moore)  
Rep. Saul's Chairs the House Commerce Committee.

Lee Co. School Board Member and longtime Republican Activist Sherry Lynn Womack (R) faces Charles Taylor. This primary is expected to be a competitive primary pitting activist Republicans backing Womack versus the establishment pick of Taylor.

The Republican winner will face Tasherra McDuffie (D) in the General Election. Safe R.

- HD-55; Mark Brody (R -Anson, Union)  
Rep. Brody is Chairs the House Committee on Housing and Development and has been considered a key ally of the builders in the NC House.

Three-way primary between farmer Clancy Baucom (R), real estate agent John Powell (R), and Richard Miller. This race will likely be competitive splitting activists supporting Powell versus the leadership aligned Baucom. The winner will face Union County School Board Member John Kirkpatrick (D). Safe Republican.

- HD-63; Stephen Ross (R -Alamance)  
Rep. Ross is one of the Chairmen of the powerful House Finance Committee, as well as the House Commerce Committee.

Attorney Ryan Moffitt (R) faces former educator Whitney Olive (D) in the General Election. This is a lean Republican seat where the lack of a well-known incumbent could provide opportunities to the Democratic Candidate. Lean Republican.

- HD-76; Harry Warren (R - Rowan)  
Rep. Warren Chairs the House Committee on Ethics and the House Committee on Oversight. He is running for Clerk of Superior Court, Rowan Co.

Rowan Co. Commissioner Greg Edds will face Democrat Scott Huffman in the General Election, with neither having a primary. Safe Republican.

- HD-90; Sarah Stevens (R – Surry, Wilkes)

Rep. Stevens previously served as House Speaker Pro Temp, until she lost that position to long time member Rep. Setzer in an internal majority leadership race in 2025. She Chairs the House Committee on Election Law and the House Committee on Judiciary 2. She is running for NC Supreme Court for the seat currently occupied by Anita Earls.

Three candidates have filed in the Republican Primary for this seat:

- State Highway Patrolman Dan Kiger (R)
- Former Surry Co. Chief Deputy Paul Baker (R)
- Funeral Director and former NC GOP District Chair A.J. Daoud.

This Republican primary will likely be competitive, with the winner facing Ken Badgett (D) in this Safe Republican seat.

### **Incumbents with Primary Opponents**

Thirty incumbent members of the House face primary elections. Twenty-two members of the Republican Majority and eight members of the Democrat Minority. A major effort was launched by a group called NC Educators on the Ballot to challenge Republican incumbents, including several long-term Democrats who switched parties to engage in the Republican Primary. Several incumbent Democrats, most especially Rep. Carla Cunningham, and Rep. Shelly Willingham are facing challenges from their left accusing them of working too much with the Republican Majority.

- HD-1; Ed Goodwin (R -Chowan, Currituck, Dare, Perquimans, Tyrrell, Washington)  
Faces Washington County Commissioner John Spruill. Rep. Goodwin favored.
- HD-4; Jimmy Dixon (R – Duplin, Wayne)  
Faces model and actress Marcella Barbour. Rep. Dixon favored.
- HD-6; Joe Pike (R -Harnett)  
Faces former Erwin Police Chief Bill Morris. Rep. Pike favored.
- HD-16; Carson Smith (R – Onslow, Pender)  
Faces Holly Ridge Town Council Member Joshua Patti. Rep. Smith favored.
- HD-17; Frank Iller (R-Brunswick)  
Faces former Belville Mayoral Candidate Nia Moore. Rep. Iller favored.
- HD-23; Shelly Willingham (D -Bertie, Edgecombe, Martin)  
Faces Patricia Smith. This race could be competitive as Rep. Willingham has drawn ire from Democrat Party activists for voting with the Republican majority on several occasions.
- HD-26; Donna White (R-Johnston)  
Faces Real Estate Agent Margie Beth Riedel. Rep. White favored.
- HD-27; Rodney Pierce (D-Halifax, Northampton, Warren)  
Faces former House Rep. Michael Wray in a rematch of the 2024 primary where Rep. Pierce narrowly defeated long-time incumbent Rep. Wray. Rep. Wray was known for working with House Republicans and Gov. Stein has endorsed Rep. Pierce. This race is expected to be competitive.

- HD-28; Larry Strickland (R -Johnston)  
Faces Benson Mayor Eric Bowles. Rep. Strickland favored.
- HD-35; Mike Schietzelt (R- Wake)  
Faces educator Michele Joyner-Dinwiddie, who recently changed parties from Democrat to Republican for the purpose of challenging Rep. Schietzelt. Rep. Schietzelt should be considered a lock in the primary, which is likely only intended to draw down resources before a highly competitive general election.
- HD-38; Abe Jones (D - Wake)  
Faces Collin Fearns. Rep. Jones favored.
- HD-43; Diane Wheatley (R-Cumberland)  
Faces Claren Goins (R). Rep. Wheatley favored.
- HD-45; Frances Jackson (D-Cumberland)  
Faces speaker and coach QuDerrick Covington. Rep. Jackson favored.
- HD-50; Renee Price (D -Caswell, Orange)  
Faces Brandall Redd and Mary Lucas. Rep. Price favored.
- HD-60; Amanda Cook (D -Guilford)  
Appointed after the resignation of disgraced former member Cecil Brockman, Rep. Cook faces a four way primary against educator Angie McMichael, former Guilford Co. Democratic Party Chair Joe Alston, and former Guilford County Commissioner Bruce Davis. Given that this is Rep. Cook's first time on the House ballot after being appointed, this primary may look more like a competitive open seat primary and she may lack the traditional advantages of incumbency. However, the number of candidates filed may work in her favor.
- HD-65; Reece Pyrtle (R-Rockingham)  
Faces small business owner Joseph Gibson and Seth Woodall. Rep. Pyrtle favored.
- HD-78; Neal Jackson (R -Moore, Randolph)  
Faces Retired Wildlife Major Mark Dutton. Rep. Jackson favored.
- HD-79; Keith Kidwell (R -Beaufort, Dare, Hyde, Pamlico)  
Faces farmer Darren Armstrong. Rep. Kidwell is a slight favorite, but Darren Armstrong has support from some republicans who have been frustrated with the freedom caucus leader. Rep. Kidwell has publicly accused another House member of helping to recruit his opponent.
- HD-80; Sam Watford (R- Davidson)  
Faces Joseph Byrne. Rep. Watford favored.
- HD-81; Larry W. Potts (R-Davidson)  
Faces Pamela Zanni, a member of NC Educators on the Ballot. Rep. Potts favored.
- HD-89; Mitchell Setzer (R - Davidon)  
Faces educator Lisa Koperski. Koperski is affiliated with a group organizing educators to run against Republican incumbents, several of which have engaged in party switching. Rep. Setzer, the current House Speaker Pro Temp. and the House's second longest serving Republican, favored heavily.
- HD-95; Todd Carver (R – Iredell)  
Faces Iredell-Statesville Schoolboard Member Michael Kubiniec. Rep. Carver favored.

- HD-99; Nasif Majeed (D -Mecklenburg)  
Faces student Tucker Neal, and public health consultant Veleria Levy. Rep. Majeed favored.
- HD-105; Tricia Cotham (R -Mecklenburg)  
Faces Educator Kelly Van Horn, who recently changed parties from Democrat to Republican for the purpose of challenging Rep. Cotham. Rep. Cotham is heavily favored in the primary, but may be forced to use valuable resources before facing one of the most competitive General Elections in the House.
- HD-106; Carla Cunningham (D - Mecklenburg)  
Seven term member Rep. Cunningham faces minister Rodney Sadler and quality control coordinator Vermanno Bowman. Rep. Cunningham has drawn ire from some Democrat activists for supporting the Republican majority on key votes and could be vulnerable.
- HD-110; Kelly Hastings (R -Cleveland, Gaston)  
Eight term member Kelly Hastings faces pharmacist Caroline Eason. Rep. Hastings announced his retirement earlier in 2025 only to decide to reenter the race a few weeks later. Ms. Eason is considered a strong candidate who was recruited to run after the retirement announcement and did not drop out after Rep. Hastings decided to run for reelection. This dynamic could make this race more challenging than usual for the long term incumbent.
- HD-113; Jake Johnson (R – Henderson, McDowell, Polk, Rutherford)  
Faces lobbyist and former House Majority Leader Mike Hager. Former Rep. Hager's long-time service in the NC House and deep political connections make this a true toss-up race and likely the most competitive Republican primary.
- HD-117; Jennifer Balkcom (R -Henderson)  
Faces Educator Dr. Christopher Wilson. Dr. Wilson is affiliated with a group organizing educators to run against Republican incumbents, several of which have engaged in party switching. Rep. Balkcom favored.
- HD-118; Mark Pless (R -Haywood, Madison)  
Faces Haywood Co. Board of Education member James Rogers. Rep. Pless favored.
- HD-119; Mike Clampitt (R -Jackson, Swain, Transylvania)  
Faces Insurance Agent Mike Yow, and Anna Ferguson. Rep. Clampitt has served four non-consecutive terms in the House, but health issues may allow openings for a challenger.

## Competitive General Election Seats

<u>District</u>	<u>Rating</u>	<u>Incumbent</u>
5	Lean Republican	Bill Ward (R)
7	Lean Republican	Open (R)
9	Lean Republican	Timothy Reeder (R)
12	Lean Republican	Chris Humphrey (R)
20	Lean Republican	Open (R)
26	Lean Republican	Donna White (R)

43	Lean Republican	Diane Wheatly (R)
59	Lean Republican	Alan Branson (R)
62	Lean Republican	John Blust (R)
63	Lean Republican	Open (R)
64	Lean Republican	Dennis Riddell (R)
74	Lean Republican	Jeff Zenger (R)
75	Lean Republican	Donny Lambeth (R)
82	Lean Republican	Brian Echevarria (R)
119	Lean Republican	Mike Clampitt (R)
25	Toss-up	Allen Chessler (R)
35	Toss-up	Mike Schietzelt (R)
37	Toss-up	Erin Pare (R)
73	Toss-up	Johnathan Almond (R)
98	Toss-up	Beth Helfrich (D)
105	Toss-up	Tricia Cotham (R)
115	Toss-up	Lindsey Prather (D)
24	Lean Democratic	Dante Pittman (D)
32	Lean Democratic	Open (D)
48	Lean Democratic	Garland Pierce (D)
54	Lean Democratic	Robert Reives (D)

### **Analysis of House General Election and Toss-Up Seats**

Republicans currently have a 71 seat near super majority in the chamber. Due to the drawing of the district maps, they face significantly more incumbents in Lean or Toss-up seats than the Democrats, with Republicans currently holding five of seven toss-up and 15 lean Republican seats to 4 lean Democratic seats. Most political observers expect the Republican majority to lose seats especially in urban counties such as Wake and Mecklenburg County. They may also be vulnerable in ex-urban counties like Cabarrus and Alamance that are slowly drifting more blue. However, absent a collapse in the national political environment, Republicans should expect to retain the majority in the House.

#### **Toss-ups:**

- HD-25; Rep. Allen Chessler (R-Nash) faces no primary. He will face off against the winner of the Democratic Primary between former candidate Lorenza Wilkins (D) and Government Affairs Profession Harris Walker (D). The Democratic primary is considered competitive. Rep. Chessler is considered a strong campaigner and is the only House Republican currently in a Democratic leaning seat.
- HD-35; Mike Schietzelt (R- Wake) faces a primary against educator Michele Joyner-Dinwiddie, who recently changed parties from Democrat to Republican for the purpose

of challenging Rep. Schietzelt. Rep. Schietzelt should be considered a lock in the primary, which is likely only intended to draw down resources before a highly competitive general election.

Rep. Schietzelt will face attorney Evonne Hopkins (D) in the General Election which is expected to be highly competitive.

- HD-37; Erin Pare (R-Wake) will face the winner of a three way primary between UNC Law Professor Marcus Gadson (D), Policy Consultant Winn Decker (D), and computer scientist Ralph Clements (D). This Wake County seat is seen as a critical pick-up opportunity for Democrats seeking to expand their seats in the NC House.
- HD-73; Johnathan Almond (R- Canarrus) will face the winner of the Democratic primary between marketing professional Thomas Monks (D) and entrepreneur Kim DeLaney (D).
- HD-98; Rep. Beth Helfrich (D-Mecklenburg) will face Former NC House Representative John Rhodes (R). Mecklenburg County trends likely give Rep. Helfrich a slight edge.
- HD-105, Tricia Cotham (R-Mecklenburg) has a primary versus educator Kelly Van Horn, who recently changed parties from Democrat to Republican for the purpose of challenging Rep. Cotham. Rep. Cotham is heavily favored in the primary. The winner will face Matthews Commissioner Ken McCool (D) in the General Election. Rep. Cotham who switched parties from Democratic to Republican during the 2023-24 Session faces political headwinds from both anti-Trump midterm sentiment and a Mecklenburg County electorate that is increasingly blue-leaning and is considered a top target by Democratic strategists.
- HD-115, Lindsey Prather (D-Buncombe) will face Swannanoa Fire Chief Anthony Penland (R) in the General Election. Buncombe county politics is trending blue, but this race remains one to watch.

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For more information about legislation described in the legislative reports, feel free to contact us at [chorton@maynardnexsen.com](mailto:chorton@maynardnexsen.com), [dferrell@maynardnexsen.com](mailto:dferrell@maynardnexsen.com), [criemer@maynardnexsen.com](mailto:criemer@maynardnexsen.com) or at (919) 573-7421. Information is also available on the General Assembly's website: [www.ncleg.gov](http://www.ncleg.gov).

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