

18 IN '18 RACES TO WATCH





As state-level Republicans have reached modern highs in legislative majorities and statewide offices held, the RSLC has brought attention to outstanding Future Majority Project (FMP) and Right Women, Right Now (RWRN) candidates running in critical races by highlighting them through the “Races to Watch” program since 2014. In years past, candidates featured in our campaigns proved to be essential majority makers and this cycle is no different. In Kentucky, 16 in ‘16 featured candidate Melinda Prunty helped Republicans flip the Kentucky House for the first time in 95 years. In Connecticut, 16 in ‘16 candidates Heather Somers and George Logan helped Republicans achieve split control in the state Senate, bringing Republicans to 69 chambers controlled. Meanwhile, candidates in Colorado, Maine, New York and Washington all played integral roles helping Republicans retain crucial Senate majorities in 2016 and expand our map.

In 2018, candidates featured as part of the 18 in ‘18 Races to Watch program are running in some of this year’s biggest legislative and statewide races with an opportunity to make history with their elections and will prove critical to helping protect and grow Republican ranks in the states. This edition of our Races to Watch list includes three female statewide candidates breaking barriers in their states as well as numerous other down ballot candidates running in competitive races. These candidates span from Hawaii to Massachusetts and in total fifteen states are represented.



ARIZONA

Walt Blackman

Arizona Legislative District 6

Republicans have controlled the Arizona House of Representatives since 1966 and currently hold a 35-25 majority.

www.blackman4az.com

Walter “Walt” Blackman is an outsider to the political system. Walt stands for truth, honor, and hardworking American principled conservative values. Walt is a dedicated, loving father of five, and husband to his wife Kristie of fifteen years. Walt is no stranger to service; he served in the United States Army for over twenty years. Walt is a dedicated and experienced leader, and combat veteran with two decades of operational experience in the US military which translates to a consummate professional, team player, and devoted patriot. After his retirement in 2016, Walt continued to serve his community by volunteering at local food banks, and an anti-drug coalition organization. Walt routinely invests in the youth from his district, by offering his time to local schools to teach the importance of dignity and respect and the prevention of sexual assaults, harassments, and anti-bullying. Walt has also spent countless hours volunteering for the Department of Veterans Healthcare Affairs where he gained a genuine insight of the critical issues facing veterans in the White Mountains and the 6th district. Walt is an avid supporter of teacher pay raises, bonuses, and performance-based incentives. He also wants to fight to reclaim federal lands in Arizona, establish common sense forestry management, introduce rural development projects, improve the internet infrastructure, and combat the opioid and meth addictions in the district.

If elected, Blackman would become the first African-American Republican elected to the Arizona House of Representatives.



CALIFORNIA

Justin Mendes

California Assembly District 32

Members of the California Assembly represent approximately 465,000 people making it the largest population-per-representative ratio of any state's lower chamber.

justinmendes.com

A Valley native, Justin Mendes has always felt a commitment to public service and giving back to his community. Justin is the son of Portuguese dairy farmers, and he has never forgotten where he comes from. His family started dairying in the 1930s and his father was a 3rd generation dairyman. Justin was taught the value of hard work, honesty, and treating others with respect. He believes that someone's word is still something to hold in the highest regard, and a handshake means the world. Mendes completed his undergraduate degree at the University of the Pacific. After starting his professional career working in the financial industry, Mendes worked in state government for Assemblyman David Valadao. Valadao, also a Portuguese dairyman, shared a common bond with Mendes. He would later transition to the U.S. House of Representatives where he would eventually work his way up to District Director. Mendes truly felt he helped make a difference in constituents' lives by helping them navigate Federal agencies and complex regulations. In 2014, Mendes ran and won a spot on the Hanford City Council. In 2016, Justin served a term as Mayor of Hanford. While on the council, Justin focused on common sense solutions to provide clean drinking water and jobs to the community. Justin lives in Hanford with his wife, Melissa, and his two sons, Alexander and Dominic.

Assembly District 32 overlaps a significant portion of California's 21st Congressional District, which despite its Democratic leaning, is currently represented by Republican Congressman David Valadao, Mendes' former boss.



CONNECTICUT

Pam Staneski

Connecticut Senate District 14

Republicans gained three seats in the Senate in 2016 bringing the chamber to a 18-18 tie. If Republicans flip the chamber it would be the first Republican Senate majority in the state since 1994.

www.pam4senate.com



Pam Staneski currently represents the 119th General Assembly District of Milford and Orange. She was re-elected in November 2016 to her second term. She serves as the ranking member of the Higher Education committee, and also serves on the Appropriations and Public Health committees. Pam served for a decade as an elected official on the Board of Education and Board of Alderman and has been deeply involved with several community service organizations. She is an outspoken leader on issues regarding substance abuse and underage drinking and is Co-founder of the Milford Prevention Council. She is a volunteer for United Way of Milford and the Rape Crisis Center of Milford and served as Past President of Milford's Promise. Representative Staneski resides in Milford with her husband, Paul, and their three dachshunds. When they have free time you can find them visiting one or more of their four children and catering to their granddaughter. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education from Old Dominion University.

In the 2016 presidential race, Hillary Clinton narrowly won this district by less than 1% despite President Obama carrying it by 10% in 2012.

FLORIDA

Elizabeth Fetterhoff

Florida House District 26

Florida became a Republican trifecta state following the 1998 elections and has remained that way since then making it one of the longest running Republican trifecta states east of the Mississippi.

elizabethfetterhoff.com



Elizabeth Fetterhoff has a passion for serving her community. After graduating from Florida State University, Elizabeth served her country in the U.S. Army National Guard. Throughout her career in both state and local government, Elizabeth has learned how to tackle the problems facing our community. As State Representative, Elizabeth will use practical experience to take common sense ideas and turn them into real action.

This district is a prime pick up opportunity for House Republicans as it saw one of the largest swings towards Republicans at the top of the ticket in 2016. President Trump lost this district by less than 2% while Mitt Romney lost the district by 16%.



FLORIDA

Jeanette Nuñez Florida Lieutenant Governor

In Florida, lieutenant governors run as a ticket with the gubernatorial candidate and Republicans have held the Governor's office since 1998.

www.facebook.com/JeanetteNunezCampaign



Jeanette M. Nuñez was born and raised in Miami, Florida. She was elected in 2010 to the Florida House of Representatives and was subsequently reelected in 2012, 2014, and 2016. She began her healthcare career working at Jackson Health System in 2004 as the State Director for Government Relations and handled all aspects of the organization's state affairs. Over the years, Representative Nuñez has demonstrated her ongoing commitment to the South Florida community through her active involvement in various local organizations and professional groups. She has been involved with the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce, Leadership Miami, WHEN, and Women in Government. Representative Nuñez is a proud graduate of Florida International University (FIU) and a lifetime member of the FIU Alumni Association. Representative Nuñez is married to her husband of 21 years, Adrian Nuñez, and together they are the proud parents of three children – Megan age 19; Justin, age 17; and Jason, age 12.

Nuñez is the first Cuban-American woman to be chosen as a lieutenant governor candidate in Florida state history.

HAWAII

Val Okimoto Hawaii House District 36

The current Hawaii House Republican Leader Andria Tupola is running for governor.

www.valokimoto.com



Val Okimoto was born and raised on the Island of Kauai, Hawaii and her upbringing there allowed her to grow up with humble, yet hard-working values. After graduating as a scholar athlete with honors from Kauai High School, she went on to study at Brigham-Young University Hawaii, where she received a bachelor's degree in Accounting, with a minor in Business Management. Prior to her college graduation, she took a little "break" during her junior year and served a church service mission in the Philippines Cebu Mission. After college, she was hired by and worked for a local CPA firm. Shortly thereafter, it became clear that she wanted to pursue a career that would allow her to serve others more and became a Certified Special Education teacher for the Hawaii Department of Education (DOE). Teaching in the public school education system for ten years allowed her to work with the children ("keiki") of Hawaii, as well as with other educators, administrators, parents, and professionals. Along with being a teacher, wife, and a mother, she has served her community in roles with her church, town association, and school district.

While consistently voting for Democrats at the top of the ticket, Hawaii's House district 36 has a history of electing Republican representatives.



IDAHO

Janice McGeachin Idaho Lieutenant Governor

A Republican has occupied the Idaho lieutenant governor's office since 1979.

www.janiceforidaho.com



Janice McGeachin is the Republican nominee for Idaho Lieutenant Governor, a former state Representative, and a successful business owner from Idaho Falls who, along with her husband Jim McGeachin, own and operate multiple businesses in the automotive industry, with stores in Idaho Falls and Boise. In 2012, she and her family renovated a historic building in downtown Idaho Falls and established the area's only Irish restaurant, The Celt Pub & Grill. Janice and Jim have two children, Liza and James, who help manage their family businesses. Janice was an elected state Representative from 2002-2012, and served on numerous committees including Health & Welfare where she served as the Chair to prevent the implementation of Obamacare in Idaho in 2012 by educating colleagues and the public of the devastating impacts of the law to individuals and to the business community. Janice's community service includes having served as the Chairman of the Board for the Idaho Innovation Center and as a Board Member for the Development Workshop and the Mountain River Valley American Red Cross. She is a member of the Idaho Falls Rotary Club, and was an active member of the Greater Idaho Falls Chamber of Commerce, and the United Way Disbursement Committee.

McGeachin would become the first female lieutenant governor in state history if she wins in November.

INDIANA

Zaki Ali Indiana Senate District 25

The current 41-9 Republican majority in the Senate is the largest margin the chamber has seen since 1920.

www.zakialiforindianasenate.com



Zaki Ali, of Anderson, Indiana, has been practicing law for over 19 years and currently is a successful lawyer. He comes from a humble background, as Mr. Ali and his siblings were raised by a single mother in public housing. At times, just to survive, his mother relied upon welfare, food pantries, and second-hand stores to provide for her children. As a child, Mr. Ali focused his energies into athletics, an area where he excelled; however, he struggled in the classroom as it was discovered he had dyslexia. He worked hard and learned how to manage his learning disability, and by doing so his academic world changed. He continued by educating himself and competing in intercollegiate athletics. Mr. Ali went on to earn his bachelor's degree from Southeast Missouri State University, and his master's from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. After completing graduate school, Mr. Ali worked for Eli Lilly and Company. Later he earned his law degree from Chase College of Law, while working full-time at Eli Lilly and Company. Before beginning his law practice, Mr. Ali worked for the Office of the Indiana Attorney General and the Office of the Madison County Prosecutor.

If elected in November, Ali will become the first African-American Republican elected to the Indiana state legislature.



KANSAS

Michael Snowden Kansas House District 56

The Republican House caucus reached an all-time high of 97 members following the 2014 midterm elections.

snowdenforkansas.com

Michael J. Snowden is the Worship Pastor at First Assembly of God Church in Topeka, KS. Pursuing a call to ministry, he studied at Global University and became a credentialed minister with the General Council of the Assemblies of God in May of 2016. He has been on staff in different capacities at the church since January of 2014. Pastor Michael has a desire to help people understand that worship is a lifestyle that extends beyond the Sunday morning experience. Passionate about teaching children about who God is, he has worked extensively as a volunteer in the areas of children's and youth ministries. Active in the Topeka community, he currently serves on the Board of Directors for TDC Learning Centers, serving on several committees including: Internal Affairs, External Affairs, and Governance. A supporter of the local arts, he is a member and season ticket holder at Ballet Midwest and the Topeka Symphony. Pastor Michael enjoys reading, writing, traveling, trying new recipes and restaurants. An avid soccer fan, he is a supporter and season ticket holder of Sporting Kansas City.

The 56th District is one of the most competitive House districts in the state as it has changed parties the past three elections.



MASSACHUSETTS

Dean Tran Massachusetts Worcester and Middlesex Senate District

Despite the state's partisan tilt, Republican Governor Charlie Baker has the highest approval rating of any governor in the country and is in a strong position for his re-election bid.

www.deantran.com

Senator Tran was born in Saigon, Vietnam and emigrated with his family to the United States at the age of 4. A son of an army soldier and a successful business family in Vietnam, he knows how it is to start from the bottom and work his way up. His family sacrificed every possession they had in order to flee from the communist country and achieve freedom. After fleeing Vietnam, Senator Tran's family spent 2 years in a refugee camp while waiting for their application for green cards to be approved. In 1980, he and his family were sponsored by a Catholic priest in Clinton, Massachusetts where he called his first real home. In 1986, his family relocated to Fitchburg, Massachusetts where he graduated from Fitchburg High School. He went on to earn a bachelor's degree from Brandeis University. In 2005, Senator Tran became the first person of color to be elected to the City Council in Fitchburg, MA. After 12 years as a City Councilor At-Large, in 2017, he became the first Vietnamese-American elected to the Massachusetts Legislature, the first person of color elected in his district, and the only American of Asian descent elected to the State Senate. He also has over 23 years of experience in the private sector, including managing employees and projects on three different continents and responsible for products producing hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue. He is married to Kerry and they have four beautiful children, Isabelle, 19, Olivia, 15, Madilyn, 9, and Dean 6.

Tran won a special election for this district in December of 2017 growing the Republican Senate caucus to seven members, its highest number in 18 years.



MINNESOTA

Lisa DeMuth

Minnesota House District 13A

Republicans hold their largest majority in the House following a presidential election year with their 77-member majority.

www.lisademuth.com



Lisa DeMuth believes in the value of faith, family, hard work, and strong communities. She was born in Paynesville, MN and lived there until the age of seven. She and her mother then moved to the Minneapolis area. Lisa is married to Nick and they have four children, two sons-in-law and three grandchildren. They have lived in Cold Spring for over 20 years. She co-owns and manages a commercial office building. She is the founder and owner of the smartphone app, myKin, which allows family and friends to keep track of their loved ones' milestones and accomplishments. She serves on the Advisory Board for Bridging the Gap and is on the Board of Trustees for Trinity Bible College in Ellendale, ND. The experience of listening to the community, making wise financial decisions and meeting local, state, and federal requirements as a ROCORI School Board member has, in part, prepared Lisa for serving in the House of Representatives. Listening to the concerns of the residents in District 13A has given insight to how legislative decisions affect agriculture, small businesses, homeowners, and individuals in our area.

DeMuth won her first election for public office as a write-in candidate for her local school board where she has now served for 11 years.

NEVADA

Barbara Cegavske

Nevada Secretary of State

Nevada Senator Dean Heller previously served as the Secretary of State from 1995 to 2007.

cegavskeforsos.com



Barbara Cegavske considers it an honor to have served as Nevada Secretary of State since she was first elected to the office in November 2014. Prior to that she spent 18 years in the Nevada State Legislature serving in both the State Assembly and Senate. Her tenure in the State Legislature required her membership on a broad array of committee assignments and leadership roles, providing the invaluable and necessary experience to fulfill her duties as Secretary of State. Secretary Cegavske was born in Minnesota, but Nevada is where she met and subsequently married her husband, Tim, 38 years ago. She is the mother of two sons, and grandmother of six. Prior to entering public service, Barbara Cegavske and her husband were owners of a successful 7-11 franchise. Barbara is a firm believer in giving back to the community, and is actively involved in numerous, diverse organizations throughout the valley.

Cegavske's race has been highlighted as one of the most closely watched Secretary of State races this cycle with national Democrat groups already pouring millions of dollars into the state for her Democrat opponent.



NEVADA

Jill Dickman Nevada Assembly District 31

Republicans controlled the Nevada Assembly as recently as 2016 when they gained 12 seats to give them a 27-15 majority following the 2014 midterm elections.

www.votejilldickman.com

Jill Dickman is a former legislator and candidate for Assembly District 31. First elected to the Nevada State Legislature in 2014, Jill served on the Ways and Means Committee, in addition to leading as Vice Chair of the Transportation Committee, as well as Assistant Majority Whip, North. Jill fought for responsible legislation by prioritizing lower taxes, school choice, and smaller, more accountable government. Jill knows the value of hard work, high ethical standards, and self-reliance. Coming from a long line of entrepreneurs, Jill managed various family businesses that included a clothing store, a marina, and a large-scale logging operation in Upper Michigan. Taking the values, she learned from her family, Jill moved to Nevada in 1989 and shortly thereafter opened a manufacturing business in Sparks with her husband Tom. Knowing the destructive effects of irresponsible taxation and regulation on small businesses, Jill has fought for free-market policies that promote job growth and economic development. As Nevada's economy continues to be a beacon of success for the rest of the country, Jill will continue to make the economy, jobs, and an educated workforce her top priorities in the 2019 legislative session.

District 31 is a pick-up target for Assembly Republicans as it's currently represented by a Democrat, who won by less than 100 votes in 2016, despite President Trump carrying the district by 6%.



NEVADA

Tiffany Jones Nevada Senate District 9

Republicans need to flip two Democrat-held state Senate districts to regain control of the upper chamber.

tiffanyjonesnv.com

Tiffany Jones was born and raised in San Diego, California and graduated from the University of California – San Diego with a degree in Psychology. In 2005, she moved to Las Vegas to work at the Four Seasons. She would go on to become an Assistant Pastry Chef at the Mirage Hotel and Casino. After her daughter was born she began working on a business plan to start her own bakery. She raised the seed money, found a space, hired a contractor, and, in early 2013, opened Peridot Sweets, a boutique bakery specializing in custom cakes, dessert displays, and edible wedding and party favors. Dealing with every level of starting a business has been an eye-opening experience that Tiffany will take with her to Carson City.

Jones would become the first Asian American elected to the Nevada state Senate if she wins in November.



NORTH DAKOTA

Michelle Strinden North Dakota House District 41

Following the 2016 elections, Republicans gained 10 seats which increased their majority to 81 Republican members in the 94-member chamber.

www.michellestrinden.com



Michelle is a lifelong North Dakotan and a first-time candidate for public office. She is running for state House in District 41, where she has lived with her husband, Tom, and four children, Jacob, Joe, Ben, and Sarah, for the past 22 years. Michelle was raised in Bismarck, where her mom was an eligibility worker for the state of North Dakota and her father was a sales manager for Caterpillar. She got her start in politics in 1988, working on her future father-in-law's campaign for U.S. Senate while studying at the University of North Dakota. She graduated in 1991 with a degree in secondary education and with a minor in German. A few years later she went back to school and obtained a master's degree in counseling from Minnesota State University Moorhead. She spent the next several years working in the West Fargo Public School district, before stepping away from her career to raise her kids. For the past 15 years she has focused on raising her four children and serving her community through multiple organizations. She has previously served as committee chair for the Family Policy Alliance, founder and president of the Parent Association at her children's school, and Vice-Chair of the District 41 Republican Party. She has also been a group leader and children's leader for Bible Study Fellowship since 2008. Michelle and Tom are active members of Atonement Lutheran Church in south Fargo.

Strinden's father-in-law, Earl Strinden, served in the North Dakota House for 20 years including 13 of them as Majority Leader.

OKLAHOMA

Aaron Means Oklahoma House District 34

Republicans flipped the Oklahoma House of Representatives in 2004 and have steadily increased their majority in each election since then.

www.draaronmeans.com



Dr. Aaron R. Means Sr. is a retired United States Public Health officer, a general dentist, ordained minister, and author. He served in two uniform services where he practiced general dentistry for over 27 years (the United States Public Health Service and the United States Air Force). Dr. Means retired in July 2017 after serving as the director of Pawnee Indian Health Center dental clinic for 11 years. His career focused on serving the great citizens of multiple Native American tribes and the men and women of our United States Armed Forces. Dr. Means attended Morgan State University for his undergraduate studies and completed his dental education at Howard University College of Dentistry. Dr. Means is married to Shelia D. Means and they have five children and four grandchildren. They have been citizens of the Great State of Oklahoma since 2001 when they moved to Southeast Oklahoma and reside in McAlester.

Despite its tendency to vote for Republicans at the top of the ticket, the 34th House District is currently represented by a retiring Democrat who ran unopposed in the past three elections.



OREGON

Selma Pierce Oregon House District 20

Republicans are just five seats away from split control in the Oregon House of Representatives.

selmapierce.com



Selma Pierce has an abiding respect for everyday Oregonians who get things done. As a common-sense pragmatist, Selma is a centrist who is adept at spotting solvable problems and finding common ground. As a child growing up in an immigrant household in San Francisco, where Chinese and English were spoken, Selma experienced what it is like to be viewed as the “other.” She recalls that after her father graduated from Harvard Business School, no one would hire the first-generation Chinese-American. Her dad had to settle as a job as a cashier in a family member’s market. Eventually, through persistence, he was hired by the State of California and had a satisfying career there. After dental school, Selma was the primary breadwinner while her husband, Dr. William “Bud” Pierce, completed a medical degree and a doctorate at UCLA. Soon after came a daughter, Kristina, and then a son, Michael. When Dr. Pierce completed his schooling, the young family moved to Oregon. Selma has taken on an array of civic and philanthropic endeavors. In her work reviewing grants for the Oregon Community Foundation, she is constantly exposed to fresh ideas from all corners of the state.

This district has been represented by a Republican as recently as 2012.

PENNSYLVANIA

Wendi Thomas Pennsylvania House District 178

Republicans flipped control of the Pennsylvania House during the 2010 midterms and have held a steady majority in every election since then.

www.votewendi.com



Wendi Thomas is a 30-year business professional who helped grow a small start-up company in the healthcare industry into a national firm. That company, HealthAdvocate, was built on a foundation that is the overriding theme of her personal and professional life: helping people. Before leaving her job to run for Representative, she spent every day making sure that people who need help navigating the maze of our healthcare system get the help they need. Active in her community for the more than two decades, Wendi is best known for her service as a Council Rock School Board member. There, she applied real-world business principles to save taxpayers millions of dollars, earn her school’s national recognition for educational excellence, and hold property taxes among the lowest in Bucks County. Wendi and her husband have three grown children and reside in Northampton Township, Pennsylvania.

Thomas is looking to return this district to Republican control after Democrats won a special election earlier this year for this seat, flipping it from Republican control.





ABOUT FMP

The Republican State Leadership Committee's (RSLC) Future Majority Project (FMP) seeks to identify, recruit and support candidates who better reflect the full diversity of our nation. Launched in 2011, FMP supports men and women from diverse communities as they run to grow the economy, support job creators and focus on ways to keep more money in the pockets of working families. The efforts are helping to build a strong bench of current and future Republican leaders. In the 2013-2014 cycle, FMP recruited 244 new candidates of all diverse backgrounds and successfully helped elect 43 to office in states nationwide, with an investment totaling more than \$6 million – in partnership with Right Women, Right Now. In 2015-2016, FMP invested \$7 million – in partnership with the RSLC's Right Women, Right Now (RWRN) – to identify and recruit 174 new, diverse candidates in 36 states. Through these efforts, FMP and RWRN saw 22 new candidates of diverse ethnicity elected, as well as 165 new women. FMP also saw 18 diverse elected officials enter leadership. Since its founding in 2011, the RSLC has with an over \$20 million investment helped elect over 500 women and over 100 diverse candidates.



ABOUT RWRN

The Republican State Leadership Committee's (RSLC) Right Women, Right Now (RWRN) initiative serves to identify, recruit and support women candidates nationwide in order to help elect more Republican leaders who better embody the electorate of our country, where women are 53 percent of the voters. RWRN offers candidate trainings, mentorship matchings and digital organizing tools for our candidates' campaigns for state-level office. Since its founding in 2012, RWRN has recruited hundreds of women candidates, elected over 500 new women to office and continues working to grow the largest caucus of Republican elected women in the country. RWRN is co-chaired by Tennessee Speaker of the House Beth Harwell and Arizona Secretary of State Michele Reagan. In the 2015-2016 election cycle, RWRN shattered its recruitment goal of 500 candidates by identifying and recruiting 690 new, women candidates to run for state-level office. RWRN saw 165 of those candidates appointed or elected in 37 states. In partnership with the RSLC's Future Majority Project (FMP), which aims to elect candidates from all diverse communities, RWRN invested \$7 million between 2015-2016 to identify, recruit and support these candidates.

