**Race for legislative control gets serious**

By WisPolitics.com

In the Assembly, it’s about control.

In the Senate, it’s about setting the stage for 2026.

Insiders are watching more than a dozen fall races under new maps to see if: Republicans can keep legislative control for another two years; or if Democrats can beat the odds and seize control of the Assembly for the first time since 2010 and set the stage for a Senate takeover two years from now.

With the primaries now out of the way, the focus turns to the November elections and the races that will most likely get the most attention from the caucuses and outside groups.

In the Senate, the calculation is simple. There’s no real path for Democrats to retake the majority after going into this session down 22-11. But there are four GOP-held seats considered in play. To create a path in 2026 to flip the chamber, Democrats have to pick up at least three of those seats and defend state Sen. Brad Pfaff, D-Onalaska, to have a shot at the majority in two years.

In the Assembly, the puzzle is more complicated. Republicans went into this session with a 64-35 majority and are expected to see their majority shrink under the new maps.

Longtime GOP redistricting consultant Joe Handrick rates 46 Assembly seats as “safe” or “strong” Republican. He rates 44 seats “safe,” “strong” or “lean” Democrat. That leaves nine seats that he considers the most competitive.

For Republicans, keeping their majority is a matter of winning all 46 that are safe or strong GOP and winning four of the nine remaining seats. For Democrats, it’s a matter of winning the 44 safe, strong or lean seats on their side and winning six of the nine.

State Reps. Jessie Rodriguez, R-Oak Creek, and Todd Novak, R-Dodgeville, are now in lean Democrat seats under the new map. Meanwhile, state Rep. Loren Oldenburg, R-Viroqua, is seeking reelection to a strong Democrat seat. All three have run ahead of the top of the ticket in the past. If they can pull that off again this fall, it could create additional paths for Republicans to hold the majority.

A WisPolitics virtual event on Aug. 20 focused on the race for the Legislature.

Experts on the program expect tight races and heavy spending in legislative races under new maps this fall.

Ex-GOP Assembly Speaker Scott Jensen and former Gov. Tony Evers aide and current GPS Impact consultant Melissa Baldauff participated in the virtual WisPolitics event.

The new legislative [district lines](https://www.wispolitics.com/2024-redistricting/), signed into law earlier this year — widely [expected](https://www.wpr.org/news/wisconsins-new-maps-legislature-balance-power) to be more favorable to Democrats — will be used for the first time in the 2024 elections. Republicans currently have wide majorities in both the Senate and the Assembly.

“Anybody who thinks that the ground is settled… has not been paying attention,” Jensen said, adding that 2024 “could match 1968” in terms of “twists of turns” during the lead-up to the elections. “This is going to be a rollercoaster ride all the way to the end.”

Baldauff and Jensen agreed the race for the Senate is a multi-cycle task for Democrats but that several races, including the 8th SD in suburban Milwaukee, are key to watch.

The 8th could set a record for Wisconsin Senate spending, upwards of $5 million on all sides, Jensen predicted. The district pits GOP Sen. Duey Stroebel against Dem Jodi Habush Sinykin.

In the Assembly, Baldauff predicted Democrats could win 53 out of the 99 [assembly seats](https://www.wispolitics.com/2024/2024-assembly-races/), flipping the majority from Republicans to Democrats, while Jensen said he expected GOP members to keep 54 to 55 seats in the chamber.

Baldauff said she thought excitement over the new Democratic ticket of Kamala Harris and Tim

Walz is helpful to downballot Democratic candidates but that a lot of success depends upon the quality of the candidate.

“After the change at the top of the ticket, [voters] were even more excited about Kamala Harris and Tim Walz, and even downballot… these young people are all about voting, they are excited to vote,” Baldauff said. “We are seeing so many candidates who are running in legislative districts around the state, who are people that have really deep roots in their community and people who are super well known, and they might actually be driving the support up.”

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