

# [***In Maryland's Democratic Senate primary, a high-stakes clash between a history-making pick and a candidate with deep pockets***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C0S-V2Y1-JBSS-S00M-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

Silver Spring, Maryland (CNN) &#8212; The farmers market in this suburb of Washington, DC, was a ripe crowd for Angela Alsobrooks, who's locked in an increasingly contentious Senate Democratic primary on Tuesday.

"I would really like to see a Black woman in the Senate. It's about time," 68-year-old Kathy Pruitt of Takoma Park said as she stood in the pickle line last Saturday.

If elected in November, Alsobrooks, the executive of Prince George's County, could become only the third Black woman ever elected to the Senate. (The one Black woman currently serving - California's Laphonza Butler - was appointed and [*isn't running*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/19/politics/laphonza-butler-not-running-senate-california/index.html) to stay beyond this year.) Alsobrooks would also add a woman to Maryland's 10-person congressional delegation, which is all male.

First, though, she'd have to defeat one of those men - [*Democratic Rep. David Trone*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/05/04/politics/david-trone-maryland-senate-primary/index.html), the co-owner of Total Wine & More, who has poured about $60 million of his own money into the election so far.

"I think it's going to be a tight race, and I think they both have a path to victory," said Mileah Kromer, who oversees the Goucher College Poll, noting the potential power of Alsobrooks' endorsements and Prince George's County base vs. Trone's enormous spending advantage.

The race has divided Congress, with nearly all of the Maryland delegation backing Alsobrooks and key members of House Democratic leadership backing Trone. The eventual nominee will likely face off against former GOP Gov. Larry Hogan, whose popularity in the state could [*jeopardize Democrats' chances*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/05/politics/senate-race-rankings-april-2024/index.html) of holding the seat - and with them, the Senate majority.

The potential history-making aspect of Alsobrooks' candidacy isn't her central pitch to voters, and many of her female supporters stressed that this isn't about identity ***politics***.

"If I didn't like everything else about her, it would not be enough," Pruitt said.

And yet in a contest with few distinct policy differences between the candidates on big federal issues, Alsobrooks is making her lived experience a point of contrast with Trone - especially in a race where protecting abortion rights is a key part of the argument for keeping the seat in Democratic hands. Trone is also pointing to the stakes of November, making an electability argument about having the resources to defeat Hogan.

But here in Maryland, a state where Kromer estimates the Democratic primary electorate is about 40 to 45% Black, the primary isn't as simple as coalition ***politics*** vs. money. Trone, for example, has his own support from Black women, including some prominent local leaders from Alsobrooks' backyard who have appeared in his attack ads.

Asked if electing a Black woman to the Senate mattered to her, one Prince George's County voter coming out of a Target in Bowie Monday night was frank.

"Not at this point. I, like, need a job done. There were times when it did. At this point, I'm voting for whoever I think is going to do the best job," the 49-year-old French teacher said, noting that would not be Alsobrooks because she was disappointed with her record as county executive.

"I've seen many buildings go up with nothing else," said the teacher, who requested anonymity for fear of retribution in the school system, which she said "has crumbled."

But in a hint of the challenges that lie ahead for Democrats, she paused after saying she was leaning toward Trone - noting that she "was very pleased with Hogan as a pandemic governor" - then added, "However, I have to look at the long term."

A historic opportunity to elect a Black woman, but it's not a motivator for everyone

The women who walked with Alsobrooks through the drizzle last Saturday - from her downtown Silver Spring campaign office to a local early voting location nearby, with a marching band alerting farmers market foragers along the way - easily rattled off their candidate's accomplishments for schools and the local economy before they talked about her being a woman.

But it was an undeniable part of Alsobrooks' appeal - when she talks about her experience as a domestic violence prosecutor, for example, or when she or her allies attack her businessman opponent for having donated to GOP governors who have since signed abortion restrictions. (He's chalked those contributions up to business expenses and touted the millions he's donated to Democrats.)

"Electing women is not just good for Maryland," Alsobrooks told supporters assembled outside her campaign office. "It's good for America to make sure that the voices of women are included at these tables as we're making important decisions."

Ellen Malcolm, the founder of EMILY's List - whose affiliated super PAC recently made a $2.5 million investment in the race - told the crowd, "We are going to make history again," noting how the powerhouse Democratic group burst onto the scene by helping elevate Maryland's Barbara Mikulski to the Senate in 1986.

The former senator has backed Alsobrooks, as have the Washington Post, Gov. Wes Moore and every other Democratic member of the state's current congressional delegation, with the exceptions of one House member who backed Trone and of retiring Sen. Ben Cardin, who's remaining neutral in the race to replace him.

Alsobrooks' allies are looking at this seat as an opportunity not only to maintain the status quo of one Black woman in the Senate, but also to potentially grow the ranks. After California Rep. Barbara Lee failed to advance to the November election, attention turned to Delaware, where Rep. Lisa Blunt Rochester is running for an open Senate seat, and, now, to Maryland.

Pamela Luckett, 67, of Silver Spring said Maryland should play a role in diversifying the chamber.

"As a leader in democracy across the country, it's very important that we do that - with a qualified person," she added. "It's not just about identity. She is qualified, and she is the most qualified candidate in that race."

But experience - and whose is more relevant - has become a flashpoint that's also brought the conversation back to race.

Trone, first elected to Congress in 2018, leans into his voting record and argues that he'll be able to get 10 Republicans to sign on to legislation in the Senate to overcome a filibuster.

"That's what really matters is getting things accomplished, and not being beholden to any special interests," he said.

His campaign has taken heat, however, for an attack ad in which a local lawmaker said the Senate "is not a place for training wheels." More than 750 Black women leaders wrote a letter saying Trone's ads echo "tones of misogyny and racism."

"This attempt to undermine Ms. Alsobrooks' candidacy is deeply troubling and emblematic of the obstacles Black women face in political spheres," they wrote.

That comment was edited from the ad, but Trone himself told a [*local NBC affiliate*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=mXQPrA1UAnM&feature=youtu.be), "This job is not for someone on training wheels."

Alsobrooks hasn't hesitated to call him out, trying to contrast their tones. "That kind of disparaging remark is what we've seen too much of in Washington; people are sick of it," she told CNN last weekend. "And it shows also what is in his mind - that he has a very low opinion of women."

Asked about the "training wheels" comment by CNN Tuesday night, Trone denied he had said it, pinning the words on the local lawmaker, but added, "Frankly, she doesn't have the experience at the federal level."

And he has some powerful local Black women surrogates making that argument for him too.

"You can't learn this stuff overnight - you got to know this stuff on Capitol Hill," state Sen. Joanne Benson told the crowd at a Women for Trone event in Bowie Monday. "Do you understand the person who's going on Capitol Hill has to deal with the likes of Donald Trump?"

Speaker after speaker at the rally in Alsobrooks' home county praised Trone's hiring of formerly incarcerated people and his backing from the teachers union, for example.

His record, many Black women here said, trumped any potential history Alsobrooks might make.

"It's not that simple, because it matters what you believe," said Prince George's County councilmember Krystal Oriadha, who argued that playing identity ***politics*** was a GOP tactic her own party needed to beware of.

"They elevate someone because they think because of identity ***politics***, if you're a woman, or you're Black, you're gonna forget the issues and you're gonna be blind to if they actually align with what's best for your community."

Self-funding, a badge of independence for some voters, turns off others

Trone - who's also spent millions of his own money on his House campaigns - doesn't go around talking about how much he's spent, but his ability to self-fund is a big part of his pitch.

"We know all the good things that need to happen often don't happen because of special interest money," he told an audience at the AFI Silver Theatre on Tuesday, arguing that he can stand up to the NRA and the pharmaceutical industry.

"Not accepting money from PACs, and special interests, I save about 30% of my time to have time instead to build connectivity," he added, touting his work across the aisle.

Trone's supporters draw a distinction between his humble roots - he often talks about not having an indoor toilet when growing up - and politicians who have inherited their wealth.

"Let's be clear about this: He was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth," Benson told attendees at the Women for Trone rally, praising his rags-to-riches story and recounting how he'd written a $10,000 check for a scholarship fund she wanted to set up for her late sister.

Besides giving him an advertising and operational advantage, Trone also sees his money as a selling point to Democrats worried about holding this seat in November.

Alsobrooks hasn't lacked resources - she had raised nearly $7.8 million by the end of the pre-primary reporting period on April 24. She's risen to the fundraising challenge that's often been a barrier to Black women in ***politics***, said Glynda Carr, the president and CEO of Higher Heights for America, whose PAC works to elect Black women and is supporting Alsobrooks.

"The new barriers, though, if you follow the data, are self-financed candidates," Carr said.

But Alsobrooks' supporters point out that Trone's spending, while it has certainly gotten his message out, hasn't put the race away for him.

And for some, his ability to fund is itself a turn-off.

Back at the pickle stand, Pruitt said: "We don't need another millionaire, billionaire in the Senate. I do feel kind of strongly about that."

By Simone Pathe, CNN

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