

# [***Maryland's Democratic Senate primary will test how far money can go as Trone breaks self-funding record***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6C1D-D9V1-JBSS-S11N-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** By Simone Pathe, CNN

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; Maryland's Democratic Senate primary will test the power of self-funding as a congressman who's loaned his campaign more than $61 million faces off Tuesday against a county executive who could become just [*the third Black woman*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/11/politics/maryland-primary-angela-alsobrooks-david-trone/index.html) elected to the Senate.

But the race between [*three-term Rep. David Trone*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/05/04/politics/david-trone-maryland-senate-primary/index.html) and Prince George's County Executive Angela Alsobrooks isn't just about the future of the Democratic Party in Maryland; it will set up a general election matchup for a [*seat Democrats cannot afford to lose*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/04/05/politics/senate-race-rankings-april-2024/index.html) if they're to retain their Senate majority this fall.

Popular former Gov. [*Larry Hogan*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/09/politics/larry-hogan-senate-maryland/index.html) is heavily favored to win the Republican Senate nod on Tuesday. And that would make for a competitive fall campaign to succeed [*retiring Democratic Sen. Ben Cardin*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/05/01/politics/cardin-retirement-reelection-decision/index.html) in a state that backed [*Joe Biden*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/joe-biden) in 2020 by one of the largest margins in the country. With Republicans already poised to pick up a Senate seat in West Virginia, Hogan's entrance into the Maryland race earlier this year shook up the Senate battlefield.

"It has made all of us Democrats wake up and pay close attention to this race," Maryland Rep. Jamie Raskin, who has endorsed Alsobrooks, said at a get-out-the-vote event with his fellow Democrat in Silver Spring earlier this month.

Trone, the co-owner of Total Wine & More, has argued that he's best positioned to defeat Hogan and many of his ads have highlighted the GOP threat. "Only one seat stands between losing a woman's right to choose," a [*recent ad*](https://host2.adimpact.com/admo/viewer/b4d13b72-9a1f-49d1-a389-3f451bfcd080) says, "and only one candidate can stop it."

His money is a big part of that pitch, especially with national Democrats needing to defend vulnerable incumbents in tougher states.

"We're going to continue to spend whatever it takes to win," Trone told reporters last week when asked if he would invest his own money in a general election. "That will give them a lot more flexibility to spend money elsewhere. And I'm sure that will appeal to the leader [Chuck] Schumer."

Alsobrooks is touting her record in Prince George's County, home to one of the state's biggest concentrations of Democratic voters, while arguing that she's a stronger messenger on protecting abortion rights. Democrats are expected to lean on the abortion issue to warn voters that sending the well-liked Hogan to Washington would only bolster the GOP's chances of controlling the Senate.

Alsobrooks frequently points out that her opponent has donated money to Republicans who have since signed abortion restrictions, and she recently received outside help from EMILY's List's super PAC in [*taking that message to the airwaves*](https://host2.adimpact.com/admo/viewer/829eabba-714f-49e0-84b8-ceae578a0ea9). (Trone has said that those were business expenses and that he has donated millions to Democrats.)

"I have never compromised my values around the protections that women need and deserve, and he has," Alsobrooks told CNN.

Her authority to speak on the issue as a woman - of which there are currently none in the 10-person Maryland congressional delegation - resonates with her supporters, even if they said it wasn't the only reason they were backing her.

"I want a woman to speak for me. I want Angela Alsobrooks to speak for me," state Del. Jheanelle Wilkins said after the recent early vote event with Alsobrooks in Silver Spring.

"Now there isn't a single woman in the federal delegation. So I'd like to see that happen," added 82-year-old Walter Thaxton from Prince George's County.

If elected, Alsobrooks would also be the first Black woman that Maryland sends to the Senate - a potential accomplishment with national implications since the only current Black female senator, [*California's Laphonza Butler*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/19/politics/laphonza-butler-not-running-senate-california/index.html), was appointed and is not running for a full term.

That unique profile is an electability argument in itself, Alsobrooks' allies say.

"We believe that she's the voice that is needed that can coalesce around a state that is a multicultural state," said Glynda Carr, the president of Higher Heights for America, which works to elect Black women.

Early money versus early endorsements

Trone's self-funding of at least $61.77 million has set a record for a Senate primary, and he's already close to the record that Florida Sen. Rick Scott set for an entire campaign, when he invested about $63.6 million in his 2018 bid, including the general election.

That enormous financial advantage has led to a significant ad spending disparity - Trone has spent about $47.5 million to Alsobrooks' $4 million. EMILY's List's $2.5 million buy for Alsobrooks, launched in the final stretch of the campaign, is a drop in the bucket compared with Trone's firepower. The total ad spending has made this race the second most expensive Senate primary after California.

"This race is almost an A/B test of how much does paid media matter," said one Democratic strategist supporting Alsobrooks.

Trone's money has allowed him to dominate the airwaves early, but it's also powered operational advantages that have helped him reach and turn out voters in senior centers, for example, or those who said they wouldn't normally show up for political events.

"I'm just wondering why I should vote for him over Angela Alsobrooks," 42-year-old Dorothy, who declined to give her last name, said last week as she arrived at his Women for Trone event in Bowie, noting that she'd received a text from the campaign to show up.

After hearing local female elected officials praise him and his commitment to hiring formerly incarcerated individuals, her mind was made up: "I'm going to vote for him."

Trone talks about his self-funding as a way of bolstering his progressive bona fides, arguing that only he can stand up to "special interests" such as the NRA and pharmaceutical companies.

And that's connected with some supporters, who draw a distinction between his rags-to-riches story and politicians who have inherited wealth.

"I'm glad that he's spending his own money," Prince George's County Council Member Krystal Oriadha said at the Women for Trone event. "People funding their own campaigns is not dangerous. Special interests are dangerous."

But the spending - and Trone's vow to spend whatever it takes - has alienated others.

"It is so offensive," 80-year-old Carolyn Long of Bethesda said at the Alsobrooks event in Silver Spring, arguing that her inability to self-fund makes her more relatable.

"There's so many White men who are millionaires who are in the Senate, and who are really out of touch with the issues that count, but she's really in touch," she said.

While Trone's campaign got on air early, Alsobrooks picked up early endorsements, including from Gov. [*Wes Moore*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/01/politics/wes-moore-maryland-governor-election-cnntv/index.html) and every other Democrat in the state's congressional delegation, except for one House member and Cardin, who's staying neutral in the race to succeed him.

"She reminds me a lot of Ben Cardin, the outgoing senator, in that she's really worked her way up through Maryland ***politics***," said Raskin, who himself overcame Trone's self-funding in a 2016 House primary. "And we're a state that really likes to get to know our officials. We're very intimate face to face."

Both candidates lean on surrogates

Sonya Snedecor, 50, who was browsing the Silver Spring farmer's market on a recent weekend, said she only recently realized that the primary was coming up and hadn't yet decided who she was voting for. What would she look at to make her decision? "Probably The Washington Post."

Even if newspaper endorsements have typically had limited influence, observers say [*Alsobrooks' endorsement by the paper's editorial board*](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/04/18/endorsement-angela-alsobrooks-maryland-senate-democrats/) could resonate in the highly educated suburbs of Washington, DC, where she needs to run up the score.

Mileah Kromer, who runs the Goucher College Poll, believes endorsements from other elected officials could be especially important when there's not much ideological difference between the candidates. "That comes with political networks and that comes with door-knockers ... and an information shortcut or a cue on who you should vote for."

But Trone has his own backers - including House Democratic leadership - and he's leaned on surrogates like California Rep. Adam Schiff, who appeared with him in Silver Spring last week for a "Defending Democracy" rally, to tout his congressional experience. Both state Attorney General Anthony Brown and Maryland Rep. Dutch Ruppersberger have cut ads for him.

Trone has also highlighted the backing of some local elected officials from Prince George's County - especially Black women - who have appeared in ads attacking Alsobrooks.

One of those ads, in which a local politician suggested Alsobrooks would need "training wheels" in the Senate, has further injected race and gender into the conversation in a state where Black voters are expected to make up at least 40% of the primary electorate.

The Trone campaign removed that comment from the ad, but the candidate repeated it in an interview with a [*local NBC affiliate*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=mXQPrA1UAnM&feature=youtu.be), only to [*deny to CNN last week*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/05/11/politics/maryland-primary-angela-alsobrooks-david-trone/index.html) that he had said those words. Earlier in the race, the congressman [*apologized for using a racial slur*](https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2024/03/21/david-trone-congress-racial-insult/) during a congressional hearing, saying that he misspoke.

More than 750 Black female leaders have condemned Trone's attack ads, calling out "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 in a letter.

Asked to respond to voters who think it's time to send a Black woman to the Senate, Trone told reporters, "I have supported wonderful women and diverse candidates all over this country and will continue to do so."

Despite the increasingly contentious tone at the end of the race, Raskin said he was confident that however the primary turns out, Maryland Democrats will unify against Hogan.

"We have a very politically engaged and sophisticated electorate in Maryland," he said. "People understand that it might be one thing to have, you know, a vaguely moderate Republican governor, but to send a person like that into the Senate is just to put another brick in the wall of the MAGA Republican Party behind Donald Trump."

CNN's David Wright contributed to this report.

By Simone Pathe, CNN

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