

# [***Hogan shakes up Maryland Senate race as Democrats wrestle over their nominee***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BRH-RD51-DY7V-G00R-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

BALTIMORE, MD (CNN) &#8212; Former Republican Gov. Larry Hogan passed on a bid for a Maryland Senate seat last cycle, insisting he had no ambitions to serve in higher office. And even up until early this year, Hogan was still signaling he wasn't interested.

But after years of entreaties from Senate GOP Leader Mitch McConnell and other top Republicans - and even a direct sales pitch from former President George W. Bush - Hogan finally relented in February, [*jumping into the Senate race*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/09/politics/larry-hogan-senate-maryland/index.html) at the very last minute and widening the GOP's path to the majority this fall.

"I still don't have any burning desire to be a senator. I wasn't looking for a title. I don't need a job. But I'm just so frustrated with how broken our political system is," Hogan said in an interview with CNN during a campaign stop at a food market in Baltimore last week. "George Bush was a pretty good salesperson trying to convince me that the party and the country needed me, and I would have had an important voice that I can make a difference."

The surprise entrance of Hogan, a popular former governor and prized recruit for Republican leaders, has shaken up race to replace retiring Democratic Sen. Ben Cardin this November, when control for the Senate is up for grabs. The longtimesafe blue seat, in a state President Joe Biden carried by over 30 points in 2020, is now suddenly competitive, complicating the calculus for Democrats as they look to defend around half a dozen more vulnerable seats in order to retain their slim Senate majority.

Meanwhile, Democrats remain divided over who to select as their nominee in the May 14 primary. It's become an increasingly contentious two-way contest between Rep. David Trone, a three-term congressman and founder of the beverage retailer Total Wine & More, and Prince George's County Executive Angela Alsobrooks, a former state attorney for the county.

With the contours of the race arestill taking shape, Democrats are already signaling they plan to nationalize the race and tie Hogan to the most extreme elements of his party, even as Hogan tries to run as an independent-minded candidate and keephis distance from former President DonaldTrump.

"He's going to vote and caucus with Republicans. So let's get that idea that he's some sort of, you know, bipartisan individual - that's just not true," Trone told CNN during an interview at his campaign headquarters. "He's Mitch McConnell's prized recruit."

Hogan told CNN he will not vote for either Trump or Biden. But he still views himself as the underdog and acknowledges he's facing a difficult path to victory. And being a well-liked governor doesn't always translate into a successful bid for the Senate.

"It's a very hard thing to do," Hogan said. "This is even harder because it's in a presidential year; Donald Trump is on top of the ticket. He lost by 33 points, so I've got to overcome that challenge."

Still, the race is poised to be far more competitive - and expensive - than Democrats had initially anticipated. Democratic sources said the party is watching the contest closely, but cautioned it's too early to say whether the campaign arm will divert precious resources to the state. And senior Republicans view Maryland as an important race on their expanding battleground map.

"The national party, from Leader (Chuck) Schumer on down, everybody's taking this very, very serious," Trone told CNN."They understand who Larry Hogan is... but governor is a whole nother race than going to Washington."

The race has already become one of the most expensive in the country, largely fueled by Trone's personal wealth. As of the end of last year, which is the most recently available data, Trone had plowed $23 million of his own money into the primary. Overall, his campaign has spent nearly $30 million on advertising, while Alsobrooks has spent $1 million and Hogan has spent only about $26,000 so far.

Trone, whose platform includes advocating for getting money out of ***politics***, argued it's a huge asset that he doesn't have to rely on corporations for cash, and signaled there's no limit to how much he will invest: "We're going to spend what it takes," Trone said.

Trone's ability to self-fund could make him more competitive against Hogan - and therefore, a more attractive candidate in the eyes of Democratic leadership, which is not picking sides in the primary. But his opponents have criticized the congressman's eagerness to pour his personal fortune into the race.

"It goes against what we expect in terms of democracy. It's gross," Alsobrooks told CNN during a phone banking event at the University of Maryland. "And what I know is that money can't buy Maryland."

Democratic candidates compete for congressional endorsements

As Trone and Alsobrooks fight for the nomination, they've also been battling over congressional endorsements.

Trone - who has touted his business background and bipartisan record, even as he paints himself as the most progressive candidate in the race - has secured high-profile endorsements from House Democratic leadership, including Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries.

"We're absolutely the front runner," Trone said. "I think we're gonna be able to bring it home, and then after that, take Larry Hogan down."

Alsobrooks disputed the idea Trone is the favorite, calling their match-up a "neck and neck race."

"I think the people will decide who the front runner is in the race," she said.

Alsobrooks has backing from all but two members of the Maryland House delegation besides Trone, as well as Democratic Sen. Chris Van Hollen. And five members of the Congressional Black Caucus announced they were endorsing Alsobrooks not long after Trone accidently used a racial slur during a recent congressional hearing.

"The people who have endorsed me have done so because they know both of us," she said. "And they have decided that I have the best experience and the best track record to deliver for Marylanders."

Trone said he intended to use the word "bugaboo" but accidentally mispronounced the term, resulting in one that was offensive.

"We apologized immediately, once we went back and realized we had said that," Trone said.

Alsobrooks, who has focused on turning out grassroots support, is one of just two Black women running to serve in the US Senate. She has positioned herself as a champion for change, arguing she is a more inspirational candidate than Trone and noting the Maryland delegation currently has no women. Some Democrats have privately expressed frustration that not more is being done to pave the way for her candidacy.

"It's important to America to have people of every gender and every race and every background," Alsobrooks said.

Hogan goes hyper-local, but faces questions on abortion and Trump

As Democrats duke it out, Hogan is trying to run a hyper-local campaign, launching a 10-day bus tour across the state and touting his willingness to work across the aisle.

"We're gonna be in every corner of the state. It's really how I've won ... connecting with real voters who don't think like people inside the beltway," Hogan said. "They're just concerned about somebody telling it to them straight and going down there to represent their interests, and I think they like the fact that I'm nonpartisan."

But with abortion rights on the ballot in Maryland this fall, he's facing questions from voters about his record as governor, which includes vetoing a bill - a move that was ultimately overridden by the Democratic legislature - to expand access to abortion in the state by lifting a restriction that only physicians can perform the procedure.

One Maryland resident, who said she was undecided and described herself an independent, approached Hogan during his campaign stop in Baltimore and asked Hogan about his views on abortion. Afterwards, she told CNN Hogan gave her a generic answer.

Hogan maintains he would not support a federal abortion ban, but dodged a question about whether he would vote to codify Roe v. Wade.

"I'm not going to talk about speculation over specific wording of a specific bill, but we'll talk about that during the election," Hogan told CNN.

Trone criticized Hogan for not answering directly. "You think on an issue like that, you might know what you're going to do," he said

And while Hogan is running as an anti-Trump Republican, it's still an open question of whether he can successfully keep Trump at an arm's length - or whether there would even be room for someone like Hogan in today's Senate GOP.

"We had a former governor who voted for a person who's deceased, rather than do the right thing and cast his vote for Biden," Alsobrooks said, referring to Hogan writing in Ronald Reagan's name in the 2020 presidential election. "So why would we expect that he would ... operate in a bipartisan fashion? Well, he didn't in the most important moment of all, which was to make sure that Donald Trump was not reelected."

CNN's Kristin Wilson, Sheden Tesfaldet, David Wright and Haley Talbot contributed.

By Melanie Zanona, CNN

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