

State Senate: The races to watch

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Body

Oct 22, 2020(CalMatters: <https://calmatters.org> Delivered by Newstex) ;; Democrats hold nearly three-quarters of the seats in the Senate, which at half the size of the Assembly is the Legislature's more liberal-leaning chamber. After a few mega-expensive intraparty primary brawls, the Senate map has been winnowed down to just a handful of competitive races. Two in the Bay Area will choose between different flavors of Democrats — center-left versus lefty-left, and a state party favorite versus an Obama-endorsee. The rest of the close contests will resolve a longer standing question: Is this the end of the California GOP's primacy in the SoCal suburbs?

— By Ben Christopher District 11 About the district Abandon hope all ye Republicans who enter here. This is San Francisco and its southern suburbs. It's an incubator of California Democratic movers and shakers — from the governor to the Speaker of the House to both state U.S. senators and the Democratic vice presidential candidate. The political fights here divide the left from the left-er. And more so than any other place in the state, housing is the central dividing line. Where is the district? Who are the candidates? Two candidates, two very different versions of what it means to be 'progressive.' Democrat Scott Wiener The incumbent, Wiener has a knack for taking up legislative causes that makes some people really mad. Since winning this Senate seat in 2016, he's authored bills that would force President Trump to release his tax returns in order to appear on the ballot, set up a state net neutrality law, create a non-binary gender category on state IDs, and institute a California estate tax. Not all of these measures have gone anywhere, but all have generated headlines. But none of Wiener's legislative efforts have attracted as much attention as his housing bills. As one of Sacramento's most prominent YIMBYs (that's short for 'Yes in my backyard'), Wiener has repeatedly spearheaded efforts that would make it easier for developers to build, and build densely. That's earned him the ire of anti-gentrification activists suspicious of market-based solutions to the state's housing shortage, suburbanites protective of their large lots, and President Trump. In August, Trump and Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson called Wiener out in a Wall Street Journal opinion piece[1] for his 'push to abolish single-family zoning in California.' In Trump-loathing San Francisco, that constituted an in-kind contribution to the Wiener campaign. Democrat Jackie Fielder For those outside the city who see Wiener as some kind of socialist, meet Jackie Fielder: an actual Democratic socialist. A 26-year-old with no electoral experience, Fielder, who is Latina and Native American, is a longshot against one of the Senate's most prolific fundraisers. But Fielder's critique of Wiener's approach to housing — that facilitating more private housing construction in order to increase the housing supply will only benefit real estate developers — is one that's shared by many on the left in San Francisco. Fielder also got an unexpected boost in August when the California Labor Federation dropped its endorsement of Wiener over an affordable housing bill[2] that the union group said did not offer sufficient protection for workers. She already has the backing of the powerful California Teachers Association. What are the stakes? In the era of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Cori Bush, Jamaal Bowman and other leftist dethroners of powerful Democratic incumbents, this is the race to watch — and one with profound

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consequences for housing policy in California. Endorsements Relevant Stories District 15 About the district Spanning the Santa Clara Valley from One Infinite Loop in Cupertino to East San Jose, this district contains downtown San Jose, affluent suburbs, Little Saigon, and the largest Sikh temple in the United States. Its politics are not quite so diverse. Nearly half of voters here are registered Democrats, while Republicans represent fewer than one in five. A Republican has never represented the district. Incumbent Sen. Jim Beall has held elected office since his late 20s. Now that he's termed out — after a career marked by his authorship of a 2017 bill to raise the gas tax, and support for better mental health services — he leaves a vacuum in one of the state's most racially diverse, wealthy but also economically unequal districts. Where is the district? Who are the candidates? In this solidly Democratic district, the campaign is less an ideological battle than a contest of allegiances, endorsements and resumes. Democrat Dave Cortese A known entity in the San Jose area, Cortese has been a county supervisor since 2008 and very nearly became mayor in 2014: He lost to Sam Liccardo by a couple thousand votes. That name recognition probably helped him stand out in a crowded primary, getting more votes than any other candidate by far. As an experienced lawmaker, Cortese is running on the promise that he will have little on-the-job learning to do. All that time spent in local politics has helped him assemble a commanding phalanx of endorsements: the California Democratic Party, Rep. Ro Khanna, some of the state's most influential labor groups and the incumbent, Beall. Democrat Ann Ravel If Cortese is running on the work he's done within the district, Ravel is running on the work she's done outside it. She worked as a U.S. Justice Department lawyer before serving as the state's top election watch dog at the California Fair Political Practices Commission, and then an Obama-appointed commissioner to the Federal Election Commission. She stepped down within a few weeks of President Trump's inauguration, decrying in her resignation letter[3] the 'unlimited, often dark money' channeled into political campaigns. Now, with the endorsements of Barack Obama and local Reps. Jackie Speier and Anna Eshoo, she's running on her pro-transparency bonafides. What are the stakes? This is a contest to replace Beall, who in the era of term limits is about as close a thing there is to an institution unto himself. The outcome will also determine: With so much focus on national politics, can the backing of the state Democratic apparatus overcome the likes of national figureheads like Barack Obama? Endorsements Relevant Stories District 21 About the district Anchored by its largest population center in Santa Clarita, this district reaches up into Lancaster, Palmdale and east to Victorville. The population growth in these latter high-desert communities — fueled by former Angelenos seeking cheaper, more suburban and safer neighborhoods — has shifted the voter registration numbers more Democratic. But while Democrats have outnumbered Republicans here since 2014, GOP and GOP-inclined voters have always punched above their weight, voting at higher rates and regularly backing Republicans for Congress, state Senate, Assembly and governor. The exception: Clinton outpolled Trump here by 3 points. Where is the district? Who are the candidates? A moderate Republican incumbent tries to hold off a young labor lawyer in this rapidly changing district, and one of the last red bastions of Los Angeles County. Republican Scott Wilk Starting as a community college trustee in 2006, Wilk went on to represent the area in the Assembly before the Senate. That makes him a known entity. His voting record is what you might expect from a Republican in a Clinton-backing purple district. He has occasionally broken with his party on gun control and business regulations. Earlier this year, he was the only Republican to support putting Proposition 16 — which would allow the state to reintroduce affirmative action programs — on the ballot. Democrat Kipp Mueller Mueller's career as a labor lawyer earned him the endorsement of the Los Angeles County Labor Federation, the Service Employees International Union and the Democratic Party early on in the primary. In some ways he embodies the anti-Trump energy that propelled so many Dems into power in 2018. The 33-year-old was an active volunteer on former Rep. Katie Hill's campaign. But he only moved to Santa Clarita from downtown Los Angeles in the spring of 2019, it will be easy for his opponent to label him a carpetbagger. What are the stakes? In 2012, Republican Steve Knight won this seat by nearly 15 points. In 2016, Wilk won by 6. With the help of anti-Trump turnout, a ton of volunteer energy and the rapidly changing demographics of Antelope Valley, Democrats think 2020 might be their opportunity to replace one of the GOP's most moderate members. Endorsements Relevant Stories District 23 About the district As recently as 2016, state Democrats hardly bothered to show up in this stretch of the San Bernardino Valley. Sen. Mike Morrell, the termed-out incumbent, won his last race by 14 points and is one of the Capitol's most reliably conservative votes. But after a decades-long decline in GOP registration numbers, the inevitable happened in 2018: The number of Democrats surpassed Republicans. Forming a bracket around the denser bits of Riverside, this district probably still leans conservative. President Trump narrowly outpolled Clinton in 2016 and in the 2020 primary, GOP candidates won nearly 55% of the vote. But with high Democratic turnout predicted in November, local GOP organizers will have to do something they aren't used to doing here: Put up a fight. Where is the district? Who are

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the candidates? Two daughters of immigrants with positions on local school boards square off for this open seat. In the swiftly evolving Inland Empire, the contest has given the GOP an opportunity to recalibrate with a new type of candidate. And it's given Democrats the once-unthinkable chance to win here. Republican Rosilicie Ochoa Bogh They may belong to the same party, but Ochoa Bogh is no Mike Morrell. The daughter of Mexican immigrants who sits on the Yucaipa-Calimesa school board, she has worked as a field representative for Assemblymember Chad Mayes, a moderate who recently defected from the Republican Party. In a rapidly changing district, Bogh was the clear favorite of the party establishment during the primary — the face of what a viable GOP contender in California might look like. The party got its pick. Democrat Abigail Medina A familiar feature on the local ballot, Medina serves as City of San Bernardino's school board president and very nearly beat former GOP Assemblymember Marc Steinorth in 2016. Also the daughter of Mexican immigrants, she spent some of her teenage years working in tomato fields. That experience, she said, informs some of her top policy priorities: affordable housing, tougher environmental standards and expanded educational opportunities. What are the stakes? Republicans are eager to keep this seat and refresh their image in the process. Whether Medina is able to put up a fight will depend on how thinly stretched Democratic dollars are elsewhere across the state.

Endorsements Relevant Stories District 29 About the district From western Anaheim to Chino Hills, this mostly suburban district that cuts across three counties saw the GOP's voter registration advantage disappear in the months leading up to the 2016 presidential election. A Republican hasn't won in a regularly scheduled election here since. But in 2018, Democratic state Sen. Josh Newman was recalled, ostensibly over his support for a state gas tax increase. So while Democrats have a narrow advantage, this is hardly a progressive stronghold. Where is the district? Who are the candidates? This is a rematch of a rematch. Ling Ling Chang and Josh Newman are probably sick of campaigning against one another at this point. Republican Ling Ling Chang The only Asian American woman in the state Legislature, Chang lost this seat before she last won it. In 2016, the one-term member of the Assembly ran against Newman and lost by fewer than 2,500 votes. When Newman was recalled in June 2018, Chang beat out five challengers to replace him. But in a low turnout, winner-take-all election, she won with just over 50,000 votes — a third as many votes as Newman won the year before. This has all made Chang's future representation of this politically mixed senate district uncertain. She has governed accordingly. By some measures, she is the most moderate Republican in the Senate. Democrat Josh Newman With the help of high turnout and ever-worsening voter registration numbers for the local GOP, Newman hopes to be the first state legislator to return to the Capitol after being recalled. An advocate for veterans with a penchant for weird election tactics (he spent much of the 2016 campaign in a bear suit), Newman was recalled in the summer of 2018. He wasn't the author of the gas tax hike, but as the most vulnerable Senate Democrat, he was a top target for Republicans and anti-tax advocates. Running during a regularly scheduled general election with an unpopular Republican president at the top of the ballot, he's counting on a re-reversal of fortunes. What are the stakes? After a nail-biter in 2016 and a wildly contentious recall in 2018, this is likely to be the most closely watched and exceedingly expensive senate campaign in the state. It's also a chance for Democrats to get even for their biggest loss in 2018.

Endorsements Relevant Stories District 37 About the district Split almost entirely between two longtime GOP congressional districts that flipped blue in the 2018 election, this senate seat — which holds elections every four years — is up now. As a district where voters backed Clinton over Trump by a healthy margin and where Republicans hold only a narrow lead of registered voters, it's a tempting target for Democrats. All the more so after the March primary, when Democratic candidates received a combined 53% of the vote. Running from the Anaheim hills through Irvine down to Huntington and Newport Beaches, it's one of the more affluent and well-educated enclaves of the state. Where is the district? Who are the candidates? One of the most vulnerable members of the Senate GOP caucus and one of its most outspoken fiscal hawks faces a challenge from a law professor with no elected experience but a history of electoral brawling. Republican John Moorlach Moorlach has been a presence in Orange County politics since running for treasurer-tax collector in the mid-1990s and warning of financial ruin. When the county did eventually go bankrupt, Moorlach embraced the image of fiscal Nostradamus. A predictable conservative Senate vote on most issues, Moorlach, a certified public accountant, focuses on fiscal matters, where he rails against unchecked public pension debts and the excesses of state spending. Democrat Dave Min This contest is likely to be fierce, but Min is plenty used to that. A Democrat and UC Irvine law professor, he ran for the overlapping congressional seat running to the right[4] of Rep. Katie Porter before losing in a raucous convention battle[5]. This March he ran as the progressive alternative for Senate against Costa Mesa Mayor Katrina Foley —a faceoff that also turned fairly negative[6]. Finally clear of intra-partisan bickering, Min is hoping to prevail by tapping anti-Trump enthusiasm and raking in vast amounts of cash. What are the stakes? This is one of only two remaining red splotches of coastal California, and where Democrats hope to

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finish up what 2018's blue wave started. For Republicans, it's a vital toehold in an area they once dominated — and it's held by one of their most seasoned legislative advocates on fiscal issues. Endorsements Relevant Stories Click to show more Election Feed 19 hours ago 19 hours ago 19 hours ago 19 hours ago 1 day ago 1 day ago 1 day ago 1 day ago Post-It 1 day ago 2 days ago 2 days ago 3 days ago 6 days ago 7 days ago 10 days ago 10 days ago Post-It 13 days ago Post-It 14 days ago 14 days ago [1]: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/well-protect-americas-suburbs-11597608133> [2]: <https://sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com/2020/06/26/sb899-yigby-affordable-housing-bill-churches-state-senate/> [3]: <https://medium.com/@AnnMRavel/departing-the-federal-election-commission-fee0ae9d63a1> [4]: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/14/us/politics/house-democrats-california.html> [5]: <https://twitter.com/douglasjherman/status/967778414114451457> [6]: <https://calmatters.org/politics/california-election-2020/2019/11/how-the-democratic-endorsement-battles-shaped-up-this-weekend-long-beach/>

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