

2026 North Carolina Primary Election Update

March 4, 2026

Introduction

Primary elections were held across the state yesterday, as North Carolinians cast their ballots for various local, state and federal races. Voters selected the candidates who will face off for the open US Senate seat this November and at the state level thirty-nine incumbents faced challengers. Based upon election night results, at least eight of them were defeated.

As background, Republicans enjoy a veto-proof supermajority in the NC Senate and are one vote short of that threshold in the NC House. While the outcomes of the primaries won't directly affect the partisan composition of the chambers, the results will have subtle impacts on the fundraising and candidate viability in general elections.

In the most watched race of the primary cycle, unofficial election night results showed Senate Leader Phil Berger (R-Rockingham) down by just two votes out of the 26,152 counted to challenger Sam Page, the Rockingham County Sheriff. Senator Berger is the longest serving Senate President Pro Tempore in the history of the state and is seen by some as the most influential state elected official. It is estimated that between Sen. Berger's campaign and the independent expenditure groups backing him, roughly \$10 million was spent on his reelection efforts.

A couple of themes from the primary elections:

- The trend of third-party groups spending large sums of money to support or oppose candidates continued, as these entities expended tens of millions of dollars in races up and down the ballot.
- There was an effort by progressives and other segments of the Democratic Party to replace incumbents deemed too moderate with more progressive candidates. These endeavors largely targeted a handful of House Democrats who sided with Republicans on certain key legislative measures. The Young Democrats of North Carolina raised money to support the candidates challenging three Democratic incumbents, Rep. Carla Cunningham (Mecklenburg), Rep. Shelly Willingham (Edgecombe) and Rep. Nasif Majeed (Mecklenburg) in the State House with a history of voting with the Republican majority in that chamber. In addition, Governor Stein backed one of Rep. Cunningham's challengers. All three of these incumbents lost.
- A group of current and retired teachers recruited six educators (all previously registered as Democrats or unaffiliated) to run in Republican primaries. None of them were successful.
- Early voting continues to be popular, as more North Carolinians voted early in this year's primary than in the past two midterm primary elections.

Lastly, here are a few of the applicable election rules. A candidate who finishes second can request a runoff election if the top vote-getter received 30% or less of the votes cast. While there are no automatic recounts, candidates have the option of requesting a recount if the margin of victory is less than 0.5% of the total votes cast or 10,000 votes for statewide races or 1% for non-statewide races.

U.S. Senate

Two-term US Senator Thom Tillis announced back in June that he would not seek reelection, creating an open seat that could prove to be the most hotly contested, and expensive, US Senate race this fall. Although there were contested primary elections for this seat, there was very little suspense as insiders for both parties consolidated support behind candidates deemed to possess the greatest chance of success in the general election. Two-time governor Roy Cooper was the pick of the Democrats after garnering more than 90% of his party's vote, while former national and state GOP party chair Michael Whatley captured over 60% of Republican primary voters' support.

U.S. House

1st District

A recent redrawing of this district by the legislature resulted in District 1 moving from the swing district category to a lean Republican district. The district is massive in terms of geography and encompasses 23 entire counties and parts of two others in northeastern NC. Five Republicans vied for the opportunity to face off with incumbent US Congressman Don Davis in November. Laurie Buckhout, a former Army colonel, bested State Senator Bobby Hanig, Carteret County Sheriff Asa Buck and two others. She moves on to the general election for a rematch with Congressman Davis, after narrowly losing to him in 2024.

4th District

The Democratic Primary in the 4th District featured a rematch between incumbent Valerie Foushee, a former Orange County Commissioner and State Senator, and Durham County Commissioner and social media campaigner Nida Allam. In this solidly blue district, the race pitted traditional party interests against younger, more progressive elements of the party. Allam is pro-Palestine, a supporter of the Green New Deal, and was endorsed by progressives such as US Senator Bernie Sanders. It has been reported that over \$3 million of outside spending has been attracted to this race. Congresswoman Foushee prevailed and moves on to face Mahesh Ganorkar in the general election.

Here is a chart of the congressional races for this November:

District	Republican	Democrat
1	Laurie Buckhout	Don Davis*
2	Gene Douglass	Deborah Ross*
3	Greg Murphy*	Raymond Smith
4	Mahesh Ganorkar	Valerie Foushee*
5	Virginia Foxx*	Chuck Hubbard
6	Addison McDowell*	Cyril Jefferson
7	David Rouzer*	Kimberly Hardy
8	Mark Harris*	Colby Watson
9	Richard Hudson*	Richard N. Ojeda II
10	Pat Harrigan*	Ashley Bell
11	Chuck Edwards*	Jamie Ager
12	Jack Codiga	Alma S. Adams*
13	Brad Knott*	Paul Barringer
14	Tim Moore*	Lakesha Womack

*incumbent

State Senate

Nine incumbents faced challengers in the 50-member NC Senate and there will be one open seat due to Sen. Hanig's run for Congress.

District 1

As mentioned above, this northeastern NC seat is being vacated as a result of State Senator Bobby Hanig's quest to join the US House of Representatives. After facing three challengers, retired Superior Court Judge Jerry Tillet prevailed. He will now go on to face Melissa Zehner, the Democrat nominee, in the fall election.

District 18

Two Republican candidates squared off in their party's primary to earn the opportunity to face State Senator Terence Everitt in November in this swing district that includes Granville County and part of Wake County. Lawyer and lobbyist Chris Stock overtook Cheryl Caulfield, a previous Wake County School Board member, and will challenge Everitt this autumn.

District 26

As mentioned above, the unofficial results on election night show Senate Leader Phil Berger down two votes to Rockingham Sheriff Sam Page. But again, these results are unofficial. The authentication of the official election results occurs after the canvass, which is the official process of determining that the votes have been counted and tabulated correctly. Ten days after the election, each county holds a canvass meeting when the results are certified. Elections officials count absentee ballots that came in before the deadline and research provisional ballots to determine whether they should be counted.

The declared winner of this primary will face Democrat Steve Luking in this deep red district that includes Rockingham County and part of Guilford County.

District 34

Incumbent Chris Measmer, who was appointed to fill the unexpired term of State Senator Paul Newton, was defeated by former State House member Kevin Crutchfield in the Republican Primary in the 34th District which includes most of Cabarrus County. Of note, a third-party group affiliated with DraftKings paid for mailers, TV ads and text messages against Measmer. Crutchfield will now go on to face Democrat April Cook in the fall in a district that favors Republicans.

State House

Of the 120 seats in the House, 30 incumbents faced challengers and nine incumbents are not seeking reelection. As in the Senate, in the districts that are heavily Democratic or heavily Republican, the primary effectively determines who will represent the area in the next legislative session.

District 23

In the Democratic Primary in District 23, which includes Bertie, Edgecombe and Martin Counties, incumbent Representative Shelly Willingham was beaten by Patricia Smith, a minister and small business owner. As discussed above, Smith received the Young Democrats of North Carolina endorsement. She will square off with Brent Roberson, a business owner from Williamston, in the general election this fall in a district very favorable for Democrats.

District 27

In a rematch, incumbent Rodney Pierce prevailed over former House member and businessman Michael Wray in the Democratic Primary in District 27 (Halifax, Northampton and Warren Counties). Wray previously served in this seat until losing to Pierce in 2024. Former Democratic Governor Roy Cooper supported Pierce in that race as a result of Wray's siding with Republicans on certain legislation. Governor Stein supported Pierce in this year's primary. Pierce moves on to face Kenneth Bentley, Jr., in the fall in this solidly blue district.

District 32

In the 32nd District, two primary races took place between candidates that hoped to represent parts of Vance and Granville County. In the Republican primary former Representative Frank Sossamon defeated Pamela Ayscue, one of the "NC Educators on the Ballot" referenced above. Sossamon moves on to face off with Democrat Federal Prison Warden Curtis McRae who bested Melissa Elliott, the Mayor of Henderson, in the Democratic Primary. District 32 projects as a swing district.

District 60

Democrat incumbent Amada Cook, a former High Point City Council member, was appointed to fill the remainder of the term of former Rep. Cecil Brockman. She faced three challengers in the Democratic Primary for this district in southwest Guilford County: Joe Alston, a Guilford County employee, Bruce Davis, a former Guilford County Commissioner, and educator Angie Williams-McMichael. Ultimately, Cook distanced herself from the rest of the field and moves on to the general election. Joseph Perrotta is the Republican nominee for this district, which is favorable for Democrats.

District 65

Incumbent Representative Reece Pyrtle (R-Rockingham), former Chief of Police for the City of Eden, lost to challenger Seth Woodall, a real estate and criminal defense attorney in Eden, in the race for House District 65 in Rockingham County. Woodall will face Democrat Gavin McGaughey in the November general election in this strongly Republican district.

District 79

Incumbent and House Freedom Caucus Chairman Keith Kidwell was outpaced by Darren Armstrong, a farmer from Beaufort County. There is no Democratic candidate in the race this fall so Armstrong will be unopposed.

District 90

Three candidates battled in the Republican Primary in District 90, which includes Surry County and part of Wilkes County. This seat is open as a result of Representative Sarah Stevens' decision to run for the NC Supreme Court.

Former State Highway Patrolman Dan Kiger garnered enough votes to win out over businessman A.J. Daoud and Surry County Magistrate Paul Barker. Kiger now faces Democrat Ken Badgett in general election this fall in a district that is favorable to a GOP candidate.

District 99

Two challengers, Veleria Levy and Tucker Neal, filed to take on incumbent, former Air Force combat pilot, and small businessman Nasif Majeed in the Democratic Primary in the 99th District. Neal ultimately announced that he was endorsing Levy. The Young Democrats and Carolina Forward, a progressive advocacy group, also supported Levy as a result of Majeed siding with the Republican majority on a handful of bills. Representative Majeed has voted to

override nine vetoes from Democratic governors Roy Cooper and Josh Stein since 2023. Ultimately, Levy easily distanced herself from Majeed in this race and as no Republican filed in this heavily blue district in Mecklenburg County, she will head to Raleigh in 2027.

District 105

Incumbent Republican Representative Tricia Cotham easily overcame the challenge of educator Kelly VanHorn, one of the “NC Educators on the Ballot” referenced above, in Mecklenburg County’s District 105. Democrat Ken McCool, who did not have a primary, will square off with Cotham in this swing district this November.

District 106

The 106th District Democratic Primary was one of the most watched primaries this spring. Seven-term incumbent Carla Cunningham has been one the House Democrats criticized by her colleagues for crossing the aisle to vote with Republicans, effectively providing the GOP with a veto-proof supermajority on these votes. Since 2023, on 15 occasions Representative Cunningham has voted to override the vetoes of Democratic governors Roy Cooper and Josh Stein. As a result, she picked up two challengers and Governor Stein and the Young Democrats supported one of them, Rev. Rodney Sadler. Clearly benefiting from this backing, Sadler prevailed easily in the primary. No Republicans filed to run in this heavily Democratic district in Mecklenburg County and thus Sadler will head to the legislature in 2027.

District 110

Pharmacist Caroline Eason pulled off an upset in the Republican Primary in this district, which includes parts of Gaston and Cleveland Counties. She beat incumbent legislator Kelly Hastings. Democrat Mary Silver awaits her in the general election.

District 113

Incumbent Republican Representative Jake Johnson cruised to a victory over challenger Mike Hager, the former House Majority Leader, in this western NC district that includes Polk County and parts of Henderson, McDowell and Rutherford Counties. The only Democrat who filed, Mason Rhodes, withdrew.

District 118

In a district composed of Madison and Haywood Counties, incumbent Representative Mark Pless was ousted by school board member Jimmy Rogers in the Republican primary. Democrat Danny Davis did not face a primary challenger in this Republican-favorable district.

District 119

Incumbent Representative Mike Clampitt faced off with two others in the Republican Primary for District 119 (Jackson, Swain and Transylvania Counties). In the end, Clampitt bested small business owner Anna Ferguson and mental health provider Mike Yow and moves on to face Democrat Mark Burrows in this GOP-friendly district in the fall.

NC Court of Appeals

On the 15-member NC Court of Appeals, Republicans hold 12 of the 15 seats. There will be three contested races in the general election and there were two primaries yesterday.

In the Republican Primary for Seat 1, Administrative Law Judge Michael Byrne bested Union County Superior Court Judge Matt Smith, who was supported by NC Supreme Court Justice Paul Newby. Judge Smith moves on to the general election to face incumbent Judge John Arrowood.

In the Democratic Primary for Seat 3, Christine Walczyk, who has served as a District Court Judge in Wake County for the past 20 years, bested litigation attorney James Whalen. She will now go on to face Gaston County Superior Court Judge Craig Collins in the general election this fall.

There were no primaries for NC Court of Appeals Seat 2, but there will be a general election later in the year. Judge Toby Hampson, the incumbent Democrat, will face Mecklenburg Superior Court Judge George Bell, the Republican candidate, in the race for this seat in the fall.

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