



## REPUBLICAN STATE LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE

TO: RSLC STAKEHOLDERS  
FROM: EDITH JORGE-TUÑÓN, PRESIDENT, RSLC  
DATE: APRIL 16, 2026  
SUBJECT: RSLC ANNOUNCES STATE LEGISLATIVE TARGETS FOR 2026

The Republican State Leadership Committee and its affiliated PACs (“RSLC”) enter the second quarter of 2026 facing a political environment that is likely to be one of the most challenging for state Republicans in recent years. With national dynamics in a mid-term year increasingly shaping down-ballot races, state legislative contests are expected to reflect broader headwinds that have historically put the party in power at a disadvantage.

Democrats and their aligned outside groups are already signaling an aggressive, [well-funded effort](#) to contest Republican-held chambers and expand their influence at the state level. With control of key legislatures often decided by just a handful of seats, even small shifts in turnout, messaging, or national sentiment could have significant consequences.

***These dynamics mean success this cycle will not be defined by sweeping gains, but by whether state Republicans can withstand sustained pressure in the most competitive districts.***

The RSLC’s strategy reflects that reality: a defensive-first posture rooted in message discipline, early investment, and a clear understanding of the map.

Recent cycles have reinforced a critical lesson: waiting to engage late is no longer a viable path to victory for Republicans at the state level. That is why the RSLC has expanded [Project Doorstrike](#), its grassroots initiative designed to hyper-localize races and maximize voter contact in key districts, will continue to deploy its Absentee Ballot and Early Voting [\(AB/EV\) program](#), which proved to be a huge success in the 2021-2022 cycle, where it accounted for win margins in targeted districts, and is making its most significant investment in data infrastructure to date, leveraging deeper analytics, improved targeting, and real-time insights to drive smarter, more efficient campaigns while simultaneously expanding its footprint to compete in more races than ever before.

**The seven-figure investment in data alone will be essential to remaining competitive in races where margins are razor-thin.**

# A VOLATILE ELECTORATE WITH AN OPENING FOR GOP MESSAGING TO BREAK THROUGH

An internal national battleground survey conducted last month makes clear that 2026 will be fought in a deeply unsettled political environment, one driven less by partisan loyalty and more by frustration with the country's direction.

Just 33% of voters say the country is on the right track, a stark indicator of broad dissatisfaction with both parties. This discontent is being shaped overwhelmingly by views of Washington, where voters see dysfunction, gridlock, and a lack of results. For voters across the ideological spectrum, "government" has become synonymous with Congress, creating a distorted lens that fuels anti-incumbent sentiment across the board, including in races far removed from federal decision-making.

That dynamic is evident in the 61% of voters who say they prefer candidates who do not currently hold elected office. While this signals a clear appetite for change, it is rooted more in frustration with national leadership of both parties than in a rejection of state-level governance. This creates a critical distinction: the political environment is being driven by Washington, but many of the most competitive races will be decided on local performance and credibility.

***At the same time, Republicans retain an advantage on the issues voters care about most.***

The GOP leads public trust on growing the economy and creating jobs (44%–42%) and holds an edge on public safety (47%–38%)—two defining issues in a cycle we believe will be shaped by economic anxiety and concerns about stability. In 2024, these same issues helped deliver Republicans a governing trifecta, underscoring their continued electoral potency. These advantages position Republicans to benefit if campaigns successfully channel voter frustration toward promoting solution-oriented policy contrasts rather than generalized anger.

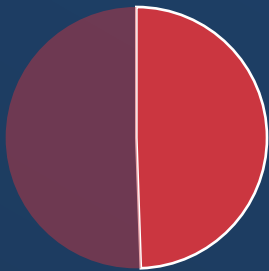
There are also clear signs of movement in key battlegrounds. In Michigan, voters now view Democrats as more extreme than Republicans, 43%–40%—a 13-point shift from last year. Minnesota shows a similar trend (45%–43%), underscoring that Democratic overreach remains a tangible liability.

Voters are not locked into straight-ticket behavior either. Nearly half (49%) say they are willing to split their ticket between parties for governor and state legislature. This reinforces a crucial opportunity: when Republicans clearly differentiate state-level leadership from Washington dysfunction, these races become highly competitive even in a challenging national environment.

## Who do Americans Trust to Lead on Key Issues?

	Democrats	Republicans
Growing the Economy	42%	44%
Public Safety	38%	47%

Taken together, the electorate is frustrated, skeptical, and heavily influenced by perceptions of a broken federal government. The opportunity for Republicans lies in sharpening that contrast, separating state leadership from Washington, focusing relentlessly on economic strength and public safety, and converting broad dissatisfaction into targeted, down-ballot gains.



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## 2026 TARGET STATE OVERVIEW

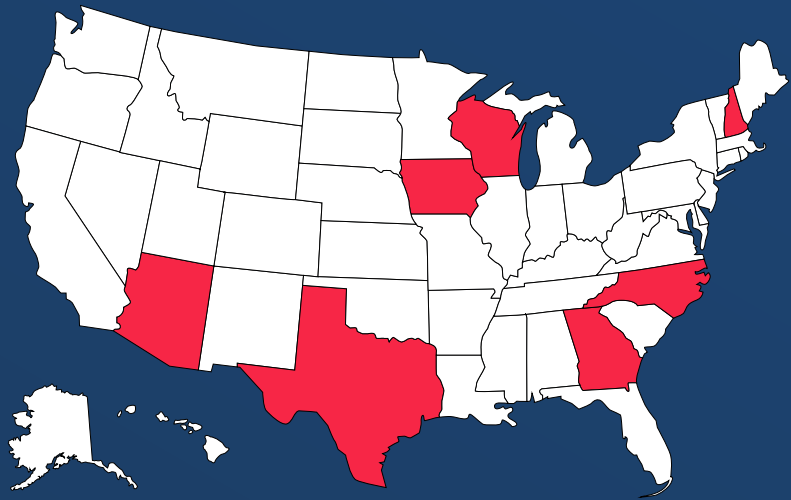
The path to holding our ground in 2026 is narrow and unforgiving. Control of state legislatures will once again come down to a limited number of highly competitive chambers, where the difference between holding ground and losing it could be measured in a small number of races. Republicans must be prepared for a cycle in which we focus more on protecting existing majorities and making strategic gains in others. Discipline and resource prioritization will determine whether the party can blunt Democratic advances.

### Defending Republican Strongholds:

Republicans enter this cycle with 50 state legislative chambers to defend, and maintaining these strongholds will be critical. These chambers are the foundation of Republican state power, and Democrats are increasingly targeting them as part of a wider effort to erode our advantage.

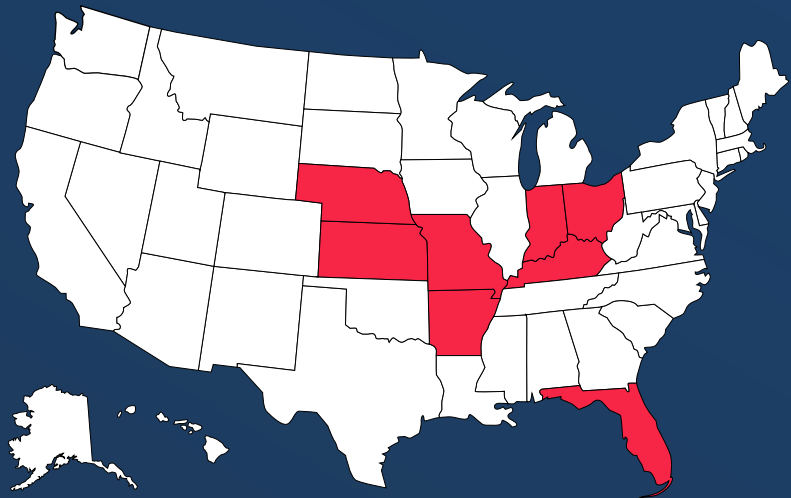
## Top Defense Battleground Chambers:

The top defensive battleground chambers represent the most competitive and volatile segment of the map this cycle. These states feature narrow margins and shifting political dynamics, making them prime targets for Democrats and central to the broader fight for state legislative control. With 88 of 99 state legislative chambers on the ballot, Republicans will be on defense across a broad map.



## Core Republican Chambers:

Maintaining strength in states that receive less national attention is equally critical, as these legislatures form the foundation of Republican state power. These chambers represent durable governing majorities, deeply rooted political alignment, and a significant share of the party's overall legislative strength nationwide, making them essential to preserving long-term balance across the map.

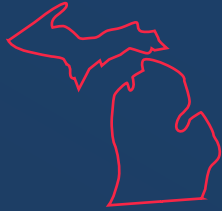


*Failure to fully engage in these chambers early could create openings that are difficult to close later in the cycle.*

## Navigating Split Legislatures

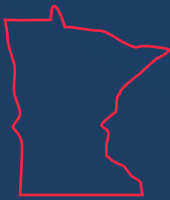
Even in a difficult political environment, key opportunities remain in states where power is divided, and margins are razor-thin. Our objective is not only to protect existing majorities but to strategically compete for chambers that would shift control of state governments.

### *Michigan*



Republicans have a clear opportunity to compete for the state Senate, which currently stands at a razor-thin advantage for Democrats 20-18 while maintaining its existing House majority. With an offensive strategy in the Senate and defense in the House, Republicans have the opportunity to reshape the balance of power.

### *Minnesota*



With a tied 67-67 House, the path forward is to break the [deadlock](#) while also targeting the state Senate. Even marginal gains in either chamber could decisively shift legislative control. The political environment has been further shaped by sprawling [fraud scandals](#) involving several state-administered programs that have drawn national scrutiny and raised concerns about oversight and accountability for nearly a year. The controversy spanning multiple programs and involving hundreds of millions, and potentially billions of dollars, in fraudulent spending has intensified pressure on Democratic leadership and contributed to Governor Tim Walz's decision not to seek re-election. In a closely divided state, even small shifts in voter confidence could prove decisive in determining control of the legislature.

### *Pennsylvania*

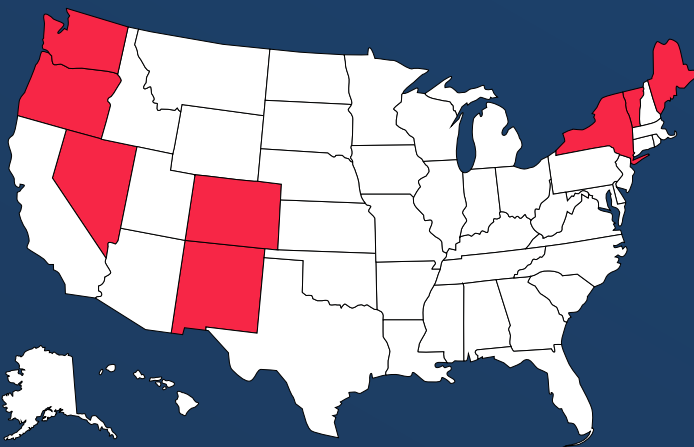


Republicans must focus on reclaiming the state House which currently stands at a 102-101 advantage for Democrats while holding our state Senate majority. This remains one of the most competitive and consequential split-legislature environments in the country.

## PROTECTING AND BUILDING ON RECENT GAINS

The broader map continues to present long-term opportunities, particularly in traditionally Democrat states where conditions have begun to shift. With the key understanding being not backtracking on the progress already made in these states, there are opportunities to expand GOP control where we are seeing frustrations in blue states.

**The RSLC will continue to prioritize protecting and building upon gains in the following states:**



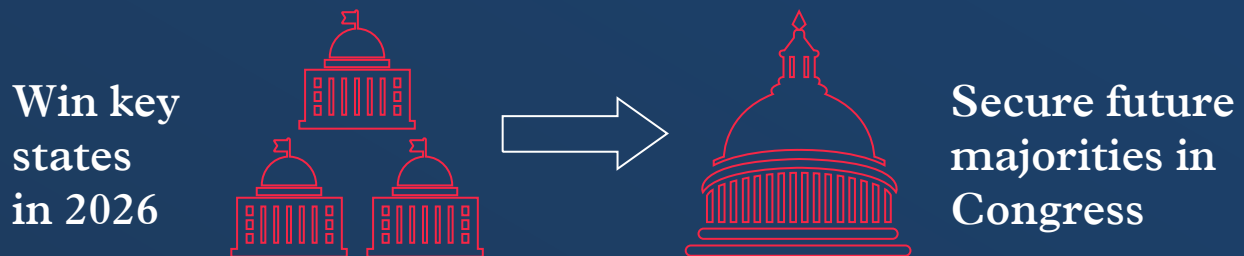
Our direct investment will be diversified in alternative forms of support, such as ground game infrastructure, technical assistance, and targeted data resources that will be critical to sustaining and growing our impact.

## REDISTRICTING: THE STAKES FOR 2028 FEDERAL ELECTIONS

Beyond the battle in the targets above, the 2026 cycle will also determine who controls the redistricting pen for the remainder of the decade – and Democrats have shown they are willing to go to extreme lengths to win.

The redistricting [landscape](#) is defined by a handful of key states, where flipping just a few seats would hand Democrats unified control of state government and, with it, the ability to redraw congressional maps mid-cycle in their favor. While these are among the most critical battlegrounds, they are not the only opportunities Democrats are actively contesting additional states where similar power shifts could further expand their redistricting advantage.

- In Minnesota, Democrats cling to a 33–32 majority in the Senate, while the House is tied 67–67. With Tim Walz as Governor, Democrats are just one seat away in each chamber from securing total control. A single-seat shift would deliver a trifecta and open the door to aggressively redrawing maps to cement their congressional advantage in 2028.
- In Pennsylvania, Democrats hold the House by just one seat, while Republicans control the Senate 27–23. But with Josh Shapiro in office, Democrats need to flip only three Senate seats to secure a trifecta. That change would give them unilateral authority to redraw Pennsylvania’s congressional maps and tilt the delegation toward Democrats for years to come.
- In Arizona, Republicans currently hold narrow legislative majorities (House: 33–27, Senate: 17–13), with congressional redistricting authority resting with the Arizona Independent Redistricting Commission. Although the Commission’s structure limits immediate mid-cycle map changes, shifts in legislative control could influence future efforts to alter or replace the Commission through constitutional means. As a result, maintaining or changing control of the legislature could have long-term implications for how congressional districts are drawn later in the decade.



The consequences of failing to hold the line are profound. If Republicans lose even a handful of these seats, Democrats will gain the power to redraw congressional maps in multiple battleground states, locking in structural advantages that could last the rest of the decade and dramatically narrowing the path to a Republican House majority in Congress. And the downstream impact in Washington is decisive. If those maps are lost, any viable path to passing a reconciliation package or securing a unified government under a future Republican administration will be nonexistent.

***Without a durable House majority, a Republican president will face a fundamentally constrained governing environment.***

In other words, 2026 is not just another midterm, it is the cycle that will determine who draws the maps, who controls the U.S. House, and whether Republicans retain any realistic path to governing at the federal level in the years ahead.

# THE FINANCIAL LANDSCAPE: A STRUCTURAL DISADVANTAGE THAT DEMANDS EARLY ACTION

The financial reality of 2026 is straightforward: Democrats will outraise and outspend Republicans in nearly every competitive state legislative race. This is not new; it is a structural advantage fueled by national donor networks, outside groups, and liberal megadonors. That advantage is accelerating. In 2020, national Democrat affiliate groups spent **\$98 million**, outspending Republicans by at least two-to-one. In 2024, spending from the constellation of national liberal groups swelled to \$175 million compared to the RSLC's \$49 million, with Democrats spending more in the final weeks alone than Republicans did over the entire cycle.

In **2025**, Democrats held a two-to-one spending edge in battleground districts in Virginia, while it approached three-to-one in New Jersey. In many of the country's most expensive media markets, that advantage allowed Democrats to dominate the airwaves and define races early.

## Political Spending Comparison

	Democrats (Outside Groups)
2020 Spending Ratio	2x Republicans
2020 Cycle Spending	\$98 million+
Total 2024 Spending	\$175 million+
Final Weeks Spending 2024	More than GOP total cycle
Virginia 2025	2x Republican spending in battleground districts

There is every reason to expect this to intensify. National Democrat groups will use recent results to mobilize even more resources and return in 2026 prepared to spend at unprecedented levels. The Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee (DLCC) has already announced their plan to spend [\\$50 million](#) in 2026.

Despite these past gaps, Republicans remained competitive across dozens of races, proof that strong candidates, disciplined messaging, and effective field operations can offset financial disadvantages.

### ***But that does not happen without early investment.***

In races decided on the margins, late money is less effective and more expensive. If Democrats define the battlefield first, the path back narrows quickly. Early resources are what keep races competitive, protect key chambers, and prevent small disadvantages from becoming decisive losses.

The takeaway is simple: Democrats will have more money. Whether that advantage decides the outcome depends on whether Republicans invest early enough to compete.

## **HOW WE FIGHT BACK: STRATEGIC TACTICS FOR 2026**

To counter Democrats' financial advantage and the national headwinds, the RSLC will execute a multi-pronged strategy focused on early engagement, disciplined resource allocation, hyper-localized voter contact, and candidate quality:

- Early Investment in Key Races – Define races, protect vulnerable incumbents, and prevent Democrats from dominating the narrative.
- Targeted Absentee and Early Voting Programs – Maximize turnout among reliable Republican voters in battleground districts.
- Project Doorstrike: Grassroots Engagement – Hyper-localized [voter contact](#) to increase persuasion and retention.
- Candidate Quality and Support – Recruit, train, and support high-caliber [candidates](#) who reflect local values and can clearly communicate Republican priorities. Strong candidates are critical in tight races.

- Resource Prioritization Across the Map – Allocate volunteers, staff, and funding where they can have the greatest impact.
- Data-Driven Decision Making – Use analytics to refine strategies, target persuadable voters, and respond quickly to changing political dynamics.

These tactics ensure Republicans are proactively shaping the battlefield, protecting critical chambers, and positioning the party to compete successfully in every state.

## CONCLUSION

The 2026 election cycle will be a stress test for Republican strength at the state level. The combination of national headwinds, concentrated Democratic spending, and narrow legislative margins creates a landscape where setbacks are possible if Republicans are not prepared.

The RSLC's strategy is built around that reality: prioritize early engagement, maintain a disciplined focus on the most competitive districts, and invest in turnout operations capable of outpacing a difficult environment.

Success in 2026 will not be measured solely by expansion, but by the ability to hold the line, protect critical chambers, and remain competitive in the races that will decide control.

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