

ALABAMA PRIMARY ELECTION REPORT

May 19, 2022

Republican and Democratic Party primaries for all contested statewide constitutional offices, and legislative seats, as well as a U.S. Senate seat, congressional seats and many local offices are on the ballot next Tuesday, May 24.

US SENATE

There is a crowd in the Republican primary for the state's open seat in the U.S. Senate, which is currently held by U.S. Senator Richard Shelby. The race features sitting Congressman Mo Brooks, Shelby's former Chief of Staff and former Business Council of Alabama CEO Katie Britt, and federal defense contractor Mike Durant, known for his military career as a U.S. Army helicopter pilot. His career is notable due to his capture by Somali soldiers after his Black Hawk helicopter went down, which story is featured in the movie Black Hawk Down.

The race began with Brooks holding a strong double-digit lead over the other candidates due to name recognition and President Trump's endorsement. Brooks is endorsed also by Club for Growth, which has spent millions attacking Britt, even before she scratched 10% in polls. By February, Durant had overtaken Brooks in the polls and Britt remained in second but steadily increasing. Each candidate polled in the 20-30% range at that time, and Durant was settled into a healthy lead. Trump rescinded his endorsement of Brooks as polls consistently measured him in a distant third. Eventually in May, Durant became a target of negative ads for the first time in the campaign. More recent polls show Durant and Brooks trailing Britt by double digits, competing to make a potential runoff with Britt.

Britt has led in fundraising in Alabama but does not have the most resources at her disposal. That distinction goes to Durant who has given his campaign upwards of \$6.5 million, with a quarter of a million in donations from other sources. Brooks trails in fundraising but is relying heavily on the millions invested by Club for Growth aimed at discrediting Britt. Both Britt and Durant are the beneficiaries of political-action committees focused on supporting them and attacking opposition.

GOVERNOR

Governor Kay Ivey appears to have a strong lead in the Republican primary race for her second full term in office over a large field of candidates. A distant second are Tim James and Linda Blanchard, who are neck in neck according to recent polls. Both challengers are largely self-funded. Neither has held public office, though Tim James is the son of a former two-time Alabama governor and this is his third gubernatorial bid. Blanchard was the U.S. Ambassador to Slovenia under President Trump. She was one of the first candidates to throw her name into the hat in the U.S. Senate race but switched to the race for governor before the qualifying deadline. Recent polls suggest Ivey is within striking distance of the 50 percent threshold and winning the nomination outright without a runoff. All three candidates are increasing their intensity in the final weeks, as Blanchard and James try to push the race into a runoff. Six candidates are vying for the Democratic nomination for governor.

SECRETARY OF STATE

There is a field of four candidates in the Republican primary to be the state's chief election officer: Current House Rep. Wes Allen, current State Auditor Jim Zeigler, Christian Horn, and former Secretary of State office staffer Ed Packard. Allen, a hard-worker running a traditional grassroots fundraising campaign, and Zeigler, a say-anything populist, are the favorites.

APPELLATE COURTS

The only Alabama Supreme Court race in contention is for the seat currently held by retiring Associate Justice Michael Bolin. Birmingham attorney Greg Cook faces Circuit Court Judge Debra Jones. This is Cook's first time running statewide. Jones finished third in the primary race for the seat currently held by Associate Justice Sarah Stewart. Associate Justice Brad Mendheim finished second in that race but was later appointed to a vacant seat. Both candidates have had large infusions of campaign funding in the final two weeks and are advertising heavily.

PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION

Two of the three Public Service Commission seats are up for reelection this year.

Place 2 – Republican incumbent Commissioner Jeremy Oden faces three primary challengers: John Hammock, Stephen McLamb, and Brent Woodall.

Place 3 – Republican incumbent Commissioner Chip Beeker faces two primary challengers: Robin Litaker and Robert McCollum.

STATE SENATE

Out of 35 seats in the Alabama Senate, there are ten Republican primaries and four Democratic primaries. Five primary races are for open Senate seats (three Republican, two Democrat).

Here is a rundown of the open seats:

SD 11 (St. Clair, Talladega) – Attorney Lance Bell and fellow Republican Michael Wright face off for the seat currently held by retiring Sen. Jim McClendon. Bell appears to be the front runner.

SD 12 (Calhoun, Talladega) – Republicans Wayne Willis, Keith Kelley, and Wendy Draper are vying for the Republican nomination in the primary to face Democrat Danny McCullers in November. This seat is the open seat left by retiring Sen. Del Marsh. The Republican primary will likely be headed toward a runoff.

SD 19 (Jefferson) – Sitting Representatives Merika Coleman and Louise Alexander are in a heated Democratic primary race for the seat held by retiring Sen. Priscilla Dunn. Coleman has received a key endorsement from the local Alabama Democratic Conference.

SD 23 (Dallas, Lowndes) – Former Sen. Hank Sanders, Thayer Spencer, Robert Stewart, Michael Nimmer and former Selma Mayor and Rep. Darrio Melton are in contention for the Democratic nomination for the seat currently held by Sen. Malika Sanders-Fortier, who is seeking the Democratic nomination in the gubernatorial race.

SD 31 (Dale, Coffee, Covington, Pike) – House Rules Chairman Mike Jones faces County Commissioner Josh Carnley and Norman Horton for the Republican nomination to fill the seat long-held by retiring Sen. Jimmy Holley. The race appears to be tightening between Jones and Carnley and will likely be decided in a runoff.

Of the nine incumbents facing a primary challenger (seven Republican, two Democratic), three of those sitting members appear to face serious primary opposition:

SD 2 (Madison) – Sen. Tom Butler faces a challenge by former Sen. Bill Holtzclaw for the Republican nomination. The former Senator is running a low budget campaign. The winner will face Democrat Kim Lewis in November.

SD 15 (Jefferson, Shelby) – Sen. Dan Roberts faces physician Brian Christine in the Republican primary.

SD 27 (Lee) – Sen. Tom Whatley faces Auburn City Councilman Jay Hovey in the primary. The winner will face Democrat Sherri Reese in November.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Out of 105 seats in the Alabama House, there are 21 open seats. There are 26 incumbent representatives who have primary opposition.

There are two open Republican seats with only one declared Republican candidate. Republican Marcus Paramore, running in House District 89 (Troy) is unopposed, while Republican Bill Lamb seeking to replace Rep. Rich Wingo in Tuscaloosa County (House District 62), faces no primary opposition and will likely prevail in November to win the conservative seat.

Three current Republican districts have competitive Democratic primaries where Democrats see an opportunity to gain seats. Those include the races for the open seats in House Districts 3 (the Shoals), House District 47 (Birmingham – Vestavia), and House District 74, a seat in Montgomery that was significantly redrawn toward the Democrats during redistricting. In addition, Democrats see potential opportunities in HD 10 (Madison) and HD 25 (Madison), both open seats.

INCUMBENT CHALLENGES TO WATCH:

HD 4 – Republican incumbent Rep. Parker Moore faces a serious primary challenge by Patrick Johnson and Sheila Banister. ALFA has endorsed Johnson, a local State Farm insurance agent.

HD 7 – Republican incumbent Rep. Proncey Robertson faces primary challenger Ernie Yarbrough, CEO of Covenant Digital Solutions. The winner will face Democrat Mose Jones, Jr. in November. Robertson, a former law enforcement officer, has been attacked for allegedly not being conservative enough.

HD 14 – Republican incumbent Rep. Tim Wadsworth, an attorney, is fighting small businessman Tom Fredricks and Deputy Sheriff Corey Franks to retain his seat.

HD 23 – Rep. Tommy Hanes faces a tough challenge from Republican Mike Kirkland. Kirkland, an administrator with Vulcan Materials, is supported by ALFA, the Alabama

Road Builders Association, and the Business Council of Alabama. Hanes is a retired firefighter and fisherman.

HD 28 – Rep. Gil Isbell is being challenged by former lawmaker Mack Butler in the Republican Primary. Isbell has received all the right endorsements for a business-friendly incumbent, but Butler has the support of Lt. Gov. Ainsworth who served with him in the House. Butler is criticizing Isbell for supporting a gas tax but Gov Ivey recently announced a much needed road project in the district funded by the tax.

HD 38 – Incumbent Rep. Debbie Wood faces Republican challenger Micah Messer. Messer is the former COO of Right Side Broadcasting Network.

HD 45 – Rep. Dickie Drake faces serious Republican primary challenger Susan Dubose, a retired banker.

HD 49 – Rep. Russell Bedsole faces Republican challenger Michael Hart, a radio host. Bedsole, a Deputy Sheriff, was elected to office during a special election. This is his first election cycle and first test in a regular primary.

HD 54 – Rep. Neil Rafferty faces Democratic challengers, Britt Blalock a community organizer, and Edward Maddox a barber. Rafferty is a U.S. Marine veteran and is considered one of the most socially progressive members of the House, representing an urban area of Birmingham. Blalock is a serious contender but Rafferty has a strong grassroots team.

HD 55 – Rep. Rod Scott faces four Democratic primary challengers: Travis Hendrix a police officer, Phyllis Oden-Jones, Fred “Coach” Plump a firefighter, and Antwon Womack. Scott is opposed by the House Democratic Caucus leadership.

HD 67 – Democratic incumbent Rep. Prince Chesnut faces primary challenger Laurine Pettway. The Sanders family holds strong political clout in Dallas County and Pettway has their support. The patriarch of that family, former Sen. Hank Sanders and his daughter retiring Sen. Malika Sanders-Fourtier will be on the ballot in other races.

HD 72 – Democratic incumbent Ralph Howard is facing a primary challenge from Curtis Travis, a former field representative for the Alabama Education Association.

HD 88 – Republican incumbent Will Dismukes faces primary challenger Jerry Starnes. Dismukes is working to rebuild his reputation with constituents after facing highly publicized legal woes which appeared to prompt personal upheaval. Many did not

expect Dismukes to seek reelection at all, but polling shows him neck and neck (with no clear winner to predict) against Prattville City Council President Jerry Starnes.

HD 94 – Rep. Joe Faust faces Republican challenger Jennifer Fidler, whose farming family’s roots run deep in Baldwin County. Fidler is gaining some traction and has the support of ALFA.

OPEN SEATS TO WATCH:

HD 2 – Four contenders are seeking to replace retiring Rep. Lynn Greer: Limestone County Commissioner Jason Black, photographer Kimberly Butler, Ben Harrison, and defense contractor Terrance Irelan. A runoff is likely.

HD 3 – The race to replace Rep. Andrew Sorrell, who is running for State Auditor, includes a Democratic and Republican Primary. The Democrats are nurse practitioner Susan Bentley and pastor Wesley Thompson. Republicans are CPA Kerry Underwood and former registrar Fred Joly. This seat is seen as competitive in November.

HD 13 – There are five Republicans seeking to replace outgoing Rep. Connie Rowe, who has taken a position on Lt. Gov. Will Ainsworth’s staff: Retired CEO of Southeastern Medical Properties Greg Barnes, Walker County Commissioner Keith Davis, detective Matt Dozier, attorney Charles Waits, and owner of Jasper Auto Sales Matt Woods who is also a former member of the Alabama Community College Board of Trustees. With this many contenders, a runoff is likely.

HD 15 – There are two in contention for the Republican nomination in the race for the seat currently held by retiring Rep. Allen Farley: Leigh Hulseley a Helena City Councilwoman and gym owner, and Brad Tompkins, a small business owner and economic developer. Both candidates are small business owners. The winner will face Richard Rouco in November.

HD 26 – Three Republicans are seeking the party nomination in the race for the seat currently held by retiring Rep. Kerry Rich: financial consultant Brock Colvin, nurse Annette Holcomb, and real property manager Todd Mitchem. Colvin has secured important endorsements in an area where those credentials have carried a lot of weight for other, neighboring officeholders such as House Majority Whip Wes Kitchens and Senate Majority Leader Clay Scofield. The Republican nominee will face Democrat Ben Alford in November.

HD 31 – Three Republicans are seeking election to the open seat currently held by retiring Rep. Mike Holmes: Elmore County Commissioner Troy Stubbs, R.T. Barksdale, and IT consultant Chadwick Smith.

HD 40 – There are seven people vying for the Republican nomination for the seat currently held by retiring Rep. K.L. Brown: Gayla Blanton, Anniston Finance Director Julie Borrelli, publisher Katie Exum, professor of Public Administration Bill Lester, general contractor Bill McAdams, Chamber executive Chad Robertson, and a student Jakob Williamson. The winner will face Democrat Pam Howard in November. A primary runoff is likely between two of the top three contenders: Bill Lester, Bill McAdams and Chad Robertson.

HD 47 – Retired insurance company IT director Jim Toomey and freelance writer Christian Coleman are competing for the Democratic Party nomination. The winner will face Republican Mike Shaw who was recently nominated by the Republican Party to fill the ballot position left by the unfortunate death of Rep. David Wheeler.

HD 56 – Four Democrats are vying for the seat currently held by Rep. Louise Alexander, who is running for the State Senate: attorney Ontario Tillman, Bessemer City Councilman Jesse Matthews, small business owner Cleo King, and Tereshia Huffman who serves on the board of the Birmingham Water Works. Tillman is endorsed by the Alabama Democratic Conference.

HD 57 – Four Democrats are in contention for the seat currently held by Rep. Merika Coleman, who is running for the State Senate: Kevin Dunn, pastor Patrick Sellers, and pastor Charles Winston III. The winner will face Republican Delor Baumann in November. Sellers is endorsed by the Alabama Democratic Conference. ■