

# 2018 House preview

A look ahead to the 2018 midterm House elections

**September 2017**

**Producer**

*Presentation Center Staff*

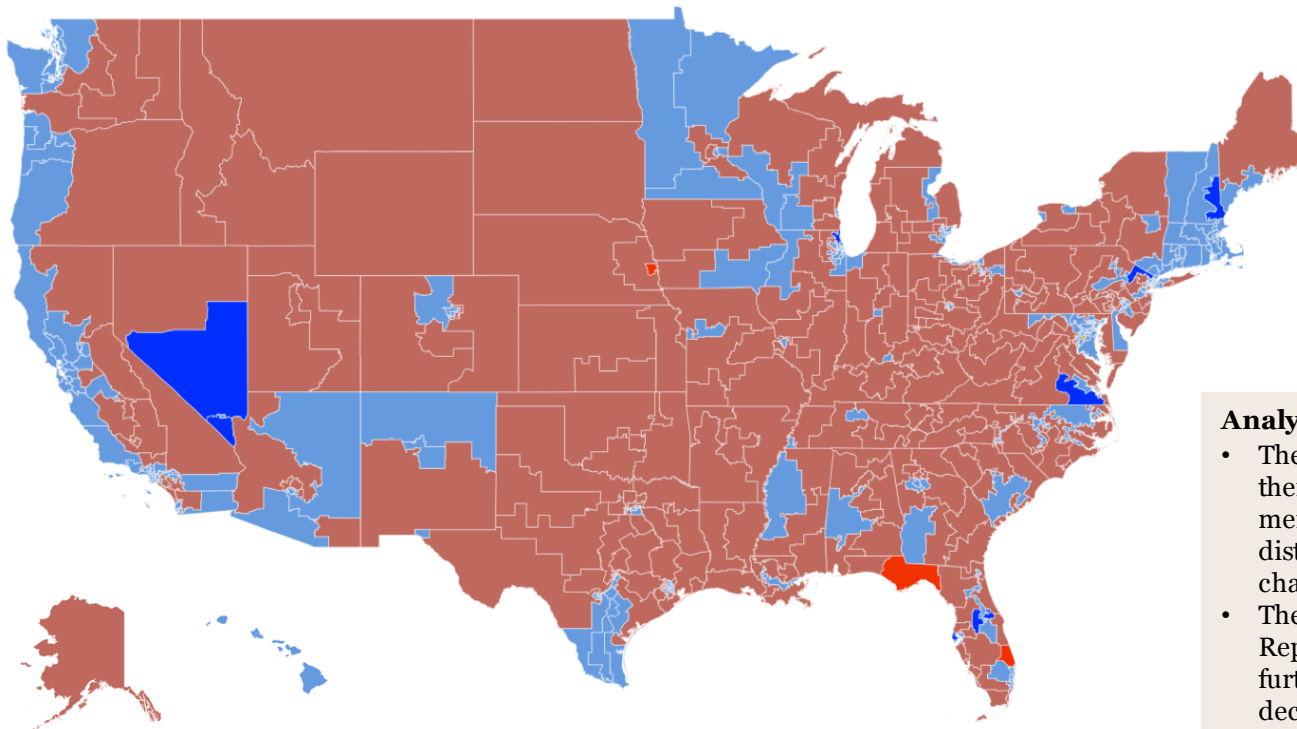
**Director**

*Alistair Taylor*

# While history suggest the GOP will lose seats in the midterms, their losses are likely to be limited

## House seats gained and held, 2016 House elections

■ Democratic gain ■ Democratic hold ■ Republican hold ■ Republican gain



### Analysis

- The GOP lost six seats in 2016, so there is not a group of freshmen members in formerly Democratic districts vulnerable to challengers
- The potential for large Republican losses in the House is further limited by the continuing decline of swing districts

Sources: Charlie Cook, "Will History Hold in 2018 Midterms?" The Cook Political Report, January 9, 2017, NationalJournal research, 2016; AP, 2016.

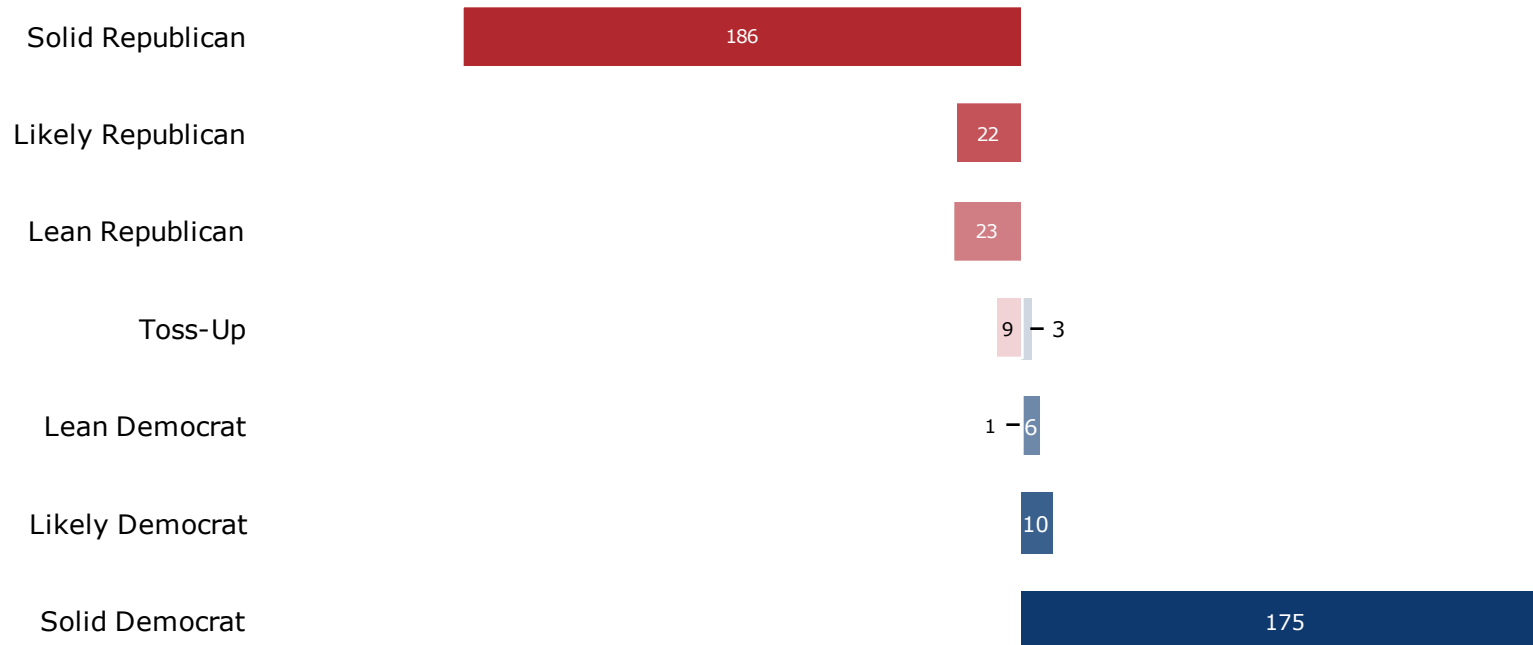
# Democrats need to pick up over 20 seats to take back the House in 2018

## Cook Political Report ratings

2018 HOUSE RACES

■ Republican held seats (240)

■ Democrat held seats (194)

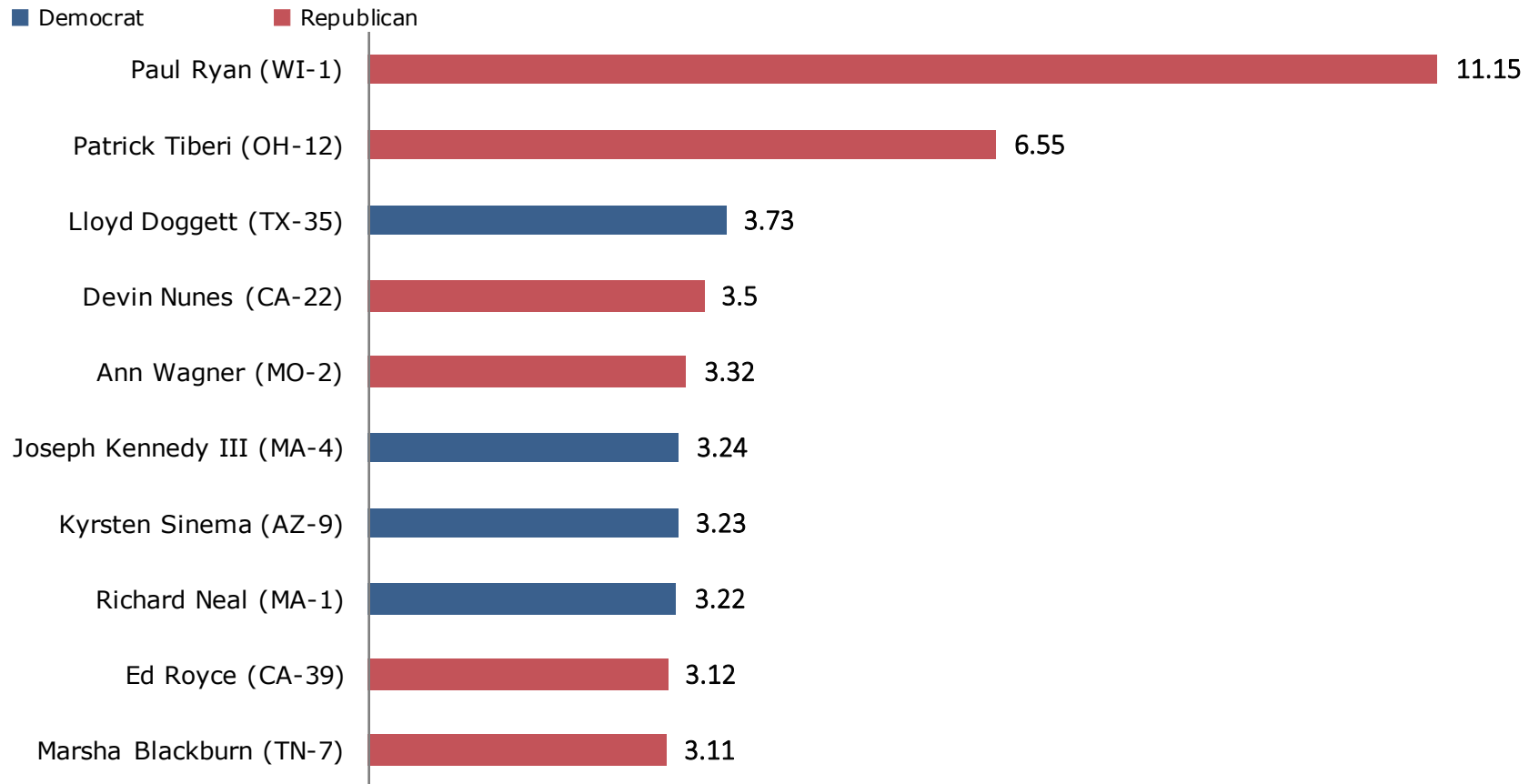


Sources: Cook Political Report, 2017.

# House members with the largest war chests for the 2018 midterm elections

## Top 10 House members with the most cash on hand

MILLIONS OF DOLLARS; AS OF JUNE 30



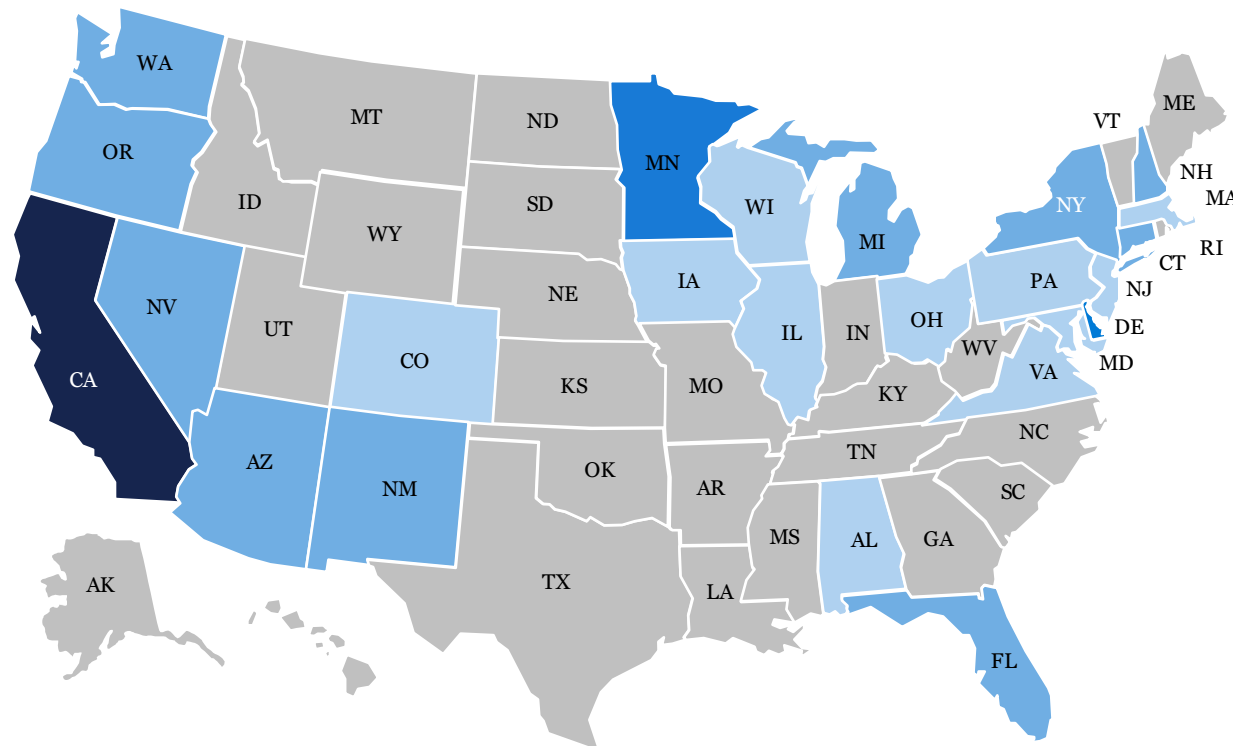
Sources: Federal Election Commission, 2017.



# The NRCC released a list of 36 Democrat-held House seats they will target in 2018

## NRCC target district overview

■ Four seats targeted ■ Three seats targeted ■ Two seats targeted ■ One seat targeted ■ Not listed



### Analysis

- One-third of the districts in the NRCC spreadsheet are seats that President Trump carried over Hillary Clinton even while a Democratic House member also claimed victory
- That segment of the list is heavy on blue-collar districts in the Midwest, which Republicans believe will be especially fertile political territory in the Trump era
- Midterm elections are typically challenging for the party in power, but Republicans note Democrats have recently struggled to motivate their base in non-presidential election years

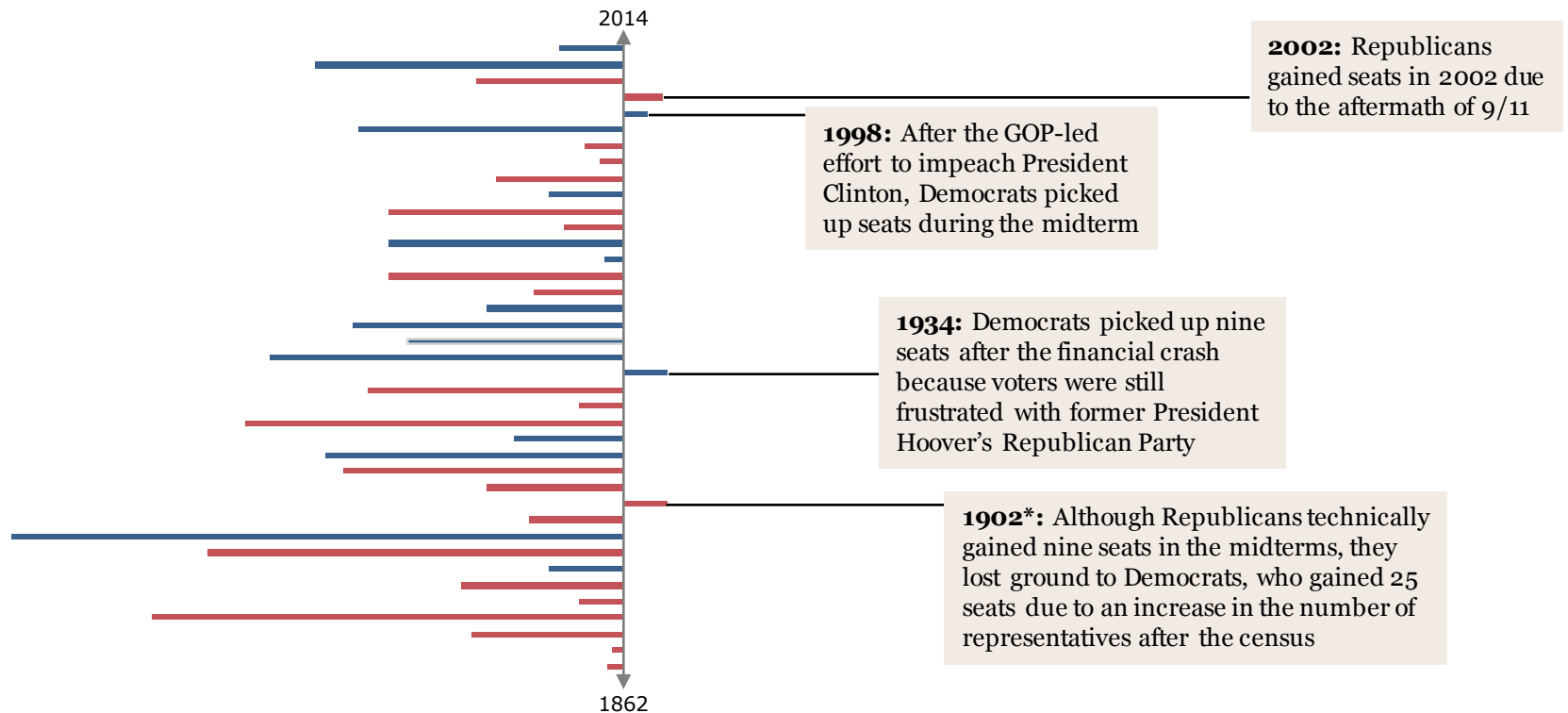
Sources: Alex Isenstadt, "House Republicans name Democratic targets for 2018," POLITICO, February 8, 2017; David Nir, "Daily Kos Elections presidential results by congressional districts for the 2016 and 2017 elections," Daily Kos, January 30, 2017.

# Since 1862, the president's party has lost ground in the House in 92 percent of midterm elections

## President's party gain/loss of seats in House

VITAL STATISTICS ON CONGRESS

■ Democratic president ■ Republican president



Sources: Charlie Cook, "Will History Hold in 2018 Midterms?" The Cook Political Report, January 9, 2017.

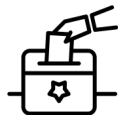
# Democrats will have to overcome four factors benefitting Republicans in 2018

## Reasons to give House Republicans hope they will not lose their majority



### Exposure

- The more seats a party has, the more seats they have exposed, which means the more they picked up in the previous election—and the more freshmen they have sitting in seats previously held by the other party
- Republicans actually had a net loss of six seats last year (unusual when winning the presidency) and a relatively narrow majority – meaning they are less exposed than might be expected



### Midterm norms

- In presidential election years voter turnout is high, broad and diverse, reflecting more or less the overall population
- In midterm election years, voters tend to be older, whiter, more conservative and more Republican, a thumb on the scale for the GOP



### District boundaries

- In most states, Congressional district lines are drawn by the state legislatures and the governors
- Democratic governors had massive losses in 2010, the last election before the most recent redistricting, so Republicans took the upper hand in a majority of states, drawing lines that benefitted the GOP
- Also, with the new computer technology, whichever party is able to draw the maps can be far more precise and effective than in the past



### Population patters

- Democratic voters are highly concentrated in urban areas and college towns, while Republican voters are more evenly distributed
- Republican voters are simply more efficiently allocated than Democratic voters are



# Why should Republicans be worried?

## Factors that may hurt Republicans in the 2018 congressional elections



### Republicans' control makes them targets for blame

Republicans hold majorities not only in the White House, Senate and House, but also in state legislatures and of governorships nationally. Disaffected voters are more likely to blame Republicans than Democrats, and these people are more likely to vote than their contented counterparts.



### The Democratic base is energized

With the loss of the White House, Senate and House still fresh in voters' minds, the Democratic base has been energized – while the Republican base lacks enthusiasm. This may prove particularly beneficial for Democratic candidates because of the number of Republicans rumored to be retiring next year.



### Trump voters may not show up for 2018 elections

Trump supporters may not return for the 2018 congressional elections, when Trump's name won't be on the ballot. A similar phenomenon occurred during Obama's tenure, when droves of voters elected – then re-elected – Obama, but did not vote in the midterms.

### “All politics is local” – except when it isn't.

Sometimes, voter demographics, voting patterns and campaigns matter – but periodically, states or districts vote unexpectedly, favoring a party they usually don't. In such years, weak candidates and campaigns beat strong candidates and campaigns, and unlikely figures win.

Roughly once a decade, we see this, as we did in the midterm elections of 1946, 1958, 1966, 1974, 1994, 2006 and 2010; in the Senate in 2014; and in the presidential election of 1980. In these wave elections, we see losses of 30 – and even as many as 65 – seats in the House, as well as losses in Senate seats, and in gubernatorial and down ballot races.

# Republicans and Democrats face unique challenges in their strategy for the midterms

## Republican strategy



### Localize

- Localize the race without needlessly antagonizing Trump or his supporters
- A Republican running in 2018 should try to avoid making his or her election a referendum on Washington or Congress
- A nationalized race is the last thing Republicans want



### Specify

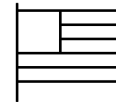
- Make the choice about the best candidate to represent the interests, values and needs of your constituents
- Say you'll support Trump when his positions help your district, and oppose him when they don't
- Make the race about two candidates squared off each other, not a referendum on how the country is doing



### Beware of Twitter

- Avoid getting drawn into reacting to every Trump tweet or new position
- If candidates comment on every controversial statement Trump makes, they'll never have time to explain their own positions
- Simply say, "my name is on the ballot in this district/state, not President Trump's. I am running my race; he can speak for himself."

## Democratic strategy



### Nationalize

- Democrats can nationalize their races and make them a referendum on Trump and Republicans in Congress
- They can stay away from local issues and run as "send-them-a-message" candidates
- Republicans successfully used this tactic in 2010 and 2014



### It's a referendum

- It's fashionable right now to say that Democrats have to stand for something
- "I have never seen a party win a midterm election on the issues; midterms are always a referendum on the party in power." – Charlie Cook
- Make the race a referendum on how the country is doing

Sources: Charlie Cook, "Midterms are about the party in power not issues," National Journal, July 31, 2017; Amy Walter, "Keeping Democrats 'better deal' in perspective," The Cook Political Report, July 26, 2017.