

# CORNERSTONE

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## THE BRIEFING ROOM

### **Special Briefing: Key States to Watch in 2025**

As the 2025 cycle kicks into gear, key battleground states are shaping up to deliver high-stakes matchups with national implications. From an open gubernatorial contest in Iowa to a potential Senate shift in New Hampshire, the outcomes in these races will set the stage for the 2026 midterms—where control of Congress, gubernatorial leadership, and the balance of state-level power will be in play. This month's edition of *The Briefing Room* highlights the dynamics, candidates, and coalitions to watch in Iowa, New Hampshire, Texas, and Georgia.

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### **Iowa – authored by Cornerstone's [Matt Paul](#) and [Jimmy Centers](#) (Des Moines, IA)**



#### **Iowa Governor – Republican Perspective**

Governor Kim Reynolds' announcement that she wouldn't seek reelection caught many by surprise, but with a deep bench, Iowa Republicans quickly began kicking the tires on potential candidates. Open races for Governor rarely occur in Iowa—this is only the third time since the 1970s that an incumbent chose not to seek reelection.

Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird is seen as a frontrunner due to her close relationship with President Trump – she endorsed him in the Iowa Caucus, and the President said multiple times he'd like to see her be governor one day. Iowa Sec. of Agriculture Mike Naig is also seen as a strong candidate, and Iowa House Speaker Pat Grassley – the grandson of U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley – has stated he will consider a run. Several state legislators are mulling a run, along with Rep. Randy Feenstra (IA-04) and Rep. Zach Nunn (IA-03). Rep.

Ashley Hinson (IA-02) and Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks (IA-01) have said they intend to continue serving in Washington.

### Iowa Governor - Democratic Perspective

Iowa Democrats are more optimistic than they have been in a long time. Even with a voter registration disadvantage, many Democratic leaders believe they have a chance to win Iowa's top office due to a sluggish state economy and the historic low performance of incumbent President's parties in midterm elections. The early negative impacts of President Trump's tariffs on the farm economy and the ongoing lightning rod issue of land rights due to a controversial pipeline proposed in the state have also created a chance for Democrats to stem some of the recent lopsided Republican performance in rural areas.



State Auditor Rob Sand, the only statewide Democrat to win in 2022, is widely expected to run for Governor. He is a former state prosecutor with strong fundraising potential. He raised over \$8 million last year and appears to be preparing to run. Jennifer Konfrst, the Minority Leader of the Iowa House of Representatives has expressed interest in running against incumbent Rep. Zach Nunn (IA-03) but has not ruled out running for Governor.

### What to watch:

- **President Trump's endorsement:** Carried Iowa by wide margins in 2016, 2020, and 2024. Should he endorse a candidate in the primary, it will significantly winnow the field and create an instant frontrunner. However, expect a robust field on both sides of the aisle, regardless of what national endorsements occur.
- **Sen. Joni Ernst:** If Republican Senator Joni Ernst decides not to seek reelection, there is wide speculation that several Democrats will run for that seat and force a primary. Some lesser-known Democratic candidates that are currently thinking about running for Governor may instead decide to run for the Senate. An open US Senate seat would also likely spark interest from current members of the Iowa Congressional delegation.

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## New Hampshire - authored by Cornerstone's [Marc Goldberg](#) and [Kirsten Koch](#) (Concord, NH)

### Governor & U.S. Senate – Republican Perspective

First-term Governor Kelly Ayotte has been off to a smooth start, as reflected by a recent University of New Hampshire poll showing her with 52 percent approval to 34 percent

disapproval. New Hampshire governors almost always

is in a strong position to continue that trend. Scott Brown, Former Ambassador to New Zealand, U.S. Senator from Massachusetts and 2014 candidate for Senate in New Hampshire, has said he is exploring the opportunity to run again after former Governor Chris Sununu announced he would not run.



### Governor & U.S. Senate – Democratic Perspective

No Democratic opposition has announced yet, though former executive councilor and 2024 gubernatorial primary candidate Cinde Warmington is rumored to run again. The biggest development in New Hampshire politics this cycle is the retirement of U.S. Senator and former Governor Jeanne Shaheen after a career in public office spanning over 35 years. Democratic Congressman Chris Pappas (NH-1) quickly entered the race, garnering significant support. Despite speculation that she may run, Congresswoman Maggie Goodlander (NH-2) recently announced that she would remain in the House of Representatives and threw her support behind Rep. Pappas. With an essentially clear field, other Democratic leaders are expected to line up behind Rep. Pappas as well.

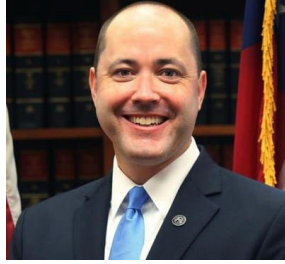
### What to Watch: New Hampshire Congressional Races

- **Developing Democratic Primary in NH-01:** Maura Sullivan jumps in with \$400K raised, but Stefany Shaheen may enter, potentially shaking up the race with strong family political ties.
- **Republicans Reconsider NH-01:** Previous candidates Joe Kelly Levasseur and Chris Bright are eyeing the seat again in a historically swing district.
- **Stable Outlook in NH-02:** Rep. Maggie Goodlander is favored to hold her seat, facing a familiar GOP challenger, Lily Tang Williams, for the third time.

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## Georgia - authored by Cornerstone's [Ben Sheidler](#) and [Lauren Hunter](#)(Atlanta, GA)

Georgia is heading into a high-stakes political cycle, with both parties preparing for major leadership shifts and battles up and down the ballot.



### Governor & U.S. Senate – Republican Perspective

With Governor Brian Kemp's term-limited, Georgia Republicans are already heating up. Attorney General Chris Carr has declared his candidacy, touting a public safety platform. Lieutenant Governor Burt Jones and Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger are likely contenders, setting the stage for a crowded and fractious primary. Republicans are also eyeing Senator Ossoff's seat as a prime pick after Trump's 2024 win in Georgia.



### Governor & U.S. Senate – Democratic Perspective

Georgia Democrats are searching for star power. With Stacey Abrams still undecided and Rep. Nikema Williams resigning as the party Chair, success will hinge on new candidates building statewide recognition and fundraising capabilities. Democratic Senator Jon Ossoff's seat is a must-win for Democrats looking to rally the base after 2024. The gubernatorial bench includes former Atlanta Mayor Keisha Bottoms, state Senator Jason Esteves, and ex-Dekalb CEO Michael Thurmond – all with varying levels of name ID and fundraising muscle. At the local level, incumbent Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens is favored for re-election in 2025 despite facing multiple challengers. Critics are targeting his record on public safety and city services, but his current popularity signals a shift in urban Democratic priorities.

### What to watch:

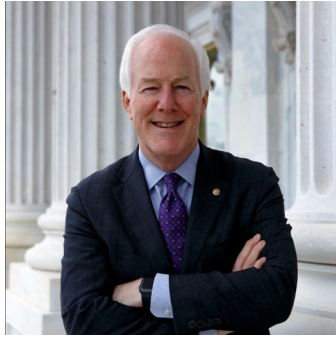
- **MAGA vs the Establishment:** The Republican primary season is shaping up as a battle between the establishment and MAGA base, with ripple effects down the ballot.
- **Not All Politics Are Local:** Democrats' ability to mount serious challenges – for governor, Senate, and beyond – may hinge on the national mood and Trump administration's policy wins (or losses).

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Texas - authored by Cornerstone's [Max Moll](#) and [Tony Essalih](#)



## (Houston, TX)



### **U.S. Senate**

The developing 2026 Texas Republican Senate primary will invariably become the most expensive race in the state's history and is already a bitter battle between incumbent Senator John Cornyn and Attorney General Ken Paxton. The mild-mannered Senior Senator from Texas and the firebrand Texas Attorney General reflect the deepening rift within the GOP. Ken Paxton - a staunch ally of President Donald Trump - is primarying Cornyn from the far right, while Senator Cornyn is running on his longstanding record of public service, fundraising prowess, and his ability to get legislation passed in a pitched political environment.



### **Texas Attorney General**

With Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton launching a bid to unseat US Senator John Cornyn, the race to succeed him has begun in earnest and is attracting a formidable field of Republican contenders. Former U.S. Attorney John Bash and State Senator Mayes Middleton have already declared their candidacy for the position. The GOP primary race will continue to see new entrants with State Senator Joan Huffman, State Senator Bryan Hughes, former Texas Supreme Court Justice Eva Guzman, and Dallas Mayor Eric Johnson all signaling their potential entry into a coveted position in Texas politics.

### **What to Watch: Texas's 18th Congressional District**

- ♦ Harris County Attorney Christian Menefee and former Houston City Council Member Isiah Martin have declared their candidacies, kicking off a competitive race.
- ♦ More than a dozen candidates are anticipated to join the race for this inner-Houston district in the coming weeks.