



**TO: Interested Parties**  
**FROM: DLCC President Jessica Post**  
**DATE: March 16, 2021**  
**RE: 2021 & 2022 Legislative Battlegrounds**

The 2020 wave that earned Democrats the federal trifecta revealed a fundamental truth about modern politics: Democrats cannot count on national momentum to have a decisive impact on state legislative elections.

While 2020 fell short of the Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee's ambitious goals, we made significant progress in state legislatures during the Trump administration. We flipped eight chambers and hundreds of seats red to blue. We transformed the DLCC from an understaffed, underfunded organization to a \$51 million committee that is now the largest Democratic spender in the state legislative space.

Heading into the 2020 election, Republicans had maps rigged in their favor, significantly more resources, and incumbency advantage. An unexpected surge of Trump voters led to sufficient Republican overperformance to overwhelm many Democratic candidates in already difficult districts.

Almost immediately in this new year, Republican lawmakers reminded us why even with a Democratic trifecta in the federal government, it is a strategic imperative for Democrats to win back state legislatures.

At least 500 Republican lawmakers tried to help Trump illegally overturn the presidential election and amplified his claims of a stolen election. More than a dozen were in Washington for the January 6 insurrection rally. Republicans in at least 43 states are mounting an unprecedented assault on voting rights—with the assistance and coordination of the Republican State Leadership Committee—and they're openly admitting that gerrymandering is their path back to control of Congress.

Democrats made significant progress in undermining Republican dominance in state legislative elections. In 2022 we're not taking any of our majorities for granted in a midterm election that historically has the party in power losing seats down-ballot. But, we believe that GOP majorities in states where we will get new maps like Arizona, Michigan, and Pennsylvania are extremely vulnerable. All indications show that in 2022 America will be in the midst of a recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, largely because of strong Democratic leadership. We plan to make sure that Democrats are ready for that environment and poised to be competitive in those chambers and more across the country.

At the DLCC, we're going to learn the lessons of 2020, reorient our strategy, and chart a path forward to keep putting Republican chambers in play. Here's what we need to do.

## **Democrats must invest in state legislative races as much as they invest in other levels of the ballot**

---

The DLCC had a historic, \$51 million fundraising cycle—the most ever for Democratic legislative races. It was an extraordinary achievement, yet it was just over half of the \$96 million raised by Amy McGrath’s longshot campaign in Kentucky alone.

Democrats will never be able to overcome the structural disadvantages we face in state legislative races without a change in our giving strategy—one that prioritizes investments in the state legislative candidates’ campaigns, in-state campaign organizations, and the DLCC.

Changing the narrative is central to that effort.

When Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg passed away over the summer, millions of dollars from grassroots donors went to Senate races, rightfully, because supporters knew that a Democratic Senate was key to blocking extremist judges from sitting on the highest court in the land.

While the DLCC saw a small bump in donations at that time, it was nothing compared to the bump at the Senate level. But the issues being argued in front of the Supreme Court start in the states. State legislatures are on the front lines of the battle for reproductive choice, LGBTQ+ equality, voting rights, and dozens of other policies. State legislatures can also be the last line of defense against a conservative U.S. Supreme Court. We need to be more effective at drawing that line and repeating it often so Democratic grassroots donors understand why they should care and invest in the state legislative level.

State legislative races cannot continue to take a back seat to federal offices. It’s more difficult to win a majority of districts in a swing state than it is to win statewide. Unlike statewide races, entities focused on winning legislative power cannot just rely on bolstering turnout in Democratic areas. Our funding strategy should match that reality.

## **Investments must be early and consistent**

---

In the 2020 legislative elections, Republicans had more money earlier than Democrats did. The Republican State Leadership Committee brought in \$10.5 million to our \$5.8 million in the second quarter of 2020. By the third quarter, they had raised \$23 million to our \$9 million. With that haul, Republicans sent nearly \$2 million to Michigan, \$10 million in Texas, and \$10 million to North Carolina.

At the DLCC, we saw a massive uptick in donations in October, as did many of our candidates, meaning we were coming in with resources late by comparison to Republicans.

Democrats must invest early. Despite talented staff, caucus campaign organizations and state legislative campaigns are often under-resourced. They need money for staff for recruitment, candidate support, and to build winning infrastructures. None of that is possible if we do not send them the money to do it.

Early funding is particularly critical for the upcoming midterm election. Democrats are going to need to defend our gains under the Trump administration. We have plenty of reasons to be optimistic in 2022, but it's still a midterm when Democrats are in control of the White House and we must be prepared. We must proudly and fiercely defend our majorities and shine a light on their considerable accomplishments.

### **State Republicans need to feel pressure and accountability**

---

After the January 6 insurrection at the Capitol, the DLCC ran digital ads in **Pennsylvania**, **Michigan**, and **Arizona** spotlighting that Republican lawmakers were complicit and, in some cases, present. Voters deserve to know that now—and it's strategically important that we remind them often.

Over the last decade, some of the most egregious pieces of legislation and worst state actors flew under the radar. That needs to change. Over the next two years, the DLCC will dig further into accountability work to make sure that voters understand exactly what their legislature is doing and who is to blame.

### **Seize the challenge and the opportunity of 2021-2022**

---

The radical conspiracy theorist wing of the Republican Party is rapidly rooting out its moderate members, and the more aggressively Republicans gerrymander state legislative districts during this redistricting cycle, the harder it will be for moderates to survive. State parties are censuring the few Republican officials who have dared to demonstrate a contrast to Donald Trump while Trump is issuing statements against Republican lawmakers from Mar-a-Lago and wielding the threat of primary endorsements over his own party.

Trump knows exactly how popular he is with the base of the Republican Party—and so do Republicans. As we saw in the 2020 elections, Donald Trump's presence on the ballot—and his presence alone—turns out low propensity Republican voters. He will not be on the ballot in 2022. That's a problem for the GOP.

The rise of Trumpism opens a door for engaging moderate suburban voters in the coming cycle. We will convey that this is not your grandfather's Republican Party, making GOP candidates toxic to moderate voters.

Further, Democrats are about to usher in the recovery from a devastating pandemic and economic crisis—one Republicans failed to take seriously. The Biden-Harris

administration and Democratic Congress just passed a comprehensive and widely popular COVID relief bill to reopen schools, fund the vaccine rollout, give American families direct relief, and cut child poverty in half.

While we believe that 2022 presents a unique opportunity to seize on a post-Trump Republican Party that has lost its way, we don't underestimate the challenges Democrats will face in 2022.

Historically, midterms have not been kind to the president's party. At the legislative level, while we anticipate that maps will improve in most states, Democrats could be running in difficult districts in others.

Although we don't yet know the maps on which we'll be running, we know to plan for the worst and be aggressive in fighting for fairness. Ten years ago, Democrats had no idea what was coming and had few resources to push back. This year, we'll have a comprehensive public accountability and legal strategy to fight for an equal playing field.

## State Legislative Battlegrounds

---

We still don't know what the political environment will look like, but we already know where we need to invest and which states are emerging as next cycle's battlegrounds.

**Virginia House:** Democrats flipped this chamber from red to blue in 2019 for the first time in a generation, and our first election defending our majority will be in 2021. The new Democratic majority wasted no time in enacting long-overdue change to the state, passing new voting rights laws, reaffirming reproductive choice, and becoming the first state in the South to put LGBTQ+ anti-discrimination laws on the books. While we're confident we'll hold the chamber, this will be the first off-year election under the Biden administration, and Republicans will be desperate to show they can still compete in Old Dominion. The fight for state legislatures in this new decade starts by defending our majority in the Virginia House.

**Arizona House & Senate:** Democrats have made significant progress over the last four years, with the state going blue at the federal level in 2018 and 2020. We are on the cusp of a legislative majority in both chambers and will get new maps drawn by an independent commission that better represents the population in 2022. Furthermore, Arizona is ground zero for the rapidly radicalizing GOP. Many of their members are conspiracy theorists or were highly involved in the Stop the Steal movement, and we know that will serve to repel moderates in the midterms.

**Alaska House:** A bipartisan governing coalition backed by Democrats prevailed again in 2020, despite the RSLC spending nearly half a million dollars to clinch an outright Republican majority in the Alaska House. Republicans also spent money against the ranked choice voting ballot measure—which voters passed in November—likely because they knew this system would make it even more difficult for them to gain a majority in the future.

**Colorado Senate:** Democrats flipped the Colorado Senate in 2018, and while we were able to defend and expand our majority there in 2020, our 20 to 15 seat majority is narrow. We're not taking anything for granted in a midterm election.

**Maine Senate:** This chamber flipped red to blue in 2018, and Democrats grew our majority in 2020. We also just won a highly-competitive special election in a Collins-won district. Despite this progress, Republicans are still just five seats away from taking back the majority, and this chamber will be competitive.

**Michigan House & Senate:** Democrats will be running on fair maps in Michigan for the first time in decades thanks to an independent redistricting commission installed by the voters. Democrats won the popular vote for the state House in every single election in the last decade, but it never translated to legislative majorities because of aggressively gerrymandered districts. In 2022, we'll have our first fair shot at the Michigan legislature in both the House and the Senate.

**Minnesota House & Senate:** Minnesota will be competitive in both legislative chambers in 2022. Republicans were able to make gains in the House in 2020 and protecting our Democratic majority will be a top priority. Democrats will also be fighting to flip the Senate, which is just barely controlled by Republicans.

**Nevada Assembly & Senate:** Republicans gained three seats in the Nevada Assembly during the 2020 election. While Nevada is trending blue, Republicans held both chambers as recently as 2016, and our margins are in the single digits. We are committed to defending our majorities in both chambers.

**New Hampshire House & Senate:** The New Hampshire legislature has changed partisan control in six of the last eight elections, including in 2020 when Republicans flipped these chambers blue to red. The New Hampshire House is the largest in the country, with 400 overlapping multi-member districts, making this chamber difficult to predict. We're all-in on New Hampshire and taking back control, but Republicans will be in control of the map-making process and will make it as difficult as possible for Democrats to build back power.

**New Mexico House:** Republicans flipped a seat in the House in the 2020 elections and, while they have a long way to go to take either majority, there will be a competitive governor's race to drive turnout on either side. The DLCC will prioritize protecting this critical chamber.

**Pennsylvania House & Senate:** In the last redistricting cycle, Pennsylvania Republicans drew state legislative maps, but this year we'll have an improved Supreme Court of Pennsylvania appointing the tie breaking vote to the Legislative Reapportionment Commission. That means Democrats will be competing on fair maps in the Keystone State for the first time in well over a decade. It will be a steep hill to climb, particularly because Democrats lost a few rural districts in November, but Pennsylvania will have gubernatorial and Senate races in 2022 and the legislature will be competitive. We're going to make sure we mount an aggressive challenge.

## Building Democratic Power

---

Building sustainable Democratic power is critical in the fight to win state legislative chambers. While the following states will be challenging for Democrats, the DLCC is committed to investing in infrastructure and laying the groundwork for Democratic victories over the next decade.

**Georgia House:** The Georgia legislature isn't red; it's gerrymandered. The DLCC has invested in Georgia since 2012, and those investments saw us flip 12 seats in 2018, breaking the Republican supermajority, and flip another three seats red to blue in 2020. Georgia is a battleground state, going blue at the federal level for the first time in decades. But Republicans have trifecta control of the state and will try to again gerrymander legislative and congressional maps. Democrats stand ready to challenge these maps in court. The GOP legislature is also on its way to passing extremely restrictive voting laws targeting communities of color. Democrats need to gear up for a long fight in Georgia.

**Iowa House:** Democratic efforts to retake the Iowa House fell short in 2020, but we've been investing in infrastructure here for the better part of a decade and believe it's critical to keep that up. Iowa has traditionally had a nonpartisan redistricting process, meaning that we will likely be able to compete on fair maps.

**North Carolina House & Senate:** North Carolina is aggressively gerrymandered. In 2018, Democrats won the popular vote for the House but were only able to break the Republican supermajority. Even on bad maps, Democrats were still able to gain in the Senate in 2020. We believe laying the groundwork for Democratic success in North Carolina is critical. Democrats made a lot of progress there over the last few years, with cities and suburbs trending our way. We will continue to invest in strong Democratic infrastructure in the state to chip away at the GOP's gerrymandered stronghold.

**Texas House:** The RSLC spent \$10 million to maintain the status quo in 2020. They were terrified they would lose their majority and with good reason. While Democrats weren't able to take back the majority this cycle, we held our gains from 2018 on gerrymandered maps. Democrats will need to make continued investments to pry this chamber away from Republicans, and we're in this for the long haul.