



TO: **Interested Parties**
FROM: **Jessica Post**
RE: **State Legislative Strategic Update**
DATE: **October 21, 2022**

Midterm elections are historically difficult for the party of the sitting president, especially in their first term. In 2010, under a Democratic president, state Democrats were routed after national Democrats neglected state legislatures during the midterms. The party lost 21 legislative chambers in a single night — setting us back for a decade. While the Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee has worked tirelessly to close that gap, the reality is we are still fighting from behind.

This midterm cycle has also seen the overturning of *Roe* and the fate of abortion rights falling to the states, where MAGA Republicans in state legislatures across the country have passed cruel abortion bans and ignited a national movement that has led to growing momentum for Democrats.

The DLCC has capitalized on this growing momentum, fundraising at its fastest pace ever and bringing in over \$47 million to date for the cycle. This number reflects the continued progress and strength of the committee, but sadly still pales in comparison to the billions of Democratic dollars flowing to federal races and the amount of money being spent by Republicans on state legislative races.

Republicans understand that state legislatures are their ticket to power, a truth they've known for some time. With a conservative majority on the U.S. Supreme Court, Republicans have a greenlight to pass regressive and MAGA GOP policies at the state level. They have used their legislative majorities to ban abortion, sabotage future elections, ban classrooms from teaching accurate history and demonize teachers, made schools a hostile environment for LGBTQ+ youth, and weakened gun safety laws.

Even with sky high stakes, the reality is that state legislative races are difficult to win. For far too long, Democrats have relied on a trickle-down strategy, hoping that money and attention for the federal level would simply trickle down the ballot. We know that isn't the case. And while the fight to protect abortion rights has energized voters for Democrats — this is still the first midterm cycle under a Democratic president. History tells us that the party in the White House will lose seats in Washington, and those losses are felt most acutely in state legislative races across the country.

We have always been clear-eyed about this cycle. Earlier this year, the DLCC developed a strategic Path to The Majority plan that prioritizes protecting Democratic power and putting Democrats in the most advantageous position possible in GOP-held chambers. If we can mitigate losses during a tough political cycle, we'll be able to go offense in more challenging territory late in the decade.

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With that in mind, our first priority this cycle is to defend our majorities in **Colorado, Maine, the Minnesota House, Nevada, and the New Mexico House**. We understood from the beginning of the cycle that these chambers could be vulnerable to a GOP takeover — they are all chambers Democrats lost in the 2010 or 2014 midterms. We're doing everything in our power to keep them in our corner, but Republicans are flooding these places with resources to try to flip these chambers and it will be a tough fight.

The Republican State Leadership Committee has also moved funds to target the **Oregon and Washington legislatures** and we are mobilizing to defend our majorities there.

We are not letting up on vulnerable GOP majorities in **Michigan, New Hampshire, and the Minnesota Senate**. These chambers represent our most realistic opportunities to gain ground despite anti-democratic Republican efforts and historical trends. Even if we fall short of a majority, we will be doing the vital work of closing our margins for future cycles.

Similarly, in **Arizona, Pennsylvania, and the Georgia House**, redistricting realities, the political environment, and current legislative margins make these chambers more challenging — but Democrats are doing the hard work of building the necessary infrastructure to gain ground over the next decade. We will continue to be involved in these states as we look for more opportunities to win and grow Democratic power.

State legislatures pass the policies that have the biggest impact on Americans' day-to-day lives. They dictate your freedom to vote, whether you have access to reproductive care, the quality and affordability of your health care, and increasingly, your rights as an LGBTQ+ individual, and so much more. Here at the DLCC, we know that state legislatures have the power to protect our fundamental rights because they are the building blocks of our democracy. But beyond protecting our rights, many draw the maps that Democrats in statehouses and in Congress will run on and serve as constitutional guards of the electoral process that protects the path to the presidency.

The deck is stacked against us, but we are still playing the best hand we have. In the final weeks of the cycle, this midterm should be a warning sign to national Democrats: if we do not make winning state legislatures a top priority and send resources down ballot accordingly, we risk making it more difficult to compete at every level. Our Republican counterparts are well-funded and flooding money into state legislatures because the GOP understands levers of power. We cannot afford to continue to neglect these races, and our democracy cannot stand if we do not make sustained investments now and for years to come. State legislatures need to be a key strategic priority of the Democratic Party — not an afterthought.