



## WHAT TO WATCH OVER THE CONGRESSIONAL RECESS

*With recess underway, here are three dynamics to watch – with big implications for 2018 Senate campaigns.*

### GOP PRIMARIES WILL GET NASTIER

*GOP recruitment failures and infighting giving way to nasty primaries.*

Some notable examples:

- **NEW in Nevada:** Danny Tarkanian “[blasted](#)” Senator Heller as he announced his primary challenge. More on Senator Heller’s no-win situation below.
- **Indiana:** Congressman Luke Messer and Todd Rokita have called each other “unhinged,” “desperate” and a “ticking time bomb.” *Howey Politics* [wrote](#) the primary is devolving into “virulent fratricide” and the *Indy Star’s* Tully [wrote](#) “it’s time for Messer and Rokita to grow up.” The attacks could get even worse as the two make formal announcements in the upcoming days: Messer will hold an event this Saturday while Rokita’s expected entrance is “imminent.”
- **Montana:** Insurance Commissioner Matt Rosendale wasn’t the GOP’s [first](#) or [second](#) choice, but that didn’t stop other likely candidates from knocking his campaign announcement: one [slammed](#) him as a carpetbagger while another [attacked](#) him as a self-serving political opportunist. Reminder: at least six Republicans have filed or expressed interest in the GOP U.S. Senate primary.
- **West Virginia.** Attorney General Patrick Morrisey and Congressman Evan Jenkins are escalating their “[Appalachian infighting](#)” that has already been called “[vicious](#),” “[bruising](#)” and “[ugly](#).” Jenkins, Morrisey and their respective PACs just [launched](#) a fresh round of [digital advertising](#) against each other.
- **Wisconsin:** After the GOP’s first choice candidate refused to run, Kevin Nicholson entered the race – and it didn’t take long for conservatives and his [likely opponent](#) to attack the former Democrat. Here’s one example of what Nicholson’s facing:

[Mark Belling, Conservative Milwaukee Radio Host:](#)

"You not only were a liberal when you were younger, you were very ambitious and successful in moving up the ranks, the Democratic party. You were a member of the Democratic National Committee. You spoke at the Democratic National Convention, spoke in fact, on the issue of making sure that we keep abortion legal. That wasn't that long ago."

This dynamic extends across almost every Senate race. Politico [wrote](#) “**There isn’t a state on the Senate map where national Republicans are facing their dream candidate scenario,**” and “in seven of the eight most competitive states in 2018, **either a top candidate has turned them down, two candidates are staring at a potentially messy primary, or both.**” Here’s the key point on this trend, from [The Washington Post](#):

“Republicans have struggled to recruit top candidates... [and] a lack of a clear leader is leading to a bunch of lower-tier candidates jumping into the race, which means Republicans could spend the next year in potentially expensive (and, in some cases, divisive) primaries.”

## HEALTH CARE REMAINS TOP OF MIND FOR VOTERS

*If and when GOP Senate candidates encounter voters over the recess, they're sure to face even more fallout over their toxic health care agenda.*

Even NRSC Chair Sen. Gardner cannot escape the wrath of his constituents: he was "[lambasted](#)" by his voters over his healthcare vote at a town hall last week.

Democrats are keeping up the pressure: In Nevada, Jacky Rosen released what Axios called a "[blistering](#)" digital ad campaign using Heller's own words against him – highlighting how he flipped after receiving a threat from President Trump and the impact his deciding vote will have on Nevadans.

Some key polling and numbers:

- Kaiser Family Foundation [found](#) voters overwhelmingly and rightly hold the Republican Party and GOP candidates responsible for the state of America's health care system – including for any premium increases and loss of coverage caused by the uncertainty the GOP has created.
- In their most recent polling, [Quinnipiac](#) found that **80 percent** of all voters disapprove of the GOP's handling of the health care issue, including **60 percent** of Republican voters.

## THE HEAT IS ON HELLER AND FLAKE

*Senators Heller and Flake are both in damage control mode this recess. They've hurt their standing with GOP base voters as well as the moderate, independent voters who will ultimately decide their elections.*

**In Nevada:** Senator Heller is the most vulnerable Senator up in 2018, and he "[completely botched](#)" the pivotal health care vote. Weeks after standing with Governor Sandoval to decry the GOP's health care plan, he folded to pressure from President Trump and voted to advance the agenda he railed against.

Simultaneously, Senator Heller's failure to keep his campaign promises has "[riled up](#)" the Republican base – and now he's facing a contentious and potentially expensive primary from Danny Tarkanian. Encapsulating this dynamic, *The Nevada Independent's* Jon Ralston [wrote](#) "Nevada's senior senator ended this odyssey the way he began – casting a vote that will fire up the left and not placate the right." **Most recent [public polling](#): Heller approval rating at **22 percent**.**

**In Arizona:** Senator Flake broke with Senator McCain, backing the GOP Health Care Plan and Senator Cruz's amendment to strip coverage and dramatically increase costs for individuals with pre-existing conditions – leading the Arizona Republic's Jeff Montini to write "[Jeff Flake trades sick people for votes](#)." Flake has voted with President Trump 93 percent of the time, but his D.C. book tour slamming his own party has led to open revolt from conservatives, including the potential for [additional](#) primary challengers. **Most recent [public polling](#): Flake approval rating at **18 percent**.**

## THE BOTTOM LINE

*As the August recess continues, watch for three key trends across the Senate battleground map: escalating GOP primaries, more fallout from the Republican's toxic health care agenda, and for Senators Heller and Flake to continue facing a barrage of criticism from all sides. The bottom line: this August recess is shaping up to preview the GOP infighting and backlash against the Republican candidates that has, and will continue to, dominate the 2018 Senate campaigns.*