

Jahana Hayes: U.S. House of Representatives, Connecticut

Recommendation Level: Priority



Connecticut Rep. Jahana Hayes's life story is genuinely inspiring. She grew up in the housing projects of Waterbury, Connecticut, and nearly dropped out of school when she became pregnant at 17. Instead, inspired by her teachers, she continued her education, earning an associate's degree at community college, then a bachelor's, then a master's degree, after which she returned to her hometown to teach at John F. Kennedy High School, where kids struggle with the same poverty that afflicted her. (Today, more than three-quarters of the mostly Black and Hispanic student body qualify for the free lunch program.) She was so successful as a teacher that in

2016 she was [National Teacher of the Year](#), an award that made her something of a celebrity; she was profiled in the *Washington Post* and even [appeared](#) on Ellen. Hayes leaned on this experience in her 2018 run for the 5th Congressional District seat, which had been held by Democrats since 2007 (the incumbent was retiring). She's gone on to win in both 2018 and 2020 by double digits, but the seat is still seen as competitive, especially in a cycle that promises to swing in Republicans' direction.

Blue Tent views supporting Hayes' candidacy as a **priority**. Below, we explore three key questions that small and medium donors should answer before supporting candidates. ([See how we evaluate candidates.](#))

Is This Race Important?

Democrats probably have little chance of holding onto the House, so the focus should be on just keeping the margin of defeat close so they can regain it in 2024 or 2026. Additionally, Democrats should try to retain truly valuable members of their caucus. Hayes certainly qualifies; she could be a rising star in the party, and was [rumored](#) to be on Joe Biden's shortlist for Secretary of Education.

Can Hayes Win?

An incumbent in a Democratic-leaning district shouldn't have too much to worry about, and Hayes won in 2018 and 2020 by 12 and 11 points, respectively – but 2022 is going to be tough for

Democrats everywhere, and she'll likely have a closer race in 2022 than in either of the previous two cycles, even though the Cook Political Report rates this seat "Likely Democratic." (Connecticut made minimal changes to its congressional maps during redistricting, so her district is largely the same.) The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee certainly thinks so – it's named Hayes to its "Frontline" list of vulnerable members, [noting](#), "The [National Republican Congressional Committee] has made Rep. Hayes a top target for 2022. She spent \$1.6 million to hold her seat in 2020 and we expect she will need considerably more to fend off their attacks."

Does She Need Money?

As of the latest FEC reports, Hayes has \$1.6 million in cash on hand. That's not terrible relative to how much she spent in previous cycles, but as the DCCC notes, Republicans are going to be spending a lot in this district, the only competitive one in Connecticut. (Her Republican opponent might be George Logan, a former state senator, or Michelle Botelho, a political outsider.) Hayes's placement on the Frontline list indicates just how bad of a year this could be for Democrats – if she's at risk, so are dozens of Democrats who previously might have been considered safe. But of all the members of Congress who are vulnerable, Hayes is surely one of the most important to reelect, since she's exactly the kind of person Democrats want in Congress.

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