

[Intro Music]

Bianca Bruno: American government was set up to separate church from state. For many religions, belief is centered on trusting in what you can't see. And that tenet seems to have spilled over into modern American politics. I'm Bianca Bruno and you're listening to Sidebar, a podcast by Courthouse News. Today, Denver-based reporter Amanda Pampuro gives us a preview of what could happen during the year's midterm elections. She talked to Courthouse News reporters and experts across the country about how, a year and a half after he left office, former President Donald Trump is still shaping American politics. Trump supporters and the Republican candidates who want their votes have adopted his unsupported claim the 2020 election was stolen as a sort of ethos driving conversations around other issues from voting rights to critical race theory. But the glue that's binding the party together isn't conservative theories that originated on the margins of the party: it's a camaraderie built around identity and resistance to changing demographics. Here's Amanda with the report.

Amanda Pampuro: If you want to know the truth, you have to start at the source.

Michael McDaniel: I'm Michael McDaniel. I'm a veteran and a correspondent in Phoenix for Courthouse News. I've covered right-wing protests and Antifa protests in Phoenix for the last few years. I went to the Kari Lake Rodeo Rally, which was about an hour outside of Phoenix in Morristown, Arizona. It's a very rural kind of country vibe and there were about 1,000 people in attendance at the height of attendance.

Kari Lake: Who's in this fight with me?

[Cheering Crowds]

AP: Republican Kari Lake is running to replace term-limited Arizona Governor Doug Ducey.

KL: Come on, I didn't hear you. Who's in this fight with me?

[Cheering Crowds]

MM: There was a bunch of colorful characters there. We had a gentleman with a brick wall jacket, which is obviously a nod to Trump's border wall. There's a lot of different military folks wearing colorful patches. Different symbolism, like MAGA t-shirts, blue line t-shirts, a lot of flags were being flown on cars and outside the establishments. There were no signs because everyone there was kind of like-minded, they weren't protesting anything, they were just there hanging out with conservative, like-minded people. And that's the gist of stuff that's happening here in Arizona is it has a cult-like following here. And it's rooted in like-mindedness; it's rooted in camaraderie. What everyone wants here to kind of get out of their experience is to be brash, different and counter culture.

KL: Absolutely no matter what our background is, no matter where we come from, no matter if we are here from the country, if we are here from the city, it is our love for this great country that binds us together. Isn't that the truth? The left wants to tear it down, the left wants to tells us if we're patriotic we're racist, when the fact of the matter is this country and our love for it is what binds us together and what makes us one.

AP: Another idea bringing people together is the idea that the 2020 election was stolen.

MM: For you to be part of this club, you kind of have to believe in the fantasy that the election was stolen without any substantial evidence. And that gets dangerous. Believing in a lie gets dangerous. Because when you selectively choose your reality, you selectively choose a lot of different things to believe in, laws and so forth.

AP: It's been a year and a half since Biden was elected. That's a year and a half without substantial evidence of mass fraud, and yet the appetite to stamp out election fraud has grown among certain conservative groups. This idea is inspiring dozens of "patriots" to run for office nationwide, from county clerks to the secretary of state, from state reps to the U.S. Senate.

Mike Lindell: The way this whole election was stolen was done through the machines.

MM: Mike Lindell, CEO and founder of MyPillow.

ML: Also, all the stuff they did with inflating voter rolls. You know you had over five counties here in Arizona they had more people vote than to live in the county? There were more votes than voters. You guys shouldn't have done that. You know Pennsylvania's got a law against that.

KL: They like to tell us, but we heard Mike, Mike laid it all out. They like to tell us in 2020 that we turned purple or we turned blue. What color is Arizona? Red! That's right. They can flood us with as many bogus ballots as they want. They can do all they want to cheat but we know what happened in that election and I've got news for them. We are going to take this state back in 2022.

AP: It's worth pointing out that many Americans like Lake and Lindell and the whole cheering crowd, they all began asking the same questions at the same time.

Michael Rocca: The source of this, of course, it's easy, right. It goes right back to President Trump and his rhetoric following the presidential election. My name is Michael Rocca and I am a professor of political science at the University of New Mexico. Ever since grad school I've been interested in the reasons why members of Congress take the positions that they do. So, one of the key driving factors going back a hundred years in everything from the way that members of Congress vote to the types of speeches that they deliver, to now to the types of tweets that they send out, can be traced right to the types of constituents and the demographics and the partisanship of their voters. If you are a member of the Republican Party, then the smart position to take would be to assume the position that President Trump is leading on about the Great Steal.

Rose Wagner: I mean, I think one way to understand why it's become this litmus test, and why it has been so hard for the Republican Party to shake this idea of "The Big Lie," is to understand that it was never really fringe.

AP: This is Rose Wagner, she covers Congress for Courthouse News.

RW: I think this is something that the January 6 commission has really been hinting at and trying to make clear with their subpoenas is that this was not some idea conceived of at the fringe of the Internet. This was a conspiracy developed and espoused by leaders of the Republican Party, by people in the White House, by the President.

Donald Trump: If we are right about the fraud, Joe Biden can't be president.

RW: More than a year after January 6 when we look more than a year after the 2020 election, this is still where voters for the Republican party sit. On the anniversary of January 6, right before, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst released a poll and it found that about 71% of Republicans and a third of Americans still believed that Biden's win was likely or definitely not legitimate. So, part of the story of why this is fueling campaigns and why lawmakers and politicians are not rejecting the "Big Lie" still is because it is politically beneficial for them not to.

AP: Even as the "Stop the Steal" catchphrase falls away, the act of leaning into fears of election security is still advantageous for many Republicans. Here's Professor Rocca.

MR: What is being used as the key argument in a number of Republican states in particular, states that are trying to restrict voting rights, the number of voting locations and early voting, and who can vote, and let's say voter ID laws, is the logic that if the 2020 presidential election was stolen, we need to do a better job of tightening up our laws in the ways that we count votes so that the next election isn't stolen. Of course, what's happening here though, and this is from both sides, is that America is changing.

AP: The 2020 Census tells us this: in California, in New Mexico, in Texas, the percentage of people identifying as white dropped by about 20% between 2010 and 2020. Elected representation reflects this. Nearly a quarter of people in the U.S. House and Senate identify as Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander or Native American. Pew calls the 117th Congress the most diverse in history. As America is diversifying, the Democratic Party has broadened its message to reach wider voting blocs. At the same time, the Republican Party has homed in on the primal fear of change, particularly among the white majority projected to lose political dominance by mid-century.

MR: As the demographics of the U.S. continues to shift, the political basis underneath the Democratic and Republican parties begin to shift. And that makes them nervous. So, you have arguments out there about what's right and what's wrong. You have arguments about the "Great Steal" or not. But really what's happening here is the Democratic and Republican parties are looking to win elections.

RW: Trump in other ways is still a prevalent force. Even if his name is not being spoken by lawmakers.

AP: Rose Wagner says it's not just around voting fraud.

RW: One of those is the widespread condemnation of so-called critical race theory as sort of a catch-all for any conversation about race and as a tool to go on the offensive against Democratic legislation, whether it be aimed at reforming the criminal justice system or talking about voting rights. This has become a really mainstream line of rhetoric among lawmakers who may not be saying Trump's name but have learned the strategies and the sort of topics that he espoused as president. When this kind of debate on voting rights happened on the Senate floor, we saw Mitch McConnell, who has not believed that the election was illegitimate in 2020, but he very much was happy to use a similar line of logic to condemn voter rights, an idea that voter suppression is not real. In fact, he referred to voter suppression as this "Big Lie." That strategy is derived from Trump and it's being used by people who even publicly have distanced themselves from him.

DT: I'm a very stable genius.

AP: Did Trump carefully craft his messages in response to these trends, or did he luck out?

MR: I think President Trump came along in 2016 because of the way that America was changing and the great discomfort that a lot of America had with “the swamp,” with Washington, D.C. political insiders, with suddenly their community and their counties and their cities are not looking the way that they're used to it looking and they were looking to politicians who reflected those changes, whether it was candidates like AOC, who look like me, or President Trump, who looked like me and sound like me, or whatever that might be.

AP: Functionally it's effective, but do you see it as problematic to run on the message that the election was stolen?

MR: So, asking me as a political scientist, is there any danger in this? I would say absolutely there's a danger in this. There's a danger in democratic norms unraveling. What is a more interesting debate, though, is what is good representation? A Republican member of Congress, thinking that the election wasn't stolen, but yet taking positions that it was because their constituents do so? What's the job of that member of Congress right there? And that's a much more difficult conversation and answer to be honest with you, to deliver.

AP: Claims of election fraud clearly get people riled up. But some Republicans wonder if the snake oil is worth the price.

Gunner Ramer: Telling lies, sowing distrust in our electoral system. You know, there are polls coming out where you have a bunch of Americans who no longer believe that our political system works, that our electoral system works. And when you take those sorts of ideas away from people, when you have people participating in the democracy, they really need to believe that their vote counts. I am Gunner Ramer, and I'm the political director at the Republican Accountability Project. We have someone here internally that literally watches Steve Bannon's show all day. Like that's his job is to track down the craziest Republicans and craziest things. And part of that is watching Steve Bannon. So, people like Mark Fincham, Jody Hice, Jim Marchant in Nevada, Kristina Karamo, Trump-endorsed in Michigan running for secretary of state. The “Stop the Steal” message is like the sole message these candidates are running on and Colorado is no stranger to that. The Secretary of State candidate Tina Peters is this chief among them.

AP: Like your phone and computer, electronic voting machines across the country need to be updated regularly. After all the 2020 scrutiny, Mesa County Clerk and Recorder Tina Peters decided to take matters into her own hands. In May 2021, she took the security cameras offline, and let the updates be recorded. Now, these updates are done manually, in person, to keep every detail under wraps. On Peters' watch, these unauthorized videos of the process and passwords were posted on Telegram and the Gateway Pundit. Last year, Colorado Secretary of State Jena Griswold sued to prevent Peters from overseeing the 2021 election. The judge granted the request and Griswold filed a second lawsuit in January to keep Peters away from the midterms. More recently the Mesa County DA filed criminal charges against Peters for identity theft and violation of duties connected to the incident. Amid all this controversy, Peters announced she was running for Secretary of State.

Tina Peters: And I won't quit standing against corruption and massive government overreach, and I'm standing against nationalized elections and this one-party rule in our state and federal government.

AP: Throughout the saga, Peters claimed she was in the right, increasing transparency for the people. She calls the investigations and indictment part of a political hit job. When she started speaking at the same events as MyPillow CEO Mike Lindell, Peters got lumped in with the “Stop the Steal” community. I read the 2021 forensic report analyzing the Mesa County leaks. It raises a narrow concern: could files deleted during a software update interfere with the county’s ability to run a full forensic audit? That seemed reasonable, so I reached out to Peters’ campaign to get clarity. I asked whether I was mischaracterizing her, whether she was making a nuanced critique about the distribution of power between the state and county, whether she had been unfairly categorized with the “Stop the Steal” clique. Her spokesperson turned the table and asked why I wasn’t trying to get the *second* audit report from the Mesa County Board of Commissioners, which has not been made public. “Why would that be if the information that has been found by the cyber experts is totally bogus?” she wrote. “The general feeling is they want to quash the report because it is damning. As a journalist you should be asking to see and read that report. You will then have answers to many of your questions.” I put in my open records request. And I asked other sources whether I had the story wrong. Here’s Gunner Ramer:

GR: When someone goes on Steve Bannon’s show to launch their secretary of state campaign, based on the whole narrative that the election in 2020 was stolen, I think absolutely she is a “Stop the Steal” candidate. I think Colorado is a purple state, but I think it's leaning more Democratic. So, could she win the Republican primary? I think she could. She probably will earn Trump's endorsement, and she already has Steve Bannon’s support. So, yes, but going against a Democrat in the general, luckily for Colorado, I'm less concerned about that race. But I will just say, you never know what can happen in election.

AP: In a state where the majority party is actively unaffiliated, navigating too much toward one party base can sink a candidate’s chances of winning statewide election.

Jon Caldara: I'm only concerned about one issue as someone who believes in limited government. My issue is that Republicans are going to screw it up again and let this incredible opportunity for a conservative wave to crash over America and Colorado to somehow get screwed up. I'm Jon Caldara. There's no 'H' in Jon and no 'E' in Caldara, all A's. And I'm the president of the Independence Institute, which is a free market think tank in Denver, Colorado. If you're familiar with Colorado politics, we deal with something that I labeled Caldara’s first political axiom, which is there is nothing Republicans can't fuck up. Does a Republican in Colorado need to profess that the election was stolen, that Trump's election was stolen, in order to win the primary? Maybe. We will find out in a couple of months. If they say that the election was stolen, and if that is a primary push of theirs, their defeat in the fall is guaranteed.

(Music Break)

AP: I saw a stack of fraudulent ballots, on Election Night 2020. I got the full tour, down at Denver’s elections headquarters downtown, while an army of volunteers ripped open envelopes and sorted ballots. I saw where ballot signatures are manually verified, and where each name is checked against the state database to make sure dead people don’t vote. My guide pointed to a shelf of rejected ballots. “One of these,” he said, “was cast by someone who was reported deceased.” That year, Denver rejected 3,511 ballots. In 2021, Denver rejected 1,129 ballots and referred 847 to the DA for review. That number includes all the ballots where the signature wasn’t corrected, plus the small number cast by people reported as dead or registered to vote in another state. Statewide, about 1% of ballots are rejected every election. That’s like 15,000, which sounds like a lot, but it’s usually enough to change the final tally

in an election where 1.5 million voted. This is proof that faulty ballots are cast every year, it is evidence of fraud and evidence of mistakes, but it's also evidence of a system designed to catch common issues. While the political make up of Colorado makes it unwise to campaign on election fraud fears, the issue is still very much driving politics in Republican-led states like Arizona.

MM: This year, this legislative session, they've actually proposed over 100 election reform bills.

AP: Michael McDaniel is in Phoenix, where Republicans control the statehouse and the governorship.

MM: What's going to be interesting to see is Ducey going to sign all these bills, right? He's on his last term, and he can't be reelected. He's a moderate, who's sort of dissented from Trump after the election, he certified the election to the chagrin of many Republicans in the state. I think a lot of people in Arizona have seen surrounding states turn blue. They feel like the politics there hasn't been successful. So, Arizonans are moving towards a defend Arizona mode, and are willing to do anything it takes.

AP: Gubernatorial candidate Kari Lake hits on this.

KL: This is the last bastion for freedom in the West, and I want to make this state red, bright red. You know those, those billionaires and globalists, really out of California, they have picked off every last state in the West. And they have their crosshairs on Arizona. But they've messed with the wrong people.

MM: This midterm election, we're going to see America First candidates.

KL: Go out and vote for Kari Lake. I am the only America First candidate running for governor. And vote America First up and down the ballot.

MM: What is America First?

AP: Another ghost of the not-so-distant past, many see America First as a call to return to Trump-era policies.

MM: The way the election falls out is going to be an indication of whether or not the America First gets promoted more.

AP: And.

MM: Is going to be an indication of where our country's gonna go.

AP: Elections tell us where the country's going, and where the country is. In the general election, most people are picking between two parties, but in the primaries, you're asked to pick which part of the party you most agree with — whether it's the progressives or Blue Dog Democrats, whether it's fiscal conservatives or America First. I want to know where Americans stand on these social and political divides. The coming weeks will tell us whether our fears will continue to drive politics, or whether these ideas will pitter out as forgotten fuels of the past.

[Music Break]

BB: Thanks to Courthouse News reporters Rose Wagner and Mike McDaniel for sharing their expertise on politics in D.C. and Arizona. For more of their reporting, check out their stories on courthousenews.com.

[Music Break]

BB: As polarizing as American politics has become, there are still purple states where unaffiliated voters make up most of the constituency. And Colorado is the state to watch. In the newly drawn 8th Congressional District, candidates are lobbying for voters' support the old-fashioned way: through their pocketbook. According to a January report from the Consumer Price Index, Colorado's inflation rate was slightly higher than the national average. Cost of living appears to be top-of-mind for Coloradans and congressional candidates have noticed. Amanda went to a recent candidate forum to hear firsthand what touchstone issues are driving the race.

[Cars driving]

AP: On a Thursday night, I drove 30 miles north from Denver rush hour traffic, through vast farmlands, to the Fort Lupton Rec Center on the edge of oil country. Four Republican candidates were making their case to voters in Colorado's newly drawn 8th Congressional District. I wanted to hear them for myself. A festive air filled the conference room as folks finished off the barbecue buffet. In opening remarks, the panel launched right in with quick jabs at the D.C. establishment, President Biden and Nancy Pelosi.

[Boxing Ring Bell]

Toby Williams: We're taking shots for Nancy to go away. So, we sat down early before the forum started and said, what's going to drive us to drink? And it's going to be every time we hear a candidate say that Nancy Pelosi needs to go.

AP: That's Toby Williams, a longtime Republican supporting the campaign for Jan Kulmann, a petroleum engineer and current mayor of Thornton. By the way, those were shots of Coors Banquet Beer. Before 2018, the Centennial state elected a Democrat for governor and a Republican for secretary of state, and nobody batted an eye. It makes sense that the independent redistricting commission drew the newest Congressional to be 28% Democrat, 25% Republican and 44% unaffiliated. Unlike Boulder Democrats and Mesa County Republicans who can play to their base, the representative elected to the 8th District is going to be chosen by unaffiliated, centrist voters. You see both parties focusing on kitchen table issues that cut party lines.

[Phone Dial Tone]

Megan Burns: I'm Megan Burns, the communications and digital director for the Colorado Democratic Party.

Kristi Burton Brown: Hi, this is Kristi Burton Brown, chairman of the Colorado Republican Party.

MB: I think like a lot of people really just want to see things return to normal.

KBB: The fact that they're paying more at the gas pump, they're paying more at the grocery store and they're afraid it is going to continue to go higher. Nine in 10 Coloradans are worried about inflation.

MB: With, like, you know people are looking to save money with inflation post the pandemic.

KBB: The fact that Colorado is the number one state for auto theft, violent crime has risen.

MB: Here in the metro area, we've definitely seen a rise in car thefts and catalytic converters theft, and I think it's really about taking a systemic view on what is causing crime to go on the rise.

KBB: And those are the issues that voters are most concerned about when we talk to them. We do have to reach a majority of unaffiliated voters and turn out the Republican base in order to win elections in Colorado. And the Democrats have to do the same thing for their part.

AP: One issue is notably absent from the Republican quiver over here. At the forum, when asked point blank whether they subscribe to the notion that the 2020 election was stolen, two of the four candidates balanced an ambiguous call for better election security with the need to move on. One teased that there are too many irregularities to ignore. And the last...

Nick Kliebenstein: What you only heard from one candidate was that unequivocally the 2020 election was not stolen. A lot of them danced around the topic. But one candidate, Barb Kirkmeyer said that, no, the election was not stolen in Weld County and no, the election was not stolen in 2020.

AP: Nick Kliebenstein works for Kirkmeyer's campaign.

NK: She's not happy with the result of the election, but I was knocking on doors with her in Broomfield hearing from those voters. She outperformed Donald Trump in Broomfield by talking to those voters when she was running for the State Senate. But there were definitely people who were not a fan of the personality of Trump.

AP: There is one issue Republicans hope will give them an edge in both the primary and the general election.

KBB: A lot of people in the 8th Congressional District work in oil and gas.

Tyler Allcorn: It's wildly important to have energy independence,

AP: Tyler Allcorn, former Green Beret, and 8th Congressional District candidate.

TA: And the thing is, we shouldn't be sacrificing the oil and gas industry to pursue these green energy initiatives that they have, considering that they are not prepared and they're not technologically advanced, or have a large enough energy share within our country to be able to supplant the oil and gas industry.

AP: Democrats from the statehouse to Gov. Jared Polis vowed to decrease Colorado's reliance on oil and invest in renewables. This meant overhauling oil and gas regulations, allowing local governments to opt out of fracking, holding operators accountable for plugging abandoned wells, and scrutinizing new permits.

[Music Break]

AP: It is early in primary season, but there is also a tough balance to strike between the Democratic base that still wants to cut fossil fuels, and the large portion of the general 8th District electorate that works for the industry. Megan Burns says voters don't really have to choose between the economy and the environment.

MB: You know, this is an interesting comms and marketing tactic from the GOP, that they often say it is one or the other, when there's a lot of industries that do both. And they do both really well. Looking up at Wyoming, there's been some really cool stories coming out of there with wind farms and helping to build jobs and replace coal and mining and that sort of thing. I don't see why they are mutually exclusive. I think people are looking for a solution that isn't about restricting, but is about gain, it's like, how do we move forward in an economic, economical standpoint, as well as, you know, help save the environment so we have longevity in this region?

AP: There is a strong sense of optimism from voters and candidates in both parties, like anything is possible. Voter turnout is usually lower in the primary than in the general election, but this is where the big decisions get baked in, where open-ended questions become binary choices. Courthouse News will have the results throughout primary season, and when Colorado votes in June.

[Music Break]

BB: Your friends and family aren't the only ones who left work during the pandemic-induced Great Resignation. That polarization of American politics Amanda and our guests explored earlier is just one factor that's caused a record number of members of Congress to say goodbye to D.C. So far 53 representatives have announced they won't be running for reelection this year. How will the dearth of incumbents affect political races in the Capitol? Here's Amanda's final report.

AP: Over the last year, record numbers of Americans left the workforce, particularly in the service industry. We sometimes overlook the fact, but our elected representatives are public servants, and at first glance, it looks like they're not immune to the nation's Great Resignation.

["America The Beautiful"]

AP: At this point, 53 members of Congress have announced they're not running for reelection. That's 10% of Senate Republicans and 10% of House Democrats, the highest number to leave the blue side of D.C. since the '90s. What is happening here? The truth is a complex concoction of political pressure, redistricting, and perhaps the pandemic-spurred realization that life is short.

GR: So, I'm gonna pick out two Republicans that are not running for reelection.

AP: Gunner Ramer, political director at the Republican Accountability Project.

GR: One, Rob Portman in Ohio, fairly moderate Republican by all accounts, supported Trump and all that, but you know, he tried to do bipartisan infrastructure and all that. He's not running for election anymore. Because I don't think he wanted to get involved in a Republican primary and try to get primaried by the right. Look at the Ohio Republican primary: Josh Mandel.

AP: Pro-God, pro-gun, pro-Trump.

GR: And J.D. Vance.

AP: Endorsed by Marjorie Taylor Greene.

GR: Jane Timken and Mike Gibbons.

AP: Both America First candidates.

GR: They're all running on this the Stop the Steal platform, but Rob Portman doesn't want to get involved in that because he doesn't want to carry out the message that the election was stolen. In Pennsylvania, you have Pat Toomey, who has been a more moderate republican these last few years. Why get involved in Republican primary, you know, considering some of his comments about Donald Trump and things like that.

Pat Toomey: The idea that a sitting president would try to, I don't know, pressure, cajole, persuade state legislators to dismiss the will of their voters and select their own group of electors and send them to the electoral college is completely inconsistent with any kind of truly democratic societies

AP: Three of the 10 House Republicans who voted to Impeach Trump are retiring. Plus, several others who cite increasing polarization and extremes. Here's six-term Illinois Rep. Adam Kinzinger:

Adam Kinzinger: In this day to prevail or survive, you must belong to a tribe. Our political parties only survive by appealing to the most motivated and the most extreme elements within it.

GR: They don't want to run and maybe lose in a Republican primary, because they're not willing to say what's going to appease a majority of Republican primary voters. And I don't, I don't hold the Republican primary voters as accountable as the politicians that are spreading the lies that are influencing how these voters think. I mean, these voters would not feel as much the election was stolen if Donald Trump wasn't putting out statements every day.

MR: The decision not to run for your reelection, to retire from the U.S. Congress is a deliberate and strategic decision.

AP: Professor Rocca at the University of New Mexico.

MR: Democrats are gonna have a tough year in 2022. If there's any year that you wouldn't want to just put up the fight, go through the countless hours of fundraising and negative ads and put your family and friends through the stress and put yourself through the stress of running for reelection — 2022 if you're a Democrat would be the year. President Biden's approval ratings are low. The economy, inflation is high. We've got major international crisis taking place. And we also know that it's, it almost always happens that the president's party loses seats in the House of Representatives in a midterm election.

[Country Music]

RW: It is almost a law of nature, regardless of what policies the president and Congress are able to pass that members of the president's party are just going to lose some ground in midterm elections.

AP: Rose Wagner in D.C.

RW: You know, there are several political science theories about why this trend exists, and there are very few exceptions to this trend too, which I think is important to think about as we will see a lot of Republicans and Democrats go on the campaign trail and a lot of talk about whether Build Back Better passing or not passing is going to be the reason why some Democrats lose. And it's I think it's really important to look historically at the fact that even when the president's party has passed their biggest agenda items that they ran on, this trend still tends to happen. In the case of the Democratic Party, they don't really have seats to lose without losing the majority.

AP: Redistricting based on the 2020 Census has changed the game in some states. Courthouse News tracked more than 50 lawsuits since 2021 challenging new district boundaries from Alabama to California. About half of retiring House Democrats are leaving newly drawn districts. Some have become more competitive, and others, a safer bet to pass on to an unknown Democrat. One last factor we just don't collect data on: kids and grandkids. North Carolina Democrat David Price is retiring after 18 terms — that's 36 years! The average outgoing Democrat served 16 years in D.C. After a decade or more decade in Congress, a lot of these folks are saying they want to spend time at home and be with their families. Take three-term Florida Democrat Stephanie Murphy:

Stephanie Murphy: Public service is not without personal sacrifice, and as the mom of two young children, my time away from them has been hard for them, for me, and for our family.

AP: Mike Glassman, a senior fellow at Georgetown crunched the numbers in 2018 and found it's not unusual to track 12 to 16% turnover in Congress. But it's still worthwhile to watch who is leaving and who replaces them. This changing representation reflects a changing country. I know we're short on time, but I did want to throw out the big broad question that we always watch elections for. Do you think the results of the primary elections will tell us anything about the America we live in?

RW: Some of the things that we might be able to kind of learn and infer from the primaries is really where voters stand on the intra-party divisions that are existing in both of the parties. Right? I think it will help us get a read on where voters stand when you have a Trump-backed candidate stand against a more mainstream Republican. I think it's gonna tell us a lot about on the Democratic side, how people feel about Biden's agenda, backed up against a more progressive agenda. And if people, you know, what people are hungry for especially when we are outside a Trump presidency and we are almost two years into another presidency.

[Music Break]

BB: Halfway through President Joe Biden's term, the political makeup of Washington, D.C. could see some major changes later this year. And Courthouse News reporters will be following the developments — from the Supreme Court to the halls of Congress. Be sure to follow us on Twitter @SidebarCNS and @CourthouseNews for real-time updates on law and politics from coast to coast. See you next time when we preview the long-awaited defamation slugfest between actors Johnny Depp and Amber Heard.

[Outro Music]