

NE-02 District Primer

In 2024, Republican Don Bacon won this seat by 5829 votes.

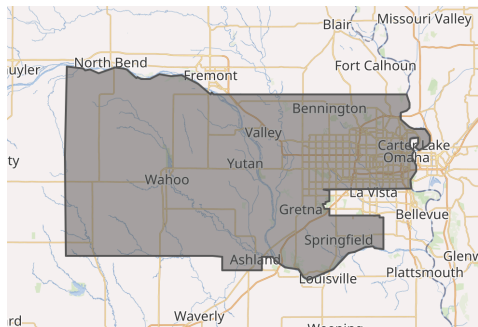
That's close! Dems lost by 5 votes per precinct. If we can persuade just 6 voters per precinct, we can win this year. With your help, we're going to **FLIP** this key seat and secure a Democratic House majority in 2026.

Key dates
Filing Deadline: March 2
Primary: May 12
Midterms: November 3

Recent Election Results

2024 Presidential Election	2024 House Election	2022 House Election
Harris: 163,541 (51.64%) Trump: 148,905 (47.02%)	Don Bacon (R): 160,198 (50.09%) Tony Vargas (D): 154,369 (49.1%)	Don Bacon (R): 112,663 (51.3%) Tony Vargas (D): 106,807 (48.7%)

District Facts & Stats



Largest Cities

- Omaha, pop. 483,335
- Papillion, 23,791

Geography

NE-02 encompasses the Omaha-Council Bluffs metropolitan area. Mostly urban, with suburban enclaves in Omaha and Papillion, the district includes all of Douglas County (Omaha), western Sarpy County, and part of Saunders County. It is economically significant to the region and the state, with major industries throughout. Offutt Air Force Base is located in Sarpy County and has a population of ~45,000 active-duty service members and their families, as well as other employees and retirees.

Citizenry

The district is largely white. Black residents are the next largest group, with a significant presence in North Omaha. Thirteen percent of residents identify as Hispanic. One in three Black residents, and sixty percent of Black children, live in poverty; and Black households earn less than 60% of white residents. Omaha is an important center of Black history.

The Local Vibe

In NE-02, a competitive district in a ruby-red state, voters have often preferred Democratic presidential candidates, and recent GOP House wins have been by increasingly small margins. Thanks to Trump, the district's diverse population is on edge. In June 2025 a massive ICE raid at an Omaha meat-packing plant, which resulted in the detention of 75 employees, spurred protests. A few days later, hundreds of people attended No Kings protests in nearby Council Bluffs, IA. Rising costs due to Trump's tariffs and fees on imported goods, as well as cuts to SNAP, Medicaid, the VA, and the USPS have many people worried; meanwhile the state legislature just overrode the statewide voter initiative of 2022 which raised the minimum wage in Nebraska.

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Key Issues

- **Affordability:** Nebraska's minimum wage was raised by an initiative passed by the state's voters in 2022. Despite rising prices everywhere, in 2026 the majority-GOP state legislature approved a bill to lower it.
 - **Environmental concerns:** Omaha's water comes from rivers and from the Dakota Sandstone Aquifer. All these sources are vulnerable to pipeline spills (DAPL and Keystone XL). There are 2 Superfund sites in the district.
 - **Immigration:** In 2025 a massive raid on an Omaha meat-packing plant detained 75 workers. Meatpacking is an important industry here, dependent on immigrant workers.
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About the Candidates

In June 2026, incumbent GOP Rep. Don Bacon announced that he would not seek re-election. The primary is on May 12. Until then, we're keeping an eye on the front-runners vying for this open seat.

GOP Candidate

Brinker Harding has been a member of the Omaha City Council since 2017. He works in commercial real estate at Colliers International and he previously served as chief of staff for Omaha's former mayor, Hal Daub.

Democratic Hopeful(s)

Denise Powell is the founder of Women Who Run, an organization that has supported hundreds of Nebraskan women running for office. She frequently publishes op-eds in the *Omaha World Herald*. Her fundraising efforts are going well, and she has been endorsed by numerous leaders, including Tony Vargas, the previous Democratic candidate for this office; former NH Rep. Annie Kuster, a Democrat; and several groups such as Latino Victory and Emily's List.

Retired Navy Officer **Kishla Askins** has a distinguished record of service, including as Senior Defense Advisor to Sen. Joe Donnelly (D-IN), Congressional Liaison to the Surgeon General of the Navy, Senior Military Advisor to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs, and Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Department of Veterans Affairs in the Biden-Harris Administration. She lives in Omaha with her wife Allison, who is a Nebraska native and a retired Marine Corps colonel and helicopter pilot.

James Lueschen, born and raised in NE-02, is running on an affordability platform, citing his experience caring for his family. An economic policy expert, he has served in senior staff positions in the U.S. House, including as Policy Director to former Democratic Majority Leader Steny Hoyer. He worked with the district's former Democratic Rep. Brad Ashford to deliver a new VA medical facility to Omaha serving tens of thousands of veterans. He lives in Omaha with his physician wife and their 3 boys.

Also running are Omaha native **John Cavanaugh**: attorney and former Douglas County assistant public defender, now in the Nebraska state legislature; and **Crystal Rhoades**: the Douglas County Clerk of the District Court who frequently appears on TV.

The contrast: This district's hard-working residents have had enough of the GOP's corruption, divisiveness, and appeasement of Donald Trump. The qualifications of the Democratic hopefuls to represent this district in Congress vastly outweigh those of the lone Republican running for this seat, and they are all candidates who will keep the district's interests uppermost in mind, rather than performing to please Trump.

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