

Know Before You Go: NC-02 District Primer

May 2018 • Researched, summarized, and edited by Swing Left's all-volunteer research team!

In the last election, Republican George Holding won this district by only 52,000 votes (13%). That's close! With your help, we're going to win this seat for the Democrats in 2018.

About the Incumbent

Introduction: Republican George Holding has served as a U.S. Representative since 2013. This is his first term in NC-02; he was previously a two-term rep for NC-13. Holding won NC-02 by a 14% margin in 2016, which was also his margin in NC-13 in both 2012 and 2014. He is a pro-tax-cuts, pro-gun, pro-life conservative who supported Ted Cruz in the Republican primaries.

Issues: Holding supports cutting government (domestic) spending; repealing the ACA; enacting a constitutional amendment to implement term limits; and creating a flatter tax code. He supports increased spending on national defense and escalation in the fight against ISIS.

Strengths: Holding is well-financed, ranking second out of 13 reps in the state. He reported \$2.6 million in campaign contributions in 2016, 30 times that of his Democratic opponent. He has a strong base of support, and he has been active in North Carolina politics since the late 1990s. He's a card-carrying conservative with endorsements from the ACU, NRA, and Family Research Council in a district that leans strongly Republican historically.

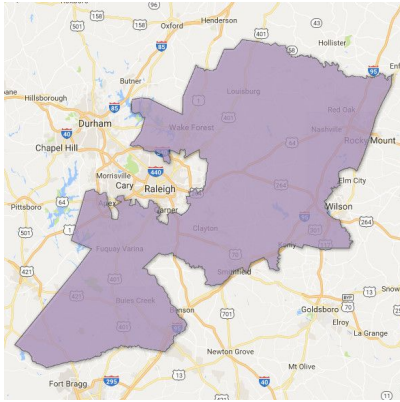
Potential Weaknesses: If Trump continues to be unpopular, it could become a liability for Holding, who has consistently voted with the administration, including to table the resolution to have Trump disclose his tax returns (which 74% of Americans want released). Out the dozens of government transparency bills that were introduced in 2015, Holding supported none of them. Holding supports repealing the ACA (with or without a replacement) and has opposed Medicaid expansion, positions that conflict with the opinion of a majority of his constituents. Holding wants to cut taxes for wealthy people, which could be a liability in the less affluent areas of his district.

About the Challenger

Introduction: Democrat Linda Coleman won the Democratic primary with 56% of votes. Linda Coleman served three terms as a Democratic state representative in the North Carolina General Assembly and is well-known in NC-02. Coleman's name recognition helped get her strong margin of 24% in the May 8th primary, compared to Romley's 33% and Wendy May's 11%. Previously, Coleman served on the Wake County Board of Commissioners. She ran for Lieutenant Governor twice - in 2012 and 2016 - winning the Democratic primary each time but losing the eventual election. Coleman is from Greenville, North Carolina and has a background in human resources. For the 2018 cycle, Coleman has raised \$141,120 in campaign contributions, much less than Holding. First-time candidate Ken Romley stated that she has his endorsement for the November election. Coleman also has endorsements from the State Employees Association of NC, the Sierra Club, and the NC Association of Educators.

Issues: According to her responses to Ballotpedia's candidate survey, Coleman's priorities are education, jobs, and healthcare. She is against tax cuts for the wealthy and supports keeping the Affordable Care Act, having said that she hopes to make the 2018 general election a "debate on healthcare." She also supports funding North Carolina's public colleges and universities, alongside increasing resources for public school classrooms.

Potential Weaknesses: One of the biggest challenges facing Coleman will be ramping up campaign contributions. Holding is far outpacing Coleman so far with 2018 contributions.



NC-02: Better Know the District

Geography

NC-02 includes suburbs near and in Wake County as well as poorer, rural areas in Harnett, Franklin, Johnston, Nash, and Wilson counties. Fort Bragg is partially in the district, but urban Fayetteville has been meticulously carved out. NC-02 falls mostly in a coastal plain and is relatively flat. Rivers and lakes exist throughout the district.

Citizenry

Citizens in NC-02 are predominantly either suburbanites who live and work in Wake County or members of rural communities. These rural counties have relatively high rates of poverty when compared to the rest of North Carolina, and their median household income is lower than state averages. Wake County citizens are more affluent (Cary and Apex have particularly low poverty rates and high median incomes), but the areas of Wake County in NC-02 are mainly outer suburbs of Raleigh that are not necessarily the wealthiest parts of the county. Volunteers working across the district should be prepared to encounter people from a variety of economic backgrounds. The district is predominantly white, but Wake County is known for its diversity, and a few of the counties have significant African-American populations (Wilson and Nash in particular). Most citizens in these rural counties have high school degrees (but no further education).

NC-02: Facts & Stats

Population Centers

- Raleigh, 451,000 (state capital)
- Cary, 159,769
- Rocky Mount, 55,806
- Wilson, 49,643
- Apex, 45,585
- Clayton, 19,304

2016 Presidential Results

- Clinton: 173K (44%)
- Trump: 211K (53%)

2016 House Results

- McNeil (D): 169K (43%)
- Holding (R): 221K (57%)
- Registered, didn't vote: 183K
- Eligible, not registered: 112K

2014 House Results

- Aiken (D): 85K (41%)
- Ellmers (R): 122K (59%)

Elections

The current version of NC-02 was established in 2016, and, as a result, two incumbent Republicans faced each other in the primaries. An enormous amount of money from individuals, local groups, and national groups was spent in this primary race. Renee Ellmers, previously supported by the Tea Party, was criticized for not being conservative enough and for supporting Trump. She lost to Holding, who was supported by conservative PACs. The general election didn't garner the same national interest.

Higher Education

NC-02 includes quite a few small universities and colleges, most of which have religious affiliations, and a number of community colleges. However, few rural residents have any form of college education. Notably, NC-02 is just south of Durham and Chapel Hill, the locations of two of the largest universities in the state, and it surrounds a portion of urban Fayetteville that contains Fayetteville State, a historically black college.

Industries

The most popular industries in the old configuration of this district were healthcare and social assistance, manufacturing, retail trade, and accommodation/food services. Many citizens in NC-02 work for the state of North Carolina, healthcare organizations, institutions of higher education, and local school districts. Farming, once a way of life in the rural areas, is no longer a major employer, partially as a result of mechanization and agribusiness. Johnson County is very agricultural and has the highest number of farms in the state, including some multi-generational family farms. Fort Bragg is in the district and many voters in the southern part of the district may be affiliated with the base.