To: Interested Parties
From: Erik Polyak, 314 Action Executive Director
Date: January 26, 2026
RE: Six Races Under the Radar in 2026

Races Under the Radar in 2026

Over the past decade, 314 Action Fund has raised and spent over $70 million to help STEM candidates win competitive primaries and flip seats from red to blue. In 2026, we are committed to raising $25 million and working with candidates in sleeper races R+8 and below to expand our path to victory and flip control of the House.

Recent Democratic wins in 2025 across Florida, Georgia, New Jersey, and Virginia show that districts long considered out of reach are increasingly competitive. Winning the House majority requires going on offense–that's why 314 Action Fund announced its expanding the map to 43 House targets earlier this year. Among them are six overlooked races to watch in 2026, including pickup opportunities in: FL-07, FL-15, MN-01, MT-01, NC-11 and AR-02.

Democratic overperformances combined with rising health care costs, and RFK Jr.'s attacks on science and vaccines—an issue with broad, bipartisan support—make these districts especially fertile ground for STEM candidates. There are few seats in the country more vulnerable than these in the midterms—if Democrats want to win tough races and take advantage of voter disapproval with RFK Jr., then we need to support more scientists, doctors, engineers, nurses, and teachers running for office in competitive districts.

Pro-Science Candidates Make Swing Seats Winnable

314 Action Fund has a track record of working with candidates overlooked by the establishment—that approach helped us elect candidates like Eric Sorensen in Illinois' 17th District and Joe Cunningham in South Carolina's 1st—both initially dismissed as long shots. **Their victories prove pro-science candidates can win in tough districts.**

More recently, 314 Action Fund successfully elected over 100 STEM leaders to office downballot in 2025, flipping key seats and securing historic victories in state legislatures across the country:

- In Virginia, 314 Action Fund helped elect **Dr. Mark Downey** to the 69th House District—flipping a Trump district for the first time in a decade. Once sworn in, he will become the only doctor in the Virginia State Legislature.
- In New Jersey, **Dr. Marisa Sweeney** flipped the 25th Assembly District winning by just 664 votes, becoming the first Democrat to hold this Assembly seat since 1977.
- In recent special elections in Florida and Georgia, 314 Action Fund-endorsed candidates **Rob Long (FL-HD-90)** and **Eric Gisler (GA-HD-121)** won their races in traditional

Republican strongholds, signaling that voters increasingly trust STEM professionals and doctors to lead and win.

Six STEM Underdogs in 2026

- **FL-07 – Bale Dalton**: Bale Dalton is a Navy Captain with over 23 years of public service. He flew special operations missions in Iraq and Africa, provided combat air support with Navy SEALs in Afghanistan, and later served as Chief of Staff at NASA, managing 16,000 civil servants across 14 different facilities throughout the country. He's running a competitive race in an R+5 district against incumbent Rep. Cory Mills, who is currently under multiple House Ethics investigations and had a restraining order issued against him by a Florida judge.

- **FL-15 – Darren McAuley:** Col. Darren McAuley is a third-generation combat veteran with 25 years of service in the Air Force. First deployed to Baghdad in 2008, he treated wounded American service members and completed six deployments. He later served as a physician at the Veterans Health Administration and now serves as Florida's State Air Surgeon. McAuley is running a competitive campaign in a district with 30% of the electorate not affiliated with either party. He would become the first Black representative from FL-15.

- **MN-01 – Jake Johnson**: Jake Johnson is a public school math teacher with 20 years' experience in the classroom and a respected union leader who helped negotiate improved working conditions for more than 1,000 employees. Running against Rep. Brad Finstad in this R+6 district, Johnson has no primary opposition and has raised more than Finstad's campaign committee. As of the end of September, he has raised $510,000 and holds $251,000 cash on hand—clear signs of momentum in a district primed for an upset. With U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar considering a run for governor, this seat is even more competitive if voters ride on the coattails at the top of the ticket. The last time Amy Klobuchar ran in a Trump midterm, she won MN-01 by double digits.

- **MT-01 – Matt Rains:** Matt is a U.S. Army veteran, engineer and fourth-generation Montana rancher. After serving in Iraq and South Korea as a U.S. Army Black Hawk pilot, he worked as an engineer overseeing million-dollar power plant inspections before returning home to strengthen Montana's agricultural economy. MT-01 is an R+5 district, which Jon Tester won in a 2024 Senate matchup.

- **NC-11 – Jamie Ager:** Jamie Ager is a fifth-generation farmer and sustainable agriculture entrepreneur from Western North Carolina. He runs a local meat company employing 25 people and works with dozens of farmers across the region. NC-11 is an R+5 district that includes Democratic-leaning Asheville alongside deeply Republican rural counties. In Q3, Ager outraised incumbent Rep. Chuck Edwards, posting $340,511 to Edwards' $227,657 cash on hand. A recent poll conducted by Impact Research showed Ager in a

1-point lead over Edwards (45-44).

- **AR-02 – Chris Jones:** Chris Jones is a scientist, minister, and community leader who made history in 2022 as the first African American nominated for governor in Arkansas. He ran against Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders and received about 44% of the vote in the newly redrawn 2nd Congressional District. His prior statewide performance demonstrates clear potential to outperform expectations in this R+8 district. A recent poll has this race in a dead heat in a 1-point race with Rep. French Hill.

About 314 Action Fund

314 Action Fund is the nation's only organization working to recruit, train and elect scientists. Over the past 10 years, 314 Action Fund has supported over 1,500 Democratic scientists and elected over 500+ STEM candidates to all levels of government. In the 2026 cycle, 314 Action Fund is already working with 150 STEM candidates running nationwide.

Bottom Line: With strong fundraising, close polling, credible STEM candidates, and messages that resonate across partisan lines—especially on the issue of health care—these races could play a decisive role in securing a Democratic majority in the House in 2026.

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314 Action is the only national organization working to recruit, train and elect Democratic scientists across all levels of government—from the Senate down to local school boards. The organization is powered by a grassroots community of over six million people supporting scientists and health care professionals who will use science and facts to address the most urgent issues facing our generation.