



Iowa House Majority Leader and candidate for Iowa's 4th Congressional District Matt Windschitl speaks during a GOP candidate forum in Holstein on Nov. 24, 2025.



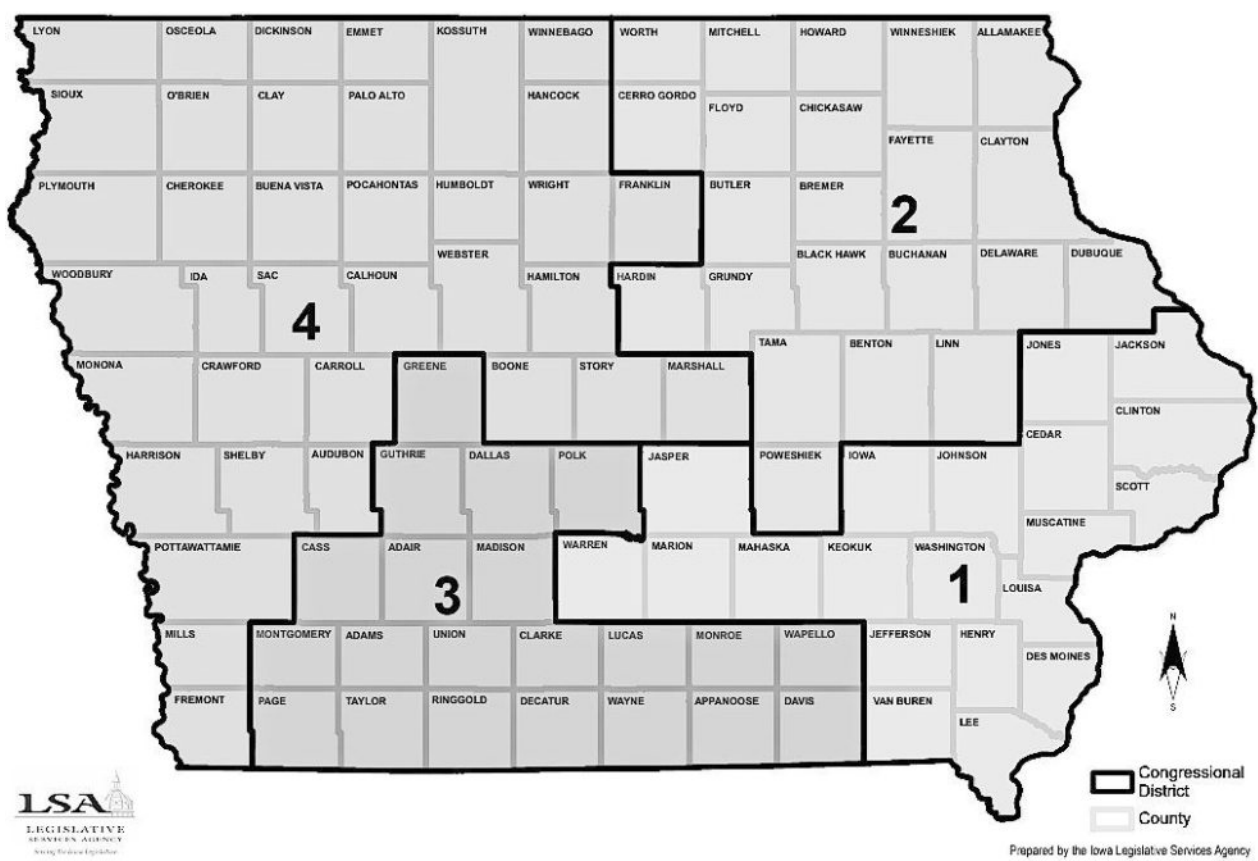
Chris McGowan, a candidate for Iowa's 4th Congressional District, speaks during a GOP candidate forum in Holstein on Nov. 24, 2025. PHOTOS BY ZACH BOYDEN-HOLMES/THE DES MOINES REGISTER



Christian Schlaefer is a candidate in the running for Iowa's 4th Congressional District. Here, he speaks during a GOP candidate forum in Holstein on Nov. 24, 2025.



Chris McGowan, a candidate for Iowa's 4th Congressional District, speaks during a GOP candidate forum in Holstein, Nov. 24, 2025.



Iowa's four congressional districts. PROVIDED BY IOWA LEGISLATIVE SERVICES AGENCY

4th District

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Businessman Douglas Jensen ended his Republican primary campaign in December.

"I do not remember a time when the primary congressional candidate field for our district had more depth," said Lori Leonard Reyman, who helped organize a recent candidate forum in Holstein on behalf of the Ida County Republicans.

The event drew a full house of Republicans eager to engage with the candidates.

Reyman said she's spoken to dozens of people in the weeks since that event, and there's no clear consensus among activists about a favorite contender.

"That shows you that all of these individuals have voter appeal," she said.

Iowa's 4th District is the most heavily Republican district in the state, and elections analysts strongly favor Republicans to maintain control of it following the 2026 elections.

That gives extra impetus to the GOP primary race, because the winner has historically gone on to win the general election.

But Democrats plan to put up a fight.

There's a three-person primary on the Democratic side in a signal of just how competitive the party hopes the midterm election year could end up being.

Democrats Dave Dawson, Stephanie Steiner and Ashley WolfTornabane are all competing.

It would take a monumental and perhaps unprecedented effort for Democrats to actually win in Iowa's 4th District.

But even narrowing their margin of defeat could help lift candidates for governor, U.S. Senate and other statewide offices by invigorating Democrats to turn out and vote up and down the ballot.

That mentality "is everything," said state Rep. J.D. Scholten, D-Sioux City.

"It's about getting people enthusiastic about Democrats all across the state and voting for and turning out for Democrats," he said.



Iowa's four congressional districts. PROVIDED BY IOWA LEGISLATIVE SERVICES AGENCY

Scholten twice ran for Congress as a Democrat in the 4th District, coming within about 3 percentage points of topping then-Republican U.S. Rep. Steve King in 2018.

It was the closest a Democrat has come to winning the district since 2012, when former Iowa first lady Christie Vilsack came within 8 percentage points.

"I think the big thing about my 2018 campaign was we brought out so many more people," he said. "And I've had a lot of people who won their seat or different things in this area that said they're very grateful for my campaign for like a 'high tides raises all boats' type of scenario."

Rhodes, Schlaefer make hardline pitches on immigration, promise to be a fighters in Washington, D.C.

Two of the Republican candidates are explicitly pitching themselves as fighters for the conservative cause, promising voters they won't cave under pressure in Washington, D.C.

Rhodes, of Ames, serves on the board of the conservative social media site Parler after he stepped down as CEO earlier this year.

"These are not the Democrats of the '80s and the '90s who we negotiate with, OK?" he said at the Holstein forum. "These are the Democrats who are killing our children and, once they get out of the womb, they're trying to transgender them."

Rhodes previously worked for Ben Carson and helped conduct outreach for Michelle Bachmann during their Republican Iowa Caucuses campaigns. Carson has endorsed Rhodes campaign.

Rhodes said Republicans in red districts need to stop electing candidates who vote with the party 80% of the time and simply "say the nice conservative stuff."

"They're not fighting," he said. "They're not pushing back."

He said immigration is one of the very top issues facing Congress.

"They are bringing these people into our country, and we can't have it," he said. "There is no way to remain the Christian moral foundation, the nation who is leading the world, if we don't solve this. Immigration is at the absolute forefront because it leads to the other things because it changes our entire culture."

Schlaefer also put a hardline emphasis on the need to crack down on immigration and send a "fighter" to Washington.

"The people who built this were Christian Europeans who came over to an empty land, and from nothing they built the greatest country in the history of the world," he said, glossing over generations of Native American inhabitants. "We cannot sell that out. We cannot abandon that. That is our history, and that must be our future."

When somebody in the audience challenged him on his view of "American identity," arguing that many

immigrants came to this country seeking a better life, Schlaefer pushed back.

"The immigration of the old is not an immigration of today. That is simply made up," he said. "We are not a country of immigrants. That is a lie you have been told. We are a country of pioneers. We are a country of settlers."

Schlaefer works as a software consultant and serves in his community as a firefighter and guest preacher. He and his wife have a homestead in Lakota.

Windschitl, McGowan highlight experience, effectiveness as key campaign for Republican nomination

Windschitl, who is the only candidate currently serving in elected office, has cast himself as more of a steady hand, with proven experience.

He has been a major player at the Statehouse, serving as House majority leader, the number two position in the chamber, from 2019 until he stepped down to run for Congress. He was first elected to the Iowa House in 2006 at the age of 22 and is serving his 10th term.

"(My opponents) talk about some of the things they want to see done or some of the successes that we've had here in Iowa," he said at the Holstein forum. "Folks, I'm here to tell you, I've been doing this long enough that I've had my hand in every one of those fights."

He said he's been a critical voice in helping to pass legislation enhancing Second Amendment protections, cutting taxes and banning abortions.

"We passed the 'Heartbeat bill,'" he said. "When the Supreme Court overturned it, I was the one on the phone calling my fellow legislators, calling the governor's office saying, 'We have to hold a special session.' ... You want to talk about advancing pro-life measures? I've been there."

McGowan enters the race with a collection of endorsements from current members of Congress, including House Majority Whip Tom Emmer of Minnesota and House Judiciary Committee Chair Jim Jordan of Ohio.

"We understand that we must send someone to Washington who will not only reflect our values, but also be our voice and be that effective voice," McGowan said.

At the Holstein forum, McGowan thanked organizers extensively and shared quotes from President Abraham Lincoln and Thomas Paine.

He described himself as a husband of 26 years and father to six homeschooled children, five of whom joined the military. He's a veteran and went to law school before working in economic development.

"For the last 20 years, I have been fighting to help create jobs and to bring capital investment and to add to value-added ag right here in our communities," he said.

He said he believes life begins at conception, the

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