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POLITICS

Rep. Don Davis Says He Won't Go Down Without a Fight

Rep. Don Davis is running for reelection for a third time—and under a third congressional map.

by Christa Dutton October 28, 2025



Rep. Don Davis (D-N.C.) speaks to media during a press conference. (Graeme Sloan/Sipa via AP Images)

When Rep. Don Davis runs for reelection in 2026, it will be his third bid for Congress—and the third congressional map he's had to contend with.

Davis' district in the northeastern part of North Carolina will adopt six counties that voted for President Donald Trump and Republican gubernatorial candidate Mark Robinson in 2024 as a part of [the new congressional map](#) approved by the state legislature. He is one of the clearest casualties of the nationwide redistricting wars.

Still, the House Democrat says he will rebuke Republicans' redistricting push once again.

"People across the country are watching what North Carolina has done, but it's only for one part of the state, just the east. Leave us alone. We're resilient. We'll figure it out. We're okay electing Donald Trump and Don Davis. We're okay with that," Davis told *NOTUS*.

Davis has not announced which district he'll run in in 2026; his office said he would run in either the 1st or 3rd Congressional District. The last time his district was redrawn to include more red-leaning counties, Davis beat his Republican challenger, Laurie Buckhout, by [a thin margin](#) in 2024, bucking expectations.


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— Rep. Don Davis

These new maps, by his own admission, are even "tighter." How he campaigns will almost certainly be a test of how frontline Democrats can navigate an increasingly charged political environment.

"It's just going to be a real uphill battle for him," said Asher Hildebrand, a former Democratic operative and public policy professor at Duke University. "He's probably as well-suited to that battle as any other candidate out there, but it's a lot to ask of even the perfect candidate to run in a district like that."

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Davis' district will become more coastal than it currently is, covering most of the Outer Banks. That region trends older, whiter, and more conservative.



Rep. Don Davis speaks at a campaign event for Democratic Kamala Harris at East Carolina University. (AP Photo/David Yeazell)

The new map already faces legal challenges. Plaintiffs in an existing lawsuit about past maps added an amendment arguing that the latest map disadvantages Black voters. The lawsuit says that Democratic voters in the 1st District will decrease by 4 percentage points, and the Black voting age population will decrease by more than 8 percentage points. State lawmakers said that racial data was not used in the map's creation.

Despite having to campaign in strong Republican counties, Davis said his strategy won't change. "I'm going to be myself," Davis said when asked how he would appeal to more conservative or undecided voters.

Voters in Davis' district haven't elected a Republican since 1883 and have chosen a Black representative since 1992. The area also has a large veteran population. Davis grew up in Greene County (which will no longer be in the 1st District), worked in tobacco fields and served in the U.S. Air Force before running successfully for Snow Hill mayor and serving in the state senate for 12 years.

Making inroads in the adopted red counties will require embracing at least some of Trump's agenda, Hildebrand said, noting some commonalities among the 13 House Democrats who won in Trump districts. They had deep ties to their districts, focused on economic issues and avoided notable culture war issues, like transgender athlete policies or critical race theory in schools. "That's not a characterization of Davis' record, necessarily, but it is a template that I think is generalizable to his situation," Hildebrand said.

Among the biggest challenges for Davis will be how he talks about Trump. Hildebrand said that a full embrace of the president is not necessary to be a strong Democratic candidate, especially when you can position yourself as someone "not in lockstep with your party on a lot of issues where, frankly, the party's brand is very toxic."

"I'm less about talking about anybody as opposed to talking for and what we are about, and we have to be about providing hope and letting people in this region, our hard-working families in the east, know that they're not forgotten," Davis said.



A road signs point to Nashville and Momeyer in North Carolina's 1st Congressional District. (Matt Ramey for *The Assembly*)

Davis said he plans to focus on housing, health care, job creation and infrastructure needs. About 18% of people in the 1st District live below the poverty line. Shuttered textile and tobacco factories removed jobs from the area, and the population continues to decline.

Susan Sawin, the chair of the Democratic Party in Dare County, one of the red counties that Davis' district is gaining, said that Davis' attention to the issues affecting his current district will earn him favor in the coastal county.

"What he's already paying attention to and why he won where he won will land as well as any candidate could land in Dare County."

She added that, on paper, the county "looks redder than it feels."

Republicans are already lining up to run in the 1st District, including Rocky Mount Mayor Sandy Roberson and state Sen. Bobby Hanig. That lineup could have included Republican Rep. Greg Murphy, who considered running in the 1st District instead of the 3rd, the one he currently represents. That plan was reportedly stymied when White House officials said they expect Murphy to run in the 3rd and will support him in that race, [Punchbowl News first reported](#).

"I was very disappointed," Murphy [said on a local radio show](#) last week. "The way the Senate drew the map in Raleigh basically took the 3rd District and split it in half. This has always been a coastal district. I've always represented coastal interests."

Murphy said last week he was going to meet with White House officials last Wednesday, [Punchbowl reported](#). He told [Spectrum News](#) the next day, on Thursday, that he would be running in the 3rd District.

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