

Dems bullish in efforts to regain Nev. Legislature

By Michelle Rindels, AP

Democrats have been itching to regain their majority in the Nevada Legislature since 2014's conservative red wave swept them out of power, and they say the results of Tuesday's primary gave them a bit more encouragement they'll succeed.

Three Republicans who last year voted for Gov. Brian Sandoval's tax package toppled in their primaries against anti-tax challengers. It was a better outcome than it could have been for moderate Republicans, with seven other tax-supporting incumbents surviving such challenges. But every seat matters for a GOP that holds a 25-17 Assembly majority and is already expected to lose ground in a presidential election cycle.

Republicans' inability to save tax-supporting incumbents P.K. O'Neill and Glenn Trowbridge in their primaries sent a message that their message and values aren't resonating with people, Democratic Assemblywoman Irene Bustamante Adams said.

"That gave me a boost of confidence that the majority is ours to take back," she said.

Democrats are well-poised to turn out their voters thanks to a new level of coordination between legislative and congressional campaign organizations, Bustamante Adams said. And internal divisions among Republicans will weaken them in their quest to retain power, she said.

Republicans are fresh off a bitter primary season that pitted moderates against anti-tax purists led by freshman Assemblyman Brent Jones. Most Jones-backed candidates lost, but Jones narrowly won a primary – meaning Republican leaders will have

to mend fences with him to have a chance at keeping that Democratic-leaning district.

“The path to the majority runs right through that district,” Assembly Majority Leader Paul Anderson said. “We’re going to have to figure out how he can appeal to a wider audience.”

Assembly Republicans already expect to lose three heavily Democratic districts that they won in 2014. But they’re fighting to avoid losing any more, including Democratic-leaning districts held by vulnerable freshmen David Gardner and Derek Armstrong.

That means being more organized and strategic than in years past.

“I think we’re still the underdog, but that plays into our favor,” Anderson said. “They may not see us coming or understand our strategies.”

On the Senate side, Democrats who were in a 10-11 minority last session hope to flip seats in their favor and get back in the driver’s seat. The breakdown will depend on a handful of Senate races in swing districts.

Democrats need to hold on to a Henderson-area district held by Joyce Woodhouse, a retired educator who breezed through her primary but faces a tougher challenge from Republican charter school principal Carrie Buck.

They’re also watching a Reno-area race between Democratic attorney Devon Reese and Republican former lawmaker Heidi Gansert, who defeated anti-tax challenger Eugene Hoover; and one in Las Vegas between Republican incumbent Sen. Scott Hammond and Democratic challenger Alexander Marks.

But perhaps the most watched will be one in a Las Vegas-area Senate district that’s held by Republican Mark Lipparelli, who’s not seeking re-election. Republican Erv Nelson, who was

backed by GOP Senate leaders and supported Sandoval's tax plan when he was in the Assembly, lost badly in a brutal race against anti-tax Assemblywoman Victoria Seaman.

Seaman painted Nelson as a carpetbagger and a liar, fighting back when his campaign put out literature that highlighted an obscure tax cut but didn't mention the more obvious tax hikes and extensions the Legislature approved.

"We take an aggressive posture ... no issue is too small to respond to," said her campaign consultant, Ryan Hamilton, who called Seaman a vigorous campaigner and the strongest Republican for the general election. "She appeals to nonpartisans, she appeals to conservatives, and she's the hardest worker."

Seaman faces Democrat Nicole Cannizzaro, a Clark County prosecutor who didn't have a primary, in a district with a narrow Democratic registration advantage.

"I think the contrast is going to be readily apparent," Democratic Senate Minority Leader Aaron Ford said. "The people of District 6 are ... more accustomed to interacting with someone like Nicole Cannizzaro who is thoughtful, who is cordial and who is interacting on issues that are important for them, and not bombastic and offensive."