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MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

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BEFORE THE YEAR ENDS

HOW SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS CAN STRENGTHEN CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS AND BUILD MOMENTUM FOR 2027



Simple strategies to encourage repeat business, strengthen customer loyalty, and prepare for a successful year ahead.

For many small business owners, the final months of the year bring a familiar mix of opportunity and pressure. There are projects to finish, financial goals to evaluate, and decisions to make about what comes next. Whether business is booming or slowing down, October is a natural time to look at what has worked throughout the year and where there may still be opportunities to finish strong.

When evaluating business performance, it's easy to focus on numbers. Revenue, new customers, expenses, and profitability are all important measures of success. But one of the most valuable assets a small business has doesn't always show up neatly on a financial statement: its relationships.

For self-employed professionals, independent contractors, and micro-business owners, strong customer relationships are often the foundation of long-term success. They create repeat business, generate referrals, improve customer loyalty, and provide stability when market conditions change.

As 2026 winds down, now is an ideal time to reconnect with customers, strengthen existing relationships, and position your business for a successful 2027.



TAKE STOCK OF THE RELATIONSHIPS YOU'VE BUILT

Before setting new goals for the coming year, take some time to evaluate the relationships that have helped your business succeed.

Think beyond your largest customers or most profitable accounts. Consider the people who have supported your business throughout the year. Who has referred new customers? Who consistently returns for additional services? Which clients have become strong advocates for your business?

Equally important, are there customers you haven't heard from in several months? Are there relationships that may have weakened because communication slowed down or priorities changed?

A simple review of your customer list can reveal opportunities that might otherwise go unnoticed.

Start by asking yourself a few questions:

- Who are my most loyal customers, and what keeps them coming back?
- Which customers haven't engaged with my business recently?
- Are there clients who might benefit from additional products or services?
- Who has referred new business to me this year?
- Which relationships deserve more attention before the year ends?

For a one-person business, this process doesn't need to involve sophisticated customer relationship management software. A spreadsheet, customer list, or even a notebook can provide a useful starting point.

The goal isn't simply to identify opportunities to make another sale. It's to better understand the relationships that support your business and consider how you can strengthen them before the year comes to a close.

RECONNECT BEFORE THE HOLIDAY RUSH

As November and December approach, calendars become crowded. Customers take vacations, businesses finalize budgets, and holiday activities compete for everyone's attention.

That makes October and early November particularly valuable times to reconnect.

For many self-employed business owners, a simple personal message can accomplish more than another mass marketing campaign. Reaching out to a customer to ask how things are going, whether their needs have changed, or if there's anything you can help with shows that the relationship extends beyond the original transaction.

Consider a freelance graphic designer who completed a major project earlier in the year. A quick follow-up might reveal that the customer is preparing a new marketing campaign for 2027. A home improvement contractor might reconnect with previous customers to discuss maintenance or projects they're considering for the coming year.

Neither conversation needs to begin with a sales pitch.

In fact, the most effective outreach often starts with genuine curiosity. Ask questions, listen carefully, and look for opportunities to be helpful.

The key is making your communication personal and relevant. Customers receive plenty of generic promotional emails, especially as the holidays approach. A thoughtful message from someone they have already worked with has a better chance of standing out.

If your business experiences a seasonal slowdown, reconnecting can also help identify projects or opportunities that might otherwise wait until the new year. And if your busiest season is approaching, these conversations can help you anticipate demand and prepare accordingly.

SHOW APPRECIATION BEFORE ASKING FOR MORE BUSINESS

Customer appreciation is one of the simplest ways to strengthen relationships, yet it's easy to overlook when everyday business responsibilities take over.

Small business owners often focus considerable time and money on attracting new customers while giving less attention to the people who have already supported their success.

As the year comes to a close, consider how you can acknowledge those relationships.

A short, personal message can leave a lasting impression, especially when it recognizes something specific about the customer's relationship with your business.

Perhaps a longtime customer helped you reach an important milestone this year. Maybe a client introduced you to someone who became a valuable new customer. Or perhaps a business partner simply made your job easier during a particularly busy period.

Taking the time to recognize those contributions shows people that their support matters.

For some businesses, a small customer appreciation event or special offer might make sense. For others, a thoughtful note or personal phone call is enough.

The gesture doesn't need to be expensive or elaborate. What matters is that it feels genuine.

Customers want to know they're valued, not just billed.

This applies to more than customers. Referral partners, vendors, independent contractors, and employees often contribute to a small business's success. Recognizing their efforts can strengthen relationships that will continue to matter in the years ahead.

Appreciation should certainly be practiced throughout the year, but the approaching holiday season provides a natural opportunity to make it a priority.

TURN CUSTOMER LOYALTY INTO REPEAT BUSINESS

Acquiring new customers is important, but continually replacing existing customers can be exhausting and expensive.

> *For a small business with limited time and resources, repeat customers can provide a more sustainable path to growth.*

Existing customers already know your business. They've experienced your products or services and have a sense of what to expect. When those experiences have been positive, much of the uncertainty that accompanies a first-time purchase has already been removed.

This creates opportunities to build longer-lasting relationships.

As you review your customer list, consider whether there are natural ways to continue serving the people you've already worked with.

A consultant might offer ongoing advisory services rather than relying entirely on individual projects. A landscaping business might introduce seasonal maintenance plans. A photographer might reconnect with past clients about upcoming family events or business needs.

The opportunities will vary depending on your industry, but the underlying principle is the same: look for ways to continue providing value.

Be careful, however, not to confuse relationship-building with constant selling.

Customers are more likely to remain loyal when they believe you understand their needs and have their best interests in mind. Recommendations should be relevant, useful, and appropriately timed.

As you begin planning for 2027, think about which products or services naturally encourage customers to return and which offerings might benefit from a more intentional follow-up process.

Sometimes the best growth opportunity isn't finding an entirely new audience. It's finding a better way to serve the customers you already have.

DON'T OVERLOOK THE POWER OF REFERRALS

One of the greatest advantages small businesses have is the ability to develop meaningful personal connections with customers.

Those relationships can become a powerful source of new business through referrals.

When someone recommends a business to a friend, colleague, or family member, they're doing more than sharing a name. They're putting their own credibility behind that recommendation.

For a self-employed professional, that personal endorsement can carry significant weight.

Yet many business owners are hesitant to ask for referrals, even when they have customers who are genuinely pleased with their work.

The end of the year presents a good opportunity to change that.

When following up with satisfied customers, consider mentioning that referrals are always appreciated. Let them know what types of customers or projects are a good fit for your business.

A vague request to "send anyone my way" may be less effective than explaining specifically who you can help.

For example, a bookkeeper who specializes in independent contractors might ask a satisfied customer whether they know other self-employed professionals who could benefit from better financial organization.

The request should feel natural, not forced. And when someone does refer new business, take the time to thank them. Even when a referral doesn't result in a sale, the effort deserves recognition.

As you look ahead to 2027, consider making referrals a more intentional part of your business development strategy. You don't necessarily need an elaborate incentive program. Often, consistently delivering quality service, maintaining strong relationships, and making it easy for customers to recommend you is a good place to start.

PROTECT YOUR REPUTATION DURING THE YEAR-END RUSH

While the final months of the year may create opportunities for additional business, they can also introduce challenges.

Customers may want projects completed before December 31. Seasonal demand may increase. Businesses may face staffing limitations, scheduling conflicts, or delays from vendors.

For a self-employed professional managing multiple responsibilities, the temptation to accept every opportunity can be strong.

But taking on more work than you can reasonably deliver may damage the relationships you've spent years building.

Trust is earned through consistent actions. Meeting deadlines, communicating clearly, and following through on commitments are all essential to maintaining that trust.





If your schedule is filling up, be upfront about availability. If a project is going to take longer than expected, communicate that early. If a customer's request falls outside your expertise or capacity, be willing to say so.

Clear expectations are better than promises that cannot be kept.

This is also a good time to evaluate your own workload and business systems. Are there recurring tasks you can simplify? Could better scheduling or automation help you stay organized? Are you spending too much time on administrative work instead of serving your customers?

Making even a few improvements now can help you manage the remainder of the year while creating more breathing room in 2027.

Remember that sustainable growth isn't always about doing more. Sometimes it means protecting the quality of your work and the relationships that make your business successful.

Finishing the year strong should not mean finishing the year exhausted.

USE CUSTOMER FEEDBACK TO SHAPE YOUR 2027 STRATEGY

As you reconnect with customers and evaluate your business relationships, pay attention to what you're learning.

Your customers can provide valuable insights into where your business should go next.

Perhaps several clients have asked about a service you don't currently offer. Maybe customers consistently mention a particular reason they enjoy working with you. Or perhaps you've noticed that certain products or services generate more repeat business than others.

These observations can help shape your plans for 2027.

Instead of basing next year's strategy entirely on revenue goals or assumptions about the market, incorporate what your customers are telling you.

Consider reviewing a few simple indicators:

- **Customer Retention:** How many customers returned or continued working with you this year?
- **Repeat Business:** Which products or services generated additional purchases?
- **Referrals:** How many new customers came through existing relationships?
- **Customer Feedback:** What compliments, concerns, or requests came up most frequently?
- **Growth Opportunities:** Which existing customers may have additional needs in the coming year?

You don't need an elaborate reporting system. Even a basic review can help you identify patterns and make better decisions.

For businesses with seasonal fluctuations, this process can be particularly useful. Understanding when customers typically need your services allows you to plan staffing, marketing, and outreach more effectively.

You might discover that some of your most profitable opportunities come from a relatively small group of loyal customers. Or perhaps you'll identify a service that generates considerable interest but hasn't received much marketing attention.

Those insights can help you decide where to invest your time, energy, and resources next year.

The more you understand your customers, the better positioned you'll be to serve them.

A SIMPLE FOUR-WEEK RELATIONSHIP CHECKUP

With everything involved in running a business, adding another major project to your schedule may not sound appealing.

Fortunately, strengthening customer relationships doesn't require a complicated strategy.

Consider setting aside a little time over the next four weeks to focus on a few practical actions.



WEEK 1:
REVIEW YOUR CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS

Identify ten important relationships. Choose a mix of loyal customers, referral partners, and people you haven't connected with recently. Look for opportunities to reconnect or strengthen those relationships.



WEEK 2:
MAKE PERSONAL CONTACT

Send a thoughtful message, make a phone call, or schedule a brief conversation. Focus on checking in rather than immediately selling something. Find out what's new, what challenges they may be facing, and how your business might help.



WEEK 3:
IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE COMING YEAR

Think about what you've learned from those conversations. Are there new services you could offer? Opportunities for repeat business? Customers who may need support in the first quarter of 2027? Make a short list of realistic opportunities worth pursuing.



WEEK 4:
BUILD A FOLLOW-UP PLAN

Schedule follow-ups, note important customer information, and establish a reasonable communication routine for the coming year. Consider how you can maintain these relationships consistently without adding unnecessary work to your schedule.

These steps may seem small, but meaningful business relationships are rarely built through a single grand gesture. They're strengthened through consistent, thoughtful interactions over time.

For many self-employed professionals, a few deliberate conversations could prove more valuable than an expensive marketing campaign.

More importantly, this process can help you finish the year with a clearer understanding of your customers and a practical plan for maintaining those relationships into 2027.

BUILD A BUSINESS PEOPLE WANT TO RETURN TO



As another year approaches its conclusion, it's worth remembering that business success is about more than growth alone.

Revenue matters. Profitability matters. Finding new customers matters.

But so do the relationships that make those accomplishments possible.

For self-employed professionals and micro-business owners, relationships are often a distinct competitive advantage. A small business may not have the marketing budget, staffing, or resources of a larger competitor, but it can offer something equally valuable: personal attention, genuine connection, and a commitment to customer satisfaction.

At NASE, we believe successful businesses should provide more than financial opportunity. They should offer stability, independence, and the ability to build something sustainable over time.

As you prepare to close out 2026, take time to appreciate the customers who helped you get here. Reconnect with people you've lost touch with. Look for opportunities to provide additional value, and use what you've learned to make thoughtful decisions about the future.

A successful 2027 may depend less on how many new customers you can find and more on how well you continue serving the ones who already believe in your business.

Finish the year by strengthening those relationships, and you'll begin the next one on a stronger foundation.

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Aug 17, 2026

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MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Sheana Graham

My clients often describe me as the person who can take a stressful HR problem and break it down the way a good jazz musician breaks down a melody.

Smooth. Simple. Strategic.

Sheana Graham is the founder and principal consultant of **Savvy HR Studio**, an HR consulting firm based in Longwood, Florida. With more than 25 years of experience in human resources across healthcare, higher education, and corporate environments, Sheana helps organizations build stronger workplaces through effective communication, compliance, and strategic HR solutions.

Through Savvy HR Studio, Sheana provides AI-powered HR solutions, compliance audits, employee relations strategies, and training for small businesses. Her mission is to make HR more approachable, practical, and accessible while helping business owners navigate challenges and create people-centered workplaces.

When and why did you join the NASE?

I joined NASE in 2025 to connect with a community of entrepreneurs who understand the power of collaboration and shared experience. Being part of a network that supports small business owners with resources, education, and advocacy aligns perfectly with my mission to help businesses thrive through strategic HR and operational excellence.

What inspired you to enter the field you are in?

I have always believed that people are the heartbeat of every organization. Early in my career, I realized that when HR is done right, with empathy and strategy, it transforms workplaces. That belief drove me to specialize in employee relations, compliance,

and leadership development, and ultimately inspired me to build a business that brings that expertise to entrepreneurs and small business owners.

When and why did you start your business?
Savvy HR Studio began during what I call my season of forced freedom. A corporate layoff reminded me that sometimes life closes a door to point you directly to your purpose. That corporate layoff reminded me that sometimes endings are simply redirections. It was my moment of "forced freedom." I'm taking everything I know about HR, leadership, and communication and putting it into this consulting practice designed to support small business owners who need clear guidance and real solutions as well as job seekers. The employment environment can have its challenges. I want to help.

How do you market your business?
I market Savvy HR Studio through a blend of digital presence and personal connection, including LinkedIn networking, webinars, podcast interviews, community events, and educational workshops. I also offer free 15-minute consultations to help small business owners identify their HR needs and experience firsthand how strategic HR support can strengthen their business. I am learning and jumping in head first.

What challenges have you faced in your business? How have you overcome them?
One of my biggest challenges was shifting from being the trusted corporate HR expert to building a business brand from the ground up. It required me to move from an employee mindset to an entrepreneur mindset, which is a completely different world. I had to learn how to promote my own expertise, create systems, and lead my business with the same confidence I once poured into large organizations.

I overcame this by staying consistent, embracing technology, and focusing on genuine relationships rather than chasing perfection. Every obstacle helped me build stronger systems, clearer processes, and a deeper sense of direction.

Another challenge has been introducing new programs and proactive HR initiatives to clients who may not see the value until after the financial and time investment. HR is often like planting seeds. You plant today, you water consistently, and the results show later. The value is real. It simply requires action and patience.

Do you have any employees?
Currently, Savvy HR Studio operates as a boutique consulting practice, and I collaborate with trusted HR and tech professionals on a project basis. I do plan to expand with part-time specialists as demand grows, but I will always keep my business personal, approachable, and high-touch.

What's your schedule like? What is a typical day for you?
Every day is a mix of creativity and strategy. I start with quiet time and planning, then meet with clients, design HR audits or training materials, and record podcast content for my brand. No two days are identical, but every one of them includes coffee, client success, and a lot of purpose. I work harder now but it is rewarding with no regrets.

What's the best thing about being self-employed?
Freedom with purpose. I get to choose how I show up, who I serve, and what impact I make. I can be creative, strategic, and intentional all at once.



And I love watching my clients grow because of the clarity we build together. I can help people and businesses. I help people find jobs and help businesses. We can all work together to build something mutually beneficial to many. It is a beautiful blend of creativity and impact.

What's the best compliment you've ever received from a client?
A client once said, "You make HR feel normal again." That meant everything to me because it captures exactly what Savvy HR Studio stands for, clarity, care, and connection that make work better for everyone involved. I hope to always make HR feel like a space where employees can be happy, employers can manage, and everyone can grow.

What's the most important piece of advice you would give to someone starting their own business?
Start before you feel ready. You will figure it out along the way. Stay consistent, stay curious, and do not let fear talk you out of your purpose. Progress beats perfection every time. Do your research and continue to stay open to learning continuously.

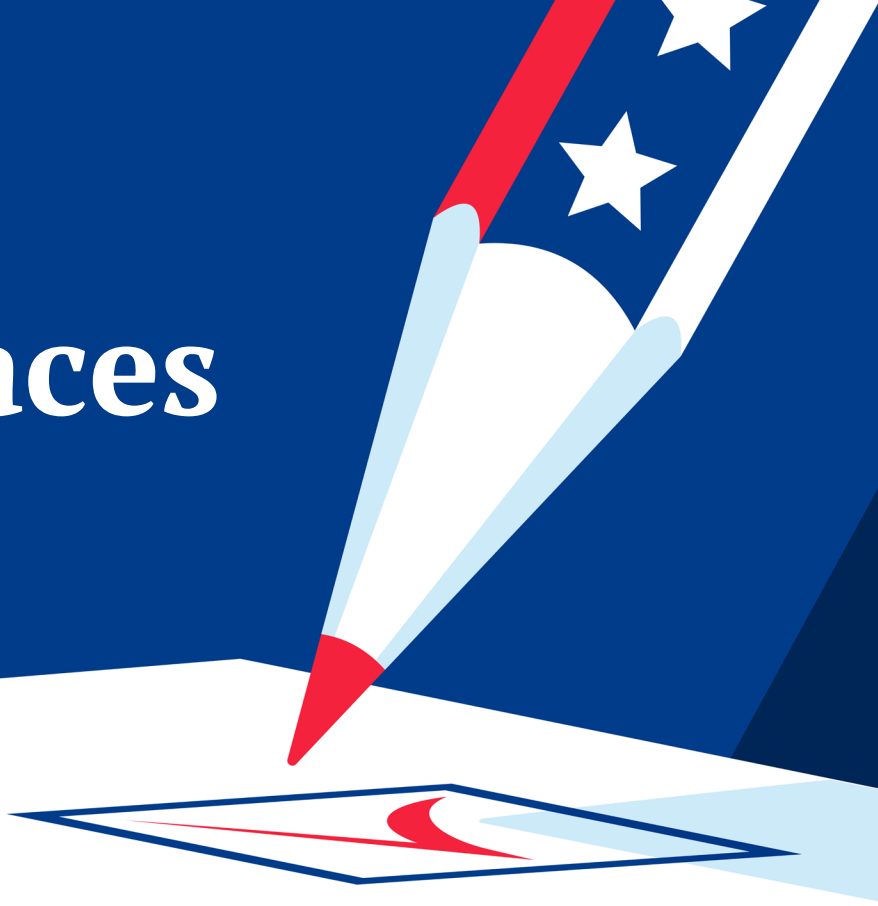
Which NASE Member benefit is most important to you?
The access to business resources, expert advice, and educational tools has been invaluable. Having a trusted support system makes entrepreneurship less isolating and more empowering.

Is there anything else you would like to share?
Savvy HR Studio is expanding into AI-powered HR tools and interactive training programs that make compliance, onboarding, and communication easier for small business owners. My goal is to use technology and strategy to level the playing field for entrepreneurs everywhere. I will be doing speaking engagements and spreading quality information to help businesses and people expand their knowledge and reach, which will benefit them as the AI world continues to grow.



The Six Senate Races

That Will Decide the Majority



Democrats need four of the six toss-up Senate races to win control; prediction markets put their odds of getting there at roughly 64–67% as of Oct. 26, with Iowa the only one of the six where the Republican is the favorite.

At a Glance

Five of the six seats are Republican-held; Michigan is the one Democrats must defend. Odds are Kalshi/Polymarket win prices for the Democrat, from the latest snapshots I found (Oct. 11–21), and move daily.

State	Democrat	Republican	Fox rating (Oct. 18)	Market odds, Dem win	Recent polls
Alaska	Mary Peltola	Sen. Dan Sullivan *(inc.)*	Toss-up	~70–76%	Peltola +2 to +7 *(Oct. 1–20)*
Michigan *(open, D-held)*	Abdul El-Sayed	Mike Rogers	Toss-up	~69%	El-Sayed +1 to +5 *(Oct. 5–18)*
Ohio *(special)*	Sherrod Brown	Sen. Jon Husted *(inc.)*	Toss-up	~64–66%	Brown +1 to +6 *(Oct. 1–14)*
Texas *(open)*	James Talarico	Ken Paxton	Toss-up	~63–65%	Talarico +2 to +4 *(Oct. 6–14)*
Maine	Troy Jackson	Sen. Susan Collins *(inc.)*	Toss-up	~57%	Jackson +2 to +4 *(Oct. 1–13); one Siena poll had Collins +3*
Iowa *(open)*	Josh Turek	Rep. Ashley Hinson	Toss-up	~41% (Hinson ~59%)	Turek +2 to +8 in some polls, Hinson +1 to +5 in others

The Math

Fox News Power Rankings (Oct. 18) put each party at 47 seats before these six, so Democrats need four of six to reach 51, while Republicans need only three to hold 50 and keep Vice President Vance's tiebreaker. That baseline treats Georgia, North Carolina, Minnesota and New Hampshire as Democratic holds or pickups, and Fox rates Georgia and North Carolina Likely Democratic and Minnesota and New Hampshire Lean Democratic.

Markets price Democratic control at about 64% on Kalshi and 66–67% on Polymarket as of Oct. 26, up from 62–63% on Oct. 14, with most of the recent move coming from Maine. As a rough check, treating my table's midpoint odds as independent gives Democrats about a 57% chance of winning four or more of the six; the markets price control higher because the races are correlated, since a national wave lifts all of them together. Kalshi's seat-count market has Democrats at 52 seats.

Three cautions apply. Polls have been uneven, with Iowa and Maine swinging between Democratic and Republican leads depending on the pollster. Markets lean on the same polls and are not independent evidence. And Alaska's ranked-choice count could leave the result unsettled for weeks after Nov. 3.

Alaska: Peltola (D) vs. Sen. Dan Sullivan (R)

Peltola, who held Alaska's House seat from 2022 to 2025, is the favorite at roughly 70–76% on Kalshi and 73% on Polymarket in early-to-mid October snapshots. Polls are closer than that: New York Times/Siena (Sept. 24–Oct. 1) had her up 50–43, while later surveys range from a 46–46 tie (Quantus) to 48–47 (Public Policy Polling) and 51–49 on the final ranked-choice round (Data for Progress, Oct. 20). A report on her treatment of staff gave Republicans a late attack, and a pro-Sullivan PAC bought about $600,000 of ads on it, yet the markets barely moved.

Small business angle. Fuel is the story. Rural communities pay once a year for barged-in diesel and heating fuel, with some villages quoted $10 a gallon or more and further increases expected, and fishermen and shippers face the same costs plus tariffs. Peltola ties the spike to the Iran war, which Sullivan backed, and proposes scrutiny of price gouging among Alaska's few fuel distributors, an "Essential Freight Service" modeled on Bypass Mail, and a federal seafood marketing institute. Sullivan points to a White House task force on Alaska energy, a near doubling of heating-assistance funding, and diesel production waivers, and argues that Alaska's problems are solved by producing more Alaska energy and that a Democratic majority would curb resource development.

Maine: Troy Jackson (D) vs. Sen. Susan Collins (R)

Jackson, a logger and former president of the Maine Senate, became the Democratic nominee on July 25 after Graham Platner left the race over allegations he denies. Polls mostly show him narrowly ahead: Marist (Oct. 1–4) 51–47, Washington Post/George Mason (Sept. 30–Oct. 5) 50–46, Suffolk (Oct. 8–11) 49–47 and InsiderAdvantage (Oct. 13–14) 49–47. A New York Times/Siena/Portland Press Herald poll had Collins up 49–46, and Collins has beaten her polling before. Markets price Jackson at about 57%, down from roughly 66–71% in September. He raised $20.4 million in his first three months, about four times Collins's haul.

Small business angle. Maine's economy is tightly tied to Canada, so the 50% tariffs on Canadian imports reach lobstermen, manufacturers and farmers, and some Maine products are processed in Canada and taxed in both directions; Canada has dropped its own tariff on lobster. Collins calls the tariffs "terrible" for small businesses and in July 2025 joined a bipartisan bill to exempt small businesses from the Canadian tariffs. Jackson says she should have used her seat as Appropriations chair to stop them, though PolitiFact found his attack ignored four other votes where she opposed Trump tariffs. Collins's pitch is that her chairmanship brings earmarks and resources home; Jackson's is wages, labor and rural affordability, including home heating oil costs. A pro-Collins PAC is attacking his tax record.

Ohio: Sherrod Brown (D) vs. Sen. Jon Husted (R)

Husted was appointed in January 2025 to fill Vice President Vance's seat and faces a special election for the remaining two years; Brown lost his seat to Bernie Moreno in 2024. Brown is the market favorite at about 64% on Polymarket and 66% on Kalshi. Polls lean his way but stay close: CNN (Oct. 8) 49–43, New York Times/Siena 49–46, YouGov (Oct. 6) 49–45, and InsiderAdvantage (Oct. 1) 44–43. The RealClearPolitics average on Oct. 6 was Brown 47.4%, Husted 44.3%.

Small business angle. This is the sharpest small-business contrast of the six. The National Federation of Independent Business endorsed Husted in March, citing a 100% NFIB voting record in the Ohio Statehouse, and Husted backed the 2025 tax law that made the 20% pass-through deduction permanent. Brown argues tariffs and the tax law hurt Main Street: he says the tariffs cost Ohio $6.5 billion, backs refunds, and notes that a coalition of more than 800 small businesses, including about two dozen in Ohio, is demanding tariff refunds after the Supreme Court ruled the sweeping tariffs illegal. Husted calls tariffs a tool for protecting workers but has said he wants any tariffs kept as low as possible, and he campaigns on bringing manufacturing back. Electricity costs from data centers are a second fight, with Brown tying Husted to data-center tax breaks and Husted tying Brown to higher grocery and power prices.

Texas: James Talarico (D) vs. Ken Paxton (R)

Paxton beat Sen. John Cornyn in the May 26 Republican runoff; Talarico is a state representative and former teacher. Markets favor Talarico at about 63–65%, a far cry from the 75%-plus Paxton traded at after the runoff. Polls are within a few points: University of Houston (Oct. 10–14) 48–46, with independents breaking 60–32 for Talarico, and Trafalgar 47.1–43.6. A nine-day absence from the trail in early October drew Republican attacks but barely moved the odds. Republican groups are spending heavily, with a Senate Leadership Fund allocation reported at well over $100 million.

Small business angle. NFIB endorsed Paxton, calling him a small business owner who will defend free enterprise, and Paxton brands Talarico a socialist. The Washington Examiner reports Talarico backs employer regulations that industry groups say would burden small firms. Both run on affordability: Paxton proposes new tax deductions, an expanded Child Tax Credit and permanent "Trump Accounts"; Talarico proposes higher wages, expanded tax credits and tougher action against corporations he says drive up prices, and promises Texas farmers he will end tariffs and restore farm subsidies. The political risk for Paxton is that nearly six in 10 Texans told Times/Siena they oppose the tariffs, and a Texas Politics Project survey found expectations for business conditions had "plunged" on fuel prices and tariffs. In a poll cited by Fox, voters trusted Talarico over Paxton on cost of living, 48% to 38%.

Michigan: Abdul El-Sayed (D) vs. Mike Rogers (R)

This is the open seat of retiring Sen. Gary Peters and the only one of the six that Democrats must defend. El-Sayed won the August primary over Rep. Haley Stevens by 48.5% to 47.5%; Rogers lost the 2024 Senate race by less than a point. Markets give El-Sayed about 69% on both Kalshi and Polymarket. Polls show a margin-of-error race: Marist (Oct. 15–18) 50–48 among likely voters, YouGov (Oct. 6) 49–48, Quantus 48–47, and CBS Detroit/Mitchell (early Oct.) 46–41. Michigan Democrats' strongest asset is the top of the ticket, where Jocelyn Benson leads the governor's race by about six points.

Small business angle. Canada is the shared problem. At the Detroit Economic Club on Oct. 20, both men said the trade war with Canada hurts Michigan, and Rogers has since run an ad calling for it to end, after earlier praising Trump's tariffs. They split on everything else. Rogers says other tariffs are helping, citing auto reshoring, and wants a lower business tax rate. El-Sayed says he is against "dumb tariffs" rather than tariffs generally, wants to cut the employer-side payroll tax and invest more in small business growth, and would lift the cap on payroll taxes for high earners. He also backs Medicare for All and broader union organizing, which he says would help unions work with small businesses. A conservative group, the National Taxpayers Union Foundation, estimates the tariffs cost Michigan households about $5,600 a year.

Iowa: Josh Turek (D) vs. Rep. Ashley Hinson (R)

This open seat, vacated by retiring Sen. Joni Ernst, is the one race where markets still favor the Republican: Hinson trades at about 59¢ on Polymarket and Kalshi (55% on Kalshi in an Oct. 7 snapshot). Polls have flipped back and forth, and Hinson has led three of the last four in October by margins inside the error. Fox News (Sept. 24–28) had Turek up 49–47, Marist (Sept. 17–20) 50–42 and Suffolk (Oct. 1–4) by four, while Times/Siena (through Oct. 1) had Hinson ahead 48–47 and Emerson 50–45. Fox found Republicans less committed to Hinson than Democrats are to Turek (87% to 96%), and the Democratic governor candidate, Rob Sand, led 53–44, a possible drag on her.

Small business angle. Iowa's small-business story is mostly the family farm. Both candidates say farmers are squeezed by input costs and both want a seat on the Senate Agriculture Committee as the farm bill moves. Turek would end the tariffs, which he says may have hurt Iowa more than any other state because of soybeans, and backs right-to-repair, antitrust action on consolidation, a ban on grocery price gouging, a higher minimum wage and the PRO Act; he also attacks Hinson's votes for the 2025 tax law's Medicaid provisions and for the Iran war, which he links to record diesel prices. Hinson focuses on fertilizer costs and reliance on foreign suppliers, opposes California's Proposition 12 and says Turek voted for Green New Deal mandates on farmers. I did not find an NFIB endorsement in this race.

What it Means for Small Business Policy

Three themes run through all six races, and the first two are cost shocks rather than tax policy.

1. **Tariffs.** The Democratic nominees in Ohio, Iowa, Texas, Michigan and Maine oppose the current tariffs, and Brown and Turek tie them directly to small business and farm costs. On the Republican side, Husted and Paxton defend the policy, while Collins and now Rogers break with the administration on Canada specifically. A Democratic Senate would change who controls committees and the floor, but with a Republican president it would not by itself end the tariffs.
2. **Energy and fuel costs.** Alaska and Iowa campaigns center on diesel prices that candidates blame on the Iran war; Ohio's fight is over data-center electricity demand; Maine's includes home heating oil.
3. **Tax certainty.** The 2025 tax law made the 20% pass-through deduction permanent, raised the Section 179 expensing cap to $2.5 million and restored 100% bonus depreciation, so the near-term tax cliff small business groups feared is gone. The remaining tax fights are over the 2025 law's health-care and corporate provisions (Brown, Turek, Peltola), payroll-tax changes (El-Sayed) and new deductions (Paxton).

The NFIB has endorsed the Republican in Ohio and Texas; I did not find its endorsements in the other four races, so small-business group support is not a clean tiebreaker.

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Sources

Odds and polls change daily; figures are from the dates noted in each section. I read these search results on Oct. 26 and opened only the Fox News page in full.

- **Fox News: nine key races and Power Rankings (Oct. 18)**
- **DeFi Rate: Kalshi and Polymarket midterm odds; Kalshi: Senate control market**
- **Action Network: Texas Senate odds; Maine; Michigan; Ohio; Alaska; Iowa**
- **Newsweek: Alaska polls; Maine polls; Ohio polls; Iowa polls**
- **Marist: Michigan poll (Oct. 15–18); Fox 7 Austin: Texas poll (Univ. of Houston); Fox News Iowa poll**
- Small business and issues: **NFIB endorsement of Husted**; **Washington Examiner on NFIB and Paxton**; **Ohio Capital Journal on tariff refunds**; **PolitiFact on Collins and tariffs**; **Maine Public via NHPR**; **Michigan Public on the Detroit Economic Club forum**; **Fox 4: Texas affordability plans**; **ADN: Alaska fuel debate**; **Alaska Beacon: Peltola affordability plan**; **AgWeb: Iowa farm issues**; **NFIB: 2025 tax law business provisions**