

Inside Elections

with

Nathan L. Gonzales

Nonpartisan Analysis

APRIL 7, 2023

VOLUME 7, NO. 7

California 27: Turning Over a New Candidate

By Jacob Rubashkin

For three consecutive elections, Republican Mike Garcia has bedeviled Democrats by winning a left-trending Los Angeles County seat despite amassing a staunchly conservative record in Congress. But Democrats have a renewed optimism this cycle, because for the first time in four years, they'll have a different candidate.

Democrats need a net gain of five seats to regain the House majority, and they'll likely need to win races like this one in Southern California to make it happen.

The Lay of the Land

The 27th District sits in the northwest corner of Los Angeles County. Its three main population centers are the cities of Santa Clarita (30 percent of the district), Lancaster (23 percent), and Palmdale (22 percent). The latter two sit in the Antelope Valley region. The district also includes a small slice of Los Angeles proper, the neighborhood of Porter Ranch.

Demographically, the 27th is diverse. By overall population, the district is 42 percent Hispanic, 34 percent white, 12 percent Black and 11 percent Asian. But the electorate skews whiter. As of 2020, the citizen voting-age population was 44 percent white, 35 percent Hispanic, 11 percent Black and 10 percent Asian.

The Hispanic population is concentrated in the Antelope Valley, while the Santa Clarita valley area is predominantly white.

Politically, the 27th leans Democratic at the federal level, despite the area having been held by Republicans for most of the last few decades. Joe Biden would have carried it by 12 points, 55-43 percent, in 2020, and Hillary Clinton would have won it by 10 points, 52-42 percent, in 2016. The seat has shifted leftward in recent years: it would have voted more narrowly for Barack Obama in 2012, 50-48 percent.

The 27th has retained some of its more GOP-leaning DNA at the state level. In 2022, the seat voted for GOP gubernatorial nominee Brian Dahle over Gov. Gavin Newsom, 51-49 percent, and for most other GOP statewide candidates by margins ranging from 0.05 points to 7 points.

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2024 House Ratings

Toss-Up (4D, 8R)

CA 13 (Duarte, R)	NY 3 (Santos, R)
CA 27 (Garcia, R)	NY 4 (D'Esposito, R)
CO 8 (Caraveo, D)	NY 17 (Lawler, R)
MI 7 (Open; Slotkin, D)	NY 22 (Williams, R)
NJ 7 (Kean Jr., R)	OR 5 (DeRemer, R)
NM 2 (Vasquez, D)	WA 3 (Perez, D)

Tilt Democratic (3D)

CA 47 (Open; Porter, D)
PA 7 (Wild, D)
PA 8 (Cartwright, D)

Tilt Republican (7R)

AZ 1 (Schweikert, R)
AZ 6 (Ciscomani, R)
CA 22 (Valadao, R)
IA 3 (Nunn, R)
MI 10 (James, R)
NY 19 (Molinaro, R)
VA 2 (Kiggans, R)

Lean Democratic (14D)

AK AL (Peltola, D)
CT 5 (Hayes, D)
IL 17 (Sorensen, D)
ME 2 (Golden, D)
MI 3 (Scholten, D)
MN 2 (Craig, DFL)
NV 1 (Titus, D)
NV 3 (Lee, D)
NH 1 (Pappas, D)
NY 18 (Ryan, D)
OR 6 (Salinas, D)
PA 17 (Deluzio, D)
VA 7 (Spanberger, D)
WA 8 (Schrier, D)

Lean Republican (6R)

CA 41 (Calvert, R)
CA 45 (Steel, R)
CO 3 (Boebert, R)
NE 2 (Bacon, R)
NY 1 (LaLota, R)
TX 15 (De La Cruz, R)

	GOP	DEM
Solid	172	168
Likely/Lean/Tilt	25	29
Total	197	197
Toss-up		12
Ohio/North Carolina		29
Needed for majority		218

Likely Democratic (12D)

CA 49 (Levin, D)
FL 9 (Soto, D)
FL 23 (Moskowitz, D)
IN 1 (Mrvan, D)
KS 3 (Davids, D)
MD 6 (Trone, D)
MI 8 (Kildee, D)
NV 4 (Horsford, D)
NH 2 (Kuster, D)
TX 28 (Cuellar, D)
TX 34 (Gonzalez, D)
VA 10 (Wexton, D)

Likely Republican (12R)

CA 3 (Kiley, R)
CA 40 (Kim, R)
FL 13 (Luna, R)
FL 27 (Salazar, R)
IA 1 (Miller-Meeke, R)
IA 2 (Hinson, R)
MT 1 (Zinke, R)
PA 1 (Fitzpatrick, R)
PA 10 (Perry, R)
SC 1 (Mace, R)
WI 1 (Steil, R)
WI 3 (Van Orden, R)

Ohio and North Carolina ratings are being withheld pending new maps.

Trump Casts Legal Shadow Over Downballot Races

By Nathan L. Gonzales

When analyzing the impact of former President Donald Trump’s legal troubles, it’s important to remember that there’s more than a presidential race on the ballot in 2024.

Considering the correlation between the top of the ballot and congressional results, developments in the presidential race have serious ramifications for House and Senate races. Just 23 of 435 House districts voted for one party in 2022 and the other party’s presidential nominee in 2020, and just five of 100 senators represent a state that voted for the other party’s presidential nominee.

If 34 felony counts of falsifying business records or future indictments in the three other active investigations damage Trump’s prospects as the GOP presidential nominee, it will be more difficult for Republicans to win control of the Senate and hold the House majority.

Thus far, Trump’s legal problems have energized his base, and he’s still the frontrunner for the nomination. But there’s no evidence he’s gained ground with independent voters, who have supported Democratic congressional candidates or the Democratic presidential nominee in the last three cycles. Independent voters, which Trump won in 2016, are critical for the entire Republican Party.

But there’s another potential complication for Republicans before the November 2024 balloting.

One or more Trump trials will be a media spectacle. It will be difficult for Republicans to cut through the legal noise to push their own campaign messages, and candidates may be forced to respond to a steady drip of news coming out of the courtroom.

At a minimum, Trump’s legal problems have been a distraction from Biden. At 43 percent approve and 53 percent disapprove, the president’s job rating is the worst it’s been in two months, according to the *FiveThirtyEight* average. Republicans should want an election focused on an unpopular incumbent, not their legally-challenged nominee.

These are uncharted waters for campaigns, which tend to look for a comparable cycle in the past to navigate the future. But this is like nothing anyone has ever seen before.

Even though Trump has survived past scandals that would have derailed anyone else, that doesn’t mean this will end the same way. The New York charges appear to be the least severe for Trump compared to the other pending cases, and voters could react differently if the indictments start stacking up. Even if Trump’s supporters think he is

innocent, they could look for an alternative if it looks like he won’t beat Biden.

But Democrats shouldn’t get too overconfident. Unlike in 2020, Biden is poised to be the unpopular incumbent bearing the weight of voters’ frustrations. There’s a long way to go in these elections. **IE**

2024 Senate Ratings

BATTLEGROUND

Democratic-Held (8)

MI Open (Stabenow, D)
Baldwin (D-Wis.)
Brown (D-Ohio)
Casey (D-Penn.)
Kaine (D-Va.)
Manchin (D-W.V.)
Rosen (D-Nev.)
Tester (D-Mont.)

Republican-Held (0)

Independent-Held (1)

Sinema (I-Ariz.)

Solid Democratic (14)

CA Open (Feinstein, D)
Cantwell (D-Wa.)
Cardin (D-Md.)
Carper (D-Del.)
Gillibrand (D-N.Y.)
Heinrich (D-N.M.)
Hirono (D-Hawaii)
King (I-Maine)
Klobuchar (DFL-Minn.)
Menendez (D-N.J.)
Murphy (D-Ct.)
Sanders (I-Vt.)
Warren (D-Mass.)
Whitehouse (D-R.I.)

Solid Republican (11)

IN Open (Braun, R)
Barrasso (R-Wy.)
Blackburn (R-Tenn.)
Cramer (R-N.D.)
Cruz (R-Texas)
Fischer (R-Neb.)
Hawley (R-Mo.)
Ricketts (R-Neb.)
Romney (R-Utah)
Scott (R-Fla.)
Wicker (R-Miss.)

*Takeovers in Italics, # moved benefiting Democrats, * moved benefiting Republicans*

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Report Shorts

Arizona

1st District. The field of Democrats attempting to unseat GOP Rep. David Schweikert is shaping up. Jevin Hodge, who came less than 1 point away from defeating Schweikert last cycle, announced that he won't run in 2024. Since then, Democratic state Rep. Amish Shah and former state party chairman Andrei Cherny have announced campaigns; orthodontist Andrew Home was already in the race and announced he raised \$150,000 plus a \$650,000 personal contribution through March 31. Schweikert's 2020 opponent, Hiral Tipirneni, is weighing a bid as well. Tilt Republican.

3rd District. The race to replace Democratic Rep. Ruben Gallego in his Phoenix-based district is heating up. Former state Senate Minority Leader Raquel Terán and Phoenix Vice Mayor Yassamin Ansari both announced campaigns. Phoenix City Council members Laura Pastor (the daughter of former Rep. Ed Pastor) and Betty Guardado are all considering bids too, along with state Sen. Catherine Miranda. Solid Democratic.

Massachusetts

Senate. Unsurprisingly, Democratic Sen. Elizabeth Warren officially announced her campaign for re-election. After defeating GOP Sen. Scott Brown in a high-profile race in 2012, Warren hasn't had to worry about re-election. And her unsuccessful campaign for president feels like ancient history. Republicans wish former Gov. Charlie Baker would take on the senator, but he's still getting used to his job as NCAA president and would have likely struggled in a federal race against Warren. Solid Democratic.

Michigan

7th District. Andy Schor, the Democratic mayor of Lansing, declined to run for this open seat after seriously considering a bid. But former Democratic Ingham County Clerk Barb Byrum is still looking at her options and recently had a conversation with outgoing Democratic Rep. Elissa Slotkin about what it's like to serve in Congress. Slotkin is running for Democrat Debbie Stabenow's seat in the Senate. The 7th District race is rated Toss-up.

10th District. Democrat Diane Young, a financial planner from Warren, became the first serious candidate to announce a challenge to GOP Rep. John James. But she probably won't be the last — 2022 nominee and former Macomb County Judge Carl Marlinga is also interested in running in 2024. Tilt Republican.

Montana

Senate. Republicans in the state legislature are trying to pass a bill that would change the Senate election to a jungle primary in order to make sure Democratic Sen. Jon Tester can't win with a plurality, as he's done in two of his three races. The law would only apply to the Senate race and only for this cycle. Battleground.

Nevada

Senate. Democratic Sen. Jacky Rosen officially announced her re-election bid. This should be one of the most competitive Senate races in the country this cycle, particularly because the last two presidential races in Nevada have been decided by less than 2.5 points, but the GOP Senate field has been slow to materialize. Rosen was first elected in 2018 by 5 points over Republican Sen. Dean Heller. Battleground.

New Mexico

2nd District. Former GOP Rep. Yvette Herrell, ousted by Democrat Gabe Vasquez last cycle, is gearing up for a rematch. Herrell is holding a rally on April 10 with House Speaker Kevin McCarthy and is expected to announce a campaign. Toss-up.

New York

3rd District. JP Morgan analyst Kellen Curry became the first Republican to announce a bid against embattled Rep. George Santos. The Air Force Academy graduate did several tours in Afghanistan before moving to New York. Santos' myriad legal issues and estrangement from Long Island Republicans make it unlikely he'll be the nominee next year, but this swing seat could still be highly competitive. Toss-up.

North Carolina

House. In the wake of a controversial party switch that gave Republicans a super majority in the state House, Speaker Tim Moore also said the legislature will revisit redistricting this summer, which could net a handful of U.S. House seats to Republicans.

Ohio

9th District. A few Republicans have announced bids to challenge Democratic Rep. Marcy Kaptur, who represents a Trump district ripe for a GOP pick-up. State Rep. Craig Riedel, the second place finisher in the 2022 primary, is running again. Former Walbridge Mayor Dan Wilczynski also announced a campaign. But this seat could change after another round of redistricting, so it's unclear how vulnerable Kaptur might be.

South Carolina

1st District. The Charleston-based district might become more Democratic and more competitive at some point in the decade as legal challenges to the GOP-drawn map play out. For now, GOP Rep. Nancy Mace starts her re-election as the favorite and Democrats are looking for a challenger. Pediatrician Annie Andrews, who lost to Mace by 14 points in 2022, told *National Journal's Hotline* that she's not running this cycle. Michael Moore, the founder of Charleston's International African American Museum, has announced he's running. Likely Republican.

Virginia

Senate. The former vice president for government affairs at the Club for Growth, Scott Parkinson, is the first serious GOP challenger to Sen. Tim Kaine. According to *The Dispatch*, Parkinson is working with the same consulting team — general consultants at Axiom, media by Poolhouse, and polling by WPAi — that helped Gov. Glenn Youngkin win the Democratic-leaning state in 2021. The race is rated as a Battleground but it's not a top tier offensive target for Republicans.

West Virginia

Governor. State Attorney General Patrick Morrisey announced his campaign for governor, joining state Del. Moore Capito and auto dealer Chris Miller in the GOP race. GOP Gov. Jim Justice is term-limited and actively exploring a run for Senate, potentially against Democrat Joe Manchin, who has not announced whether he's running for re-election. Solid Republican.

Pennsylvania House: Three Key Races in the Keystone State

By Erin Covey

Across the country, Republican candidates who embraced former President Donald Trump’s MAGA agenda and echoed his false stolen election claims lost a tranche of winnable races in battleground states last cycle.

Nowhere was this more obvious than in Pennsylvania, where Republican gubernatorial nominee Doug Mastriano, a state senator who helped bus protesters to the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021 and ran an underwhelming campaign, lost to Democratic nominee Josh Shapiro by 15 points.

Mastriano’s collapse weighed down Republicans in competitive races up and down the ballot — most notably in three U.S. House districts held by Democrats that the GOP aggressively targeted. Reps. Matt Cartwright and Susan Wild defeated well-funded Republican challengers, and Democrat Chris Deluzio won an open swing seat previously held by moderate Democratic Rep. Conor Lamb.

Looking ahead to 2024, Pennsylvania Republicans could find themselves in a similar position as they make another attempt at toppling these three Democrats.

With the presidential primary field in flux, and another Mastriano campaign looming in the background, Republicans weighing congressional bids have no idea what kind of environment they’ll be running in next November — and there’s only so much they can do to separate themselves from the top of the ticket.

In conversations with *Inside Elections*, Republican strategists said that uncertainty about the GOP’s presidential primary and Senate primary is impacting the party’s ability to find strong candidates to run for Congress.

In 2016, Trump became the first Republican to win the commonwealth in nearly three decades. But there’s mounting evidence that the MAGA movement

has lost strength in Pennsylvania. Republicans who spoke with *Inside Elections* were largely in agreement that having a candidate who isn’t Trump at the top of the ticket should benefit Republicans downballot.

And though Democratic Sen. Bob Casey is favored to win re-election, the right Republican nominee could make his race more competitive, which would benefit the rest of the GOP ticket. Some Republicans are hoping that David McCormick, a former hedge fund CEO who lost the Senate nomination to Dr. Mehmet Oz last cycle, will run again. But Mastriano is also weighing a Senate campaign, and Republicans in the commonwealth cautioned that the state senator remains popular with a significant portion of GOP voters.

“If we draw a bad hand there, those seats probably suffer the same fate that they did last cycle,” one Pennsylvania Republican told *Inside Elections*.

The 8th District

More so than most other House Democrats in competitive districts, Cartwright has proven his appeal to voters across the aisle and

established his own political identity separate from the national party.

The congressman is in an exclusive club: he’s one of just five Democrats who hold seats that Trump won in 2020. That year, Cartwright ran 8 points ahead of Biden and defeated his opponent, former Trump administration official Jim Bognet, 52-48 percent.

But Cartwright didn’t have to worry about outperforming the top of the ticket last November. Shapiro carried his swing seat by 9 points, and Cartwright won by slightly a smaller margin compared to 2020, defeating Bognet in a rematch, 51-49 percent. Democrat John Fetterman



Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

Matt Cartwright

ran slightly behind Cartwright and carried the 8th by 1 point in the Senate race. ran slightly behind Cartwright and carried the 8th by 1 point in the Senate race. In this northeastern region of the commonwealth, white working-class voters who had historically supported Democrats abandoned the party in droves to support Trump in 2016. Trump won Luzerne County, which includes Wilkes-Barre and surrounding rural communities, by 19 points in 2016; four years earlier, Barack Obama had won it by 5 points. In Lackawanna County, Obama won by 28 points in 2012, and Hillary Clinton only won it by 3 points four years later. Biden, who hails from Scranton, did slightly better, winning the county by 8 points in 2020.

Despite the district’s rightward shift, Cartwright has held on to enough Trump voters to keep winning re-election, sticking to a populist message and touting the federal funding he’s brought to the district.

The Scranton attorney was first elected to Congress in 2012 after he defeated incumbent Democratic Rep. Tim Holden in the primary (The Blue Dog Democrat’s district had become much bluer after redistricting, and Cartwright was also boosted by outside money targeting House incumbents). After his once-blue district swung toward Trump in 2016, he became a top target for Republicans. He had his closest race to date in 2022, and is expected to face another competitive race in 2024.

But at this point, there aren’t any Republicans in the district who’ve publicly signaled that they’re interested in taking on Cartwright. “It’s been oddly quiet at this point in terms of people talking with other people about potentially running,” one Republican operative based in the commonwealth told *Inside Elections*.

Bognet, a former Trump appointee who worked for the Export-Import Bank, might challenge Cartwright for a third time, according to Republicans who spoke with *Inside Elections*. But after losing two cycles, he isn’t the preferred candidate of some Republicans in D.C., who’d like to find a fresher face. One Republican said there’s “definitely donor fatigue” about Bognet.

Bognet has remained politically active since his loss. He traveled to D.C. in early April to testify in a congressional hearing looking into Luzerne County’s election administration issues last November.

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Courtesy Deluzio Campaign

Chris Deluzio

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One alternative GOP contender floated was state Sen. Rosemary Brown, who served in the state House for a decade before she was elected to the state Senate this past November, and now represents part of the 8th. Brown's state senate district stretches from outside of Scranton to East Stroudsburg.

Seth Kaufer, a gastroenterologist and an RNC delegate in 2016, has also been mentioned. His brother, Aaron Kaufer, represents part of Luzerne County in the state Legislature.

Some Republicans attribute the relative lack of interest in running stems from concerns that Cartwright would be a uniquely difficult Democrat to face. And Republicans and Democrats agree that the congressman has proven to be resilient against GOP attacks.

One Pennsylvania Republican also noted that Casey's Lackawanna County roots will be a boon to Cartwright. "The Casey family name is gold in northeast Pennsylvania," the strategist told *Inside Elections*.

Trump carried the 8th in both 2016 and 2020, so whoever Republicans nominate for president should be the favorite to carry the district in 2024. But that isn't guaranteed, after Mastriano lost the 8th by nearly 10 points.

Initial rating: Tilt Democratic.

7th District

Wild's district is one of the most evenly divided in the country — Biden won it by less than 1 point in 2020.

The former Allentown city solicitor was first elected during the 2018 "Blue Wave," flipping a district centered in the Lehigh Valley that encompasses the Allentown–Bethlehem–Easton metropolitan area. She succeeded Republican Rep. Charlie Dent, a moderate and Trump critic who retired ahead of the 2018 midterms. Lehigh and Northampton counties both favor Democrats, while the more rural Carbon and Monroe Counties are bright red.



Susan Wild

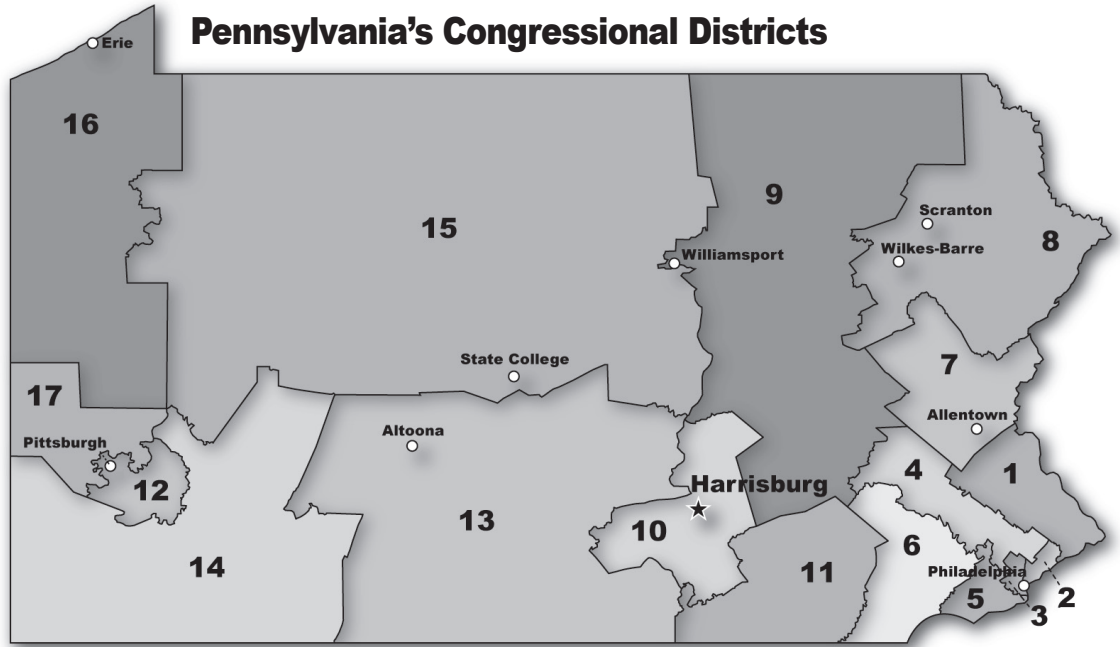
Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call

The congresswoman has survived serious challenges from Republican Lisa Scheller in the past two cycles.

After Wild defeated Scheller in 2020 by 4 points, her district became slightly more Republican with the addition of Carbon County. Republicans believed Wild was one of the most vulnerable House Democrats in the country and spent heavily against her in 2022.

But the congresswoman survived, defeating Scheller 51-49 percent.

Pennsylvania's Congressional Districts



Mastriano was clearly an anchor on Scheller — Shapiro defeated him by 13 points in the 7th. Fetterman also ran slightly ahead of Wild, carrying the 7th by 4 points.

Scheller, the CEO of a global manufacturing company, poured millions of dollars into both campaigns, loaning her campaign \$2.5 million in 2020, and \$3.2 million in 2022. Though she hasn't ruled out a third campaign, Republicans are skeptical that she'll run again after coming short two cycles in a row despite spending millions of dollars.

At this point, the list of other potential Republican candidates in the district is short, and Republicans told *Inside Elections* that the bench in this swing seat isn't particularly deep.

There's chatter that state Rep. Ryan Mackenzie, who represents part of Lehigh County, might run. Mackenzie briefly mounted a bid to succeed Dent in 2018, though he dropped out before the primary. He's served in the state Legislature since 2012, and last May he won a contentious primary battle against another Republican legislator that was spurred by redistricting.

Kevin Delligler, an Air Force veteran and former economic policy adviser to Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Ridge, could run again. He held Scheller to just a 2.6-point win in the 2022 primary despite her steep financial advantage.

In a district so evenly divided, the top of the ticket dynamics could be pivotal in 2024. This is one suburban congressional district where Republicans believe having someone other than Trump at the top of the GOP ticket would help them downballot. And since this district is in the expensive Philadelphia media market, Republicans will need to find a candidate who can raise the money necessary to compete with Wild on the airwaves.

Initial rating: Tilt Democratic.

17th District

The 17th District encompasses part of Allegheny County along with the significantly more conservative Beaver County. Republicans in the suburbs of Pittsburgh have been steadily losing support over the past

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several years even as the surrounding areas have become increasingly more conservative.

When Lamb decided to leave this swing district to run for Senate in 2022, Republicans believed that the newly-open seat would be ripe for a flip. Lamb, then an assistant U.S. attorney with a moderate image, had flipped an older version of the district in a special election in 2018, and faced a competitive challenge from Republican Sean Parnell in 2020.

Though the new version of the seat was a few points more Democratic (Biden would have won it by 6 points in 2020), polls showed the battle for the open seat would be close. But Democrat Chris Deluzio — who shared a number



Rob Mercuri

PA House Republican Caucus

of similarities with Lamb as an Iraq War veteran and attorney with a young family — defeated Republican Jeremy Shaffer by 7 points, a larger margin than both parties had anticipated.

The impact of the top of the ticket was particularly dramatic in the 17th. Shapiro carried the district by 26 points, running nearly 20 points ahead of Deluzio, and Fetterman, whose base of support is in western Pennsylvania, carried the district by 14 points.

Republican sources say Shaffer has shown some interest in running again, and he met with the NRCC earlier this year.

The former Ross Township commissioner ran as a Chamber of Commerce Republican and stayed away from the polarizing issues that hurt Republicans running in swing seats. In the final weeks of the campaign, he even cut an ad featuring his wife, a physician, asserting that Shaffer would “stand up for women’s health care.” (Shaffer, however, is pro-life and was supported by national pro-life groups.)

Shaffer, a tech entrepreneur who’s now an executive at a software company, is personally wealthy and loaned his campaign \$1 million last cycle. His ability to spend his own money on another race makes him an attractive candidate to the party.

But he’s not the only Republican taking a look at this seat. Multiple strategists said that Republican state Rep. Rob Mercuri is weighing a campaign. Mercuri, an Iraq War veteran and West Point graduate, represents a portion of Allegheny County in the state House, and has experience running in competitive districts.

A few Republicans who vied for the GOP nomination in 2022 also might run again: Jason Killmeyer, a national security analyst who came in a distant second to Shaffer, and Tricia Staible, the owner of an industrial fan manufacturer who dropped out before the primary.

Other potential candidates include Sam DeMarco, an Allegheny County councilman and the chair of the county GOP (he briefly considered running for the 17th last year), and former state House Speaker Mike Turzai.

The top of the ticket could make or break Republicans’ ability to compete in the 17th. The nearly 20-point gap between Mastriano and Shaffer showed just how toxic the gubernatorial candidate was in the Pittsburgh suburbs, and Republicans believe they’ll probably fare better here in 2024 — though that’s not a guarantee, especially if Mastriano is

the Senate nominee.

McCormick has roots in the Pittsburgh area, which could help him in this district if he becomes the nominee, and would likely benefit whoever Republicans nominate in the 17th.

No matter who Republicans nominate, Biden is favored to carry this district again. Republican sources are divided on whether a nominee like DeSantis would fare better than Trump. Someone who’s not Trump might do better in Allegheny County, but Trump remains very popular in Beaver County. DeSantis is also attempting to burnish his credentials in this part of the state — the Florida governor’s father is from Beaver County, and he’s claimed that he was “culturally” raised in the Midwest.

Democrats running in the Pittsburgh region also benefit from a robust local party — in 2022, Allegheny County cast more votes than Philadelphia, despite having roughly 100,000 fewer registered voters. As Pennsylvania-based Democratic strategist Zach Kennedy has noted, an upcoming Democratic primary for the Allegheny County executive role will provide another signal of the strength of Democratic electorate in this region ahead of 2024.

While Deluzio is less established than Cartwright and Wild, which could make him more vulnerable to a Republican challenge, his district’s Democratic bent gives him a clear advantage against whoever Republicans’ nominate in 2024.

Initial rating: Lean Democratic.

Potential Pick-Up Opportunities for Democrats

The races in Pennsylvania’s 7th, 8th, and 17th districts will be prioritized by both parties next November. But two more Republican-held districts, the 1st and the 10th, are on the edge of the House battlefield — each for very different reasons.

Republican Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick is one of 18 Republicans who hold districts Biden won in 2020. And within that cohort, he might be in the best position to win re-election.



Brian Fitzpatrick

Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call

Biden’s 5-point victory shows that this suburban Philadelphia district could be competitive on paper. He won re-election in 2022 by 12 points against Ashley Ehasz, who didn’t receive much outside support from the Democratic Party.

The cycle before, he defeated Christina Finello by 13 points in a race that Democrats expected to be more competitive.

Democrats who spoke with *Inside Elections* believe Fitzpatrick could be vulnerable if they find the right candidate. But Democrats have been saying this for years, and at this point in the cycle, it’s not clear who that would be. Ehasz, the 2022 nominee, just announced a 2024 campaign.

The 10th District is significantly more conservative-leaning than the 1st; Trump won it by 4 points in 2020. But Republican Rep. Scott Perry’s alliance with Trump, leadership of the House Freedom Caucus, and involvement with the former president’s attempt to overturn the 2020 election results could put him at risk in 2024. National Democrats didn’t

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target this district in 2022, and Perry's Democratic opponent, Harrisburg City Council member Shamaine Daniels, lost by 8 points. But Mastriano lost the district by 12 points — which Democrats think shows a path to defeating him.

Inside Elections has rated both districts as Likely Republican, for now. Depending on who Democrats nominate, these races have the potential to become more competitive, or fall off the House battlefield entirely.

The Bottom Line

In a battleground state like Pennsylvania, the presidential and Senate races will consume most of the political oxygen in the commonwealth this election cycle. The television airwaves will be crowded with ads from both races, making it difficult for any House candidate to break through and establish their own identity. In those circumstances, the top of the ticket matters even more.

Because Democrats are defending the three most competitive House districts, they'll have a natural advantage — particularly with someone

like Cartwright.

"The deeper an incumbent is rooted in the district the more resilient they are against top of the ticket forces," one national Democratic strategist told *Inside Elections*.



Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call

Scott Perry

Democrats should also have the incumbency advantage in the presidential and Senate races; Biden and Casey are both expected to run for re-election, though neither Democrat has

announced their campaigns.

The onus is on Republicans to nominate candidates in 2024 that won't repeat the party's failures in 2022. **IE**

Florida Senate: A Cloudy Forecast for Democrats

By Erin Covey

Rick Scott has never won an election by more than 1.2 points, but Florida's rapid shift rightward has left Democrats in a dismal position to challenge the Republican senator as he prepares for his 2024 re-election campaign.

The GOP has been gaining ground in the Sunshine State for the past decade, an effort that culminated on election night last November when Gov. Ron DeSantis defeated former Gov. Charlie Crist by nearly 20 points. And Democrats haven't won a Senate race in Florida since Democratic Sen. Bill Nelson was elected to his third term in 2012 — also the last year a Democratic presidential candidate won the state.

Florida Democrats insist that with the right candidate, the Senate race could become more competitive than it looks right now, coming off such a brutal election cycle for the party.

But they're also well aware that defeating Scott, a polarizing figure who's made enemies in both parties, would take a level of national investment that Florida isn't likely to receive in 2024.

Though Scott might be the GOP's most vulnerable senator on the ballot next year (Ted Cruz is also in the running), a host of Democratic senators across other purple and red states are facing competitive elections. As the national party prioritizes defending its incumbents, Florida's Democratic nominee might be on their own.

The Potential Democratic Field

One of the most prominent Democrats actively considering a campaign is former Rep. Debbie Mucarsel-Powell, who represented a

congressional district largely based in Miami-Dade County before she lost her re-election bid to Republican Carlos Giménez.

Republican gains in South Florida over the past several years have been particularly dramatic — DeSantis won Miami-Dade County by 11 points last November after Joe Biden won it by 7 points in 2020 and Hillary Clinton won it by 29 points in 2016. A candidate from this region of the state like the former congresswoman could have the ability to win back Latino voters in South Florida who've abandoned the Democratic Party. Mucarsel-Powell ran 2 points ahead of Biden in 2020.

Mucarsel-Powell, the first South American-born immigrant elected to Congress, immigrated from Ecuador with her family as a 14-year-old. She worked at Florida International University as an administrator for over a decade and volunteered with John Kerry and Barack Obama's presidential campaigns before making her own foray into politics in 2016, when she unsuccessfully challenged a Republican state senator.

The following year, Mucarsel-Powell announced her challenge to moderate Republican Rep. Carlos Curbelo. She defeated Curbelo by less than 2 points after a hotly-contested race. But South Florida swung toward Republicans in 2020, and the congresswoman lost to Giménez, then the mayor of Miami-Dade County, after serving for just one term.

Mucarsel-Powell, 52, now works as a senior adviser for Giffords, the gun violence prevention organization.

Another former congresswoman, Stephanie Murphy, could run as well. The 44-year-old had seriously considered running against GOP Sen. Marco Rubio last cycle, but decided not to run after her colleague Rep. Val Demings launched a campaign.

Murphy, 44, was first elected to Congress in 2016, flipping a district based in the Orlando suburbs that had been held by Republican Rep. John Mica for 12 terms.

After serving in Congress for six years and developing a reputation as a centrist lawmaker unafraid of criticizing her party, Murphy decided to retire in 2022 to spend more time with her family (her purple seat had

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Rick Scott

Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

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also become Republican after redistricting).

Since leaving Congress, Murphy has stayed out of the spotlight. But the Vietnamese immigrant hasn't ruled out a return to Washington.

"Florida is not dark red," she told the *Orlando Sentinel* last December. "It can be a purple and blue state with the right candidates and with the right field strategy."

No one in Florida's current congressional delegation appears interested in attempting to make the jump to the Senate. All but two Florida Democrats—Reps. Darren Soto and Jared Moskowitz—represent comfortably Democratic districts, and aren't likely to give up their safe seats. Two members, Reps. Frederica Wilson and Lois Frankel, have explicitly ruled out bids.

A number of Democrats in local and state-level offices have been floated as potential candidates, including state Sen. Shevrin Jones, state Rep. Anna Eskamani, former Hillsborough County State Attorney Andrew Warren, and Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer.

Jones, the first openly-gay person elected to Florida's state legislature, is seen as a rising star in the state's Democratic Party. The former public school teacher has been a vocal critic of DeSantis' policies restricting the way racial and LGBTQ issues are taught in the state's schools. Jones, 39, has served in the state Legislature since 2013 and represents part of Miami-Dade County.



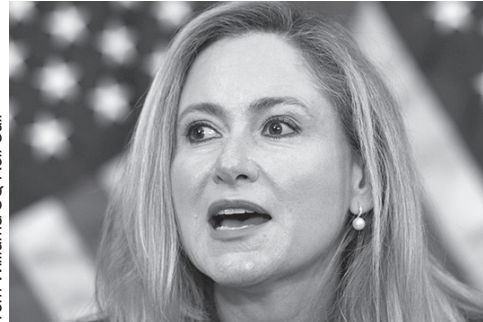
Stephanie Murphy

Eskamani, a 32-year-old progressive who represents Orlando in the state House, seems less likely to run, but hasn't technically ruled out a bid. "A lot of everyday folks want me to run but right now I'm running for re-election in the House," she told the *Florida Phoenix* in February. She also considered running for governor last cycle but decided to run for re-election instead.

Warren, the former state attorney, unseated a Republican incumbent in Hillsborough County in 2016 and won re-election in 2020. The state attorney was suspended by DeSantis last summer for refusing to prosecute people who broke Florida's abortion laws, which catapulted Warren into the national spotlight.

Dyer, the mayor of Orlando, has had a much longer political career than the other Democrats floated. His 20-year tenure makes him the city's longest-serving mayor, and he previously served in the Florida state Senate for a decade.

And former Rep. Gwen Graham, a frontrunner for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination in 2018 who narrowly lost to Andrew Gillum, has also been mentioned as a potentially formidable candidate, though Democratic strategists who spoke with *Inside Elections* had not heard that she was actively considering a campaign. Graham is currently an



Debbie Mucarsel-Powell

assistant secretary in the Department of Education.

Democrats can't afford a contentious primary in 2024 — they need to devote their resources to defeating Scott. A candidate like Murphy or Mucarsel-Powell would probably

have a relatively easy path to the nomination, in part because so few Democrats are interested in the challenge. "I think Florida Democrats are really uninterested in a primary," one Democratic strategist told *Inside Elections*.

Republican Headwinds

The 2022 midterms cemented Florida's political identity as a red state, though the shift had become apparent over the last few election cycles.

DeSantis defeated Crist by 19 points, and Rubio defeated Demings by 16 points, as Republicans further down the ballot running for statewide offices all won by double digits. Meanwhile, the party's new gerrymandered congressional map enabled them to pick up four seats in the U.S. House.

Republicans' are less likely to win the state by the massive margins they won by this past midterm cycle — Democratic turnout lagged at 52 percent as Republican turnout reached 67 percent, the largest difference in turnout in the state's recent history.

But it's now clear that the GOP has a marked advantage in the former swing state. Registered Republicans currently outnumber registered Democrats by 437,000; the last time Scott was on the ballot in 2018, Democrats had a 264,000 voter registration advantage. And *Inside Election's* Baseline metric gives Republicans a 8.8 point advantage after the 2022 elections. In comparison, the party had a 4.5 point advantage in 2018.

Reversing the political trends in Florida will take more than a compelling Senate candidate.

The eventual Democratic Senate nominee will have to convince Democratic donors and the national party that Florida can still be competitive — as Florida Democrats counter that the state won't be competitive unless the national party invests.

The presidential match-up will inevitably impact this race too. If the Republican nominee implodes, Democrats' path to knocking off Scott becomes easier.

And the state Democratic party, which has been saddled with debt and organizational issues for the past few years, needs to be rebuilt under the new leadership of former Agricultural Commissioner Nikki Fried.

Even if Florida Democrats get their dream candidate, defeating Scott will be a difficult task.

CALENDAR

May 16	Kentucky Governor Primary
Aug. 8	Mississippi Governor Primary
Aug. 10	Louisiana Governor Filing Deadline
Aug. 29	Mississippi Governor Primary Runoff (if necessary)
Oct. 14	Louisiana Governor Primary
Nov. 18	Louisiana Governor Runoff (if necessary)



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Sen. Alex Padilla (51-48 percent) and Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara (50-49 percent) were the only two Democrats to carry the seat.

The GOP Incumbent

Garcia, 46, was first elected to Congress in a 2020 special election to replace Democrat Katie Hill, who resigned in the wake of a scandal that included an inappropriate relationship with a campaign staffer and the leak of explicit pictures.

The Los Angeles-born Garcia, whose parents immigrated from Mexico, graduated from the Naval Academy in 1998 and served several combat tours in Iraq as a fighter pilot. He also received a master's degree from Georgetown in national security policy studies. From 2009 to 2018 he worked for defense contractor Raytheon.

In 2019, Garcia announced his intention to run for Congress in the then-25th District, an ancestrally GOP seat that Democrats had flipped in the 2018 midterm elections. When Hill resigned, he also entered the special election race for the remainder of her term.

Garcia defeated Democratic state Assemblywoman Christy Smith, 55-45 percent, in the May special election. He faced Smith again in November, and narrowly eked out a 333-vote win, a margin of 0.01 percent. Garcia was one of nine Republicans elected to a district Biden won in 2020.

In 2022, Garcia's district was redrawn to be even more Democratic. While his seat was initially a top target for Democrats, national Democratic groups redirected their resources elsewhere after voters nominated Smith as the Democratic standard-bearer for a third time and polling showed the race as less competitive than other California contests. Garcia defeated Smith once again, 53-47 percent.

In Congress, Garcia serves on the Appropriations, Science, Space and Technology, and Intelligence committees.

Garcia's campaign team includes general consultant Joe Pileggi (former political director at the NRCC), media consultant Jon Reedy of SRCP Media, and pollster Chip Englander.

The Democratic Challengers

George Whitesides, a space-industry businessman with deep ties to the Democratic Party, is the only announced Democratic candidate so far, but he won't have the primary to himself. Franky Carrillo, a criminal justice advocate and local party official, is also preparing to run.

Whitesides, 49, was recently the chief executive officer of Virgin Galactic, the commercial spaceflight company founded by Richard Branson. The Massachusetts-

born Princeton (1996) and Cambridge (master's in 2000) graduate was the executive director of the National Space Society nonprofit before becoming chief of staff at NASA at the beginning of the Obama administration.

In 2010, he took over Virgin Galactic, where he was CEO until 2020. Since then, Whitesides has served as the company's "chief space officer."



George Whitesides

Courtesy Whitesides Campaign

He's also focused on wildfire prevention, co-founding a wildfire policy organization and an investment firm that develops wildfire prevention technology.

Whitesides has been involved in Democratic politics for over a decade, and was approached about running for Congress in this district in previous cycles. He is personally wealthy — public documents show he took home more than \$8 million as CEO in 2019 — and has already contributed \$500,000 to his own campaign. Additionally, he announced raising another \$500,000 through March 31.

Whitesides' campaign team includes media consultant J.J. Balaban of Technicolor Political, pollster Molly Murphy of Impact Research, direct mail consultant Mike Muir of AMHC, and Uplift for digital media.

Carrillo, 48, is expected to officially launch his campaign later this month. He filed with the Federal Elections Commission on March 7 but subsequently parted ways with his campaign consultants, delaying his actual announcement.

Carrillo is currently a member of the LA Democratic Party central committee and the LA County Parole Oversight Commission.

As a teenager in Los Angeles, he was convicted of murder in 1992 and sentenced to 30 years in prison. In 2011, lawyers from the Innocence Project helped overturn his conviction and secured his release (two other men later confessed to the crime). Carrillo sued the LA County Sheriff's office, alleging civil rights violations and other misconduct in the course of his arrest and investigation. In 2016, LA County settled the case for \$10.1 million. Carrillo also received \$683,000 in compensation from the state of California in 2014, and was featured on Netflix's "The Innocence Files" in 2020.

Carrillo received an undergraduate degree from Loyola Marymount University in 2016. He briefly ran for an Echo Park state assembly seat in 2017 when incumbent Jimmy Gomez was elected to Congress, but dropped out before the primary.

The Primary

California utilizes a top-two primary system, in which all candidates run in the same primary election, and two candidates who receive the most votes advance to the general election, regardless of party.

In a departure from earlier years, when it was in early June, the congressional primary will take place on Super Tuesday, March 5, 2024. That means the airwaves could be crowded by not just a competitive Senate race but a competitive GOP presidential primary.

While several California Republicans faced conservative primary challenges last cycle, there's little indication that Garcia will have serious issues on his right flank next year. Accordingly, he will likely place first in the primary, and the real fight will be between Whitesides and Carrillo for second place.

There is also the possibility that another candidate emerges on the Democratic side (potentially a self-funder) prior to the December filing deadline.

Whitesides begins with a significant financial advantage, between his first quarter fundraising and personal resources. And he's already locking up support from the local political establishment, including from Smith, who still has a vocal contingent of backers despite her three losses, as well as from current state Assembly members Pilar Schiavo, who represents Santa Clarita, and Juan Carrillo, who represents Palmdale.

Carrillo's allies are hoping that his compelling story and connections to the criminal justice advocacy world will allow him to tap into a nationwide

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donor network. But he has his work cut out for him to catch up to Whitesides, especially if Whitesides feels it's necessary to advertise in the uber-expensive Los Angeles media market in the run-up to the primary.

Questions of electability are sure to play a major role in the primary as well, especially with control of the House on the line and three recent wins by Garcia fresh in the minds of Democratic voters. For Whitesides, his ability to self-fund against a strong fundraiser, and his track record as a job creator, will be major selling points.

For Carrillo, who is Hispanic, his ability to appeal to Hispanic voters will be a focus, especially given Democrats' widely publicized difficulties appealing to Hispanic voters over the last two election cycles. Another asset could be his unorthodox background and unique perspective as a returning citizen, which has no precedent in this or previous congresses.

How It Plays Out

Democrats almost uniformly believe that Smith, their three-time standard-bearer, is the primary reason Garcia keeps winning despite the partisan lean of the district. Frustration with the former assemblywoman runs deep, and has its roots in her underwhelming performance in the May 2020 special election; she had costly gaffes and was unable to respond effectively to Garcia's attack on her voting record. National Democrats overhauled her campaign team for the regular election and backed her financially in 2020, but not in 2022.

For Democrats, "not running Christy Smith" is the first step to beating Garcia, says one strategist.

In particular, Democrats like that Whitesides does not have a voting record in Congress or Sacramento, after Smith was hammered for votes on taxes and teacher pay. Democratic strategists expect Whitesides to run as a job creator, and point to his fire prevention efforts as a local issue on which he has credibility.

Carrillo would present a different general election playbook, one more primarily focused on economic populism and criminal justice issues to win over blue collar voters.

Though Carrillo's allies believe he is uniquely suited to speak to Hispanic voters in the Antelope Valley, either Democratic nominee will have to pay special attention to the district's Hispanic population. Notably, while Smith underperformed Biden's vote share everywhere in the district in 2022, she lost significantly more ground in heavily Hispanic Palmdale (12 percent less vote share than Biden) and Lancaster (11 percent less) than she did in whiter Santa Clarita (6.6 percent less).

While it's still early in the cycle, abortion looks to remain a salient issue for voters, especially as other states continue to tighten their own laws, and federal lawsuits challenging medical abortions and even birth control work their way through the courts. And Democrats are heartened by early signals that Biden will center his 2024 message on Social Security and Medicare.

National Democrats' confidence in defeating Garcia is underscored by the combination of the district's partisan lean and what they see as Garcia's unwillingness to deviate from the party line — in contrast to some of his fellow Biden-district colleagues such as 22nd District Rep. David Valadao, who voted to impeach Trump, 39th Rep. Young Kim, or several members of the New York delegation who have broken party ranks.

In particular, Garcia's anti-abortion stance (including support for a federal personhood bill), and his vote against certifying the 2020 presidential election rankle Democrats.

Republicans point to persistently high gas prices and the rising cost of living in Los Angeles as powerful issues in Garcia's arsenal, and believe

that even now that he is in the majority party, he will still be able to run against not just Biden but Democrats in Sacramento. Garcia's allies also point to his military spouse licensing relief bill and his efforts to reinstate the SALT tax deduction as examples of locally-focused issues.

Garcia, for his part, leans heavily into his biography. Almost all of his campaign materials brand him as "fighter pilot Mike Garcia," and he often references his parents' immigrant story. (Whitesides' allies see the Democrat's background in the aerospace industry as a counterweight to Garcia.)

Both Whitesides and Carrillo will be picked over by GOP opposition researchers as well. Whitesides may face scrutiny over candidates and groups he's donated to in the past (a tactic the GOP has used to varying degrees of success in recent cycles), while Carrillo could be targeted for his connections to criminal justice advocates, given the GOP's intense focus on crime.

And both Democrats will have to contend with attacks over their residency. While both of them have houses in the district (Whitesides in Santa Clarita, Carrillo in the Antelope Valley's Lake Hughes), both have primary residences elsewhere in Los Angeles County (Whitesides in La Cañada Flintridge, Carrillo in Echo Park). One GOP source cited how Republicans tagged 2016 Democratic nominee Bryan Caforio as "Beverly Hills Bryan" as a preview of how Garcia's allies might approach either Whitesides or Carrillo.

Outside Help

In 2022, national Democratic groups such as the DCCC and House Majority PAC declined to air TV ads in the district or otherwise spend significantly for Smith. Democrats were defending their majority and focused on protecting their incumbents. While the party had a disappointing cycle in California, their close losses all came in challenger or open seat races, not in incumbent protection.

But with Democrats now in the minority for the first time in four years, they will have to flip GOP-held seats, and their top targets are the 18 districts carried by Biden in the 2020 election. The 27th is third on that list, after New York's 4th (Biden +15) represented by Anthony D'Esposito and California's 22nd (Biden +13) represented by Valadao.

Though it is still early, national Democrats seem more likely to invest in this race this cycle, with the DCCC including the district on its initial target list of 31 seats. One Democratic strategist involved in the race summed up the appeal of investing as, "How are we getting to the majority if we're not winning this seat?"

Whitesides' allies in particular believe that his early fundraising success will also help draw in outside money. Outside groups tend to "help candidates that can help themselves," said another Democratic source.

The Bottom Line

This election will test whether Garcia's victories are a testament to his strength as a candidate or the result of getting to run against a flawed Democrat in three consecutive elections.

Democrats could win this seat and still fall short of a majority, especially because the party is defending its own seats in Trump-won territory. But as one of the most Biden-friendly districts held by a Republican, it is exactly the type of race Democrats need to win if they want a chance of winning back the majority. With the party needing a net gain of five seats, and potentially facing redistricting roadblocks in other states, beating Garcia may be necessary, but not sufficient, to reclaim control of the House.