

Inside Elections

with

Nathan L. Gonzales

Nonpartisan Analysis

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Rhode Island At-Large: The Election Democrats Don't Want to Happen

By Jacob Rubashkin

The last time Rhode Island had just one seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, there were 15 states in the Union, George Washington was president, and the hottest track in America was Handel's "Messiah." The year was 1792.

For the next 230 years, the Ocean State had two (and briefly in the 1910s and 20s, three) seats in the House.

But according to estimates from the political analysis firm Election Data Services, Rhode Island is one of 10 states that is likely to lose a congressional seat in the reapportionment process following the 2020 decennial census. That means that for the first time since the 1790s, the state will be represented in the House by just one person.

In a normal year, it would already be clear if Rhode Island is indeed losing a seat. The Census Bureau typically delivers reapportionment data by December 31 of the year of the census. But the pandemic and litigation delayed the process; now the Census Bureau says they hope to deliver the topline reapportionment data by April 30.

If Rhode Island does lose a seat, the state's two incumbent congressmen, Jim Langevin and David Cicilline, would find themselves on track for a Democratic primary battle in 2022.

Similar situations will play out across the country, as states redraw congressional lines and members find themselves in unfamiliar or hostile districts. But Rhode Island gets a head start on the awkwardness. Because the only question is whether the state will have one or two congressional seats, not what the lines will look like, there will be an answer by the beginning of May.

The Lay of the Land

Nestled between Connecticut and Massachusetts, Rhode Island is the smallest state by land area at just 1,214 square miles — it takes just an hour to traverse by car. It also ranks 45th in population with 1,059,361 residents, but is the second-most densely populated state after New Jersey, according to American Community Survey (ACS) data.

The state is 71 percent White, 16 percent Hispanic, and 6 percent Black. Like its Northeast neighbors, Rhode Island has significant White ethnic populations; 17 percent of the state lists its ancestry as Italian (compared to 5 percent nationally), 17 percent Irish (9 percent nationally), and 8 percent Portuguese (0.4 percent nationally). According to the Pew Research Center, the state is home to the nation's highest concentration of

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2022 Senate Ratings

BATTLEGROUND

Democratic-Held (4)

Cortez Masto (D-Nev.)
Hassan (D-N.H.)
Kelly (D-Ariz.)
Warnock (D-Ga.)

Republican-Held (4)

NC Open (Burr, R)
PA Open (Toomey, R)
Johnson (R-Wisc.)
Rubio (R-Fl.)

Solid Democratic (10)

Bennet (D-Colo.)
Blumenthal (D-Conn.)
Duckworth (D-Ill.)
Padilla (D-Calif.)
Leahy (D-Vt.)
Murray (D-Wash.)
Schatz (D-Hawaii)
Schumer (D-N.Y.)
Van Hollen (D-Md.)
Wyden (D-Ore.)

Solid Republican (16)

AL Open (Shelby, R)
OH Open (Portman, R)
Blunt (R-Mo.)
Boozman (R-Ark.)
Crapo (R-Idaho)
Grassley (R-Iowa)
Hoeven (R-N.D.)
Kennedy (R-La.)
Lankford (R-Okla.)
Lee (R-Utah)
Moran (R-Kan.)
Murkowski (R-Alaska)
Paul (R-Ky.)
Scott (R-S.C.)
Thune (R-S.D.)
Young (R-Ind.)

CALENDAR

March 20	Louisiana's 2nd & 5th Districts Special Elections
April 24	Louisiana Special Election runoffs (if necessary)
May 1	Texas' 6th Special Election
May 8	Virginia Republican Gubernatorial Convention
May 24	Texas' 6th Special Election runoff (if necessary)
June 8	New Jersey Gubernatorial Primary

Louisiana 5 Special: Sombre Scene

By Jacob Rubashkin

The death of Congressman-elect Luke Letlow on Dec. 29 from covid-19 complications created a vacancy in Louisiana's 5th District that will be filled via a March 20 special election.

In Louisiana, candidates from all parties appear on the same initial ballot. If no candidate receives a majority of votes cast, then the two candidates receiving the most votes, regardless of party, advance to a runoff. This was the case in the 5th District last year, when Letlow placed first in a field of nine candidates, with 33 percent. He and second-place finisher Lance Harris (also a Republican), progressed to a Dec. 5 runoff election, which Letlow won.

The 5th District special election will occur concurrently with the special election for Louisiana's 2nd District, the New Orleans-based seat vacated by senior Biden White House adviser Cedric Richmond. In both races, an April 24 runoff will happen if necessary.

The Lay of the Land

The 5th District spans much of northeastern and central Louisiana as well as the "Florida Parishes" that line the southern border of Mississippi. CityLab's Congressional Density Index classifies the seat as "Pure Rural."

Democrats retain a vestigial voter registration of roughly 5 points, 40-35 percent, but the district is Solid Republican in its voting pattern; it voted for Donald Trump by 30 points, 64-34 percent, in 2020, and 63-34 percent in 2016.

The district is 59 percent White and 35 percent Black, though among registered voters the balance is 64 percent White and 33 percent Black.

In 2020, in the first round of voting, the four Democratic candidates combined for 33 percent, while the five Republican candidates combined for 67 percent.

Turnout for the first round of voting, on Nov. 3, 2020, was 309,556 — 69 percent of registered voters. But participation plummeted to 79,306 — 17 percent — in the Dec. 5 runoff.

The Republican Candidates

Nine Republicans filed to run in the special election.

Julia Letlow, Luke's widow, is a 39-year-old mother of two. She is an external affairs and community outreach administrator at the University of Louisiana Monroe, where she graduated from in 2002 and was a semifinalist for the presidency last year. Letlow also has a Ph.D. in communication from the University of South Florida.

Her bid was quickly backed by much of the GOP establishment, including House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy and House Minority Whip Steve Scalise, who represents Louisiana's 1st District. She is also backed by her late husband's boss, former GOP Rep. Ralph Abraham, who held the seat until January of this year. On Jan. 30, she received the unanimous endorsement from the Louisiana Republican State Central Committee.

Letlow says she is running to carry on Luke Letlow's service to the district; last year Luke Letlow had positioned himself as a continuation

of Rep. Abraham's service. On the issues, Julia Letlow falls well within the mainstream of today's GOP; her campaign's introduction video states that "our conservative Christian values are being challenged in our country," and



Julia Letlow

highlights her pro-life and pro-Second Amendment stances.

But Letlow also cites trailblazing Louisiana Democratic Rep. Lindy Boggs as her role model — Boggs succeeded her late husband, Majority Leader Hale Boggs, in Congress, and was the first woman to represent Louisiana on Capitol Hill — and spoke movingly of her conversation with then-President-elect Joe Biden after the death of her husband.

Julia Letlow is working with much of the same campaign team as Luke Letlow did last year, including manager Andrew Bautsch, general consultant Courtney Alexander of the Strategy Group Company, and pollster John Couvillon of JMC Analytics and Polling.

Allen Guillory, 50, is also running. The former St. Landry Parish police juror/2019 state House nominee ran for the seat last fall, placing in sixth with 7 percent. Guillory recently drew widespread condemnation for saying Julia Letlow shouldn't run for the seat because then her children would "lose two parents."

Other Republican candidates include Sancha Smith, the former director of the Louisiana chapter of Concerned Women for America, a women's group focused on coupling Biblical values with public policy;

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retired Air Force Col. Chad Conerly, a Kentwood-area finance professional; retired Navy Captain Robert Landsden, a Ponchatoula-area maritime lawyer; Jaycee Magnuson of Opelousas; Horace Melton III of Dry Pong; Richard Pannell of Ruston; and Errol Victor, Sr., a Harrisonburg pastor whose decade-old murder conviction was overturned by the Supreme Court in 2019 but is still in jail pending a new trial.

The Democrat

The only Democrat to file was Sandra “Candy” Christophe, a social worker who also ran for the seat last fall. Christophe, who graduated from Louisiana College (B.A., 1990) and Grambling State (MSW, 1993), received just 16 percent in 2020. But with the crowded field, she came up just 429 votes short of making the runoff.

Christophe’s campaign committee had a negative cash balance on Dec. 31, according to the latest FEC filings.

How it Plays Out

The primary will take place on March 20, with an early voting period from March 6-13. Louisiana law does not require an excuse to vote early, but it does require an excuse to vote by mail. There are also a smattering of municipal elections taking place across the district, for school boards, appeals courts, and other offices.

Julia Letlow is the presumed frontrunner, and her entry kept any Republicans who could have mounted a substantive run on the sidelines, including former Rep. Abraham, 2020 runner-up Lance Harris, and any sitting state or local officeholders.

She has a name recognition advantage stemming from her husband’s congressional run (which continued past Nov. 3 into December) and the subsequent news coverage surrounding his death. Letlow’s campaign team says that her active role during his campaign allowed her to introduce herself to voters in all 24 of the district’s parishes.

As the only candidate with institutional backing, including from House leadership and organizations such as Rep. Elise Stefanik’s E-PAC, Letlow also has access to a fundraising network that outpaces any of her opponents. The only FEC filing deadline is on March 8, which will detail fundraising and spending activity through February 28.

The district is divided between five media markets, according to *Daily Kos Elections*: 52 percent of district residents live in the Monroe market, 26 percent in Alexandria, 13 percent in New Orleans, and the balance in Lafayette and Baton Rouge.

While none of those markets except for New Orleans are particularly expensive, the need to advertise in multiple markets could be financially prohibitive for candidates who begin the race unknown. TV takes on additional importance in the 5th District, where 22 percent of the population has no internet access (more than double the national rate), and at a time when Facebook is still blocking all political advertising.

The main question on March 20 will be whether Letlow can avoid a runoff by securing a majority of the vote. With eight other Republicans on the ballot, that may prove difficult for a non-incumbent and a first-time candidate, despite all of Letlow’s advantages.



The outcome may depend on whether enough Democrats turn out to support Christophe, the only Democrat on the ballot. If Christophe can consolidate the 30-35 percent of the vote that has gone to Democrats in recent years, that would leave 65-70 percent up for grabs. Letlow would have to dominate among those voters.

For comparison, in 2020, Luke Letlow and Lance Harris, the top two Republican contenders and the two largest spenders by far, combined for just under half the total vote — 49.67 percent — while 18 percent scattered among three lesser-known, underfunded GOP candidates.

Turnout is expected to be low, likely around 20 percent. The last time the 5th District held a special election primary, in October 2013, turnout was 21.5 percent — last December, when Luke Letlow and Harris faced off, turnout was 17 percent, and heavily racially polarized, with 21 percent of white voters participating and just 11 percent of Black voters participating in the runoff when two Republicans faced off.

Should Julia Letlow and Christophe advance to a runoff, Letlow would be the prohibitive favorite in this deep red district.

The Bottom Line

More likely than not, Julia Letlow will be heading to Congress to take the seat her husband was elected to last fall. While low-turnout special elections can be prone to surprises, no other Republican has emerged as a serious contender. With ballots already in the mail, and early voting beginning March 6, there is not much time for one to do so.

Should Letlow win, either on March 20 or in an April 24 runoff, she will bring the number of Republican women in the House to its highest-ever at 31, and the total number of women in the House to a record 120 members.



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Catholics, at 42 percent.

The state is solidly Democratic at the federal level — over the past 24 presidential elections it has voted for a Republican candidate just four times: in the landslide victories of 1952, 1956, 1972, and most recently in 1984, when it narrowly backed President Ronald Reagan over Walter Mondale. In 2020, Joe Biden defeated Donald Trump by 21 points, 59-38 percent.

Since 2013, Democrats have held all of the statewide offices. The last Republican to win statewide was Gov. Don Carcieri, who won re-election in 2006 by a narrow 51-49 percent margin. Former Republican Lincoln Chafee won the 2010 gubernatorial race as an independent and later became a Democrat.

Most recently, Democratic Sen. Jack Reed won re-election 67-33 percent in 2020 over GOP nominee Allen Waters, Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse won re-election 61-38 percent in 2018 over GOP nominee Robert Flanders, and then-Gov. Gina Raimondo won re-election 53-37 percent over GOP nominee Allan Fung in 2018 as well.

The 1st District Incumbent

David Cicilline, 59, has represented the 1st District (Eastern Rhode Island) since 2011. He recently received national attention as one of the nine impeachment managers who presented the case for conviction against former President Trump in last month's Senate trial.

A graduate of Brown University (1983) and Georgetown law school (1986), Cicilline worked as a public defender in Washington, DC before returning to Providence, where he was born and where his father, Jack Cicilline, was a well-known mob lawyer. In 1992, he challenged state Sen. Rhoda Perry in the Democratic primary, and lost 59-24 percent. To date, that is his only electoral loss.

In 1994, he won a seat in the state House, and was re-elected three times. In 2002, he ran for mayor of Providence, winning the Democratic primary with 52 percent over former mayor/U.S. Ambassador to Malta Joseph Paolino and state Sen. David Iglizzi. Cicilline became the first openly gay mayor of an American capital city, and was easily re-elected in 2006.

In 2010, term limited as mayor, Cicilline entered the crowded Democratic primary to succeed retiring Rep. Patrick Kennedy, winning



David Cicilline

Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

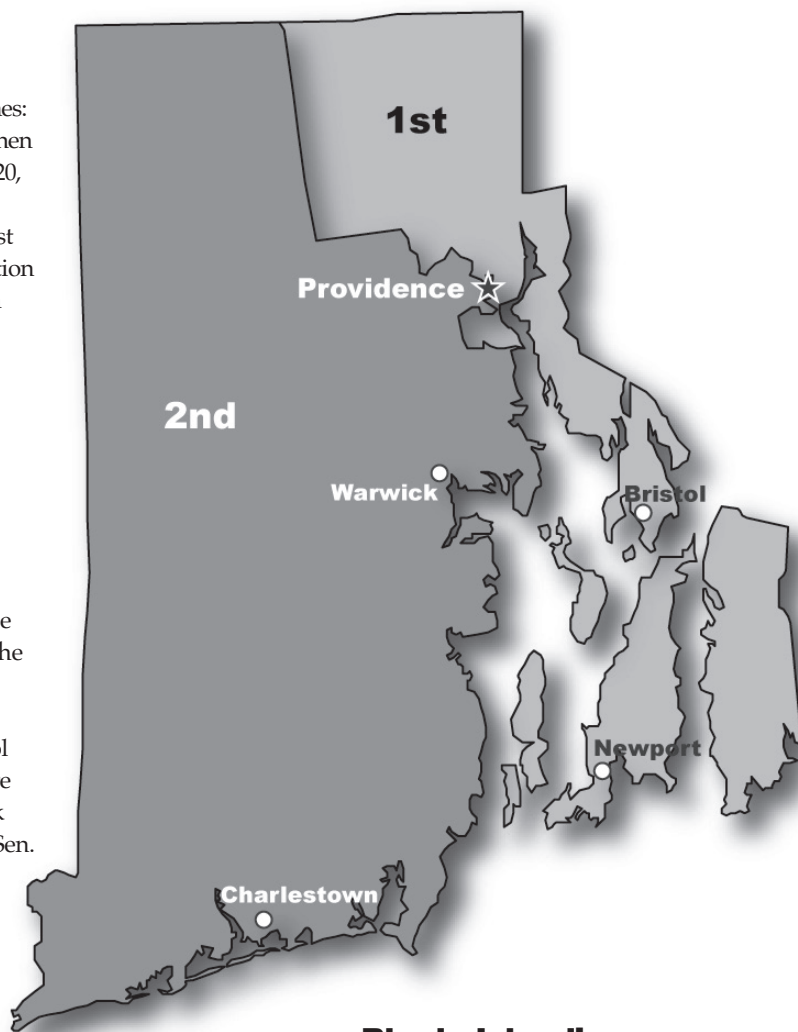
with 37 percent of the vote. In the general election, he defeated state Rep. John Loughlin 51-45 percent.

Two years later, after a contentious redistricting cycle, Cicilline faced both a primary challenge, which he won 62-30

percent, and a competitive general election (rated Tilt Democratic) that he won with 53 percent of the vote.

Since then, he has increased his share of the general election vote every year, winning 59 percent in 2014, 65 percent in 2016, 66 percent in 2018, and 71 percent in 2020.

Cicilline previously served in House leadership, as co-chairman and then chairman of the Democratic Policy and Communications Committee from 2017-2021. After the 2020 elections, he ran to be



Rhode Island's Congressional Districts



Assistant Speaker but lost to Rep. Katherine Clark of Massachusetts in a caucus vote of 135-92.

Currently, Cicilline sits on the Judiciary and Foreign Affairs committees (and is the chairman of the Judiciary Subcommittee on Antitrust, Commercial and Administrative Law). He is also the chairman of the LGBT Equality Caucus, and is the lead sponsor of the Equality Act, which would prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

Cicilline's campaign team includes media consultant Mandy Grunwald of Grunwald Communications and pollster Jef Pollock of Global Strategy Group.

The 2nd District Incumbent

Jim Langevin, 56, has represented the 2nd District (Western Rhode Island) since 2001. Born in Providence, Langevin is a graduate of Rhode

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Island College (1990) and the Harvard Kennedy School (MPA, 1994).

When he was 16, Langevin was the victim of a firearms accident in a Warwick police station that severed his spinal cord and left him wheelchair-bound for life. He was the first paraplegic elected to Congress.

In his first campaign for office, to be a delegate to the 1986 state constitutional convention, he ran on the slogan "He'll stand up for you." He won that race, winning 335 of 762 votes cast in his Warwick district.

In 1988, Langevin won a seat in the state House, 65-35 percent, and won re-election easily twice. In 1994, he won 50 percent in the four-way Democratic primary for state Secretary of State, and went on to defeat incumbent Republican Barbara Leonard 55-45 percent, becoming the youngest person to hold that office. In 1998, he cruised to re-election with 82 percent of the vote, by far the top vote-getter statewide.

When Rep. Robert Weygand gave up his seat to run unsuccessfully for Senate in 2000, Langevin won a four-way Democratic primary for the seat with 47 percent over a field that included future Providence Mayor Angel Taveras.

Over the following decade, Langevin faced two serious races, both Democratic primary challenges from pro-choice women. Langevin is

pro-life, a stance he ties to his own brush with death as a teenager, but his voting record has shifted considerably on the issue — in 2006 he received a 0 percent rating from NARAL, but the pro-choice organization has given him higher marks in recent years, including 100 percent in 2019



Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call

Jim Langevin

and 2017 (though he also received a 30 percent in 2018). Planned Parenthood currently gives him an 86 percent lifetime rating, the second-lowest of any Democratic House member but higher than any Republican in Congress.

In 2006, Brown Univ. Professor Jennifer Lawless ran a primary campaign focused on abortion issues and held Langevin to a 62-38 percent victory. Four years later, state Rep. Elizabeth Dennigan ran against Langevin and lost 57-34 percent.

The 2011 redistricting cycle was contentious. Langevin's camp accused Cicilline of attempting to influence the line-drawing process

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2022 Governor Ratings

Battleground

Democratic-held (6)

Kelly (D-Kan.)
Mills (D-Maine)
Whitmer (D-Mich.)
Sisolak (D-Nev.)
PA Open (Wolf, D)
Evers (D-Wisc.)

Republican-held (5)

AZ Open (Ducey, R)
DeSantis (R-Fl.)
Kemp (R-Ga.)
MD Open (Hogan, R)
Sununu (R-N.H.)

Solid Democratic (10)

Newsom (D-Calif.)
Polis (D-Colo.)
Lamont (D-Conn.)
HI Open (Ige, D)
Pritzker (D-Ill.)
Walz (D-Minn.)
Lujan Grisham (D-N.M.)
Cuomo (D-N.Y.)
OR Open (Brown, D)
McKee (D-R.I.)

Solid Republican (15)

Ivey (R-Ala.)
Dunleavy (R-Alaska)
AR Open (Hutchinson, R)
Little (R-Idaho)
Reynolds (R-Iowa)
Baker (R-Mass.)
NE Open (Ricketts, R)
Noem (R-S.D.)
DeWine (R-Ohio)
Stitt (R-Okla.)
McMaster (R-S.C.)
Lee (R-Tenn.)

2021 RACES

Likely Democratic

VA Open (Northam, D)

Solid Democratic

Murphy (D-N.J.)

Abbott (R-Texas)

Scott (R-Vt.)

Gordon (R-Wyo.)

Impact of Reapportionment

After the decennial census, there is reapportionment in order to make congressional districts the same size. Some states gain or lose seats depending on population trends over the previous decade. While the Census Bureau won't release final decisions until the end of April, these are the current projections.

States Losing Districts	Projected Change
California	-1 (from 53 seats to 52 seats)
Illinois	-1 (from 18 to 17)
Michigan	-1 (from 14 to 13)
Minnesota	-1 (from 8 to 7)
Ohio	-1 (from 16 to 15)
Pennsylvania	-1 (from 18 to 17)
Rhode Island	-1 (from 2 to 1)
West Virginia	-1 (from 3 to 2)
Either	
Alabama	-1 (from 7 to 6)
New York	-1 (from 27 to 26)
Or	
Alabama	No change
New York	-2 (from 27 to 25)
States Gaining Districts	Projected Change
Texas	+3 (from 36 seats to 39 seats)
Florida	+2 (from 27 to 29)
Arizona	+1 (from 9 to 10)
Colorado	+1 (from 7 to 8)
Montana	+1 (from 1 to 2)
North Carolina	+1 (from 13 to 14)
Oregon	+1 (from 5 to 6)

Source: Election Data Services

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to his own benefit and Langevin's detriment. The result was the closest general election of Langevin's congressional career; he won 55-35 percent.

In 2016, Langevin demonstrated significant crossover appeal in his district, winning 58-31 percent while Hillary Clinton carried it just 51-44 percent; he outperformed the top of the ticket by slightly less in 2020, winning 58-42 percent while Joe Biden carried the district 56-43 percent according to *Daily Kos Elections*. Langevin has never lost an election.

In Congress, Langevin sits on the Armed Services and Homeland Security committees, and is the chairman of the new Armed Services Cybersecurity Subcommittee.

Langevin's campaign team includes media consultant J.J. Balaban of the Win Company, and pollster Mark Mellman of the Mellman Group.

Candidate Conversation



Karen Carter Peterson (D)

Louisiana's 2nd District Special
— Rating: Solid Democratic

Interview Date: March 3, 2021
(Google Meet)

Date of Birth: Nov. 1, 1969;
New Orleans, La.

Education: Howard Univ.
(1991); Tulane (J.D., 1995)

Courtesy: Peterson Campaign

Elected Office: State Senator; State House (former); 2nd District candidate (2006)

Current Outlook: Peterson, the former chairwoman of the Louisiana Democratic Party, is running to replace Democratic Rep. Cedric Richmond, who resigned his seat last month to take a senior role in President Joe Biden's White House. Peterson is one of the two top candidates in the race, along with state Sen. Troy Carter, and has won the support of national progressive groups such as EMILY's List, Our Revolution, the Congressional Progressive Caucus, and the League of Conservation Voters. Under Louisiana rules, all 15 candidates will appear on the same ballot, and if no one wins a majority, the top two vote-getters advance to an April 24 runoff. It looks like that will be Peterson and Carter.

Evaluation: Peterson emphasized her long record of elected service, stretching back to her election as a Jesse Jackson delegate to the 1986 Democratic National Convention at the age of 16. She focused on the need for women, specifically Black women, to have a seat at the congressional table — Peterson would be the first Black woman to represent Louisiana in Congress, and there are currently no women at all in the state's delegation. She also emphasized the connections she made in her time as a DNC vice chairwoman, name-checking Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm and Vice President Kamala Harris as examples of personal relationships that would allow her to represent the district more effectively. Peterson is seeped in politics, able to list off all the committees she's served on in the state legislature and the local officials who have endorsed her campaign, and bristled at the notion that the state party suffered under her leadership, pointing to the successful election and re-election of Democratic Gov. John Bel Edwards.

How It Could Play Out

If the two congressmen do face off, it's not clear either would begin with an immediate advantage.

The entire state is covered by a single media market, the Providence-New Bedford DMA, and both men have been in office for the better part of two decades, so both enter with high statewide name recognition.

Cicilline has historically been a slightly stronger fundraiser, raising between \$1.4 and \$1.6 million every cycle from 2014-2020, while Langevin has never raised more than \$1.2 million for an election. Cicilline also flexed notable fundraising muscle in his first re-election campaign in 2012, raising \$2.4 million over two years, and his recent time in leadership and on the national stage may give him access to a broader network of donors.

But neither man enters 2021 with significant resources. Langevin reported \$711,000 in the bank on Dec. 31, 2020, while Cicilline had \$529,000 on that date.

Cicilline also represents the more liberal area of the state; his Providence-based 1st District, which includes much of the coastal areas including Newport, votes more consistently Democratic and is more urban and more racially diverse than the 2nd District.

Some Democratic consultants say that proximity to Democratic base voters — younger voters, more progressive voters, and voters of color — could benefit Cicilline in a statewide primary.

And while there is not much daylight between the two on policy — except when it comes to abortion — Cicilline has taken a more central role in political battles in Washington, on issues including gay rights and the two Trump impeachments, and as a member of House leadership. His willingness to engage his Republican counterparts in hearings even earned him a spotlight on "The Late Show," with Stephen Colbert referring to him as "Congressman Andy Cohen," a reference to the brash Bravo TV host. Those close to Cicilline see his higher profile as another advantage in winning over base voters.

Conversely, while Langevin has a lower national profile, his supporters say his more moderate demeanor, compelling life story, and commitment to constituent casework has enabled him to win levels of crossover support Cicilline hasn't, including from "old school" Democrats in the state, mainly white ethnic populations, that have gravitated away from the party in recent years. Langevin's position on abortion, though it has shifted over the past two decades, still gives him entree to more conservative Catholic voters in the state, his supporters say.

It isn't obvious if abortion would even be litigated in a primary. Those close to Langevin see it as a non-issue, pointing to his personal reasons for being pro-life, his recent 100 percent rating from NARAL, and the ineffectiveness of similar attacks against Langevin over the past 15 years.

Cicilline's biggest potential liability in a competitive race is not ideological. In 2010, Cicilline ran for Congress on his record as mayor of Providence and declared that he had left the city in "excellent financial condition." But in 2011, a report issued by Cicilline's successor, Angel Taveras, revealed that the city was in fact facing a "Category 5 fiscal hurricane," including a projected \$110 million structural deficit. Cicilline saw his numbers tank — one poll showed him with just 17 percent approval statewide — and he faced attacks from both a primary challenger and his GOP opponent, who often polled ahead of him despite the district's Democratic lean. Cicilline eventually apologized in 2012 and righted his political ship, but the episode could be an issue in a contested primary.

In this potential race, Langevin would need to turn out more

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moderate and conservative Democrats. The state holds open primaries, meaning that Republicans and unaffiliated voters can choose on the day of the election to vote in the Democratic primary. Without a presidential primary, Republicans and unaffiliated voters may be more likely to vote in a Democratic race, the more important contest for statewide positions given the state's partisan lean. Getting those voters motivated could be a challenge, one that Langevin's circle believes him up for but some in Cicilline's orbit view as daunting.

The two men have a good relationship, according to members of their teams, and work well together and with the larger Rhode Island delegation. The only major conflict between the two appears to have been the 2011 redistricting fight, which occurred a decade ago. And people in both men's orbits say that if they do run against each other, it would likely be a respectful contest, unlike some notably nasty or personal member vs. member elections in previous years.

So You're Telling Me There's a Chance?

A head-to-head contest between Cicilline and Langevin is not something Democrats in Rhode Island or in Washington, D.C. want to think about. Indeed, most seem to have resolved not to think about it until they absolutely have to.

The first milestone to watch for is the release of the apportionment data, which the Census Bureau has said it aims to do by April 30. Some Democrats hold out hope that Rhode Island could escape with both of its congressional seats, in which case the question at hand is moot.

That's not entirely out of the question. Election Data Services estimates that the state is just 16,842 residents short of its second seat; given the difficulties that plagued the Census this year, there is an outside chance the final numbers tilt in Rhode Island's favor — the state has devoted resources to producing a "complete count," in the hopes that they can stave off the loss.

Exit Ramps

The 2022 gubernatorial race looms large in the state, and term-limited Gov. Raimondo's appointment as Commerce Secretary scrambled the politics of that race.

Now, rather than an open seat contest, there's a new incumbent: Dan McKee, who has spent the last six years as lieutenant governor (a position so marginal in Rhode Island that in 2010 a candidate ran on the sole position of abolishing the office entirely and won 39 percent of the vote).

Both Cicilline and Langevin's names had been floated as potential gubernatorial candidates should the state lose a district, Langevin's more often. But the ascension of McKee, who is seen as likely to seek election to the top spot in his own right, could upend the calculus of a 2022 Langevin gubernatorial bid.

McKee, the former mayor of Cumberland (population 33,500), comes from the more moderate wing of the party, and has clashed with teachers' unions and other labor groups in the past — he barely won renomination as lieutenant governor in 2018, 51-49 percent, against a progressive challenger. And party insiders expect at least some progressive Democrats — Secretary of State Nellie Gorbea and Providence Mayor Jorge Elorza are mentioned most often — to run. With McKee having two years to establish himself as an incumbent in the moderate lane, that could leave less room for Langevin to pick up support.

Much may depend on how McKee does in his new job. He's

somewhat of an unknown quantity in the state, and if he falters during his two-year head start that could make the gubernatorial race more attractive. Currently, Langevin does not appear interested in running for governor, according to conversations with current and former advisers.

Beyond the governor's race, the list of potential exit ramps is short. The Biden administration could shake up Ocean State politics yet again by appointing one of the two congressmen to an administration post.

Langevin is spearheading a bipartisan effort in Congress to create a "cyber ambassador" position within the State Department — as the chairman of the House Armed Services' new cybersecurity committee, he would be a prime candidate for such a role.

For the moment, each congressman's circle seems to be hoping the situation is resolved in a way that allows their preferred candidate to remain in office. Individually, Langevin and Cicilline have been studiously silent about their intentions.

Rhode Island historically holds one of the latest primaries in the country, in mid-September of an election year, and does not require candidates to file for election until mid-July, meaning that both men have over a year before they have to make a final decision on their political future.

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Candidate Conversation



Courtesy Carter Campaign

Troy Carter (D)

Louisiana's 2nd District Special
— Rating: Solid Democratic

Interview Date: March 2, 2021
(Google Meet)

Date of Birth: Oct 26, 1963;
New Orleans, La.

Education: Xavier Univ. (1986)

Elected Office: State Senator;

State House (former); New Orleans City Council (former); Mayoral candidate (2002); 2nd District candidate (2006, 2008)

Current Outlook: Carter is one of two top Democrats looking to replace Democratic Rep. Cedric Richmond, who resigned to become a senior White House adviser to President Joe Biden — the other is state Sen. Karen Carter Peterson. Carter has a raft of high-profile endorsements, including from House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn and Richmond himself. With 15 candidates on the ballot and a majority needed to win, this race is almost certainly headed to a runoff, most likely between Carter and Carter Peterson. That race would happen on April 24.

Evaluation: Carter's case for election is grounded in his combination of time in office and community service, talking at length about the charitable events he continued to host during the 14-year gap between his council tenure and his return to the state legislature. Though he's often described as the more moderate candidate — and many national progressive organizations have lined up behind his opponent — Carter says he rejects specific adjectives and notes that he introduced the first anti-LGBTQ discrimination law in the state legislature in 1993.

Carter is unapologetic about his long standing desire to be in Congress, and discussed his race with the confidence and humility of someone who has lost a couple of times before.

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The Bottom Line

It does not look like either Cicilline or Langevin is scared of facing the other in a primary, if it comes to that. Democrats in both camps and elsewhere within the state clearly hope that some solution, expected or otherwise, will present itself and keep such a race from happening. But if there is no such solution, then, at least at this point, neither man seems ready to back away from the fight.

For Rhode Island — and for national Democrats — that situation is a clear lose-lose. The state will lose an experienced voice in Congress, going from the nation's most favorable ratio of resident to representative to the least favorable, in addition to losing one of two longtime, well-liked public servants. On another level, Congress will lose one of just 11 openly LGBTQ members or one of just two members confined to a wheelchair.

This situation in the Ocean State is just the first tangible example of the ways redistricting can upend local politics and what happens on Capitol Hill. While each situation is unique, there will be other uncomfortable situations for incumbents as district lines change.

Meanwhile, at a minimum, national Democrats are poised to lose a safe seat in Rhode Island; at a time when their House majority is so narrow, any one loss could be decisive.

IE

Candidate Conversation



Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call

Mark Walker (R)

North Carolina Senate —
Rating: Battleground

Interview Date: Feb. 16, 2021
(via Zoom)

Date of Birth: May 20, 1969;
Dothan, Ala.

Education: Piedmont Baptist
College (1999); Trinity Baptist
College (attended)

Elected Office: 6th District U.S. House Representative (former, 2015-2021)

Current Outlook: Walker is a credible candidate in an evolving race to replace GOP Sen. Richard Burr, who is not seeking re-election. Walker, who did not seek re-election in 2020 when his district was redrawn to be much more Democratic, won't have the GOP field to himself. Lara Lea Trump, President Donald Trump's daughter-in-law, U.S. Rep. Virginia Foxx, or former Gov. Pat McCrory could run as well. And there will be a competitive Democratic primary. The bottom line is that this will be a key race in deciding Senate control in 2022.

Evaluation: Walker is hoping to recapture some of the magic from 2014, when he ran as the insurgent outsider against the son of the state senate leader. Even with a few years of Congress under his belt, Walker is planning to run as an unattached, conservative bridge builder, playing up his connections to Black leaders and voters in the state. Walker will try to leverage his voting record as a conservative credential and he was critical of Burr's vote to impeach President Trump. But it's harder to see how Walker navigates running against Lara Trump, if she has her father-in-law's explicit blessing, in a primary situation where voters have been prioritizing loyalty to Trump himself.

Report Shorts

Illinois House. Buoyed by her loss in the GOP primary in the 14th District in 2020, former Department of Commerce staffer Catalina Lauf announced her primary challenge to Rep. Adam Kinzinger in the neighboring district. The congressman has been one of the most outspoken Republicans on the Hill against President Donald Trump and was one of 10 to vote for impeachment in January.

Kinzinger's current 16th District voted for Trump by 16 points, so the most important race would be the GOP primary. But Illinois is likely to lose a congressional seat because of reapportionment and Democrats are in charge of drawing the new congressional lines. So it's too early to know what this district will look like, even beyond how much of an influence Trump will have within the GOP a year and a half from now. Since geography doesn't appear to matter to Lauf, she seems poised to challenge Kinzinger wherever he runs, which would be better for her fundraising.

Ohio House. Republican Rep. Anthony Gonzalez also drew a primary challenge after voting to impeach President Trump in January. Max Miller, a former White House aide who worked in the advance office, announced his campaign against Gonzalez last week, with a Trump endorsement.

Similar to Illinois, Ohio is likely to lose a seat because of reapportionment. But unlike the Land of Lincoln, Republicans will control the process in the Buckeye State. Even with that in mind, it's unclear what Gonzalez's district will look like and if it still makes sense, geographically, for Miller to challenge him. In almost every scenario, the seat is unlikely to be at risk of a Democratic takeover in 2022.

Texas' 6th Special. This Arlington-based district will host a special election on May 1 to fill a vacancy left by GOP Rep. Ron Wright, who died a month ago with covid-19. According to state law, all candidates from all parties will run together in the initial race and the top two vote-getters will move on to a runoff if no one receives a majority of the vote.

Unlike Louisiana's 5th District, where there is a clear frontrunner, this race is more crowded. The filing deadline passed and there are 23 candidates in the race including state GOP committeewoman Susan Wright (the congressman's widow), Republican state Rep. Jake Ellzey, and 2018 Democratic nominee Jana Lynne Sanchez. The field also includes former pro wrestler Dan Rodimer, who filed just before Wednesday's deadline, and is fresh off a close loss as the GOP's nominee in Nevada's 3rd District last fall.

Considering President Donald Trump won the district just 51-48 percent over Joe Biden in 2020, this special election has the potential to become the first truly competitive race of the cycle. But it's just getting started. We'll have a full analysis of the top candidates and the race in our next issue.