**Dems see Barca's run in southeastern Wisconsin's 1st Congressional District as an opportunity**

By WisPolitics.com

Two years ago, GOP U.S. Rep. Bryan Steil of Janesville cruised to victory in the redrawn 1st Congressional District over an underfunded Dem opponent, Ann Roe, a Janesville businesswoman.

This year, Democrats are getting serious about challenging Steil, recruiting longtime former Democrat lawmaker and one-time Congressman Peter Barca into the race. Barca, from the Kenosha area, recently left Gov. Tony Evers' cabinet, where he was Revenue secretary, to jump in the race, hoping to regain the seat he lost some 30 years ago.

Helping Barca will be the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. The DCCC recently announced it had added Barca to its “Red to Blue” program, a sign it intends to invest in his campaign against Steil.

The DCCC provides candidates in the program with organizational and fundraising support, as well as guidance, staff resources, candidating training and other help.

A DCCC spokesperson said Randy Bryce in 2018 — when the seat was open — was the last Democrat candidate in the 1st CD who was on the “Red to Blue” list. Bryce was a prolific fundraiser, but lost to Steil by more than 12 points in the old district.

Steil has regularly outperformed the top of the ticket in the district. Two years ago, Democrat Gov. Tony Evers lost the 1st CD to GOP challenger Tim Michels by 472 votes out of 302,703 cast as he won statewide by 3.4 percentage points. The DCCC in its announcement touted U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin’s performance in the district in 2018 as the Madison Democrats won reelection by 11 points, as well as liberal Supreme Court candidate Janet Protasiewicz winning it by 6 points last year as she won an open seat by 10 percentage points.

The DCCC announced in April 2023 that it considered southeastern Wisconsin’s 1st CD and western Wisconsin’s 3rd among its list of 31 GOP-held districts in play. While the 3rd has a competitive primary to take on U.S. Rep. Derrick Van Orden, R-Prairie du Chien, Democrats have largely coalesced behind Barca in his run to win back a seat he briefly held 30 years ago.

Lorenzo Santos, the Racine County Emergency Management deputy coordinator and a Navy Reserve intelligence officer, listed $5,199 in the bank at the end of April after getting into the race last year. Barca, meanwhile, raised $250,000 in the first 24 hours after announcing his bid in April.

But how much will DCCC put into Wisconsin and will they stick it out through November?

U.S. Rep. Suzan DelBene, chair of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, appeared recently on WISN-TV's "UpFront" show, which partners with WisPolitics.com. She wouldn't commit to fully investing in any other House district beyond the 1st in Dems' national attempts to flip the chamber.

"We have a map of those purple districts across the country, places where we have a great opportunity to pick up seats," said DelBene, from the state of Washington. "Wisconsin 3 is also on our map, and we know we have a competitive primary going on there, but I am confident whoever comes out of that primary will be in a great position also to pick up another seat in Wisconsin."

Added DelBene: "This really is a year we see a huge contrast with the Republican Party in the House. They have been taken over by the most extreme parts of their party. There are no moderates left on the Republican side. They’ve elected the most extreme speaker we’ve ever had, and it’s been chaos and dysfunction."

DelBene wouldn't specifically say how much the DCCC plans to spend in Wisconsin ahead of November.

"Peter Barca is a proven leader, and he's focused on getting things done," she said. "We're going to continue to support our candidates, but we're not announcing specific investments."

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