

Democrat wins special election for Congress running right wing, anti-immigrant campaign

Philip Guelpa
18 February 2024

The Republican margin of control in the US House of Representatives shrank to only two votes after Tuesday's victory by Democrat Tom Suozzi in a special election to fill the vacancy created by the expulsion of New York Republican George Santos.

Santos was expelled by the House in December, with the Republican leadership deciding that his notorious corruption and fabricated biography would undermine their efforts to retain control in the November 5 general election, even though removing him temporarily weakened their hold on the lower House.

Republicans now hold a 219-213 majority in the House, meaning that any time three Republicans defect, the party could lose its majority. Another three seats are currently vacant, to be filled by special elections later this year.

The special election February 13 marked a further shift to the right in the spectrum of capitalist politics, with both the Democratic and Republican candidates virtually ignoring issues such as war, falling living standards and attacks on democratic rights, and instead focusing almost entirely on a competition to take the most reactionary position on immigration.

Suozzi defeated Republican candidate Mazi Pilip in New York's 3rd Congressional District, which encompasses much of northern Nassau County in the Long Island suburbs, and an adjacent section of the New York City borough of Queens. The district had been held by Democrats, first Steve Israel and then Suozzi himself, for more than 20 years, until Suozzi left Congress for an unsuccessful run for governor in 2022. Santos, who had lost a previous race in that district, won the vacant seat.

There was essentially no difference between Suozzi and Pilip in the race. Both ran on right-wing platforms, based on anti-immigrant positions embracing national

chauvinism, bigotry and police repression.

While Pilip, from an Ethiopian Jewish family who emigrated first to Israel, then to Long Island, made much of her background as a former soldier in the Israel Defense Forces, Suozzi matched her in fervent support for the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

The only significant difference raised by Suozzi was his effort to tie Pilip to the Republican Party's hostility to abortion rights, a subject which Pilip simply tried to avoid, speaking only in vague generalities.

Unusually large amounts of money were spent by both parties during the campaign, Democrats more than \$10 million and Republicans \$6.6 million, a glimpse of the vast sums to be expended in the struggle over control of the US House of Representatives in the November election. Suozzi had strong support from trade union bureaucrats and allied organizations, who spent over \$700,000 on his behalf.

Suozzi's tough-on-immigrants stand is being touted as a model for Democrats running for election in "swing" districts by placing greater emphasis on border security (i.e., keeping immigrants out).

His campaign essentially mirrored Republican positions on such topics as crime and taxes, as well as immigration. At one point he called on President Biden to shut the southern border. Suozzi supports restricting asylum, building the border wall, offering foreign aid to Mexico to stop migration, and creating a path to citizenship for some migrants.

As a former three-term congressman from the same district, Suozzi touted his ability to "work across the aisle" with his fascistic Republican colleagues as a member of the bipartisan Problem Solvers Caucus, where he was vice chair before leaving Congress to run for governor of New York.

Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson

acknowledged Suozzi's successful rightward tack, saying, "He sounded like a Republican, talking about the border and immigration. Because everybody knows, that's the top issue."

A further confirmation of the essential interchangeability between the political positions of the two candidates is that the Republican candidate, Mazi Hironaka, is still a registered Democrat.

Suozzi's right-wing campaign is not an exception, but rather a manifestation of the rightward shift of the Democrats in general, as seen, for example in Biden's increasingly anti-immigrant position.

Besides his greater visibility as a former congressman from that district, Suozzi had the advantage of popular revulsion towards the bizarre and corrupt record of the expelled Republican George Santos, expelled two months ago for violating ethics guidelines and House rules.

Santos was charged by New York federal prosecutors with 23 felonies in early 2023 and is now facing trial. Charges include scamming political donors, lying to the Federal Election Commission and illegally receiving unemployment-insurance benefits.

In addition to the federal charges, press reports and the subsequent House probe revealed a plethora of distortions and outright lies by Santos during his 2022 election campaign. These included falsely claiming that he was the grandson of Ukrainian Jews who had fled the Holocaust, that he graduated from Baruch College and New York University, and that he worked at the financial institutions Citigroup and Goldman Sachs, not to mention extremely dubious personal and campaign finances.

As a brazen fabricator, he stood out even among the coterie of professional liars known as members of Congress. As Mark Twain once put it, "There is no distinctly American criminal class—except Congress."

Neither the Democrats nor the New York media bothered to examine Santos' record during the 2022 campaign, when he was one of a half dozen Republicans in the state to win Democratic congressional seats, providing nearly the entire margin of control in the House nationally.

Pro-Democratic Party media, like the *New York Times*, have trumpeted Suozzi's victory as a bellwether for the 2024 presidential elections, demonstrating that President Biden can win reelection on a similar right-

wing program, combined with a defense of abortion rights.

For his part, the Republican presidential frontrunner, former president Donald Trump, blamed Hironaka's defeat on the fact that she distanced herself from his campaign and did not endorse him or embrace the January 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact