

The Delray Democrat

Florida Is in Play, but We Must Act Now¹

Thomas Witkop

How do we know Project 2025 isn't an idle threat? Look to Florida, which many have called the 'lab rat' for the Heritage Foundation's guidebook of extremist policies. Ron DeSantis and his Republican supermajority have had several years to implement these policies, and I've seen it firsthand living in North Palm Beach, just 15 minutes from Mar-a-Lago. In fact, these disastrous policies pushed me to run for Congress. My opponent is Brian Mast, a once moderate Republican turned Trump loyalist (Does that sound familiar?). But Mast is a symptom of the larger problem we are all fighting against, so let me rephrase my position: My name is Thomas Witkop and I'm running against Project 2025. At 25 years old I'm the youngest Congressional nominee in the country. I have a real shot to win, and the reasons why my race is winnable show us why Florida is now in play.

After college I worked in a refugee community in the Canary Islands, then moved to Florida to work at a non-profit helping immigrants integrate into our community. I helped newly arrived immigrants find work. When I saw how our students are underserved, I founded an after-school club to help struggling students improve their English and catch up on classes. But when Florida+ took away a woman's right to choose, what was I to do? With the looming threat of losing social security and Medicaid, how could I help in my role as a community organizer?

I decided I must directly challenge those in power for the sake of education, healthcare, women's rights and beyond. We must uphold our civil liberties and stop book bannings. We must support working families and crack down on the corporations that have ravaged our environment. We must get big money and special interests out of politics. But to achieve any of this, we must have the courage to run bold campaigns against those entrenched in power.

Many have told me not to run. They tell me I'm not old enough, to which I say that my age has been an asset because people are tired of establishment politicians. They say my opponent can't be beat, so I ask if they've forgotten that a Democrat recently held this seat. We have the voters we need, and we'll win if we mobilize them. Florida Democrats haven't mobilized in the last few cycles, but this year is exceptional: In the midst of a 6-week abortion ban, Florida has put the right to abortion on the ballot in November.

This mobilizes those who care about women's rights, and we're seeing organizations like Planned Parenthood spend millions to promote this initiative in my district. Legalizing marijuana is on the ballot, mobilizing those who believe in the right to use marijuana medically or recreationally.

¹ [The Delray Democrat](#), August 2024, page 7. Originally published in [Daily Kos](#).

With these ballot measures in place, we had hope. Then, Kamala Harris stepped into the Presidential race. A tidal wave of momentum has followed, rapidly erasing Trump's lead in several swing states. I doubt any state has felt her momentum quite like Florida, where Democrats are now brimming with excitement following years of demoralization. Democrats are coming out to volunteer in record numbers, and my campaign now has over 400 combined staff and volunteers. This is the year Florida takes back a woman's right to choose and legalizes marijuana. It's the year Rick Scott will be ousted from the Senate by Debbie Mucarsel-Powell. It's the year to flip Congressional seats and defeat Project 2025. If Harris and Florida Democrats keep our momentum going, it's the year Florida flips blue.

When Jamie Raskin endorsed me recently, he was brimming with excitement. Hearing his unbounded optimism reassured me that Florida is making a comeback. As Maxwell Frost said, "Florida isn't a red state, it's an under-organized blue state." I am organizing my district so that on November 5th we'll see its true colors, but I need your support to do it. Our campaign depends on small individual donations, and even \$25 can make a real difference. My role in the fight against Project 2025 is to take on Brian Mast. If you believe in my cause, I ask that you support me if you can. Above all, I ask that you make sure you play a role in our shared fight against Project 2025.

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