

POLITICO

# Illinois Playbook

**Progressives who saw two big races slip through their fingers in the West and Southwest suburbs** have started Empower Southwest, a PAC to fund progressive candidates in those burbs—an area that includes U.S. Rep. **Dan Lipinski's** district.

**Considered one of the most conservative Dems in Congress**, Lipinski only narrowly won his primary race in 2018. That outcome, and that of **Abdelnasser Rashid**, who fell short of GOP incumbent **Sean Morrison** for Cook County's 17<sup>th</sup> District board, were the impetus for creating the PAC.

**“There was a lot of energy in the Rashid race.** It was energy I haven't seen in a long time in the Southwest suburbs,” **Clem Balanoff**, co-founder and chair of the PAC told POLITICO. Balanoff's progressive cred runs deep. He was a political director for U.S. Rep.-elect **Jesus “Chuy” Garcia** in his mayoral run four years ago and Illinois director for the **Bernie Sanders** campaign. (Balanoff is chair of Our Revolution Chicago, which grew out of that campaign). He also was the longtime chief of staff to Cook County Clerk **David Orr** and before that was a 10<sup>th</sup> Ward Democratic Committeeman. “There's a desire for a progressive organization. After the election, people said ‘Where do we go from here?’”

**Empower Southwest hopes to raise \$500,000** over the next two years. “We've gotten broad commitments from a base of supporters,” said **Hannah Jubeh**, treasurer of the PAC. She's CEO and founder of P2 Consulting, a political consulting firm that helped elect Garcia and U.S. Rep. **Robin Kelly** to Congress.

**PAC organizers hem and haw about whether they will target** Lipinski or Morrison in 2020. “We're just getting started and not taking a position in any races,” Jubeh says. “Our focus will be on organizing and advocating over the next year.”

**Empower Southwest expects to sign on 600 volunteers** who volunteered for the Rashid campaign. The PAC will also partner with allies like Garcia and organizations that endorse progressives and their policies.

**Rashid says changing demographics and the current political climate** helped fuel his near-win against Morrison in what has been a predominantly GOP district. He's a PAC co-founder and works in his day job as chief Policy and Intergovernmental Affairs officer for Cook County Assessor **Fritz Kaegi**. “We first noticed it in 2016 when Bernie Sanders won the district. We saw that as a silver lining.”