

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 17th 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 10th 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.”