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ELECTIONS

Democrats want to take on Anna Paulina Luna in 2024

The freshman lawmaker will have more money behind her than in 2022 and the advantage of the incumbency.



Anna Paulina Luna speaks to a crowd during the Keep Florida Free Tour on Wednesday, Aug. 24, 2022, in Tampa. [LUIS SANTANA | Times]

By **Josh Archote** *Times staff*

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Democrats are targeting U.S. Rep. Anna Paulina Luna's 13th Congressional District seat in 2024. But they are still looking for a candidate to face the freshman lawmaker from Pinellas County.

The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee has labeled [31 Republican-held House seats](#) as vulnerable, including two in Florida — the ones held by Luna and Maria Elvira Salazar, who represents parts of Miami.

Democrats expect high voter turnout from left-leaning voters in Florida if they can get two initiatives on the ballot related to [recreational use of marijuana](#) and abortion.

“We got new leadership with the Florida Democratic Party. National groups are also paying attention. The vice president has been here numerous times already, and she’s indicated that she is also going to spend more time in Florida,” Democratic consultant Maya Brown said. “I think that’s going to be reflected in what’s going to be a high turnout election for Democrats.”

Although the 13th Congressional District has in recent years been a swing seat, [redistricting in 2020](#) made the district more red.

That, along with an endorsement from former President Donald Trump, paved the way for Luna’s victory in 2022, when she beat Democrat Eric Lynn, an adviser under former President Barack Obama, comfortably by 8 points. Republican turnout in 2022 in Pinellas County was higher than that of Democrats and part of [a red wave that swept Florida](#).

“Anna Paulina Luna vanquished her last democrat opponent, despite being outspent by \$11 Million, a 12-to-1 disadvantage for her. Every local democrat politician with half a brain knows they can’t beat her, that’s why none have stepped up to challenge,” James Blair, Luna’s chief political strategist, said in a text.

In her short time in Congress, Luna has cultivated a reputation for her confrontational and brazen approach to politics. A member of the Freedom Caucus, Luna has been at the forefront of a [conservative rebellion](#) against the more moderate arm of the party.

Her most recent action includes a successful effort she led to [censure Democratic lawmaker Adam Schiff](#) for his involvement in the Trump-Russia investigation. She is also leading a House [investigation into UFOs](#) and intelligence oversight.

She has also pressured the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for faster action on [beach renourishment in Pinellas County](#).

But Justin Chermol, a spokesperson with the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, said many of the issues that Luna focuses on are not what matter most to Floridians.

“Rather than work to lower costs, create jobs, and keep our communities safe, Luna has prioritized aliens from outer space and the fringe of our politics,” Chermol said in a statement.

So far, one Democrat has filed to run for the seat: John Liccione, who listed an address in South Pasadena in a statement of candidacy he [filed](#) in June with the Federal Election Commission.

The National Republican Congressional Committee said it is confident in Luna’s ability to hold her seat.

“Democrats know they have no chance to take back this seat, evidenced by the fact not one serious candidate has jumped into this race. Democrats pretending they can take this seat is all talk,” Delanie Bomar, a spokesperson for the National Republican Congressional Committee, said in a statement. Bomar’s organization is focused on flipping Florida’s 9th District, held by Democrat Darren Soto since 2017.

Luna will likely have more money behind her this election in addition to the benefit of being an incumbent. The Club for Growth, a conservative organization known for propping up more conservative members of Congress, is preparing a \$20 million defense to help The Patriot 20, according to a [memo obtained by Politico](#).

Five freshmen members of the group who are especially vulnerable will be the focus, including Luna.

Correction: *This story has been updated to reflect that, in June, one Democrat filed to run for Congressional District 13.*
