



POLITICS

Trump-endorsed candidates win primary races to replace Matt Gaetz and Mike Waltz



1 of 2 | Rep. Randy Fine, R-South Brevard County, doses on a gambling bill during a special session, Wednesday, May 19, 2021, in Tallahassee, Fla. (AP Photo/Steve Cannon, File)

BY [KATE PAYNE](#) AND [STEPHANY MATAT](#)

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TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — President [Donald Trump](#) -endorsed candidates Jimmy Patronis and Randy Fine won their Republican primaries in the special elections to replace former Florida Reps. [Matt Gaetz](#) and [Mike Waltz](#), notching wins in reliably conservative districts.

Republicans are expected to hold the seats following the general election April 1, which would boost their thin majority in the U.S. House as they pursue Trump’s agenda.

In the 1st District election to replace Gaetz, Patronis fended off a challenge from former state Rep. Joel Rudman, a doctor who gained political prominence for opposing mask mandates during the COVID-19 pandemic. Patronis will advance to the general election to face Gay Valimont, who ran unopposed for the Democratic nomination in the race for the northwest Florida seat.

Patronis, who grew up in Panama City, has been a familiar face in Florida politics for decades and previously served in the state House of Representatives. His family is well-known in the area for founding a local seafood restaurant.



AP AUDIO: Trump-endorsed candidates win primary races to replace Matt Gaetz and Mike Waltz

AP correspondent Julie Walker reports on today's US House primaries to replace Matt Gaetz and Mike Waltz.

The 1st District seat opened up when Gaetz announced he [wouldn't be returning to Congress](#), after he bowed out of consideration to be [Trump's attorney general](#) amid [allegations of sexual misconduct](#).

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Fine fought off challenges from two other Republicans in the 6th Congressional District race for Waltz's seat. The district includes Daytona Beach and communities south of Jacksonville.

Fine is known for his support of Israel and his efforts to restrict LGBTQ+ rights. He had been a key ally of Gov. Ron DeSantis before breaking with him over Fine's accusations the governor wasn't doing enough to combat antisemitism.

"This victory isn't mine. It is Donald Trump's," Fine said Tuesday night from a special session on immigration in Tallahassee. "It is first electoral win since Nov. 5. And Republicans overwhelmingly showed they remain committed to his agenda. And I can promise him — and every voter — no one will be more committed to his success than me. I'm ready to go."

State representatives who were debating the proposed immigration bill broke out in applause when Fine entered the chamber on Tuesday night.

Fine will advance to the general election to face Democrat Josh Weil, a public school teacher from Orlando. The 6th District seat opened up after Trump tapped Waltz to be his [national security adviser](#).

Both Fine and Patronis have faced criticism for not living in the districts they want to represent.

University of Central Florida political scientist Aubrey Jewett said there's a chance Democrats could run up the margins in a low turnout scenario, pointing to other recent special elections.

"Democrats might be able to take Waltz's seat, but it would take a small miracle," Jewett said. "I think for the Gaetz seat, that would be more than a small miracle. It would be like a very large miracle to take that one."



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