

Carville on Democrats running in Florida: 'Better off looking harder at Mississippi'

Democratic strategist James Carville said the party would be “better off looking harder at Mississippi” than Florida following the overwhelming GOP success in the Sunshine State in this year’s midterm elections. Carville told MSNBC’s Joy Reid on Thursday that Democrats don’t lose “that bad” in Mississippi, saying a large Black population in the state means potential exists for Democratic success there. *“It’s not as many electoral votes, but I think Democrats might be better off looking harder at Mississippi than Florida,”* he said.

Democrats largely outperformed expectations in the midterms in many states throughout the country, but Republicans dominated in Florida, which has been considered a battleground state for decades. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis (R) defeated Democrat Charlie Crist for reelection by almost 20 points, Sen. Marco Rubio (R) defeated Rep. Val Demings (D-Fla.) by about 16 points, and Republicans picked up multiple House seats in the state, winning 20 out of 28 in total.

The GOP’s sweeping success in Florida has led some Democrats to question whether they should focus resources on the state or if it is now considered a red state. Carville noted that 38 percent of Mississippi residents are Black, while Black voters only make up about 30 percent of the voting population. *“If you took your share from 30 to 38, that’s a lot of votes,”* he said.

Republican House majority, even if miniscule, will deliver a top GOP priority: the power to investigate

House Republicans are pledging that extensive oversight investigations into President Biden and administration officials will take place next Congress regardless of the size of their majority. GOP lawmakers say that even a one-seat majority will empower them to take the reins of congressional committees, and with that will come subpoena power to compel Biden administration officials to furnish documents and testimony on various topics.

“Holding the administration accountable through vigorous oversight was a top priority laid out by [GOP] Leader Kevin McCarthy,” said Rep. Lloyd Smucker, R-Pa. *“Obviously, we could do that just by holding the gavel, regardless of our margin, regardless if we have control of the Senate.”* Smucker, who is vying to chair the House Budget Committee, said he was eager to use the panel’s power to increase transparency into how the Biden administration was spending taxpayer money.

In recent days, Republicans have been grappling with how their governing agenda is likely to change after a much-predicted GOP wave failed to materialize on Election Night. At the moment, the Republican majority looks to be anywhere between 218 seats, the bare minimum needed to control the House, and 230 seats. The latter would constitute a sweep of all outstanding races, including some in which Democrats are favored, but still falls far short of the 60 seats McCarthy once said were possible.

While the media and political observers have speculated that a narrow majority might prove ungovernable, several House Republicans contend differently. Rep. James Comer, R-Ky., argued that the GOP had not promised anything on the campaign trail it could not deliver regardless of the size of its majority. Comer, who is set to chair the House Oversight Committee next Congress, said that Republicans understood that with President Biden in the White House for at least another two years, their agenda would always need to focus heavily on accountability. *“For the past two years, one-party Democrat rule has resulted in multiple crises that are harming Americans without any oversight and accountability,”* said Comer. *“With the power of the gavel, Republicans will return the Oversight Committee back to its primary duty to root out waste, fraud, abuse, and mismanagement in the federal government and hold the Biden Administration accountable.”*

Comer cited investigations his committee planned to launch into were the White House's withdrawal from Afghanistan, the origins of the COVID-19 virus, and Hunter Biden's business dealings. *"We will use all tools at our disposal to identify problems and propose solutions that make the federal government more efficient, effective, transparent, and accountable to the American people,"* said Comer.

McCarthy, who is campaigning for the post of House speaker, has long promised to make oversight a key priority for every congressional committee. The California Republican has even instructed incoming committee chairmen to focus on building out their oversight capacities before hiring other staffers. *"Every congressional committee has oversight responsibility, and we will finally get the answers the American people deserve,"* said McCarthy.

Smucker told Fox News Digital that emphasis on oversight was one shared by nearly every single House Republican. *"There might be disagreements over tactics, but on substance, we are fairly united,"* said the Pennsylvania Republican.

Biden, for his part, does not appear to be worried by the GOP's aggressive commitment to investigate his administration. *"Lots of luck in your senior year, as my coach used to say,"* Biden joked with reporters when asked about possible probes of his son Hunter. *"Look, I think the American public wants us to move on and get things done for them."*

What the 2022 midterms mean for Biden's presidency

President Biden is entering a new — and perhaps more challenging — phase of his presidency: divided government. Results are not settled, particularly for the Senate. But Republicans appear likely to control the House of Representatives. And that means Biden's ambitious legislative agenda essentially will come to a standstill.

Experts say even the most basic acts of governing — such as passing a budget or raising the debt ceiling to prevent the U.S. from default — could become a legislative grind in the new Congress. And if the GOP takes control of the Senate, judicial confirmations could crawl to a halt.

Regardless of the final tally, Biden has said he's willing to try to find consensus across the aisle. *"I'm prepared to work with my Republican colleagues,"* he told reporters the day after the election. *"The American people have made clear, I think, that they expect Republicans to be prepared to work with me as well."* Biden said he sees the close margins as an opportunity for leverage. *"There's always enough people on the other team — whether it's Democrat or Republican — that the opposite party can make an appeal to and maybe pick them off to get the help,"* he said.

But there's skepticism about the prospects for White House compromise in a Congress that's become increasingly polarized. *"Of course, they should always talk about things that would tangibly improve people's lives and secure their rights, but it's really hard to see where that's real,"* said Mari Urbina, managing director with the progressive organization Indivisible.

It's unclear where Biden is willing to compromise. Biden has said he plans to invite leaders from both parties to the White House later this year to discuss how they might work together. But he didn't make clear what those potential areas of consensus could be. The president has previously spoken about opioids, cancer, mental health and veterans issues as a "unity agenda" where Republicans and Democrats might find common ground. Biden also recently expressed hopes for a continued bipartisan approach to Russia's war in Ukraine, though in recent months, some Republicans have begun voicing concerns over the large sums of money being given to the Ukrainian government.

He may have the chance to wield the veto pen. Biden was more explicit about areas where he will not compromise. He said he will veto any attempts to create a federal abortion ban, or to repeal the Inflation Reduction Act — the signature climate and health care bill Democrats passed this summer. He has also said

he won't accept major cuts or changes to Social Security or Medicare, a proposal put forth by Sen. Rick Scott, R-Fla., chairman of the National Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee.

Some Democrats see a messaging upside to this potential legislative stalemate. With divided government, *"his conversation with the American public gets a lot easier in some ways, politically,"* said Faiz Shakir, a longtime adviser to Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt. *"You can say, 'This is what I want to do. This is the agenda I want to pass. And I got Republicans here in the House standing in my way.'"* In other words, the contrast becomes easier than it's been these last two years when Democrats controlled the House and the Senate, but fought about policy amongst themselves.

Biden will focus on foreign policy, and try to use more executive actions. With legislation stalled, the president is more likely to try to advance his domestic policy using executive actions, much like his predecessors who have dealt with split government. Biden is also more likely to turn his focus to foreign policy, where presidents have more executive power to begin with.

Late Thursday, Biden left for a series of summits overseas, featuring a face-to-face meeting with China's President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the G-20 in Bali. Navigating competition with China and managing the war in Ukraine are two key diplomatic priorities for this White House that will continue to be pressing issues after the midterms.

Republicans may face the risk of overreaching. Republican plans to repeal the Inflation Reduction Act are largely symbolic, given Biden's veto powers. But they could try to squeeze the president on their priorities by refusing to raise the debt ceiling unless he agrees to some of their initiatives. But there is risk in overreaching, said Brendan Buck, who worked for House Speakers John Boehner and Paul Ryan. *"It's very easy for every new majority that comes in to think that the election was about them — when in most cases, when a Congress gets kicked out, it's because people just didn't like what the other party was doing. It's not necessarily a validation of the new party,"* Buck said. Going too far risks backlash from voters in the next general election. *"That's what we saw in 2010 into 2012,"* Buck explained. In the 2010 midterms, Republicans gained a whopping 63 seats in the House, only to see then-President Barack Obama win reelection two years later.

Investigations could put the White House on the defensive. Even with a lean majority in the House, Republicans could become a consistent thorn in the Biden administration's side using their oversight powers. As NPR's Susan Davis has outlined, the GOP plans investigations on topic ranging from the Afghanistan withdrawal to the origins of COVID-19. Some Republicans have also been eager to investigate the business dealings of Hunter Biden, the president's son. *"It's payback,"* said Bill Galston, a former domestic policy adviser in the Clinton White House who now serves a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. *"They are very angry about the investigations to which they believe they've been subjected."*

Biden has brushed off the threat of investigations, including threats of impeachment. *"I think the American people will look at all of that for what it is. It's just almost comedy,"* he said this week. *"I can't control what they're going to do. All I can do is continue to try to make life better for the American people."*

Do the midterm results make it more likely Biden will run for a second term? Biden has faced questions about whether he should run for a second term because of his age and his low approval ratings. Polls show many Democrats are half-hearted about a Biden reelection bid. Democrats stronger-than-expected midterm results could quell internal debate, for the moment. *"This is going to diminish whatever pressure there might have been from within the Democratic party for President Biden to stand down in favor of a fresh face,"* said Galston. *"If there had really been a rout, I think that there would have been a lot of behind-the-scenes pressure that might have burst out into public view sooner rather than later. I don't think that's going to happen now,"* he said.

Biden said this week that he hopes to make a firm decision by early next year. *"My intention is that I run again. But I'm a great respecter of fate,"* he said. *"And this is, ultimately, a family decision."*

McConnell faces brewing discontent from Senate Republicans

WASHINGTON — Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell is facing a brewing challenge to his position as the top Republican in the Senate. Several senators are campaigning to delay a vote scheduled for next week that was expected to return McConnell to the top job. The Kentucky Republican has held the position since 2007, making him the longest-serving GOP leader in Senate history.

Going into the midterm elections Tuesday, McConnell appeared to have a firm grasp on the leader's job and Republicans appeared poised to take control of the Senate. But now, however, both remain uncertain. McConnell has long been the subject of ire from former President Donald Trump, who has campaigned aggressively to have him ousted as leader. McConnell publicly blamed Trump for the Jan. 6 riot.

No Republican senator has announced their intention to run against McConnell. But Florida Sen. Rick Scott's name has been floated repeatedly, including by Trump. McConnell's office did not respond to a request for comment.

Those suggesting a delay have pointed to the remaining unknowns. NBC News has not yet projected winners in Arizona or Nevada, which will be pivotal in deciding control of the Senate. And the Georgia Senate contest now comes down to a Dec. 6 runoff, which could decide control if Republicans don't win both Nevada and Arizona. Three Republican senators — Scott; Mike Lee of Utah, and Ron Johnson of Wisconsin — circulated a letter this week calling for the delay, saying Senate Republicans need more time to vet possible candidates. The letter was first reported by Politico and a copy was obtained by NBC News. *"We should cast our votes only after being fully informed of where each candidate stands on Conference priorities for the coming Congress,"* the letter states.

Asked in January what his agenda would be if Republicans took control of the Senate, McConnell deflected. *"That is a very good question,"* McConnell said. *"And I'll let you know when we take it back."* The closed-door party elections, which also install other leadership positions like the whip, are scheduled to take place on Wednesday. Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., also called for a delay, writing on Twitter that *"we need to make sure that those who want to lead us are genuinely committed to fighting for the priorities & values of the working Americans (of every background) who gave us big wins in states like #Florida."*

Republican Sens. Josh Hawley of Missouri and Cynthia Lummis of Wyoming echoed Rubio on Twitter. *"Exactly right. I don't know why Senate GOP would hold a leadership vote for the next Congress before this election is finished,"* Hawley wrote. *"We have a runoff in #GASenate — are they saying that doesn't matter? Don't disenfranchise @HerschelWalker."*

A Rubio adviser said the senator is concerned McConnell has not laid out a vision for the future. *"We are suddenly finding ourselves very likely in the minority. We just lost a whole bunch of winnable races,"* the adviser said. *"Let's figure out how we're going to spend the next two years fighting for this sort of multiracial working-class party that we want to build."* The adviser, who was granted anonymity to speak candidly, refused to say if Rubio himself would consider a run for leader. *"What he's saying is, it doesn't make sense to have this election right now while we have some of these fundamental questions we need to ask ourselves,"* the adviser said.

In the letter from Lee, Johnson and Scott, the senators were also critical of the way McConnell has been running the caucus. *"The Senate Republican Conference must change the way it operates — regardless of the outcome of the still-pending elections,"* the letter states. *"We must be vocal, sell our ideas every day to the American public, constantly articulating what we plan to accomplish to help American families, and what we are doing to put our plan into action."*