

# Know Before You Go: FL-26 District Primer

*September 2018 • Researched, summarized, and edited by Swing Left's all-volunteer research team!*

**In the last election, Republican Carlos Curbelo won this district by only 33,054 votes (11.8%).** That's close! With your help, we're going to win this seat for the Democrats in 2018.

## About the Incumbent

**Introduction:** Republican Carlos Curbelo is in his second term representing FL-26 in the House. The son of Cuban immigrants, Curbelo is viewed as a moderate Republican in a swing district. He has supported bipartisan immigration reform, LGBTQ rights, and climate-change action. Although he spoke critically of Trump during the presidential campaign, he votes reliably with Trump and the GOP.

**Issues:** Curbelo is the co-founder of the bipartisan Climate Solutions Caucus in Congress and opposes repealing Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). He is a practicing Catholic who says he supports "a culture of life." Despite his criticism of Trump during the presidential campaign, he recently voted against a proposal that would have forced the release of Trump's tax returns. He opposes gun-control legislation, and he has voted to repeal the Affordable Care Act.

**Committees:** Curbelo serves on the Transportation & Infrastructure, Education & Workforce, and Small Business committees.

**Strengths:** Despite voting consistently along party lines, Curbelo presents himself as a moderate Republican, an image that is calculated to appeal to voters in this recently redrawn district.

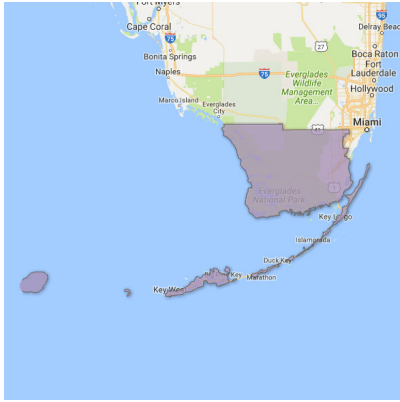
**Potential Weaknesses:** Despite giving Curbelo a substantial margin of victory in 2016, FL-26 voters voted for Hillary Clinton over Trump by an even wider margin. And notwithstanding his efforts to distance himself from Trump, Curbelo's voting record shows his commitment to the GOP's agenda despite the threat it poses to this economically struggling, majority-minority district that is also home to many immigrants.

## About the Challenger

**Introduction:** Democrat Debbie Mucarsel-Powell is a former assistant dean at Florida International University Medical School and has worked for nonprofits such as the Hope Center, Zoo Miami Foundation, and the Coral Restoration Foundation. She was a 2016 Democratic candidate for the Florida state Senate but has never previously held public office. Mucarsel-Powell is Latina and an immigrant — she was born in Ecuador and came to the U.S. as a teenager with her mother and sisters. Mucarsel-Powell is married and has three children.

**Issues:** Gun control is a top issue for Mucarsel-Powell, who lost her father to gun violence in Ecuador. She recorded a message for the March for Our Lives rally after the mass shooting in nearby Parkland, Florida. Mucarsel-Powell also stresses broadening access to affordable health care, paying workers a living wage, protecting women's right to choose, passing comprehensive immigration reform (including protecting Dreamers and reuniting separated families), and addressing climate change, which is especially urgent for the Florida Keys, Everglades, and coast, all of which are located in FL-26.

**Strengths:** Mucarsel-Powell is running in the "most Democratic" Republican district in the U.S. — FL-26 preferred Hillary Clinton to Donald Trump by a substantial margin in 2016. Her story is captivating: she's an immigrant who lost her father to gun violence and worked her way up from a doughnut shop clerk to assistant dean at a medical school. She has won the endorsements of EMILY's List, NARAL, the Planned Parenthood Action Fund, and many other organizations.



## FL-26: Better Know the District

### Geography

FL-26 comprises a portion of Miami-Dade County and all of Monroe County. It includes the southernmost tip of Florida, including the Florida Keys and the southwest suburbs of Miami. Much of this district is the Everglades and is close enough to sea level to be vulnerable to permanent flooding from climate change. The area is also susceptible to tropical storms and hurricanes. It is home to various endangered and protected species and includes the only living coral barrier reef in the continental United States.

### FL-26: Facts & Stats

#### Population Centers

- Homestead, 60,512
- Kendale Lakes, 56,901
- Tamiami, 55,271
- The Hammocks, 51,003
- Kendall West, 38,034
- South Miami Heights, 35,696

#### 2016 Presidential Results

- Clinton: 162K (57%)
- Trump: 116K (41%)

#### 2016 House Results

- Garcia (D): 115K (41%)
- Curbelo (R): 149K (53%)
- Other: 17K (6%)
- Registered, didn't vote: 128K
- Eligible, not registered: 131K

#### 2014 House Results

- Garcia (D): 78K (49%)
- Curbelo (R): 83K (51%)
- Registered, didn't vote: 192K

### Citizenry

Only half of the district's residents are U.S.-born citizens, and 66% speak Spanish as their first language. Twenty-seven percent are naturalized citizens born outside of the U.S., and 20% are non-citizen immigrants. The district is mostly suburban, low- to middle-income, and Latino, with a sizable African-American population in areas of Miami-Dade County. The vast majority of Latinos in the district are of Cuban descent. Monroe County is majority white, while Miami-Dade is majority Latino.

### Elections

In 2016, Hillary Clinton won the district by 16 points, a wider margin than Curbelo's 12-point victory over his Democratic rival, Joe Garcia. It was a rematch: In 2014, Curbelo unseated incumbent Garcia by 51% to 48%. Garcia himself won the seat in the 2012 cycle by ousting incumbent Republican David Rivera, 54% to 43%.

### Industry

FL-26's workers are generally employed in administrative, sales and management jobs. More than 18,000 residents work in education, and more than 4,000 work in farming — a small percentage of the district's overall workforce but a disproportionately large share of Florida's farm workers.

### Education

FL-26 is home to Florida International University, the fourth largest university in the country, with a student enrollment of more than 54,000. Other higher education institutions include Florida Keys Community College and the Homestead campus of Miami-Dade College.