



BY MADISON FERNANDEZ

TOP LINE

Democrats had a tough night up and down the ballot last week.

But given the losses at the top of the ticket, it “should have” been much worse in the states, said Heather Williams, president of the Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee.

“I just can't recall an election that we have been in the same presidential battlegrounds and have been able to maintain the successes that we did have, and mitigate the losses in the way that we did,” Williams said. “To be able to hold our own in Pennsylvania and maintain that majority with the losses up-ticket, there's definitely stuff to learn from that.”

 Image removed by sender. HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA - DECEMBER 14: The Pennsylvania State Capitol is seen on December 14, 2020 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Electors in Pennsylvania will meet today to certify the 2020 presidential election for President-elect Joe Biden who won the electoral college 306-to-232 against incumbent President Donald Trump. On Friday, the Supreme Court tossed out a lawsuit filed by Texas that intended to overturn Biden's win in four battleground states that included

Pennsylvania. (Photo by Michael M. Santiago/Getty Images)

The Pennsylvania State Capitol is seen. | Getty Images

It was generally a better night for legislative Republicans across the country, but far from a Democratic wipeout. Republicans maintained their majority in the Pennsylvania state Senate, though they were unable to flip the state House, where Democrats maintained a one-seat majority. “He ran on our message, frankly,” Max Docksey, the political director of the Republican State Leadership Committee, said of [Democratic state Rep. Frank Burns](#), whose race decided the majority. “He won using our talking points.”

Elsewhere, Democrats didn't hit their targets, including in Arizona, where Democrats invested heavily but failed to flip either chamber. Republicans are poised to [increase their margins there](#). Republicans flipped the Michigan state House, and the Minnesota state House — which is currently tied — is in flux as races [head to recounts](#).

One of the most notable wins for Democrats was in North Carolina, where they broke Republicans' supermajority in the state House. And they picked up seats in Wisconsin after new maps broke a solid Republican gerrymander, although they failed to win a majority.

But Republicans are taking a victory lap. "I don't know how anyone over there could look at this as anything other than an utter disaster," RSLC President Dee Duncan said. Duncan is stepping down from his role at the end of the year, and will be replaced by current RSLC deputy executive director Edith Jorge-Tuñón.

Score spoke separately with Williams, and then Docksey and Duncan in a joint interview, about last week's results.

These interviews have been edited for length and clarity.

How are you viewing the results of this election?

Williams: It was a tough election for Democrats at the top of the ticket, and given that it should have been a red wave in the states. But it wasn't. ... Did we accomplish everything we wanted to? No. ... We still have a strong firewall of Democratic majorities in the states, and in fact, we currently sit with double the [number of] trifectas that we had when Trump was last in office. So we've made a lot of ground over that time. ... These chambers are so competitive, they're competitive into this now-Trump midterm, where Republicans have a federal trifecta, and we are still on the path that we wanted to be as we build out our plans headed into the 2030 redistricting cycle.

Docksey: We were always going to get outspent massively by the Democrats. ... We needed to approach this cycle a lot differently than we have in the past, and we went about it in a few ways. One, we really started earlier than ever before. ... As soon as the '23 elections were over, we were on the ground in our target states, starting to define our candidates, define the Democrats, using creative mediums ... and really getting our

information in front of voters before Democrats had an opportunity to define the races and utilize their cash advantage to put the races away on us. Beyond that, we certainly invested heavily in vote by mail, absentee early voting programs. ... We said from the beginning that this campaign could not be about turning Joe Biden into the boogeyman, when Kamala Harris became the nominee, turning Kamala Harris into the boogeyman. This was about the issues.

How much do you think the top of the ticket impacted state legislature results?

Williams: I think when we look at the numbers through a neutral lens, these wins were not enormous. ... The Electoral College is tough, but when you look at the spread of voters, I think there is certainly not a complete rebuke of the Democratic Party agenda. There's not a complete adoption of the Republican path forward. ... There's a country that is clearly saying, 'We want solutions to things, and we feel like some mechanism of a change federally, and some continuity in the states is what we're asking for.'

Docksey: President Trump's performance at the top of the ticket was immensely helpful to Republicans at every level of the ballot. ... That being said, when you look at New Hampshire, where we went into a supermajority in the state Senate, when you look at Minnesota, where we were able to take a blue state, flip three seats, tie the balance. ... We were able to run ahead of a lot of the candidates up ballot from us: Vermont, Maine, New York, breaking the supermajority. I think there are a lot of blue states where we had a lot of success, and that's because of the programs that we implemented, and it's because of the campaigns that our candidates in those states ran.

It will obviously be much quieter next year, but what's the lesson you're taking from these races into 2025?

Williams: These results don't tell — right now — a perfect picture of what happened. But I think a few things: ... What do we see in the strength of the performance of state legislative candidates exceeding expectations? ... It doesn't seem like we're seeing huge shifts from past Democratic performance. What do we learn about our work to build infrastructure and recruit quality candidates? How do we think about our early investments that we make in battleground chambers that help shore up campaign staff and ensure that these strong candidates are recruited and that these programs hit their fundraising goals? And I think the big one is, what are we learning from being nested

in these battlegrounds where billions of dollars are being spent in these federal races, and we don't share the same flourish of resources at our ballot level?

Docksey: I hope the lesson that Republicans in general will take into 2025, 2026 and beyond, is investing in absentee, early vote, vote by mail. That's incredibly crucial to our success. We took a really positive step this cycle, and I think it made a really significant difference. We need to continue to do that, and we need to continue to grow that effort. Beyond that, continuing to talk about the issues. ... If we deliver for the voters, there's no reason to think that we can't continue to be successful running campaigns that are focused on these issues, that are focused on policy.

TGIF! Reach me at mfernandez@politico.com and [@madfernandez616](https://www.instagram.com/madfernandez616).

Days until the 2025 election: 354
