

# Hispanic Republicans at center of Medicaid debate

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Analysis by [Patrick Svitek](#) and [Meryl Kornfield](#) | Washington Post

Several members of the Congressional Hispanic Conference — a group of 11 Republicans in the House — [publicly urged](#) House Speaker **Mike Johnson** (R-Louisiana) last month not to slash Medicaid in the House budget plan. And while Johnson was able to assuage those members' concerns enough to get them on board with advancing the budget resolution, they're making it clear they are still on high alert.

- “We are vested in this,” Rep. **Tony Gonzales** (R-Texas), the group's new leader, said yesterday at a news conference to discuss its priorities. He noted the Trump administration has also committed to protecting Medicaid and added: “This is where we have to do the work. ... We have to come alongside the administration, not just wish and pray and hope that they are accomplishing things, but working with them to make sure we, once again, root out the fraud and the waste” in the program while protecting those for whom “legitimately, this is their only access to care.”

Some of the Congressional Hispanic Conference members are even more at the center of the debate by virtue of the districts they represent. Some of those districts are home to large concentrations of Medicaid recipients, some are among the most politically competitive in the country — and some are both.

Reps. **Juan Ciscomani** (R-Arizona) and **Gabe Evans** (R-Colorado) are set to run for reelection next year in races [deemed “toss ups” by the Cook Political Report](#), and Democratic groups are spending resources to build opposition to them back home based on potential Medicaid cuts.

Ciscomani is getting backup from the Republican Main Street Partnership, which [announced yesterday](#) it was launching a \$500,000 ad buy thanking him and two other House Republicans for fighting fraud in Medicaid. Evans has also sought to shift the conversation to fraud, [co-introducing a bill with a Democrat](#) this week to crack down on Medicaid dollars allegedly going to dead people.

Rep. **Mario Diaz-Balart** (R-Florida) started the Congressional Hispanic Conference in 2003 as a GOP alternative to the older Congressional Hispanic Caucus. The Congressional Hispanic Caucus has 42 members — all Democrats — and is chaired by Rep. **Adriano Espaillat** of New York.

Gonzales was elected chair of the Congressional Hispanic Conference last month. He's in his third term representing a massive district along the Texas-Mexico border, and he has a reputation for [sometimes breaking with the party line](#).

After Trump grew his Hispanic support in last year's presidential election, Gonzales is looking to make the conference more assertive and kicked off the news conference by promising that the group would “become even more active.” He singled out Rep. **Nicole Malliotakis** (R-New York) as “a leader on Medicaid.”

While the Congressional Hispanic Conference has found common cause with Democrats in advocating for Medicaid, its colleagues in the other party say the group is not fighting hard enough.

“They wrote a letter talking about how important Medicaid was to their constituents, but yet they voted for the budget framework,” Rep. **Raul Ruiz** (D-California), a former chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, told us.

## A politically ascendant moment

The conference is looking to assert itself at an ascendant moment for the GOP and Latinos. Trump won [46 percent](#) of Hispanic voters last year, compared with [32 percent in 2020](#) and [28 percent in 2016](#), according to exit polling.

“I see an opportunity for growth — tremendous growth — in the Hispanic community joining our party,” Rep. **Carlos A. Gimenez** (R-Florida) said at the news conference.

Rep. **David G. Valadao** (R-California) said Republicans have to first deliver on their campaign promises, particularly to make life more affordable for Latinos. He noted Trump went from losing his district in 2020 to winning it last year, and he said he thought the “Biden economy played a huge role in that.”

“Now it’s up to us ... to make sure that we’re keeping these voters on our side,” Valadao said. Hispanic voters were a little more negative on Trump’s job performance in a [recent Fox News poll](#) than the broader electorate was. Fifty-five percent of Hispanic voters disapproved of Trump’s performance, and 44 percent approved, while the split was 51-49 among all voters.

### **‘A rabbit hole of no return’**

Medicaid is not the Congressional Hispanic Conference’s only priority this Congress.

When it comes to immigration, some of the speakers at yesterday’s news conference spoke out in support of Trump’s deportations of criminals and others in the country illegally. But there were some differences on what the administration should focus on beyond that.

“We’re thankful to President Trump for ensuring that we’re prioritizing deporting criminals, but we also need to make sure that we work to make people who are following our rules, following our laws, working hard and want to contribute to our society, that we help them become United States citizens,” Malliotakis said.

Gonzales emphasized that lawmaking on immigration is “very, very hard.”

- “One of the things that I’ve been pushing for in particular ... is, let’s focus on those that are convicted criminal illegal aliens in our country,” Gonzales said. “If you get distracted by having this conversation of, ‘What are we going to do with the 10 million people that are already here?’ or ‘What are we going to do with the other people that have these other situations?’ you will go down a rabbit hole of no return.”

Rep. **Jesús “Chuy” García** (D-Illinois) told us he hoped that Hispanic Republicans would at least be supportive of helping “dreamers,” or young adults who were brought to the country illegally as children. He expressed doubt, though, that his hope would become reality.

“I think there is a lot — and will continue to be — buyer’s remorse on the part of Hispanics that voted for Donald Trump,” he said.