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Tennessee State Rep. Vincent Dixie. (Black Catholic Messenger/Tennessee Lookout/John Partipilo)

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Earlier this month, U.S. Rep [Mark Green](#) of Tennessee, then-chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security, resigned from Congress. A staunch supporter of President Donald Trump and a one-time cabinet nominee during his first administration, Green has left Washington for a career in the private sector. He initially announced his retirement last Congress but later reversed the move.

His resignation has sparked a fierce competition on both sides of the aisle to find a replacement for the 7th Congressional District, which covers parts of Nashville. These contests are not just for party nominees. Rather, they are a competition of values that seeks to communicate what Tennesseans want from their government and who they aspire to be amid the second Trump administration.

Among those vying to replace Green is State Rep. [Vincent Dixie](#). An African-American Catholic and former chair of the Democratic Caucus in the Tennessee General Assembly, he joins an unusually crowded Democratic primary. In the special election, scheduled for Tuesday, Oct. 7, Democrats in Tennessee and around the nation are optimistic about their ability to flip the district, and they have good reason.

In the past session, the GOP supermajority in the general assembly created statewide student education savings accounts, effectively diverting public funds to private and charter schools and thereby undermining the financial stability of public schools. Some have argued that this is one of the most unpopular legislative actions taken by Tennessee Republicans since [their rise to power](#).

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It has been noted that if Dixie wins his congressional race, he will be the first African-American House member from Tennessee who is not representing Memphis. Even so, the historical nature of his candidacy reaches far beyond this fact. His election could prove that anti-Catholic sentiment is no longer a major barrier in the cultural life of the state, or perhaps even the broader South. He would join the ranks of other Catholic politicians like Lt. Gov. [Randy McNally](#) and U.S. Rep. [Chuck Fleischmann](#), both Republicans from East Tennessee.

A cynical political pundit might say that Dixie, a Black Democrat, cannot win in a district designed to be predominantly white and give Republicans a 10-point

advantage. However, such an assumption would be a serious mistake and a gross underestimation of his abilities as a politician. Dixie can bridge the cultural divide between rural and urban to create the political coalition necessary for a Democrat in this district.

However, in recognizing his gifts and potential to make history, it must also be noted that the Democratic Party has seen better days in Tennessee. After the 2020 census, Republicans intentionally reorganized, or "cracked," Davidson County [into three congressional districts](#). It is widely believed that this was due to the Republican supermajority's desire to create an additional red district to counter Democratic congressional gains.

The county, which includes Nashville, is one of two Democratic strongholds in the state. For most of its history, it had been represented by a Democrat in Congress and remained intact within the 5th Congressional District before the recent changes. As currently drawn, the 7th District includes counties in both West and Middle Tennessee (including roughly a third of Davidson County), stretching from the northern border with Kentucky to the southern boundary with Alabama.

The question remains: Given this gerrymandering, can a Tennessee Democrat be elected to Congress? I think so, and Dixie may be the one to do it.

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