

Pennsylvania Business Report Podcast

Mid-Term Elections Retrospective

With: Brittany Crampsie and Josh Novotney

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***Transcript**

Murtha: The following Podcast is a production of Macallan Communications publishers of the Pennsylvania Business Report. PBR is the daily must-read source for news about the latest business and policy developments that serve as a catalyst for economic activity in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. You can find PBR on the web at [www dot Penn biz report.com](http://www.dotPennbizreport.com).

And welcome to the Pennsylvania business report podcast. I'm your host Jim Murtha.

The November 8 midterm elections were the latest in a series of the most important elections in our lifetime. In Washington at stake were slim majorities in the House and Senate in Pennsylvania. Rare open seats for governor and US Senate were on the ballot, as well as the entire Pennsylvania House and half of the state Senate. It was by any measure of big election, the pundit class calculating the customary loss by the party in power, in this case, the Democrats, predicted a GOP wave election. Voters frustrated primarily by economic issues like inflation, were thought to be hell bent on retaliation, and we're going to mete out their revenge on those they held responsible social issues, particularly abortion, while important to many were not figured to be a determining factor in many races. Then came November 8th.

The wave never happened. Depending on your point of view, the GOP underperformed or the Democrats, if I may use this term, punched way above their weight. To help us determine what happened are two political experts each representing their respective parties: for the Democrats.

Crampsie: I'm Britt Crampsie on the principal of Britt Crampsie Communications. I do consulting, obviously in communications, particularly in political and advocacy campaigns. Before that I was the press secretary for the Pennsylvania Senate Democrats and before that had a brief stint in political journalism.

Murtha: And for the Republicans.

Novotney: Josh Novotny, I'm a partner at SBL strategies. We're a federal government relations consulting firm based out of Washington DC, but I live here in Philadelphia and do a lot of we'll call it pro bono consulting on a lot of campaigns. And my background is I've worked for Senator Toomey and Governor Corbett. And before that, Senator Arlen Specter, so I have a long line of working for Republican statewide officials and have a lot of experience being up late on an election night.

Murtha: Okay, well, welcome to you both. I appreciate your time to talk about the midterms. Well, there's a lot to unpack with this election. So, I want to start at the top and it's probably the easiest office to deconstruct, and that's the race for governor. Democrat Attorney General Josh Shapiro, pretty much easily dispatched Republican state senator Doug Mastriano by almost 15 points, and that's just a good old fashioned butt-kicking. I don't care how you define it. Shapiro far outraised Mastriano on money. He was never behind any of the polls. I think we can say that Shapiro ran a conventional campaign, good ground game, lots of TV campaign stops all over the state. Pretty much what we expect and are accustomed to for a statewide candidate.

Mastriano, on the other hand, was anything but conventional. He limited his media exposure only to friendly outlets. His campaign stops were primarily in safe locations, but not exclusively, his media spending was virtually nonexistent.

Murtha: Josh, are we at all surprised at the outcome? You both predicted a Shapiro victory by the way?

Novotney: So I think, you know, I think when I went through the predictions again today that you shared, Jim, I think, the surprise was that the headwind for Democrats, with the Republican

wave was not as forceful as I thought. So there's no surprise in the outcome, I kind of thought that may be just the overall sentiment around the country may have lifted him into high single digits.

But I was definitely wrong. It was, as you pointed out, almost 15 points which, which the only part of my prediction that was correct was that is too much ticket splitting for people. And as we saw there were ramifications down the rest of the ballot due to this race, so into your point Mastriano. You can say unconventional, I would say terrible, ran a terrible campaign.

Unfortunately, I stand corrected.

Unfortunately, did not listen to anyone. You know, I'm not sure who he was talking to. It was not a Brit or me. I'll tell you that much. But yeah, it was it was a pretty it was a textbook terrible race.

Murtha: There's a non sequitur for you. Britt, I know that you did predict a Shapiro victory. But did you really think it would be by 15 points.

Crampsie: I said eight I think it was at least over the summer so, I don't know if anyone expected it to be quite that big but a shellacking a crushing. I mean, there's a, there's a lot of words for this one. But, you know, it was a wide margin, but it's not becoming an unusual thing in the governor's race here in Pennsylvania, the last three in a row. Republicans have put up candidates that they later called terrible, but they've lost by enormous margins each time. So Mastriano, in arguably, objectively ran a terrible campaign, from the fundraising to the field to the organizing the comms every, every single part of it was flawed. But there are some bigger issues, I think, at play, such as well, I don't I don't want to jump ahead here to our other races.

Murtha: But you know, we saw Yeah, okay. Well, that well, we'll talk about the other races. Well, what I just wanted, I don't want to spend too much time on this race, because it was just ridiculous.

But Josh, there are a lot of conservatives in the state who thought that the mistake that was made early on was the state committee not endorsing a candidate. And it allowed Mastriano

to, to win the nomination, when there probably would have been better candidates. I'm not saying they would have beaten Josh Shapiro, but they certainly may not have gotten their butts kicked by 15 points.

Novotney: So that's a so I think, I think there's a lot of how can we prevent a Mastriano type of person again, there's a couple of things. It's this is going to quickly branch out into a lot of discussions and probably some disagreements between Britt and I, where we agreed on the first part, but you know, I think I think the former president, Donald Trump had a lot to do with it, he came in heavily for Mastriano in the last few days, but before that, he came out with a very heavy slam on his biggest opponent, right at the precise time that he was starting to surge and had a lot of money behind them. And you could make an argument that he, you know, may have won with the, with the advantage of the money and a lot of support, but he got smacked over the head and, and, you know, the rest is history.

So I think a state party endorsement probably would not been enough here. I think you need to have an organized party. I'm not usually for backroom deals and organization, have a primary, kind of let voters deal with it. But in this, in this situation, there was a lot of things at play that we cannot control that, you know, all of us wanted a better candidate besides Mastriano. So I think in the future, besides a state endorsement, there probably needs either be a run-off. So if one of the candidates does not get 50% plus one, a primary runoff is probably a decent idea. You know, remember Mastriano even though he even surged, he only won you know, low 40s percentile the vote, I think 42-43 So he did not even get a majority of the Republican Party, putting him into the nomination.

Murtha: All right. Well, that's what we're going stop talking about that race and then move on to the one that was much more interesting, I thought and certainly garnered a lot of headlines nationally, and that's the race for the open seat in the US Senate by retiring Pat Toomey, Lieutenant Governor John Fetterman beat Mehmet Oz by about five points. Fetterman, as you all know, was hampered by a stroke he suffered last May. It limited his retail campaigning, and it impacted his performance in the lone debate with AWS a couple of weeks

ahead of the election. So even with those challenges, how did Fetterman pull this one out? You split your predictions on this race? And Britt, let's start with you on that?

Crampsie: Sure. I predicted Fetterman by two and I thought we weren't going to know for a day or two. And we knew election night, you know, may have been right around midnight or a couple hours later. And I think the margin ultimately with all ballots in was closer to five points. I think they ran an impressive campaign. They ran a long campaign. You know, it went on before his stroke. He had done groundwork. He had been a very visible public official for many years. He'd run statewide before several times, not always successfully. But his name recognition was good. His brand was really really recognizable. And personal health struggles didn't really get in the way. And I think that this race is a little bit more interesting than our governor's race because maybe you can dismiss Mastriano and was a terrible candidate. But Dr. Oz was not a bad candidate. I mean, he had a lot of personal money. He had an ability to raise money. He was on TV. He aligned with mainstream sort of moderate Republican Party. You can't make a lot of the allegations against him that you did against Mastriano. So I think this is a case where the Democratic platform is actually a little bit stronger and resonating a little bit better with Pennsylvanians. And the work that the Fetterman team did leading up to the stroke, and then the campaign that they ran online prime primarily helped as well, I think a great campaign in spite of challenges.

Murtha: Josh.

Novotney: I would agree with Brittany that that Oz was, I think, after he stumbled out of the blocks after the primary seemed to get his footing. And I'd seen a lot of statewide races myself, and it seemed like he ran a fairly decent campaign for most of the fall season. But it still wasn't enough. What happened there, do you think? Yeah, so I'll start by saying I'm not taking anything away from Senator elect Fetterman. I agree with Brittany, he had a very good presence online, his fundraising, his grassroots all was very good. And I also agree that Oz I think, you know, ran a good campaign, he went to the center, he went after the suburban voters, swing voters, he moderated himself, you know, he had a high negative coming out of the primary, which I think was difficult to deal with for a while, the battle between him and McCormick, I think was, was definitely had some lingering effects. But, you know, I'll say the outcome probably was more to

do with the race that you were done talking about, I think, as I predicted in June, that ticket splitting doesn't go past about eight or 10 points. You know, we saw that with Governor Corbett's re-election in 2014. You know, the State House and State Senate races, you know, really needed him below 10 points, and, and he was polling at 15. And a lot of them were showing losses. And once he got down to about eight or nine points, they were able to crossover. So I think that's really what happened here. I think that's why you can attribute the State House loss for Republicans and also the pickup opportunities in a couple of congressional seats that were seen as done deals in early summer two, not happening because of the wide gap between Shapiro and Mastriano.

Murtha: Okay, you, you had mentioned Donald Trump, and I've been delaying bringing him into this conversation, but it's almost impossible not to both Mastriano and Oz were endorsed by the former president. Brittany, what impact do you think that having the outcome?

Crampsie: Well, you know, the primary, we saw all these fawning headlines about how the Trump endorsement helps these candidates across the finish line. And he was pretty successful in his primary endorsements in Pennsylvania and beyond. But I think we have to kind of re-examine what the word helped means when nearly all of them then lost in the general. So it's really looking at the split between your Republican primary voters and Josh talked about this a little bit earlier with Mastriano winning a minority of a very small minority of voters. That's not really helping you get the best candidates into November. But of course, this is not, you know, my party's problem so much as Josh's. So I don't want to take up too much space here.

Murtha: Okay, Josh, in the states with gubernatorial candidates, not linked with Trump, they did pretty well with the electorate. I'm speaking of Mike DeWine of Ohio, Greg Abbott in Texas, Brian Kemp in Georgia, certainly DeSantis in Florida, as the Trump endorsement valuable to some in the primary become an albatross in the general election.

Novotney: Yeah, to use the old term from the Happy Days Show, I think Trump has jumped the shark. So, you know, aging myself, I haven't saying that. But, you know, in short, I think he

probably still helps in certain areas for primaries. But you know, a lot of stuff I had heard after this election, the general election was that, you know, he's going to be very difficult. It's gonna be very difficult to win competitive races, particularly in Pennsylvania statewide, with him either on the ballot, heavily endorsing someone or also call Mastriano a protege of Trump's on the ballot, and to Brittany's point a little bit earlier in this discussion. You know, we've gotten beat fairly handily in the governor's races a couple times in a row here. And, you know, if you look back the midterms and 2018, and then when Trump was on the ballot again, and 2020, and then now in 2022, if you look at the suburban vote, it's gone very heavily for Democrats, and I think that is, you know, a very big problem for our party.

We have an issue where the swing voters where they you know, will vote in a positive way for Republican kind of what we call kitchen table issues kind of pocketbook, you know, issues, maybe crime and stuff like that, where I think we have better ideas and the Democratic Party on a lot of these issues. They cannot get past the fact that, you know, President former President Trump or one of his protegees or someone that he's heavily pushing is on the ballot. I think that's a problem. I think the good news is that even staunch Trump supporters are seeing that as an issue. They see alternatives around that. They don't have to necessarily moderate too much. But they we can get people in here, hopefully in the near future that can actually win races again.

Murtha: Yep. Okay, enough about Trump.

Let's move to the US House races. In Pennsylvania, we're down one to 17. Based on the last census, we seem to lose at least one or two the last 10 years for the last or every 10 years for the last 50 I think a lot of the expected drama just didn't occur. Every incumbent won. Kind of kind of boring in a way. The tightest races were two that you both thought would be competitive. The seventh district currently held by Susan Wild, she won by two points and the Eighth District held by Matt Cartwright. And he'd held on by a bit more than two points. How come there's no drama here? You both when your prediction to diverge by a wide margin on this one. Brittany, you predicted a one seat loss for the Democrats and Josh predicted a two to three seat pickup for the GOP. So why boring this time? Brittany?

Crampsie: Well, I don't say this often. And I hope to not say it again during the show, but I'm happy I was wrong on that one. The Democrats didn't lose anything. Those two workloads and there were two seats out west that were also looking to be pretty competitive. And they were wildly expensive races, all four of those.

If you look at the issue polling for exiting voters in federal races, abortion came in pretty high. There was some thought that economic issues would dominate all of you know, voters concerns voters issues in this election. But that just wasn't the case. And following the Dobb's ruling, which overturned 50 years of the Roe v Wade precedent was on a lot of voters minds.

And I think it was a huge misstep for Lindsey Graham to introduce an abortion ban several weeks before the election. Rev up that issue again, on the federal stage, voters knew that their access to reproductive health care was on the line in these federal races. And I think they voted accordingly. They voted that way and state races to which I hope we have some time to get to.

Murtha: Josh, what do you think?

Novotney: 100% agree. Yeah, I agree. I think I mean, definitely the Roe v. Wade overturning the Dobbs case. You know, I think there's we always talked about swing voters like they're homogenous, they're not there are some that lean more towards social issues, like abortion being more pro-choice, and, and some that lean more towards fiscal issues. And in you know, the ones that lean towards the fiscal issues, I think Republicans can pick up more easily in the others the Democrats turnout more easily and this year, I think that definitely weighed heavily. It did not help us that Republicans that we had a top of the ticket, gubernatorial nominee that had said such kind of radical extreme stuff on the issue and prioritize the issue himself. So that I think a lot of people that were motivated by that turned out and we had, I guess, the wrong swing voter deciding the rights on abortion.

Murtha: I thought that after Roe v. Wade was overturned, there would be an initial hue and cry across the country and there was, but as far as single-issue voters are concerned, and at least on that issue, I always assumed that if you were animated by that issue alone, you were a voter anyway, and you would be factored into the polling.

I think I'm pretty wrong on that. So did the pundits miss on that completely? Britney? Did they really underestimate the influence of abortion?

Crampsie: I will say that not all pundits missed it. And I've been screaming about this for a couple of months now. But I think a lot of polling missed it. So you know, you do a poll and you're trying to come up with a body of likely voters. When you're coming up with likely voters in a midterm, you're looking at previous midterms and who's turning out typically, it's not a ton of women. It's not particularly not a ton of young women. But those people's surged in registration in the months and weeks following the Dobbs decision. But then also what I think was missed or what I call them a couple of races I worked on sneaky Roe voters and these are moderate and independent women, some men even that Um, you know, weren't single issue voters on this for a long time.

But this issue was essentially settled, the federal standard was pretty clear Pennsylvania standards were pretty clear. And then without those, this issue moves into an importance that it wasn't in before. And no polling model captured that because we hadn't seen something as motivating on this issue in 50 years when Roe was decided for the first time. So I think polling missed it. And you know, polling has not been great. The last couple of cycles, there was the Trump effect, where, you know, Republicans who were going to vote for Trump were not entirely honest, or they didn't respond in polls. And so everybody was off by about three or four points that they've the exact opposite happened this time we corrected for the Trump effect and then didn't look at this more younger, more female electorate.

Murtha: Okay, just to button this up, Josh, how will the GOP handle the abortion issue going forward? I don't want to say it nationally, because there are too many ways to answer this question. But just in Pennsylvania, if you're if you're running statewide, and I think that's the only valid way of looking at this, how, how does the GOP handle the abortion issue?

Novotney: Yeah, I mean, that's a complex question. To Brett's point, the polling missed it. Right. So where they thought that those voters were already kind of already solidly Democrat turnout voters. And there was going to be an extra group coming out. Obviously, that was wrong. So,

you know, in the future, I think it'll be thought about more in in, in, you know, there'll be more strategy towards dealing with the issue. I think a lot of, you know, Monday morning quarterbacking is going on whether we should have talked about it more showing the candidates, the Republicans have more moderate views on it, expressing that more instead of letting the Democrats paint everyone as, as the most extreme on it, wanting to ban it. Federally and, and, and things like that.

So but you know, I will say this, we were talking about Pennsylvania, but you know, and it's kind of doom and gloom for Republicans after the cycle in Pennsylvania. But, you know, to your point, we did have a lot of victories in Florida and New York and places like that. So I don't think it's an impossible task. I don't think it's insurmountable. I think there's a lot of swing voters. You know, in New York, I think crime was the number one issue and it outweighed I really think it came down to candidates. So I think we need to recruit the right candidates that can talk about it that are not going to scare away voters on that issue or not going to make them want to vote on that issue more than kind of the kitchen table issues that I think we as a party typically went on.

Murtha: Let's move on to the statehouse. The legislative branch of government in Harrisburg has been under total Republican control since 2011. Sometimes with pretty big majorities, but no longer. The Democrats flipped control the House quite unexpectedly by changing a dozen seats, four in the Philly suburbs alone. Neither of you predicted that last spring when we spoke. How did that happen? Britt?

Crampsie: So we're looking at? Well, a couple of things. Obviously, we're looking at new maps. The 2010 maps were some of the worst ever drawn for Democrats in the House and the Senate, they led to minorities that were incomprehensible. Given the Democratic party registration advantage statewide. There's 500,000 more Democrats in Pennsylvania and these 2010, gerrymandered maps led the Pennsylvania Senate to have only 16 out of 50 Democrats and it's just not remotely representative of the electorate.

So 2020s census comes out new maps are drawn and 21. It's a bipartisan, bicameral process, and rectifies. A lot of these very egregious districts coming out of that it looked like the Senate was

able to pick up a couple of seats there on four year staggered cycles. And the house was going to pick up a few and I think some of the best, most optimistic democratic punditry had them taking the house and 24, maybe even 26. So this was a little bit surprised. And they also were able to take the majority, and we can talk about whether they really have it right at this moment. In it. Even with losing a couple of seats. They had some incumbents retire, and they lost those particularly in southwestern Pennsylvania. So they were really able to pick up nearly every seat that was competitive this year. They beat incumbents, they picked up nearly all of the new seats. It was an impressive organizing effort. They had great candidates, they raised a lot of money. They worked really hard. And then the maps, I think put them over the edge.

Murtha: Josh, what are your thoughts on the flip of the house?

Novotney: Yeah, I mean, I think it was unexpected. I think it goes to show you the kind of things that we were talking about that the gap between Mastriano and Shapiro was so large that it really curtailed a lot of down ballot folks in and I think it's, you know, my guess is it probably was something that Josh did.

Governor elect had his eyes on because, you know, he dumped a lot of money 10s and 10s of millions of dollars definitely overkill just for his race. But I'm sure he knew there would be a coattail effect down ballot that would help him out, you know, kind of become the leader of the Democratic Party in Pennsylvania, which I think is an easy title to give him now. So, you know, I can say kudos to him for, for bringing along a lot of down ballot, State House members. If it does to Brittany's point, I guess it's not technically 100%, you know, and we still have that special election as well.

It's just a one seat majority if they do have it. But that's still something where he may be able to get something passed in the State House and force a vote in the state senate, even though the Republicans still have control and actually get something done, where Governor Wolf had eight years of Republican control and not really any defining piece of legislation.

Murtha: So that's gonna ask about that, even with the numerical majority the Democrats will have next session, they're still gonna have trouble reorganizing because two former members have new jobs. Summer Lee will be in Congress and Representative Austin Davis will become

lieutenant governor. Those seats will most likely be filled by Democrats. Nothing short of a miracle could stop that from happening.

Crampsie: Or a nightmare.

Murtha: Sorry about that. I tried to be nonpartisan in these things. So what happens in the House in the interim, is there an opportunity for some fast legislating or what, Britt?

Crampsie: This is a great parliamentary question. So the voters chose 102 Democrats 101 Republicans in the PA house.

One of those Democrats has passed away. Shortly before the election, Tony DeLuca, longtime member from Allegheny County passed away and two other Democrats from Allegheny County ran and won and other offices Austin Davis will become a lieutenant governor in summer Lee will be sworn in as a member of Congress actually on the same day as the swearing in for the Pennsylvania House. So that puts the numbers down to 101. Republicans to 99 Democrats, like you said those seats are heavily Democratic performance index close to 65 to 70%. It would be wild for one of those to flip. But Republicans only need one of them. You know, if they take one, they have one or two. Democrats need to win all of them. And the latest rumor is that Doug Mastriano's running mate Carrie del Rosso lives in that DeLuca seat. She's not coming off a particularly successful race, but her name ID is pretty high. So if Republicans are able to invest in one of those races and pick them off, it changes a little bit. But I think the most likely scenario is that Republicans try to hold on to control for about eight or so weeks while we wait for these specials to happen. Then they have Republican control of the legislature. Not sure what they'll try to do knowing that anything particularly crazy, I'll call it will be vetoed by the then governor Shapiro. But we're looking at Joanne McClinton, speakership by the mid spring.

Murtha: Josh, what would you advise the leadership in the House on the GOP side to do with this statistical opportunity that's presented to them?

Novotney: That's a great question. I don't know what exactly can be done in such a short timeframe. In especially with the governor elect, who is a, you know, the incoming governor is a Democrat and not going to get anything actually passed, I guess you could try to put some bills on his desk early that try to define him and try to, you know, either win those special elections, even though they are heavily Democrats. So some of those areas are, you know, what we call NASCAR dads that they voted for Trump heavily in 2016. And they can occasionally be swayed. But I think that part of Allegheny County and Britt may know this better than I do, is probably, you know, probably a little bit more of a good solid turnout Democrat areas. But, you know, if they can send some bills that they can, they can make some headlines with that the governor will not sign. I think that's probably best case scenario. They're not going to get much actually passed at signs in the next few months.

Murtha: My next question kind of dovetail now, you finished up your answer, Josh, the State Senate is going to remain basically status quo with the GOP firmly in control. We'll have divided government in Harrisburg. What does that mean for the Commonwealth? Britt?

Crampsie: Well, first of all talk about the composition of the Senate a little bit here. The Senate Republicans haven't gained a seat since 2016. So in 2018, they lost five seats and 19 and they lost a special they lost one and 20 and then they lost another one because of redistricting this year. So while Democrats are still in the minority, they have 22 seats now not 16. So that looks a little bit different and Republicans still have a couple of moderates. So I think that those probably three or four, moderate Republicans are going to have a lot of power in that caucus, particularly if a Democratic majority in the House continues to send or starts to send over a bunch of legislation that wouldn't typically be considered by Republicans are able to get to a majority that way.

A divided government is not unusual in Pennsylvania, we've seen it many, many times in recent years. But a divided let it legislature is interesting, particularly as one of the first items of business coming up is the budget address budget hearings, and then ultimately, budget negotiations later in the spring, and we're looking at a \$5 billion surplus. It'll be fascinating to see what these five parties the four caucuses in the governor's office can come up with changing

majorities, but also such slim slim margins, I think we're also going to see some pretty good attendance from Democrats and legislature to knowing how tenuous their holding control is.

Murtha: Well, tax cuts would be nice. I am a taxpayer, I would appreciate that. But that's just me.

Novotney: Don't count on it, I think will be given out.

Murtha: Well, Josh divided government can present opportunities for both parties, I suppose if they're willing to compromise. Do you see that happening here?

Novotney: So let me kind of incorporate both Harrisburg and Washington DC since we have kind of similar situations razor thin margins in the house, and then, you know, the Republicans control the State Senate, but not not, you know, a supermajority in Harrisburg. And then no matter what the outcome in Georgia is in DC, the Democrats will control the US Senate, but not filibuster proof by any means, you know, either a even Senate or a, you know, a two-seat majority. 51 - 49. So, you know, there are definitely opportunities. I wonder, you know, I asked the question, can we go back to the 1990s, with Clinton and Gingrich and say, hey, I'll give you this, if you give me that. And then major bipartisan legislation was passed, and it benefited everyone, including the country. And, you know, I think that was the last time we had anywhere close to a surplus on the budget.

I don't know if politics is quite there right now, I think, you know, my gut tells me you're gonna see a lot of bills that are more messaging, political messaging bills from both sides, and trying to, you know, tee up for the next election cycle, particularly the large presidential, everyone is already going nuts over the fact that Trump has announced. So I think that's going to suck up all the oxygen in the room. And for Democrats, I think, you know, they found a winning formula for at least one cycle to focus on the extreme social parts of, of our party, particularly on abortion. So, you know, you may have some bills coming through in Harrisburg trying to, you know, codify abortion and abortion rights, and kind of, you know, continue to hit the talking points and

the narratives and, and the issues that got them in there trying to, you know, see if they can increase that majority a little bit more.

Murtha: All right, let's, let's move on here. I wanted to discuss mailing ballots and their impact on the election. Because the governor's race was not competitive. It's hard to gauge the specific impact of mailings. But for the record, Josh Shapiro received over a million mail in votes, almost 800,000 more than Mastriano.

But the difference in that race was 15 points, so it's hard to say mail-ins made the difference. But then the US Senate race Fetterman received more than 725,000 mail in votes than Oz in a race that was decided by 236,000 votes. What are your views on the overall impact of mail-in votes? Brit.

Crampsie: I think that, I mean, I know that it is a legal form of participation and the opposition to it by Republicans never really made sense. It seemed like they were handicapping themselves unnecessarily. A lot of states have done this for a long time, it was actually sort of unusual. The Pennsylvania didn't have no excuse mail and voting or early voting or same day registration. It's not remarkably easy to participate in Pennsylvania. So when it became a little bit easier, the Republican or the far right Republican choice to limit themselves to Election Day turnout doesn't make a whole lot of sense. From a field organizing standpoint. If you can have an extra month of getting people their ballots and getting them filled out and getting them in. I don't know why you wouldn't do that. I think we continue to get better at the administration of it. There were some bumpy little precincts in the southeast, but for the most part, counties are getting better at it.

I think there may be some appetite in the legislature to allow some practices like pre-canvassing just to speed it up a little bit. But we also weren't waiting a long time this year, most of the races were wrapped up election night, unlike in 2020, when we were doing mailings for the first time and waiting four or five days to find out the Joe Biden had won Pennsylvania. I think we're gonna see Republicans ease up on the anti-mail-in voting rhetoric, just you know, listening to those margins that you pointed out, and seeing that it's really not going anywhere.

Murtha: All right, Josh Brittany makes some good points about mail-ins and the GOP does the party going forward incorporate a mail-in strategy for statewide elections?

Novotney: So, once again, Brett has done a perfect answer. I'll just say I agree. So no, but all seriousness, yeah, there's a lot going on here. First off, let me take a step back. And as a Republican that's active in Pennsylvania politics, just from like a civic level of trying to, you know, get out the vote and, and work, you know, on Election Day and what not.

Many of us were for mail in ballots back in 2020. The problem is that the president at the time definitely had a much larger bully pulpit than Josh Novotney, and other folks that were trying to get our maybe not four out of four voters, you know, to do mail and to increase turnout. So, I think as a whole, now, I think we've all decided that, you know, just to move on, and we're going to have, you know, small factions of our party, that will still listen to the former president, that it's a form of fraud. And look, don't get me wrong, there's always fraud, right, there is always some level of fraud, you know, nothing to the level that that caused, should have caused a different turnout, or different outcome in 2020. So it's always good.

But to Brittany's point, a lot of these systems have been, you know, kind of critiqued in the past couple of years, and they're going to continue to be fine-tuned. And, you know, I think as a whole, you've seen our party, especially the past month or two, after the, the shellacking in the gubernatorial in the unexpected losses down ballot. Turn to that, and they look at the same numbers you were mentioning Jim and say, Okay, we need to turn this around. So you're actually hearing a lot of conversations from the party level, state local party level. Now consultants are trying to come up with strategies to get back into the swing of things with it. So I think you're gonna see a massive campaign in the coming months to get more Republicans to, to mail in vote, the question is going to be how many of them actually take to it after the damage was done. Also, you have states like Florida and others that do not have the, the, the, you know, lack of trust in the process like Pennsylvania does. So we have a more of an uphill battle. I think, as a Republican Party in Pennsylvania, I think other states have already gotten ahead of us. So we have some catching up to do. And I think we're gonna do it.

Murtha: I have a couple more questions here before we end our conversation. One is about the open primaries, which we don't have in Pennsylvania. And after Doug Mastriano, won the Republican primary for Governor last spring, because of the extreme nature of his some of his positions, a lot of folks thought that candidates like him would have a difficult time if the primaries were open so that on unaffiliated voters could participate. Do you think that's something that the state would seriously consider Brett going forward?

Crampsie: I think this is something Republicans are gonna be pretty interested in. There are a lot of independents and libertarians that skew Republican but don't get a voice in the primary process. So I think, you know, given the poor candidates I've seen recently, there may be some appetite. I'm supportive of, you know, as much participation as possible all the time. One argument that you hear against it sometimes is that members of the opposite party will participate in their opposition's primary to sort of help elect the more extreme candidate. I don't think that happens.

Murtha: You mean like the Democrats did this time?

Crampsie: We dabbled a little bit.

Murtha: Several 100 million dollars dabbling there.

Crampsie: I believe we have those generals, but I think you did. So, you know, on a voter by voter basis, I don't think it's statistically significant enough. In Pennsylvania, where would make a difference is primaries and I think that you may see better candidates on both sides.

Murtha: Josh, what about open primaries for the GOP?

Novotney: Yeah, I'm already on the record on this. I was on MSNBC in May. And I said no way. So I'm going to stick with my answer. I don't think it's a good idea. I think it's too much meddling. You know, we saw at least \$2 million spent by Shapiro to, to advance

Mastriano over the goal line there, which is more money than I think Mastriano spent on his own race. I think Republicans in the past have championed, you know, you know, trying to cause that chaos as well, I think it should be within your party. In keep it that way. I also think, too, that, you know, as I mentioned earlier, there should be probably some reforms, I think you're probably we should probably only pick nominees that have at least, you know, 50% plus one of the vote in our primaries. So I think looking for those types of reforms are probably a better way of getting candidates that are more electable and also probably, you know, able to represent a majority of the Republicans, not just, you know, the third or so that, that probably don't fit with the rest of the state in regards.

Murtha: Right. So you would support rank choice?

Novotney: See rank choice go south to I think you just have a runoff is, is probably the best way of doing it. So you'd have a, you know, just like we're having in Georgia right now in the general election, have that in a primary a few weeks later, where Republicans come back to vote, and it's just the top two candidates.

Murtha: Okay, that's good. All right. I'm gonna have a little fun with this list. Last question. Who will be your respective party's nominee for president in 2024? Britt.

Crampsie: Sitting President Joe Biden.

Murtha: Okay. You didn't even hesitate. All right. Josh.

Novotney: Unequivocal. Okay. I think Joe Biden will be the nominee as well. So you won't feel my party? Your party? Yeah, no. So mine is a slightly longer answer, since we don't have an incumbent president running for reelection.

So I think, at this point, if it's a DeSantis versus Trump head to head, I probably lean a little bit towards to DeSantis at this point. I think, as I was kind of alluding to earlier, a lot of folks that are even staunch

Trump supporters in the past know that his electability is a major issue now. And you should probably everyone wants to win. I don't think anyone wants to sit there and, and, you know, focus on one person who is unelectable in the general election, which he completely is, I think, where we get in trouble as if we have, you know, 5-6-7 candidates all the way to the end of the primary season, and it splits up the non-Trump vote where he gets, let's say, 25 30%. And no one else is able to beat that everyone else has 15 to 20%. And that really gets into an issue. So if it's a head to head or the folks that are in get out and coalesce around the, the leader against, you know, Trump, I think we'll see someone else if it's a if it's a large primary.

You know, I think Trump still has a pretty good shot of getting the nomination. But I want to ask Britt question, if the president decides not to run, who do you think will get it?

Crampsie: Vice President Harris, I think fans are not going to be excited. I'm not going to be exciting on this one. I think we've got a solid bench right at the top here. I feel good about it. Okay.

Murtha: Well, thank you both. That's all the time we have for this podcast. Brittany Crampsie, Joshua Novotney. Thank you for an informative and really entertaining discussion.

Crampsie: Thanks for having us. It was a blast.

Novotney: Yeah, definitely. Thanks, Jim.

Murtha: The preceding podcast was a production of Macallan Communications publishers of the Pennsylvania business report. To submit your ideas for future podcast. Just go to [www dot Penn biz report.com](http://www.dotPenn.biz/report.com) and look for the podcast section on the front page. Until next time, I am your host Jim Murtha. Be well be safe and be prosperous.

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Inevitably, some errors are not caught but we believe this transcript captures the essence of the conversation.

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