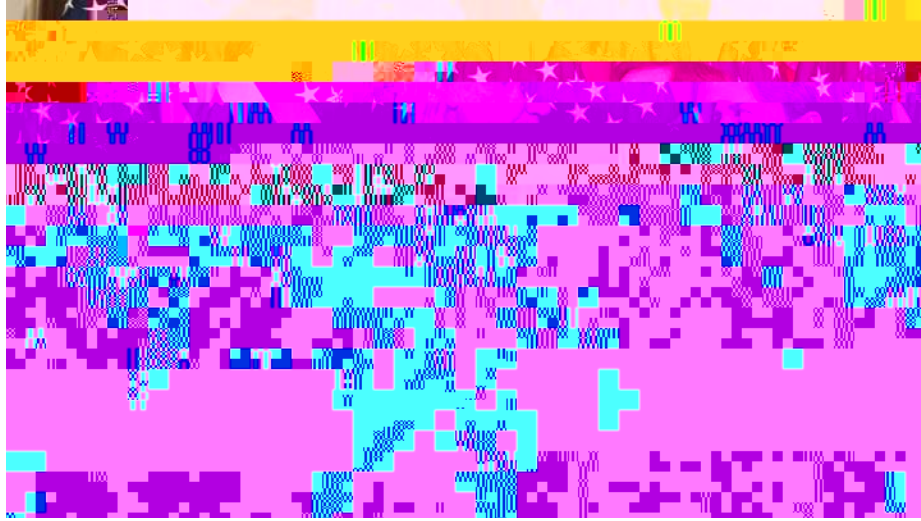


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Donald Norcross gets early and productive start in Congress



"I am humbled and honored to join such a distinguished and diverse group of party leaders as we work together to create better opportunities for America's middle class," Norcross said.

Norcross says he is learning to juggle several days' worth of orientation activities while concurrently functioning as a sitting congressman.

Though he's new to Washington, Norcross' election to the committee suggests he may wield more power than most of his incoming colleagues. If true,

"(The district) has been more or less in the hands of the same group of people for two or three generations," says Douglas. "So he has the luxury of pursuing his agenda without constantly looking over his shoulder at re-election."

Case-in-point: Norcross cast his first vote on Friday, in favor of constructing the controversial Keystone Pipeline to carry oil from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico. Though 31 Democratic representatives also voted "yea," the project has generated more support from the Republican Party, and it's vehemently opposed by environmentalists and President Obama.

Norcross says he voted in favor because of its potential to create jobs – the primary platform of his campaign. "I don't know that we bucked the president or the party but my years in Trenton were based on creating job opportunity," he said. "This vote is also about gaining energy independence from the rest of the world. It doesn't take much to remember the gas embargo (of the 1970s) when you could only buy gas on odd or even days."

Eventually, the labor organizer would like to sit on the energy and commerce committee but sets his near-term sights on the education and workforce committee and the armed services committee. Andrews sat on the latter two, so Norcross sees it partially as a way to carry on his predecessor's legacy and represent constituents who work at Joint Base McGuire-Fort Dix – Lakehurst.

Norcross is piggybacking on Andrew's tenure in other ways, too. He's keeping Andrew's Haddon Township office, and he's keeping up a dialogue with the former congressman, as well as the deep pool of defacto political advisors who populate the Democratic Party in South Jersey.

Additionally, he's maintaining continuity with pieces of his former life in that he brought along his chief of staff, Michael Maitland, from Trenton to continuing serving in that role, and he intends to stay in his Camden apartment even if he decides to also rent in D.C. "I love where I live," he said.

Norcross' vacated Senate seat will be filled by party leaders in the coming weeks.