



The move on Prieto is not without risk, however. Should he turn aside the challenge from Coughlin, he'll emerge a far more formidable figure. He will be able to consolidate his power and make it clear that neither he nor the chamber he leads will automatically fall in line with Sweeney or the Senate's wishes.

Historically, the jockeying for leadership positions doesn't begin in earnest until the outcome of the general election. The unprecedented early and highly public challenge to the Speaker is an indication of the stakes involved in what Democrats believe will be a unified government come January — control of both the executive and legislative branches.

The levers of governmental and policy power await. A decision on whose hands will grasp them will set the tone and agenda for the next four years.

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