

WASHINGTON

## McClain Delaney, Parrott tangle in Maryland's most competitive House race

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BY KATHARINE WILSON - OCTOBER 23, 2024

FREDERICK, Md. – With less than two minutes left at an otherwise cordial Frederick League of Women Voters forum on Oct. 6, two candidates for Congress suddenly erupted.

They pointed fingers, accused each other of lying and continued whisper-arguing as the forum's ending announcements wrapped up.

The verbal combatants were Democrat April McClain Delaney and Republican Neil Parrott, who are running for the 6th Congressional District, which stretches from rural Western Maryland to the Montgomery County suburbs.

The district is a politically diverse territory that has produced the most competitive House race in predominantly Democratic Maryland.

As Election Day looms, here is a breakdown of the 6th District contest.

## **The candidates**

McClain Delaney, a communications attorney, said she wants to work from the “common sense, common ground middle” in Congress.

Her main policy goals are codifying abortion access, improving the economy for businesses and families, strengthening border security and protecting children’s safety online.

McClain Delaney, who grew up in rural Idaho, most recently worked in the Biden administration as a deputy assistant secretary for communications and information at the Department of Commerce. She previously was the Washington director and a board member for Common Sense Media, a non-profit promoting online safety for children.

When the incumbent, Rep. David Trone, D-Maryland, announced his decision to run in this year’s Senate primary, McClain Delaney said she got calls from people across the 6th District asking her to run to keep the House seat for Democrats. The decision to be a candidate, however, came down to being a mother, she said.

“I looked at my four girls, and said, ‘It’s their future and someone has to do it,’” McClain Delaney told Capital News Service.

Parrott, who is running for this House seat for the third time, is a former member of the Maryland House of Delegates who represented Washington County from 2011 to 2023. He is campaigning on lowering taxes, decreasing the size of the government and bringing more jobs to the district. The engineer says he wants to bring “practical solutions” to Washington.

On the campaign trail, Parrott touts his roots in the district, which include his home in the Hagerstown area, founding the Hagerstown Area Summer Swimming program and his past job as a deputy director of public works for the city of Frederick.

Parrott has repeatedly criticized McClain Delaney for running to represent a district she does not live in. She lives just outside district lines in Potomac.

McClain Delaney counters that she knows the district well. Her husband, John Delaney, represented the 6th District from 2013 to 2019.

But, McClain Delaney told CNS, “I run my own race.”

If elected, Parrott said he would join the House Freedom Caucus, a hard-right group of GOP lawmakers headed by Rep. Andy Harris, R-Maryland.

McClain Delaney has called Parrott “out-of-this-world extreme” and said he would be as ineffective in Congress as he was in the state legislature. In 2019, CNS ranked Parrott as the least effective member of the state legislature after failing to pass any bills that he was the lead sponsor for.

Parrott, however, told CNS last month that he was actually productive for a Republican in the Democratic-controlled state legislature.

“She just doesn’t even know what she’s talking about,” Parrott said in an interview with CNS. “She has no record at all.”

McClain Delaney’s campaign has run attack ads and spoken publicly about Parrott’s actions in the Maryland state legislature, including Parrott co-sponsoring a fetal personhood bill, which if passed would have blocked abortion access. She also has criticized Parrott for his votes against removing state provisions that allowed a spousal defense against rape if there was no force or threat of force.

In 2022, Parrott called the legislation removing the spousal defense “ridiculous,” and argued that because common law says it’s illegal to rape your spouse, the law didn’t have to change.

“We’re talking like a fourth-degree offense. I mean you just pat them in the wrong way, they take it sexually inappropriately. That’s marriage. Those things are protected in marriage and this law gets rid of that,” Parrott said on the floor of the House of Delegates in 2022.

When Parrott was asked about his vote on the bill in an interview with CNS, Parrott simply pointed out that the bill did not pass that year due to an issue with a state Senate amendment and put the blame on Democrats.

Maryland ended the spousal defense for rape in 2023.

Parrott told CNS that he supports abortion regulations being left up to the states and did not comment on whether or not he would vote for a national abortion ban. The candidate said he will be voting against the ballot initiative in Maryland to enshrine the right to abortion in the state constitution.

During a Washington County Chamber of Commerce forum last Wednesday, Parrott said he supports exceptions to abortion restrictions, such as in cases of rape, incest and when the mother's life is at risk.

### **Fundraising and spending**

McClain Delaney is outspending and out fundraising her opponent, according to the latest Federal Election Commission reports.

The Democrat's campaign raised more than \$740,600 from donors between July 1 and Sept. 30, while Parrott raised about \$276,000.

McClain Delaney spent more than \$640,000 last quarter while Parrott spent \$178,100.

Matthew Klein, analyst with the nonpartisan Cook Political Report, said that part of the reason why Parrott isn't as effective in raising money is his past failed runs for the same House seat.

"It's hard to get people to be willing to put their actual money on the line if they don't think you're going to win," Klein said.

Parrott lost in 2022 by more than nine percentage points and in 2020 by almost 20 percentage points. However, Parrott said this race is different because there is no incumbent and people in the 6th District don't know McClain Delaney.

### **Polling and rating**

A Democrat has represented the 6th District in Congress since 2013.

With mostly rural Western Maryland leaning Republican and Montgomery County favoring Democrats, Frederick County appears to be the battleground of this House race.

Frederick County has not voted consistently for the same political party in recent presidential elections – going for Republican Donald Trump in 2016 and Democrat Joe Biden in 2020.

In 2022 redistricting, parts of Democratic-heavy Montgomery County were also taken away from the district as the rest of Frederick County was added, making the district more competitive.

The national Democratic and Republican parties appear to be focusing on the 6th District more than usual this cycle.

McClain Delaney was added to the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee’s “Red to Blue” program last month. The designation means the party is devoting more resources and funding to seats it considers important to keep or, in other districts, take away from the GOP.

The National Republican Congressional Committee last month placed 54-year-old Parrott on its “young guns” list – a group of candidates in open seats to which the party intends to provide additional help.

The Cook Political Report currently lists the 6th District race as competitive but likely to result in a Democratic win.

But an August poll, conducted by Gonzales Research and Marketing Strategies, showed Parrott with a 41-39% lead over McClain Delaney, with a margin of error of plus or minus 5.6 percentage points.