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Big Tech foe to leave Congress

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22 February 2023



David Cicilline, the former chair of the House of Representatives antitrust subcommittee and an outspoken advocate for reining in the largest US technology companies, will give up his congressional seat this summer to lead a nonprofit.

Cicilline, 61, revealed in a statement on Tuesday that he will step down in June to serve as president of the Rhode Island Foundation, the state's largest funder of nonprofits.

The lawmaker led the antitrust subcommittee for the previous four years of his seven terms in the House, overseeing [sprawling investigations](#) into the competitive practices of Google, Amazon, Apple and Meta Platforms and [championing legislation](#) that would restrict their conduct.

Rhode Island will hold a special election to fill Cicilline's seat later this year. Meanwhile, the longtime competition enforcement advocate's subcommittee leadership position was [reassigned](#) last month as control of the House changed parties.

Republican leaders tapped Representative Thomas Massie – who once [suggested](#) that the merger review process is unnecessary – to lead the subcommittee.

Cicilline, a former public defender, had a vastly different track record to his successor on antitrust. During his tenure, he led a bipartisan probe into digital markets, [demanded](#) more complete testimony from Google, Amazon and Facebook executives and [urged](#) the Department of Justice to launch a criminal investigation into Amazon.

Cicilline also sponsored numerous competition bills including the [American Innovation and Choice Online Act](#) (AICOA), the [Journalism Competition and Preservation Act](#) and the [Affordable Prescriptions for Patients through Promoting Competition Act](#).

Although those bills have not been passed, Cicilline also co-sponsored the [Merger Filing Fee Modernization Act](#) – which President Biden signed into law in December as part of a larger legislative package.

Outside of antitrust, Cicilline has advocated for measures to prevent gun violence and was a manager during the second impeachment of former US president Donald Trump.

He is the second high-profile antitrust progressive to resign from the three branches of government this year, following Tim Wu's [departure](#) from the White House to return to Columbia Law School in January.

The lawmaker said serving the people of Rhode Island's First Congressional District "has been the honor of my lifetime" and committed to bringing the same energy to his new role as he returns to Providence, a city he previously led for eight years as mayor.

The Rhode Island Foundation provides grants for community programmes and uses advocacy to improve economic, educational and health outcomes for the state's residents. In his new role, Cicilline will receive a significant pay rise to earn \$650,000 a year, a spokesperson told the [Boston Globe](#).

'Monumental progress'

Some in the antitrust field said Cicilline's resignation came as a surprise, sparking apprehension about the ability to pass meaningful competition-minded legislation in this session of Congress.

Seth Bloom, former general counsel to the Senate's antitrust team, found the representative's impending departure surprising – especially because Cicilline will no longer be on the "national stage".

"He was quite a vigorous member of Congress and had a very active agenda," Bloom said. "Obviously, he has his reasons, but it just comes as a surprise to me."

Bloom, who recently [signed on](#) as a lobbyist for Live Nation, said Cicilline certainly "made his mark" on antitrust policy despite the pair rarely agreeing. As the House ushers in new antitrust leadership, legislative efforts are already floundering, Bloom claimed.

But Rutgers University law professor Michael Carrier said that legislation to clamp down on Big Tech could still be on the horizon.

"Cicilline was the leading force behind much of the Big Tech legislation, so I'd imagine this might decrease the likelihood of its passage," Carrier said. "But on the other hand, many are involved in this effort, so there still is a chance."

Cuneo Gilbert & LaDuca partner Amanda Lewis said Cicilline's leadership on competition policy led to "monumental progress in the continuing fight against the abuse of monopoly power".

While Lewis said Cicilline's enthusiasm will be greatly missed, he claimed the lawmaker's colleagues – such as Representatives Hakeem Jeffries, Pramila Jayapal and Joe Neguse – will keep competition a priority. Jayapal served as the vice chair of the House antitrust subcommittee during the previous session of Congress.

Democrats have blamed Senate majority leader [Chuck Schumer](#) and minority leader [Mitch McConnell](#) for failing to enact legislation aimed at Google, Apple, Amazon, Meta Platforms and TikTok.

However, Lewis, who worked on the House antitrust subcommittee's digital markets report as counsel on detail from the Federal Trade Commission, noted that there is currently bipartisan support for at least some antitrust reform.

Since the beginning of the term, the Senate Judiciary Committee has [advanced](#) several bipartisan bills aimed at increasing competition and decreasing prices in the pharmaceutical industry.

"It is far from the case that the moment has passed for antitrust reform when we have champions from the top of government in the White House to our leaders in Congress pushing forward," Lewis said.

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