

# ELECTION DAY:

*An Insider NJ Examination  
of the June 7th  
Congressional Primary Races*



**NJ** SPECIAL EDITION

# ELECTION DAY

SPECIAL EDITION



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# Introduction



2020 redistricting reconceived mostly to protect Democratic Party incumbents gives a big advantage to the majority party in New Jersey. Even in these volatile times as Democrats struggle to find a message, their congressional delegation advantage looks mostly intact by way of the map, with only CD-7 a likely victory for the Republican challenger. That would render New Jersey 9-3 D-R by the end of the year. But we won't consider those general election contests here, at least not in the main. For the moment, we concern ourselves with the June 7th Primary Calendar.

We take a look at the dynamics in each of New Jersey's 12 Congressional Districts.

Certainly, Republicans have devoured much of the season's energy, as challengers face one another for the right to go up against Democratic Party incumbents in battleground or quasi-battleground districts. In particular, the CD-5 GOP Primary looks like a significant conflict, with the Bergen County Republican Organization (BCRO)-backed candidate in a dogfight with a strong challenger off the line. CD-3 has also commanded a lot of attention, in a true establishment versus anti-establishment Republican Primary contest.

In many contests, the influence of former President Donald J. Trump remains strong, visible in a unique way in CD-4, where two challengers oppose U.S. Rep. Chris Smith (R-4) – one of just two incumbent Republican congressmen in New Jersey – because he favored the creation of a bipartisan commission to investigate the Jan. 6th, 2021 desecration of the United States Capitol.

Keep an eye, too, on CD-10, where a progressive challenger looks to test the strength of the party organization line in her financially well-connected challenge of a veteran Democratic Party incumbent. U.S. Rep. Donald Payne (D-10) is highly favored to win, but how much will his opponent, Imani Oakley, cut into the perception of an unbeatable Essex County Democratic Party Machine?

**For analysis on those races, insider X's and O's, and much more, please read on, and don't forget to vote on June 7th.**





# CD1: Resizing the Norcross Power Base



Bruised by the evaporation of regional opportunity and the GOP grassroots toppling last year of Steve Sweeney, U.S. Rep. Donald Norcross now shoulders the cinder blocks of family name and building trades political power as he tries to keep alive if not some semblance of South Jersey Democratic Party supremacy, at least a humble dignity.

An electrical worker by trade, Congressman Norcross is supposedly the family nice guy, Fredo made good with a title and a free pass to stroll the halls of Washington. If the name inspires little more than dying political grandeur and belly laugh references to a bygone bogeyman era, the district itself retains a near-perfect fit for Norcross, almost like a shoe crafted for maximum

personal comfort. CD-1 contains all of Camden County (68% of district) and parts of Burlington (4%) and Gloucester (29%).

Candidly, few take this D+11 district seriously right now, at least when it comes to sizing up competitive elections. On the InsiderNJ battleground viability scale it comes in near the bottom, as the Norcrosses attempt to bounce back from Sweeney's loss with a less than scintillating but nonetheless authoritative family headline federal year win.

That said, not everyone agrees with a 2022 cake-walk characterization for Norcross.

Mario DeSantis, a teacher by trade and openly gay Democrat from Collingswood, wants the 1st District Congressional seat, or at least wants people to know that Norcross doesn't belong in the ill-begotten seat. "We're not just dealing with a broken system; this is a rigged system. This was designed by special interests to benefit special interests." These were Phil Murphy's comments a day after his task force determined that .." Tren-

ton lawmakers awarded billions in tax credits to the Norcross business network.

DeSantis expresses irritation over Norcross' early support for the Keystone XL Pipeline and the Covanta Incinerator. "Covanta is the largest polluter in the county and the second largest polluter of lead in America," notes the Democratic Party challenger. Little more than a quixotic candidate considering the potency of the Democratic Party organization line, DeSantis packages new energy in his role as an inevitable political casualty.

It's a part he shares with the two Republicans vying to represent their party in the general election. Damon Galdo of West Deptford is trying to get around Claire Gustafson of Collingswood, the party favorite for the nomination. She ran two years ago and Norcross drubbed her, 62.5-37.5%.

That beating ought to count for something, says her ally Steve Kush.

"Claire put her money behind other Republican candidates, walking door to door and supporting them," Kush told InsiderNJ. "She's been there for Republicans, unlike Johnny Come Lately [Galdo]."

Mostly ignoring her primary rival, Gustafson (conservative, smaller government, self-reliance, Judeo-Christian values) keeps Norcross in her sights. Notably, while DeSantis chastises the congressman from the left for initially backing the XL Pipeline, the Republican took another tack when the Democratic incumbent called for a temporary suspension of gas taxes.

"While I agree a suspension of gas taxes will provide relief for countless hard-working New Jerseyans, I have to wonder what temporary means to Donald Norcross," Gustafson said.



She also demonstrates a capacity to hit him where he fancies himself strongest: Building Trades Labor. "I remember a time when Donald Norcross fully supported the Keystone XL pipeline." Gustafson added, "Norcross showed that support was temporary as he sat silent when President Biden pulled the plug on the project. Norcross didn't care that the Laborers International Union of North America called the decision, 'both insulting and disappointing to the thousands of hard-working members who will lose good-paying, middle-class family-supporting jobs.'"

Gutsy. Tough.

Of course, it won't be enough to dislodge Norcross from the district. That said, no one appears to be watching his output anymore with a consideration of Donald Norcross' potential to go statewide as a gubernatorial or senate candidate. He's regional only, and probably only district-wide at that.



# CD2: The Jeff Van Drew Brand

Maybe you're one of those people who can't stand party switchers. But give Van Drew this: he knows his district.

While much of the rest of New Jersey cringed every time Donald Trump addressed the nation, Van Drew, presumably pumping iron at the gym or going out for a bottle of milk at the market, connected with the President's message. That's because the district connected.



While other battleground Democrats face extinction this year (Tom Malinowski comes to mind, see below), or stock massive war-chests while channeling no-labels vibes (see Josh Gottheimer, below), the Benedict Arnold of South Jersey oc-

cupies a relaxed atmosphere, all the sweat and grief of 2020 behind him now as he contemplates life as a grounded Republican in, get this, a more Republican district.

Sweeney and South Jersey Democrats never loved Van Drew, and Sweeney acted horrified when Van Drew abandoned the Democratic Party to become a Republican, but in a sense Van Drew – favoring survival to a Sweeney-like fate – simply bit the bullet on the party affiliation question rather than dampen the spirits of his own party (and invite the constant barrage of CWA workers) by playing the role of pragmatic Democrat who pals around with Republicans.

Not only did CD-2 get more Republican in the aftermath of redistricting (now it's R+5), as Democrats tried to make CD3 more Democratic for Andy Kim and offloaded red chunks of Ocean County to Van Drew. Van Drew has a Republican Primary opponent who has a similar story to himself, at least when it comes to party affiliation.

“I don't want to be known as the Republican that defeated a Democrat in disguise,” says Sean Pignatelli of Fortescue. “I want our district to be known as the district that was able to rid a Democrat from our Republican party.”

Sounds great. Bold. Authoritative. Uncompromising when it comes to defectors in the GOP.

Only, Pignatelli, a third-generation millwright by trade and proud member of Carpenters Local 219 out of Philly, is also a former Democrat.

Nonetheless, Van Drew infuriates him.

“The thing that really pissed me is when he voted for the Biden infrastructure bill,” Pignatelli told InsiderNJ. “He doesn’t understand that he’s representing the whole country, too, not just the state. For him to sit there and say he voted for infrastructure, to me is just wrong. He’d probably do better as a state senator than a congressman.”

What didn’t he like about the bill?

It ramrodded a Socialist agenda, he says.

Democrats have become Socialists, and Republicans have become Democrats, or at least two Democrats (Van Drew and himself) became Republicans.

A third candidate, John Barker of Bayville, could not be reached for comment. “I haven’t had a chance to meet him; I don’t know what he stands for,” Pignatelli said.

For his part, Van Drew has kept his own sights focused on what he sees as the district’s real tormentor: President Joe Biden. This month he fired off a release following reports of Biden attempting to hand power over to the World Health Organization (WHO).



“When President Trump was in office, he rightfully sought to withdraw the United States from the WHO, and now our current President has secretly sent the WHO multiple amendments that would hand over the organization an extensive amount of power,” said Van Drew. “Whether direct or indirect, there is absolutely zero reason that we should be giving any additional authority to an organization that succumbs to the pressures of China. The world is still reeling from COVID-19 and the WHO’s mismanagement from the beginning of the pandemic. It demanded no accountability from China and would implement and reverse COVID-19 guidelines which resulted in mass confusion. Despite this, President Biden submitted amendments that would give up U.S. sovereignty and allow the WHO to have additional authority over future pandemic responses.

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I am adamantly opposed to any attempt to hand undue power to the WHO and strongly condemn President Biden's backdoor handling of submitting these amendments without any public statement."

Now the occasion of Van Drew extricating himself from the Democratic Party and standing at a Wildwood podium with Trump unleashed a 2020 barrage against him from his former party, and resulted in a pretty vital primary season, with Amy Kennedy finally winning, then losing to Van Drew in the general election.

Maybe the example of Kennedy – a well-financed and strong candidate running in a more Democrat-friendly, pre-redistricted CD-2, in better, more galvanizing weather for a Democrat – sent others underground this season.

It's telling perhaps that Kennedy herself did not seek a rematch with Van Drew.

Stinging a bit from the new map, the allies of attorney and former law enforcement officer Tim Alexander of Oceanville see this year's less thorny primary season as a plus.

"We've built a lot of support," said Zacharia Hartman, Alexander's campaign manager, referring to the campaign securing Democratic Party lines in all but two counties (Gloucester, where they share the line with their primary opponent Carolyn Rush, and Salem, which doesn't have a line). "We need a candidate who's not focusing on intraparty battles, but on Jeff Van Drew, who's not doing his job."

Hartman cites Van Drew's failure to support the CARES Act.



COVID limited candidates' ability to pound doors and campaign vigorously two years ago, argues the Alexander campaign manager. Those strictures won't impede Alexander, Hartman argues.

A retired Lockheed Martin engineer, Carolyn Rush of Sea Isle City wants to safeguard reproductive rights for women, and cites her own problem-solving skills as a prime argument for why she – not Alexander – should fight Van Drew in the fall. She's also a mother, who raised five children.

"The district has changed slightly and become more Republican," Rush acknowledged.

That said, "Amy did not fight back when Jeff Van Drew tried to paint her as an elitist. She allowed that negative connotation to stick. I will not allow him to do that. I have been monitoring every vote he has taken, and he clearly lacks the best interests of the district, especially when it comes to veterans, women and elderly. His loyalty is not with the district, but with Donald Trump."



She cites Van Drew's opposition to a bill that would automatically guarantee medical services for veterans.



Rush also says she would fight back vigorously against Republican claims of Biden brutalizing the economy with his policies, by highlighting positives and contextualizing the times on the heels of the COVID crisis. "I'm on a mission to educate people," Rush said. "The economy is better than inflation indicates."

If Alexander has a big edge in the Democratic Primary – in no small part because of his party organization advantage, starting with Atlantic – Van Drew – presumably utterly unbothered by the GOP Primary – remains a strong betting favorite in the general. But if Alexander acquits himself well in losing to Van Drew, look for him to resurface in 2023 as a Vince Mazzeo running mate in a Democratic Party rematch with state Senator Vince Polistina (R-2).



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# CD3: The Killing Fields

Andy Kim emerged from redistricting as the most protected Democrat of the season, with the process resulting in Ocean eliminated and pieces of CD-4 gained and CD-3 going from R+3 to +5 Democrat.

If Van Drew's new district suffocated the Democrats' efforts at energy, Kim's new CD-3 threw a wet blanket on Republicans.



Still, the irrepressible Burlington County-centric district features a no less than usual – and maybe even more so - sulfuric albeit somewhat weirded-out CD-3 primary. If you have any doubts, consider the main debate between the two prime

GOP combatants, which centers on businessman Bob Healey making his case that as a punk rocker he sang lyrics about killing while gym owner Ian Smith actually killed someone.

Smith, you'll recall, was that ubiquitous bearded and musclebound Gladiator extra in the prow of the conservative Viking ship at the height of Phil Murphy's fight against COVID-19. When he announced his candidacy, news simultaneously surfaced that he had killed someone while driving drunk. Then during the campaign season itself, he ate another drunk driving charge. Healey pummeled the hell out of him.

On the strength of all the negative headlines about Smith and the backing of the establishment Republican organizations, the Thurston Howell of CD-3 – yes, Healey's family owns a yacht building company - has momentum on his side, or, if you prefer, the wind in his sails.

InsiderNJ columnist Fred Snowflack noted some of the candidates' differences on the issues.

“For example, while Kevin McCarthy seems destined to become House Speaker if Republicans gain control, Smith says he prefers either Jim Jor-

dan of Ohio or Paul Gosar of Arizona. Jordan is very much a conservative firebrand, but Gosar has been criticized even by fellow House members for speaking to white nationalist groups.

“Then there’s SALT.

“As all who care about this know, the state and local tax deduction is now capped at \$10,000, adversely affecting many New Jerseyans who pay more than that in property taxes alone. Most Republicans, Healey among them, support eliminating, or at least raising, the cap. Not Smith. He has suggested that the cap hurts only those who are wealthy – people like Healey.”

If Smith sees Healey as closer to the Democrats than himself, a third Republican candidate seems closer to him than to Healey.

“Ignore the CDC!!!” Nick Ferrara of Hamilton posed on Facebook last month. “We KNOW masks don’t do ANYTHING to stop the virus and, moreover, there are many HARMFUL effects caused by wearing masks due to the oxygen deprivation and increased inhalation of CO2. This causes cancer. It weakens the immune system. And the people at the CDC know all this!!! Wise people do the exact opposite of what the CDC dictates because they know the CDC is just a propaganda [sic] pusher for the deep state. True justice would entail people at the CDC being charged criminally for pushing these harmful lies.”

Ferrara notwithstanding, Steve Kush, who successfully managed Ed Durr’s historic 2021 take-down of Steve Sweeney, backs Smith, and says he

sees some similarities between the gym owner and the nonunion truck driver who ran over the powerful senate president. “I think CD-3 is a lot like LD-3 last year,” Kush told InsiderNJ. “I’m getting no negative feedback [about Smith]. I think what it comes down to is people are looking for something different. The more people Ian gets in front of, the better.”



While Healey and Smith duke it out on the Republican side and Ferrara Omaha beaches the CDC, Kim has his own primary to consider, which he probably doesn’t, figuring Reuven Hendler of Beachwood doesn’t exactly pose a threat.

A project engineer by trade, Hendler wants Medicare for all. He backed Kim initially, but says he believes the Democratic incumbent has gradually morphed from 2018 progressive to a pragmatist content with letting corporations write the bills. Light work for the organizationally strong Kim, the congressman will have to focus on Smith or (probably) Healey in the fall, the slabs of muscle he gained in terms of registered Democrats on paper, offset by the temper of the times and frightful approval ratings for the Democratic President Biden.



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# CD4: Chris Smith: for Life and Pro-Life

New Jersey's longest serving congressman, Republican U.S. Rep. Chris Smith (R-4) has occupied his seat for 42 years, defeating all comers in a GOP-dominant district as he fulfills the role of resident (or non-resident – more on that later) pro labor/pro-life Republican.

Challenger Mike Blasi (\$12K cash on hand at last count) got in the primary contest this year as an alternative to Smith, but MAGA candidate Mike Crispi entered the fray to make a “drain the swamp” job of hitting the Republican incumbent with a full-time fusillade from the right.

Smith has an address in Hamilton, which no longer occupies the 4th District, a 2020/2021 consequence of redistricting, which jettisoned Mercer and picked up more territory in Ocean. Smith notoriously spends little visible time in the district anyway, especially according to his critics, Crispi among them, who recoil from the congressman's status as a longtime D.C. insider.

But Smith occupies all the relevant party organization lines in this primary contest. He also has

\$825K in the bank, according to the Federal Election Commission, compared to \$36K for Crispi, coffers likely replenished or diminished since March 31st. A career anti-abortion voice, Smith too has the advantage in a Republican Primary – conceivably – of highlighting a win on his signature issue with the leaked news of the U.S. Supreme Court preparing to overturn *Roe v. Wade*.



There's more in Smith's favor, too.

Crispi's seeming live dog candidacy challenges the congressman's supremacy on key issues, as the challenger pecks away aggressively on Smith's voting record, chastising him for his less than robust right-wing, pro-Trump positions on immigration, infrastructure (Smith has always defined himself as a pro-Building Trades Republican), and January 6th.

The former talk show host with the Right Side Broadcasting Network welcomed into the district the campaign endorsement of General Mike Flynn, prosecuted and convicted for lying to the FBI. Flynn later pledged an oath to the Trump QAnon conspiracy, arguing that Trump should suspend the Constitution and call for a new national election after Joe Biden beat Trump in 2020. Trump pardoned him. His candidacy materialized, incidentally, after Smith voted "aye" to establish a commission to investigate a Trump-prodded mob's infamous desecration of the United States Capitol.

On the issue of residency, by the way, Crispi – now a resident of Seaside Heights - ran for the office of Morris County Commissioner in 2017.

More troubling to Crispi's candidacy is the doppelganger quality of America First option Steve Gray (\$85K in the bank, including an \$80K self-loan, according to FEC), a retired FBI agent from Somers Point bothered by what he describes as Smith's lack of action on border protection and "aye" vote on the Biden infrastructure bill.

"I could not bear to watch as millions of illegal immigrants poured into our country, completely

unvetted," says Gray. "My family's also feeling the sting of high inflation and gas prices. America's inflation is tied directly to Congressman Chris Smith and his vote in favor of the \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill. ... Though Chris Smith sits on the Foreign Affairs Committee, he has failed to stem the flow of illegal immigrants from across the south border.

"President Trump has inspired me to stop standing on the sidelines," he adds.

That inspiration, which simultaneously motivates Crispi, puts each in the way of the other, their objections to the incumbent swallowed in a Trump-enthusiastic echo chamber, combining to make Smith – once again – a reelection favorite.

Matthew Jenkins, a Democrat from Colts Neck awaits the congressman in the general election, but few would give him a chance in this environment, especially given the new dimensions of the R+14 4th District.





# CD5: The Big Money

Political conversations about U.S. Rep. Josh Gottheimer (D-5) inevitably become conversations about money. That's because his campaign fund contains \$13 million, a figure that this year scared away those usually ubiquitous Democratic Primary challengers, despite chafing among party critics Gottheimer's party loyalty.

Redistricting last year also favors Gottheimer, who defeated a movement conservative Republican in 2016, twice defended the seat as a moderate, and now has the advantage of shedding GOP-dominant Warren County and some of Sussex, and picking up Fort Lee, Englewood and Tenafly, Bergen County towns favorable to Democrats.

According to an April Monmouth University Poll, however, President Joe Biden – facing tough midterm elections - has a 56% disapproval rating among white New Jerseyans, who make up 70% of the electorate (Hispanics 12.6%, Asians 10.25% and Blacks 5.2% the others).

Even in a D+4 District this year, Republicans see opportunity, albeit of an uphill variety, given Gottheimer's cash advantage, the district's new dimensions, and the Democratic incumbent's

willful distancing from Biden (his opposition to the President's proposed billionaire's tax) and co-chairmanship of the bipartisan Problem Solvers Caucus, which held up Biden's main spending bill and ultimately split it in half.

A young candidate named Sab Skenderi filed to run in the Republican Primary, but this CD-5 campaign season has mostly featured a high stakes duel between Nick De Gregorio and Frank Pallotta.

Touting his corporate financial background, Pallotta ran against Gottheimer in 2018, losing 53.2%-45.6%. In his comeback, he managed to secure the Passaic County Republican line (two towns) and Sussex, while De Gregorio, a retired Marine Corps infantry officer and Iraq war veteran, won the more desirable Bergen County GOP endorsement.

Cash disparities (\$83K cash on hand for Pallotta, \$454K for De Gregorio) and insider support from the Jack Zisa network and broader band of Republican insiders (the likes of Laura Ali Rosemary Becchi, Ron DeFilippis, Dick Kamin) – not to mention the Bergen GOP line - favor De Gregorio on paper. But Pallotta has column one on a

“Bergen Republican Party” slogan, while De Gregorio drew column two with the less than readily identifiable slogan strangely favored by the organization, “Republicans for Responsible Government.”

Pallotta also seems to be running a more ideologically rip-snorting candidacy, relying on defining issues more than his personal service record. De Gregorio routinely reminds voters of his impressive combat record as a nine-year Marine. Will that be enough in a Republican Primary environment?

“Now is the time to beat back socialism,” De Gregorio says.

Apparently Gottheimer believes Pallotta’s the favorite.

In May, the congressman sent out a mailer targeting his old rival, noting that “Frank Pallotta rallies for Trump, Not New Jersey.” The piece shows a photo of a rally and includes a 2020 quote from the former president that Pallotta will be a “great congressman.”

“His polls are showing what my polls are showing, I have a double-digit lead,” said Pallotta, according to InsiderNJ columnist Fred Snowflack.

Infuriated by Gottheimer’s thwarting of Biden’s Build Back Better agenda, progressives nonetheless did not mount a primary alternative to the Democrat this year, while the congressman wagers his reelection chances on appealing to the center of an affluent suburban district, in addition to all the aforementioned insulation, starting with money.





# CD6: Another Long Shot at Pallone

In this newly drawn D+8 district, powerful chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, U.S. Rep. Frank Pallone (D-6) has no primary challenger.

Three Republicans - Susan Kiley, Rik Mehta, and Thomas Toomey – want their party's nomination and the right to face Pallone in the general.

Kiley is serving her second, three-year term on the Monmouth County Board of County Commissioners. She is serving as Deputy Director of the Board, and is the Board Liaison to the Human Services Department, including the Board of Health, Division of Aging and Disabilities, Division of County Adjuster, Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Division of Planning and Contracting for Human Services, Division of Social Services and the JDAI Program.

Businessman and self-proclaimed outsider Toomey says he has a decade of experience growing businesses of all sizes, from local to Fortune 500 companies.

A biotech entrepreneur, Mehta ran unsuccessfully against U.S. Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) in 2020.

Of the three Republicans running, Kiley has the edge based on her amassed support from the county Republican organizations, but the 6th District remains a Democratic Party redoubt and the veteran Pallone a very tough out.





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# CD7:

# Malinowski Versus Kean II

Formerly of the State Department, U.S. Rep. Tom Malinowski suffocated grassroots districtwide candidates in 2018, materializing out of nowhere to woo the party organizations by dropping key operatives onto his payroll and demonstrating sharp elbow strategizing – in addition to some foreign policy chops that made his primary rivals look smaller.

He subsequently mobilized an anti-Trump army in the same Central Jersey district that serves as home for Trump's golf course, but the same Democratic Party organizations that befriended him on a short and transactional campaign runway, also didn't suffer much when they had to pick a 2020-2021 redistricting casualty.

Within the crunching demands of drawing new congressional districts, if Democrats needed to sacrifice one in order to preserve or augment the chances of others, Malinowski – a white male with no deep ties in the district or to the establishment here, and lugging headlines documenting his failure to disclose thousands in stock trades – became the obvious choice.

His narrow, 5K-vote 2020 defeat of perennial GOP establishment candidate Tom Kean, Jr. (a three-time loser in his pursuit of federal office)

occurred in fair weather for Democrats and with the more favorable map for Democrats.

Kean wants another crack at the 7th District Congressional seat, and has the task of wading through a thorny thicket of Republican Primary candidates, including Kevin Dorlon, John Flora, John Isemann, Erik Peterson, Phil Rizzo, and Sterling Schwab, a task he's confronted by setting his alarm for the general election and going to sleep.

Why not?

Dorlon, Flora, Isemann, Peterson, Rizzo and Schwab are on course to cannibalize one another, mostly running to one another's right in a self-defeating mosh pit of miniature golfers competing for an invitation to Trump's country club, while Kean – stanchioned by the party lines in all relevant counties – stockpiles money (\$1.5 million at last check in March) for his general election grudge match with the wounded Malinowski (\$3.4 million COH).

If the establishment cannonballed Malinowski into oblivion (or at least into an R+2 District), it simultaneously backroom-prioritized Kean. Son of a former governor, Junior's high-powered party allies gave marching orders to Republican redis-

tricting commissioners to protect the kid, even as they lost the map; while Democrats snuffed out Malinowski, who in their Scotch and smoke-granular circles might as well have been named Malapropism, as they crafted districts benefiting Andy Kim, Mikie Sherrill and Josh Gottheimer as part of a winning Democratic Party configuration. Endure Kean – his father was a good governor, seemed to be the Democrats’ rationale – while preserving other party gains. Kean finally had the good luck, too, of inflation, gas price hikes, supply line woes, and a tanking Biden, in addition to those stock headlines albatrossing his rival.



Malinowski appeared unwilling to back down without a fight, and looked somewhat energized by the U.S. Supreme Court’s plan to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. Maybe he could galvanize women voters, he figured.

Roger Bacon, a Democratic Party Primary challenger out of Phillipsburg, looked like easy work for the incumbent, who like Kean, seemed general election-focused, and eager to exploit his op-

ponent’s weaknesses. If neither broke out of the mold of boring suburban white dude, Kean won the award for most media averse and least charismatic (and, let’s face it, mostly authentically suburban and white), his inability to look like more than the repackaged, warmed-over parts of past tedious and unsuccessful efforts never far removed from the sound of Malinowski’s Campaign dragging like cat claws down the edge of the same steep, corrugated establishment rooftop. The incumbent’s backers think the abortion question props him, but with the economy tottering and mostly the commodity of negativity to sell, CD-7 promised, at the very least, to again get extraordinarily ugly.





# CD8: Menendez for a New Generation

It says a lot about New Jersey politics and the overall temper of the political times that CD8, like CD7, features the son of another longtime Jersey pol.

Tom Kean., Jr., is the son of former Governor Tom Kean.

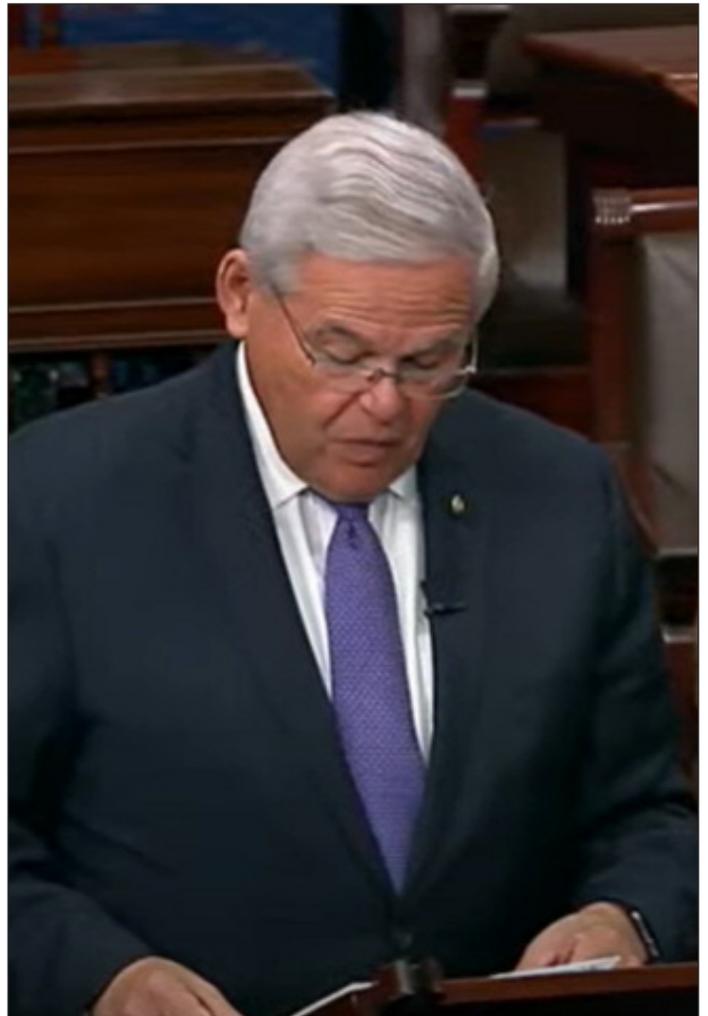
Rob Menendez, Jr. is the son of sitting U.S. Senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ).

Tom is the son of Tom.

Rob is the son of Bob.

Tom is in CD-7. Rob is in CD-8. Tom is the favorite in CD-7 by virtue of his father's power in the Republican Party. Rob is the favorite in CD-8 by virtue of his father's power in the Democratic Party.

Bob Menendez ran over Tom Kean in 2006, when the kid tried to run against Menendez.



But there is life anew for young Kean, not against Menendez, but against Tom Malinowski, who lacks the family connectivity to be a favorite this year; as the elder Menendez anew furnishes his son as the favorite, and Junior in the next Congress – barring a Malinowski miracle – will presumably have the company of Junior.

As you've probably gathered, there's not much to see here in the way of a contest, as Rob Menendez, Jr, - running for a seat vacated by retiring U.S. Rep. Albio Sires - faces a scrambled field of Democratic Primary candidates: David Ocampo Grajales, Ane Roseborough Eberhard, and Brian Varela, already out of the race on a petition signature challenge by Menendez.

To date, the Menendez campaign has looked a lot like the Tenth District Payne Campaign (see

below), which features an incumbent named Donald Jr., who is the son of the late Congressman Donald.

Menendez and Payne both have considerable party support, union support, and organization support.

Menendez's releases look like Payne's releases.

Significantly, Rob Menendez, Jr., has the party organization line behind him in Essex, Union and Hudson, the counties germane to his district.

By very stark contrast, Marcos Arroyo, a Republican from West New York, has kamikaze written all over him in the overwhelmingly (+24) Democratic Party district, served by Sires (2006-2022), between Menendez (1993-2006) and Menendez (2023-).





# CD9: Passaic County Red Alert

In a district without a primary in either party this season, it's tempting to say nothing to see here and move on, but Democrats lost a commissioner's seat in Passaic last year and the combination of negative national dynamics for the party, Murphy fatigue, and urban low turnout trends put some political pressure on veteran U.S. Rep. Bill Pascrell.

Pascrell has no primary challenge this year, as he faces a general election rematch with Billy Premph of Paterson on pretty safe D+10 turf.

Two years ago, Pascrell drubbed Premph 66-32%, and nothing suggests the Republican challenger – however well meaning – has a better shot this year in a Democratic Party-dominant district.

The issue comes down to whether Pascrell can summon one last hurrah, similar to his 2010 run, and shoulder the fortunes of Passaic County Democrats. Ten years ago, on the heels of Chris Christie reanimating Republicans in Passaic, Pascrell ran a very geared-in reelection campaign, which prepared him for his own historic, against-the-odds Democratic Primary win in 2012.

Will Pascrell coat-tail besieged Democrats in what

may be the 85-year-old's final campaign tilt, and help Passaic County Democratic Committee Chairman John Currie avoid a repeat of the 2009 fiasco when Democrats lost all three of their countywide seats?

In addition, a successor to Pascrell generates considerable countywide intrigue. Assemblyman Benjie Wimberly's (D-35) decision to forego endorsing incumbent Mayor Andre Sayegh peaks perhaps to a developing intraparty rivalry between the two men for the seat now occupied by Pascrell. Both Sayegh and Wimberly appear to be favorites to succeed the congressman and will have to work out a political gameplan for their mutual future.

Sources in the party have already begun talking to Sayegh about a possible gubernatorial campaign in 2025, which would strengthen Wimberly's shot at the congressional seat. Those roles could reverse, too, with Wimberly obtaining North Jersey party backing for governor and Sayegh undertaking the congressional bid. Others, of course, will have something to say about those plays, including Assemblywoman Shavonda Sumter and state Senator Nellie Pou, not to mention Bergen County Democrats.



# CD10: A Payne for All Seasons



Progressive challenger IMani Oakley of Montclair has run a sufficiently meaningful and competent campaign against incumbent U.S. Rep. Donald Payne, Jr. (D-10) of Newark to get Payne's- and the establishment's – attention.

The 10th remains New Jersey's most Democrat-dominant district (D+31), and Oakley, an Alexandria Ocasio Cortez acolyte with a history of grassroots organizing, including a tour of duty with New Jersey Working Families, wants to galvanize fed-up voters against a supposedly uninspiring and static Essex County Democratic Party.

But if her calculation included exploiting a sleepy CD-10 incumbent, Payne responded to the challenge by reenergizing and seizing every means at his disposal to remind voters about his efforts, counterattacking by burnishing multiple progressive endorsements, and generally acting like a congressman who very much wants to keep his job.

Now the party line in Essex County alone should give Payne a massive head-start here, but strong fundraising by the challenger (a \$300K campaign and \$108K in the bank, as of late March) makes Oakley more than merely a well-meaning pro-

gressive running against the machine. That said, Payne again has acted like he's in the race of a lifetime, breaking his own fundraising record, and facing primary day with \$569K in the bank.



In addition to many other labor endorsements, he proudly showed off the support of Oakley's former organization, New Jersey Working Families. "NJWFP is proud to endorse Rep Payne," said New Jersey Working Families State Director Sue Altman. "His record has long been indisputably progressive. He is a co-sponsor of Medicare for All, was one of only two Members of Congress from NJ who were on the Green New Deal-derived, pro-environment, pro labor Thrive Agenda, he was a major advocate behind

the scenes in garnering support for Build Back Better (while other Democratic Congressmen from NJ were torpedoing it) and he is a vocal supporter of Reparations campaigns in NJ and was an original sponsor of H.R. 40, the Commission to Study and Develop Reparations."

A second challenger in the primary, Akil Khal-fani, hasn't produced any of the energy possessed by Oakley, while dueling Republicans David Pinckney and Garth Stewart have no shot in a general election. At the very least, Oakley's challenge of the sitting congressman showed chutzpah, but also appeared to wake up and fully engage a congressman intent on demonstrating his own good standing not just among establishment players, but on behalf of causes valued by progressives.





# CD11:

# Selen Pumped Gas, Sherrill Flew Helicopters



A former U.S. Navy helicopter pilot and prosecutor with the U.S. Attorney's Office, U.S. Rep. Mikie Sherrill (D-11) probably stands as the favorite right now to represent the Democratic Party in the 2025 Primary for Governor.

That said, Sherrill, first elected in 2018 by essentially forcing incumbent Rodney Frelinghuysen into retirement and then turning a longtime red district blue in a show of anti-Donald Trump force, has to get through 2022 and – presumably – 2024.

She has no primary challenger this year, in a district augmented by Democrat-dominant Maplewood, Dover and Millburn. Malinowski's loss (see above) was Sherrill's gain. In addition to overseeing a D+5 district, the congresswoman from Montclair also has a \$5.5 million war-chest.

Multiple Republicans are facing off in the primary for the nomination of their party, including Tayfun Selen, Toby Anderson, Paul DeGroot, Alexander Halter, and Ruth McAndrew. A Morris County Commissioner and immigrant from Turkey who pumped gas before achieving the American Dream as a certified public accountant, Selen (\$195K cash on hand) is the favorite.





# CD12:

# Elementary, Dear Watson Coleman

U.S. Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-12) has no primary challenge this year.

Neither does Darius Mayfield, the Republican slated to face her in the general election, running uphill in a D+15 district.

A member of the United States Representatives since 2015, Watson Coleman has a lifetime of politics and government behind her, her reputation as a fighter for the dispossessed no less tangible than her pragmatic record as a power player in the machinery of New Jersey.

Daughter of the late Assemblyman John Watson, Ms. Watson Coleman served for 17 years in the state assembly, fulfilled a four-year stint as assembly majority leader, and won her congressional seat in 2014 in part as a consequence of her consistency as a Democrat in the face of attacks on her understanding of core priorities by then-Republican Governor Chris Christie.

Born at St. Peters Hospital in New Brunswick NJ, Mayfield is a self-described businessman and entrepreneur. “Not Black. Not White. American,” he says - “We are all Americans at the end of the day and the racial division and angst the media speaks of so often, is not indicative of how I grew up in this great country. We need regular people to start running for office to reflect the reality on the ground. Not the lobbyist with the best connections or the party-controlled lawyer that “talks the talk and walks the walk” just like the Party tells them to. We no longer need you to have the biggest black book to be our leader, we need you to have the biggest heart.”

