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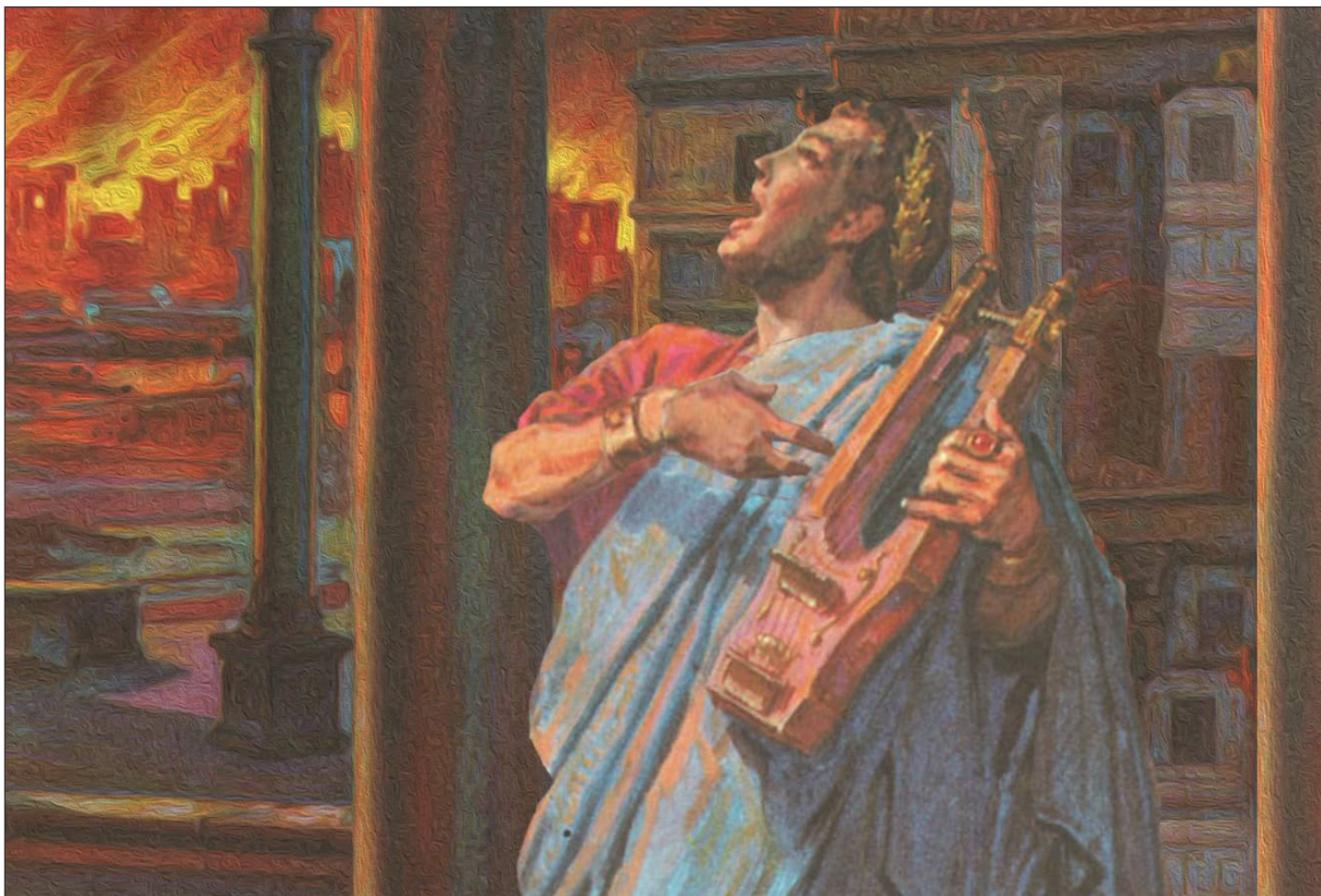
**2026**

**CONGRESSIONAL  
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# INTRODUCTION



When President Donald Trump didn't tweet out pictures of himself dressed as Jesus Christ, deface the Oval Office with gold brocade, threaten to destroy the White House on the taxpayer dime with a vulgar ballroom, overhaul buildings, namely the Kennedy Center to bear his own name, start a war with Iran he can't finish, which included the bombing of a girls' school, killing up to 168 people, unleash masked men with guns into the streets to kill Americans, enrich himself and his family through cryptocurrency while gutting healthcare, education and energy funding, try to kill the urgently needed Gateway Tunnel, champion the rollback of the Voting Rights Act of

1965, attempt to nationalize elections in defiance of state control, hike the price of gas to \$4.50 a gallon, exacerbate economic security while saying he doesn't care, pack the courts with lackeys who refuse to acknowledge that Trump lost the 2020 election to Joe Biden, try to cover up the Epstein Files, and whine like a spoiled toddler every time a reporter he doesn't like asks a question, he found some other way to be the incompetent 21st Century embodiment of Nebuchadnezzar (I would say the Emperor Nero but I have a friend who lives in Rome who says she finds the comparison deeply offensive to the memory of Nero).

All that said and desperately underwater in New Jersey, Trump miraculously still has 26% of the Garden State voting population who say they have a favorable impression of him. That gives him a ten-point plummet ramp to get to where then-Governor Chris Christie once resided in the public eye. The same April Rutgers-Eagleton poll shows a whopping 61% with an unfavorable view of Trump, while 12% have no opinion.



At the same time – and this is why anti-establishment Democrats see real opportunities (just look at the depressed results of incumbent mayors in the May nonpartisan elections), the same poll shows residents split on Democratic incumbent U.S. Sen. Cory Booker. “Thirty-eight percent of residents have a favorable view, while 33% have an unfavorable view and 20% have no opinion. Eight percent say they don’t know who he is.” His negatives aren’t anywhere Trump’s, but his positives don’t hover anywhere near great, either.

Ultimately, in this state where registered Democrats outnumber Republicans by a million voters, Booker – unopposed in the primary - won’t have trouble statewide this year.

Republicans who can’t get away from Trump, however, have problems (and they have problems if they try to get away from him, too, just ask

Tom Massie), especially in CD-7, a district commanding national attention, where Governor Mikie Sherrill this month killed an attempt by the Trump Administration to site an ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) facility, a project that local Republicans also opposed.

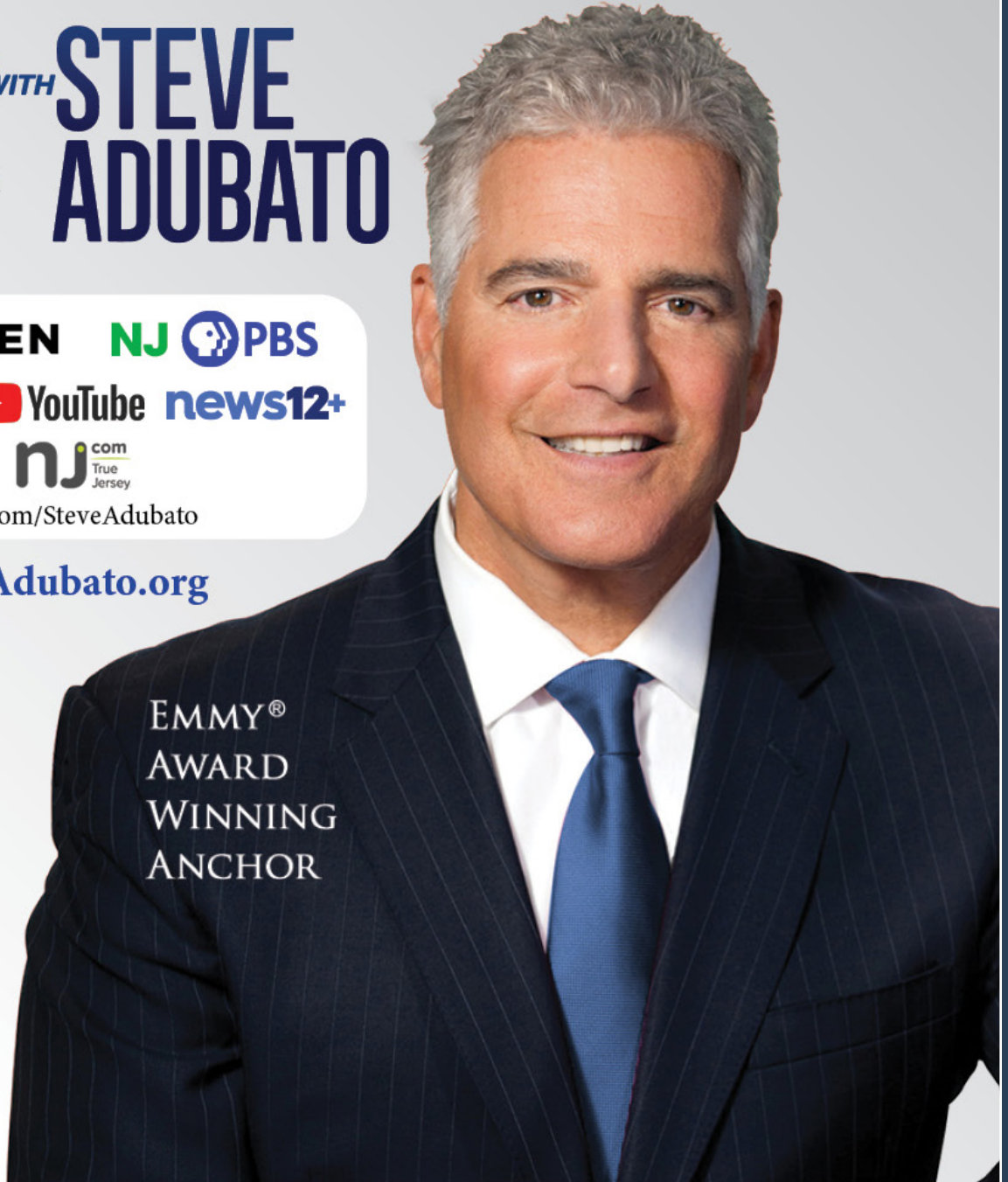
“Since we filed litigation, we’ve been demanding the federal government back off its rushed construction and operation of an immigration detention center in Roxbury,” said the Governor in a statement with state Attorney General Jennifer Davenport. “We’ve been clear from the beginning that DHS’s proposed ICE detention facility in Roxbury will harm the community and won’t do anything to make us safer. If DHS conducts a proper analysis, it will discover that this industrial warehouse is no place for a detention center. If DHS continues to plow ahead after conducting its further analysis, we will return to Court to seek relief immediately.”

Between that and the Governor having to go to court to override Trump’s attempt to crush the Gateway Tunnel project supplying very district-centric evidence of MAGA mangled policies hurting New Jersey, not to mention everything else spewing out of Trump world, the GOP will have fits trying to survive the coming drubbing, after Democrats resolve their present fights. See below...



*Max Pizarro*  
Editor-in-Chief

# THINK WITH TANK STEVE ADUBATO

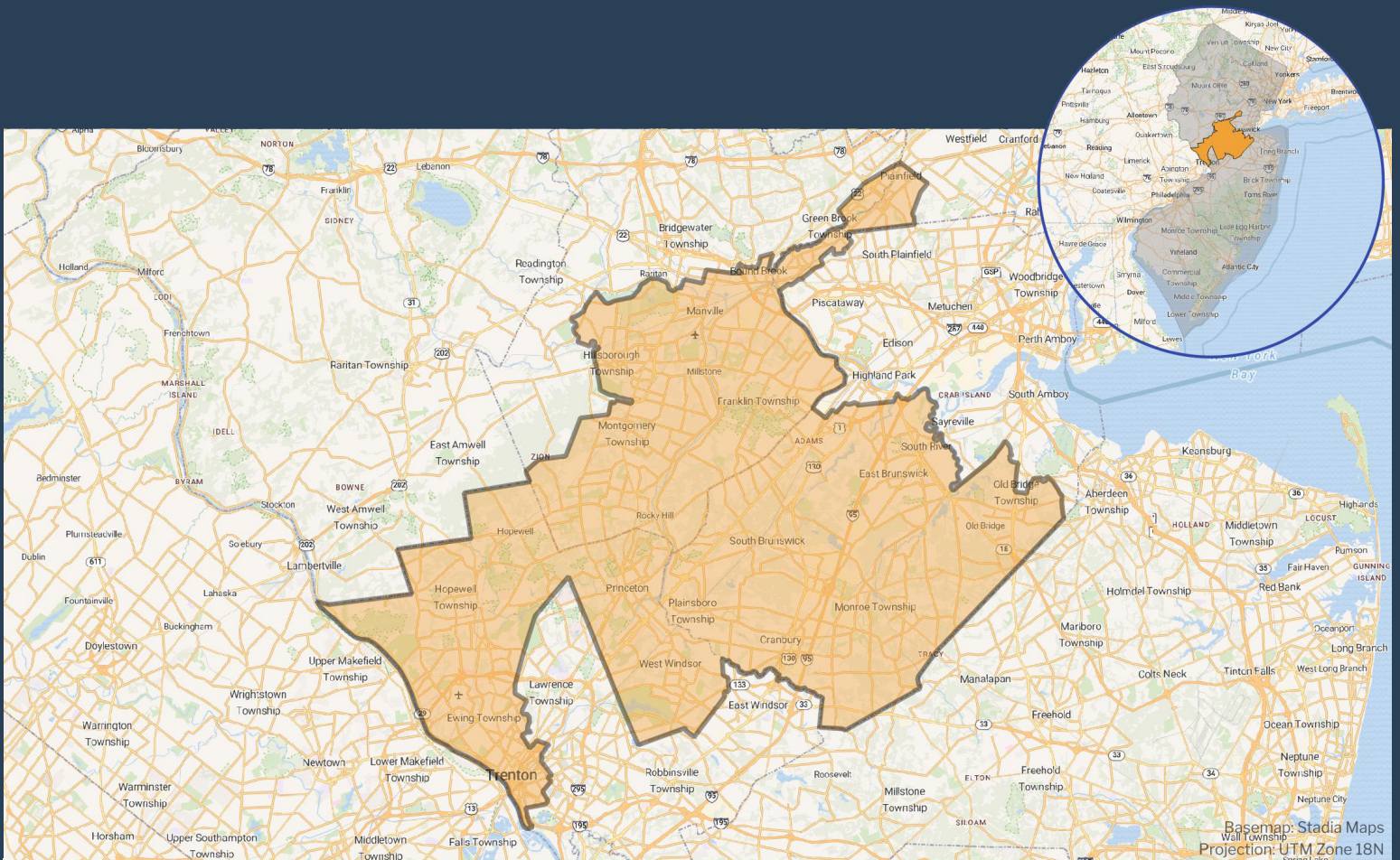


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# CD-12

**THEY THOUGHT “12” MEANT AT LEAST 12 CANDIDATES ON THE BALLOT (AND OTHER PRIMARY CATASTROPHES).**

“My hometown turned out.”

InsiderNJ will never forget those words, uttered in 2014 by then-Assemblywoman Bonnie Watson Coleman when she defied the naysayers and – on the strength of a combination of reputation, progressive credentials and, in the end, good old fashioned shoe leather labor on the district’s doorknobs – won the Democratic Primary in New Jersey’s 12th Congressional District. In a fractured

field, Watson Coleman of Ewing, with strong Trenton roots, got her backers to the polls.

Her pending retirement now, all these years later, combined with the loss of the infamous county line, Trump madness, overriding economic anxiety, and a gnawing Central Jersey identity crisis that strands the voters here somewhere between Gaza and Tela Aviv, and creates, at the very least, Democratic Primary havoc in the 12th Congressional District.

No one could say exactly what would happen or dare advance a theory about a victor on June

2nd that does anything other than create more questions than answers. But they tried. Most insiders through the month of May saw Dr. Adam Hamawy as the favorite. More on that in a minute. Almost as often, they pressed a hitherto unforeseen or unconsidered dynamic.

Case in point:

Earlier this month, InsiderNJ scrunched into a district coffee shop only to look up and see – what else – a veteran insider. Naturally, he’s all over the race. A political animal. Lives in the district. He sits down and immediately starts talking about – bombshell coming up - Princeton University Professor Sam Wang, a neuroscientist, and – this source insisted – the Princeton area equivalent of Elvis Presley.

As InsiderNJ tried to reconcile the mild-mannered, bespectacled presence at the front of the room in some of the debate forums with the wriggling, arguably most charismatic guy of all time, the source added of Wang (pronounced WONG), “He’s going ape on the mailboxes,” thus springing another dramatic visual pivot.

“The cocktail circles I float in – it’s all Sam,” the source said, nibbling at his Central Jersey coffee concoction. “That makes it difficult for Sue [Altman] and [Hamawy].”

By now he got the Charles Boyer treatment – that is to say, a numbing incredulous stare.

Ok, so it turns out, yes, now it makes sense, he supports another candidate – an African-American - who supposedly can’t get necessary districtwide traction because four other African-Americans allegedly crowd the contest.

Nefarious on his part?

Not at all.

He simply made the point that in this thorny field, no one should assume any one group dominates in the finishing itself off with aplomb department.

Verlina Reynolds-Jackson, Shanel Robinson, Adrian Mapp, Squire Servance, and Kyle Little form a circular firing squad in Princeton and Plainfield? Maybe. But then so do Wang, Altman, and Hamawy in Princeton.

The source grabbed his coffee and cleared the area.

InsiderNJ got to thinking again about Brad Cohen, mayor of East Brunswick. Cohen had the Democratic Party line (or rather support, the line doesn’t exist anymore) in his home county of Middlesex. Mulling over the situation, Insider got a couple of Middlesex sources on the horn.

Strong vote by mail in Monroe and East Brunswick – conceivably strong Cohen areas on the strength of his pro-Israel views. Plus, the machine is said to be motivated because if Cohen goes, the party will jump on a replacement. In part because he is the perceived frontrunner in the contest, Hamawy found himself targeted as an alleged enemy of Israel who in the 1990s palled around with the Blind Sheikh. The more headlines Hamawy generated the more he would galvanize the district’s Jewish vote. Or so ran the political logic (if such a thing exists!). The entire coffee shop began to lurch toward Cohen.

But then InsiderNJ got to thinking about Hamawy and the Democratic Party electorate. His Palestinian sympathies might have made him

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a nonstarter pre-Israel West Bank genocide. Now his views fell in line with many progressives. Of course, there are gradations of support for Israel. To paraphrase Analilia Mejia, “You can be pro-Israel and anti-Netanyahu.” That, of course, is different than being anti-Israel. You can support, for example, a two-state solution that honors both sides, or so runs the Democratic Primary argument. Then there’s the Trump factor. The hate factor. The racist-nativist factor. The more Trump showed his smug and wretched mug on television, the more he galvanized Hamawy’s Muslim (and progressive, because Hamawy had the backing of progressive kingpin Bernie Sanders, and a resolutely diverse Jersey) base.



But then there was Wang again, supposedly chewing into the district’s Asian (and progressive) voters, and Altman, former state director of the Working Families Party.

What about Altman? She had a legitimate record of fighting power in this state, specifically that odious symbiosis otherwise known as Christie-Norcross. She also championed the end of the party line, which in practice, Charlie Stile noted in a piece this month, had the unintended consequence of truly complicating Altman’s path to Congress. Did she have a path? She did. If she didn’t possess the backing of any county party

organizations, she had sufficient organizing ties everywhere to make a real stab at the seat. Plus, she was the only white woman in the contest, and one of only three women on the ballot, occupying a demographic reliably galvanized in the Trump (post *Roe v. Wade* overturn) era. She had some money, more than some of her rivals, bested only by Hamawy at last glance. Now, she did run before and not in the 12th but in the 7th District, where her pro-Israel stance (difficult to articulate on a mail piece) revisited might not receive robust support in a district currently occupied by the ever reliably leftward Watson-Coleman. Charges of “flip-flop” circulated. But to those looking for a fighter not locked into an extremist position (like Cohen and Hamawy, relatively speaking), Altman conceivably provided a lifeline.

But then so did Reynolds-Jackson, without the full-time activist megaphone atmospheric, or so ran the conventional wisdom. The no-nonsense veteran Assemblywoman (a former Trenton councilwoman and full-time social worker) had a record to run on, and one of the big headline issues basically corralled down on West State Street. For years, the Assemblywoman had tried to get the white male establishment to move the John R. Lewis Act only to meet gloomy resistance. Then Trump’s United States Supreme Court rolled back the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and suddenly people sat up in their chairs and paid attention. Maybe it really was Reynolds-Jackson’s time, after all. Still, just as the latte-glugging liberals in Princeton had their own bifurcations to confront, the Assemblywoman came from a county (Mercer) that hardly looked organizationally menacing. Someone let a developing county chairs fight out of the jack-in-the-box at precisely the least opportune time amid other murmurs of people losing more sleep over the commissioners’ race than the congressional race. Then, too, Squire

Servance, a likeable, thoughtful entrepreneur with some money, was said to be relentlessly pounding doors throughout the Trenton area.

A source told InsiderNJ, “I don’t sense the deep reach [from the Reynolds-Jackson Campaign] into other pockets of the district that the Ewing-Trenton-based Watson Coleman had when she ran back in 2014. Plus, remember, Bonnie had Union County support, in addition to Mercer, because both Adrian Mapp [the Mayor of Plainfield, not himself a candidate] and the late Assemblyman Jerry Green [at that time chair of the party organization], backed Bonnie. Verlina only has Mercer.” Then again, the field might be so chopped up that Reynolds-Jackson didn’t precisely need Bonnie Campaign eclat. But then again, maybe it was so chopped up that anyone could win.

“Hey, listen,” another persistent source said. “Don’t rule out Squire.”

If Hamawy and Cohen – both accomplished medical doctors - fought a civilized American version of the Middle East conflict, complete with American lapel pins, on opposite sides of the foreign policy spectrum, they drew impassioned supporters – but also ran the risk of alienating other key parts of the electorate – and disenfranchising that group opposite the one propelling each man. If voters caught on, “The second mouse gets the cheese,” another insider kept saying, in this case, the mouse with less proximity to the conflagration.

As InsiderNJ tried to find a way to escape another CD-12 fix, like maybe diving into a book co-written by Dr. Wong, titled, *Welcome to Your Brain: Why You Lose Your Car Keys But Never Forget How to Drive*, the phone rang. It was

someone with a theory about the race and – he swore – dead certainty about the frontrunner, with time ticking down to June 2nd.

Late in the game, gun to one’s head, it looked like Hamawy’s to lose, between outside cash pumping in, ubiquitous cable and digital advertising, internal polling showing him ahead, attacks by other candidates reflecting their understanding of his campaign’s good position, and the candidate issuing a press release noting how he raised over a million dollars for the campaign.

The release contained the following blurb:

Dr. Hamawy has been endorsed by U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders, U.S. Sen. Tammy Duckworth, Rep. Ro Khanna, Rep. Ilhan Omar, former Congressman Jamaal Bowman, former NJ-12 candidate Elijah Dixon, Justice Democrats, Common Defense, A New Policy PAC, Veterans for Responsible Leadership, Our Revolution, Climate Revolution Action Network, PAL PAC, CAIR Action, Organize for Peace, Progressive Victory, Beyond the Ballot, Track AIPAC, Americans for Justice in Palestine Action, New Jersey Muslim Civic Coalition Activate, and more.

It looked compelling from the standpoint of airwaves domination and endorsements, to be sure, but who would dominate the ground game? Who would prove the campaign organizer par excellence? After all, that attention to detail by Watson Coleman 12 years ago proved the difference-maker when she first won the seat she will vacate at the end of the year, much to the dismay of those who sought a consistent progressive champion.

Whose hometown would show up?



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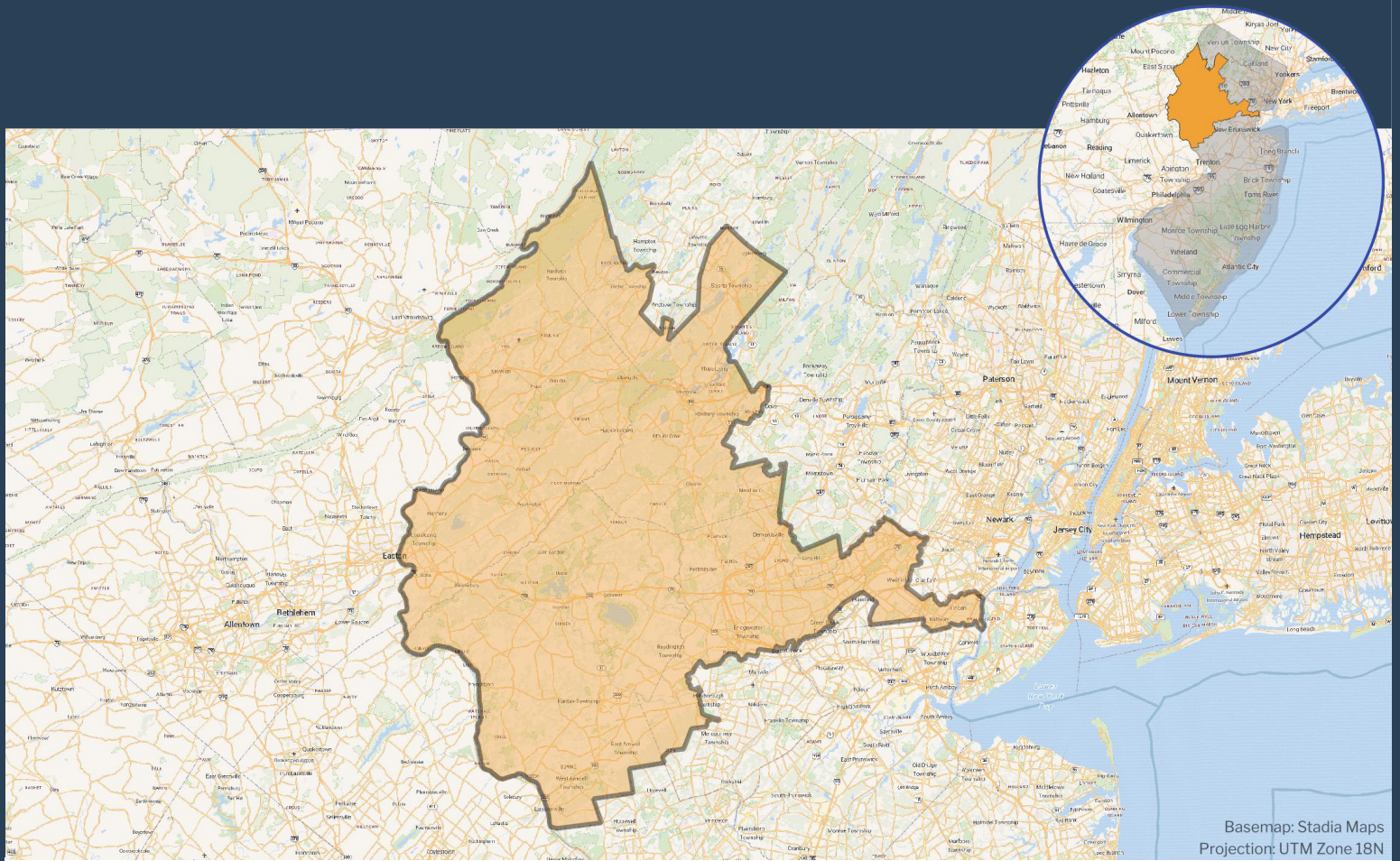
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# CD-7

## ONE OF THE MOST WATCHED DISTRICTS IN THE COUNTRY

Every scribe who came from chimneysweeps asked for only a single assurance from the croquet club class running with the hounds: maintain your dignity. Don't become vulgar or low grade. If you're an aristocrat, be one. Don't, for God's sake, succumb to the vats of mediocrity. So, it was with something like horror that what passes for intelligentsia in these bereft parts observed the Kean Family politically aligned with Donald Trump.

It suggested that when all was said and done,

the rich (and "the rich are not like you and me," F. Scott Fitzgerald once told Hemingway), sat down together at the same elongated dining room table like the one they used in *The Remains of the Day*, only mildly wincing perhaps, with the howling of suffering souls outside their gates. The phenomenon of Trump carried with it *Brotherhood of the Wolf* implications, as if the class that went back to the Mayflower would even advance the political career of a monster to ensure preservation of the perfect lawn manicure.

Were these really the guys who fought and died with us in past wars, or were they indeed merely

going through the motions of public civility in our midst to secure the intergenerational exponentiality of their own wealth?

Thus, it pained people – longtime working New Jerseyans – to see the special kind of complacency of U.S. Rep. Tom Kean, Jr. (R-7), son of former Governor Thomas Kean, Sr. The ease with which he essentially anonymously (but for his family name) absorbed the evils of Trump once again called into question the entirety of an establishment that, yes, not only solidified a crust of entitled power, but enticed Trump to these shores to begin with in the form of Atlantic City tax abatements.



Missing in action through the plodding months of Trump’s obscene presidency, Kean naturally drew a crowd of Democrats wanting to displace him from the 7th District. All of them resisted the urge to attack one another in the name of standing up to Trump and his chief Central Jersey enabler, Kean, Jr.

Notable in this group stood Rebecca Bennett of Bridgewater. A Navy helicopter pilot who flew night missions in the middle of the ocean with no margin for error, Bennett said she believes

in gutting through difficult situations to complete the mission, and right now, she wants to challenge and defeat the Trump-Kean GOP and set a new course for America and the 7th Congressional District.

“I’m a patriot,” Bennett told InsiderNJ. “I love this country. It’s why I joined the military. It’s why I’m doing this [seeking the Democratic nomination in her run for Congress] now. Throughout my entire life, I’ve run at the biggest hardest, problems.”

She’s also a mom, and with that in mind, she poses a question. “What version of the country are we going to leave for our children and for my daughters?” asked Bennett, over coffee with InsiderNJ in downtown Somerville, at the heart of the 7th District.

“Tom Kean is a coward,” the military veteran in February told a crowd of Hunterdon Democrats, in reference to the town hall-averse Republican who radiated sweaty complicit silence through the Trump era, and hardly appeared to play a role in New Jersey giving a proposed ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) facility the heave-ho out of Roxbury Township.

Ever the hardnosed alternative, Bennett reminded committee members here that “Democrats who are veterans outperform other Democrats by about six points. We just saw this yesterday in Texas.”

As the field of competitors winnowed, Bennett – in command of the backing of key county party organizations - found herself contending with three other Democrats in the Primary.

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A scion of wealth, Kean, Jr. has no idea what working class New Jerseyans experience, the fight at the heart existence for most people, and consequently no compunction about letting Trump push him and the 7th District around. There's no fight in him, which is why his comfort zone is to disappear, so argues Brian Varela, who claims he's different.

"I'm a first-generation Hispanic with a working-class background," Varela told InsiderNJ. "My parents were behind on bills when I was in high school and they were sued for not paying bills. I saw that. When you're growing up those are things you feel. You know, for example, what the impact is on families who lose Medicaid coverage. For me, it's personal. This is something I've experienced. It's not numbers on a spread sheet for me."

Varela secured the backing of SEIU as he fought to occupy a progressive primary lane and looked to hold in abeyance the candidacy of fellow contender Michael Roth.

A former senior Biden Administration official, the self-described "radical pragmatist" wants to go to Congress to run government efficiently, responsively, and fairly for the people of the 7th District, not just in times of crisis but all the time. How does he know he can do it? He's done it, he says.

"This is where my whole family is - this is home," Roth told InsiderNJ, referring to the 7th. "The economy is broken. Housing and taxes are too expensive, and I know how to fix it and I know how to bring a 21st century economy back into New Jersey and build a government that delivers for people.

"We have had decades of policies that have set our country and New Jersey back," added Roth over a cup of coffee on the day after Thanksgiving. "We see an economy in New Jersey that is lagging behind. Lagging in job growth and business creation. We need to be the epicenter of jobs in life sciences and advanced manufacturing - and people need to be able to afford to live here."

Finally, Democrats have another primary alternative in Tina Shah, a physician and former senior advisor to the U.S. Surgeon General and the National Director of Clinician Wellbeing at the VA. during the Obama and Biden administrations.

InsiderNJ Columnist Fred Snowflack sat down with Dr. Shah last year to get a bead on her candidacy:

*The most contentious part of the so-called Big, Beautiful Bill are cuts to Medicaid, which are projected to impact almost 400,000 residents in New Jersey and many hospitals in more rural parts of the country.*

*As Shah put it during her interview:*

*"I'm watching (and) the U.S. healthcare system is broken."*

*Kean contends that the bill helps Medicaid because it seeks to target fraud and abuse.*

*In mirroring what other Dems are saying, Shah said that Kean is simply rubber-stamping whatever Donald Trump wants.*

*"People are not OK with Trump," she said.*

*“People are not comfortable. They’re not OK with the volatility and the uncertainty.” She mentioned the constantly-changing tariffs.*

For a while on the trail, the Democrats appeared to be having fun mostly trading punches between two easy targets: Trump and Kean.

Trump made it easy. As his approval ratings nosedived and the flags and obnoxious paraphernalia his cult followers draped their trucks and suburban lawns with gradually disappeared, CD-7 became a national point of Democratic Party interest.

And Kean?

Kean, who made invisibility in the district one of his top priorities, then truly disappeared. He said he would be back soon, but he didn’t show.

On May 12th, NBC ran a story, which read in part:

*Republican Rep. Tom Kean Jr. of New Jersey, who has not voted in the House since March 5, will miss another week of work in Washington as the House returns Tuesday, his office told NBC News.*

*Kean’s office has said his two-month absence is related to a “personal health matter” but has not elaborated. The congressman has missed 68 votes in the House, including on legislation to end the record 75-day shutdown of the Department of Homeland Security.*

*Kean, 57, is also running for re-election in his Westfield-based seat, New Jersey’s 7th Congressional District, which is a top target for Democrats in November. Kean does not have a Republican opponent in the state’s June 2 primary, having*

*earned President Donald Trump’s endorsement.*

The four Democrats running for the seat and having fun at Kean’s expense shifted gears to show public concern about the congressman, while continuing to savage Trump and his coterie of bootlickers. “That Republican Party does not exist anymore,” Bennett told a crowd at one of her May events, referring to the Trump takeover of the GOP.

Along the way, the Cook Report swung Kean’s supposedly safe district, where Republicans hold an advantage of 20,000 registered voters, to “toss-up,” one of 19 so-designated districts on the 2026 Cook map. Republicans control Congress by a 217-212 margin, and Ken Martin, chair of the Democratic National Committee, marked New Jersey’s seventh as prime territory for a pickup.

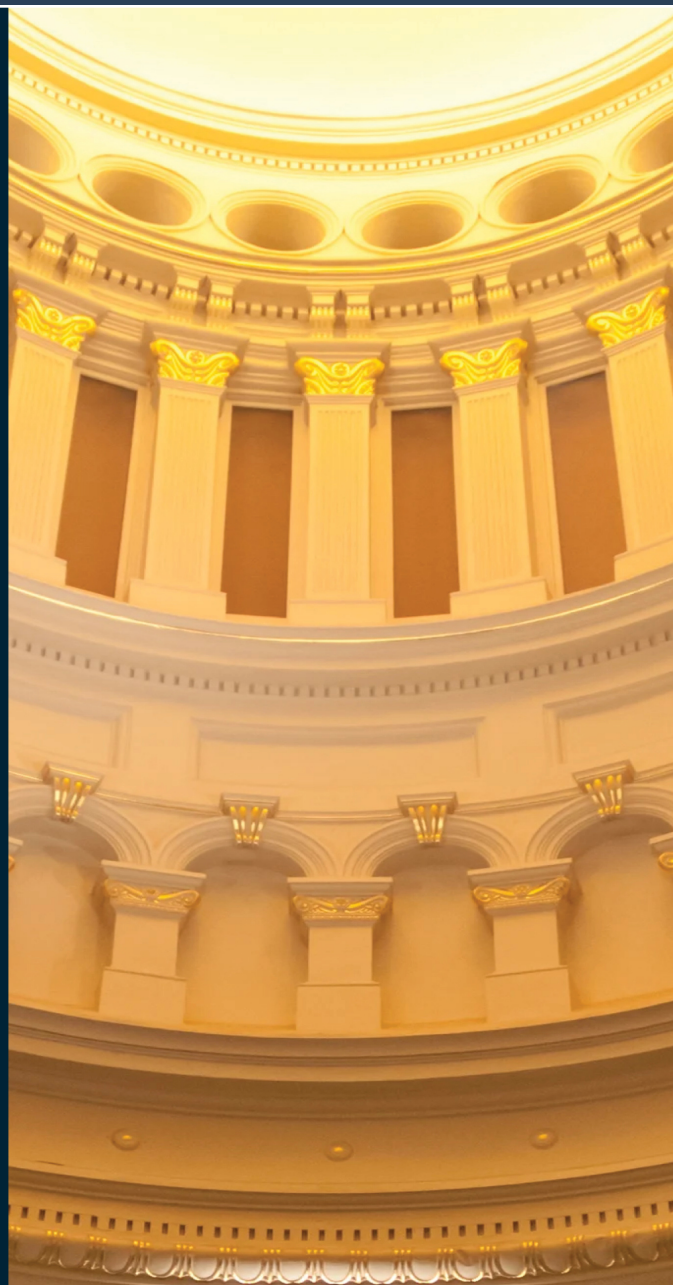
Martin was already keyed into the Seventh as early as the summer of 2025, when Somerset County Democratic Chair Peg Schaffer welcomed him to her home county. The DNC chairman in June of last year joined Schaffer and 60-70 door pounders in Bernards, undeterred by the rain, as they sought to capitalize on Anti-Trump momentum in advance of this year’s November general election.

For the time being, Bennett would have to duke it out with Varela, Roth, and Shah in the June 2nd Primary – and Shah proved an aggressive attacker down the home stretch - while the GOP tried to figure out what ailed Kean, and what they would do if he did not return to the fray, and how they could try to keep the sedate and serious Central Jersey district propped upright under the unseemly and undignified – and those are the nicest words one can use - onslaught of the sitting President and his cronies.

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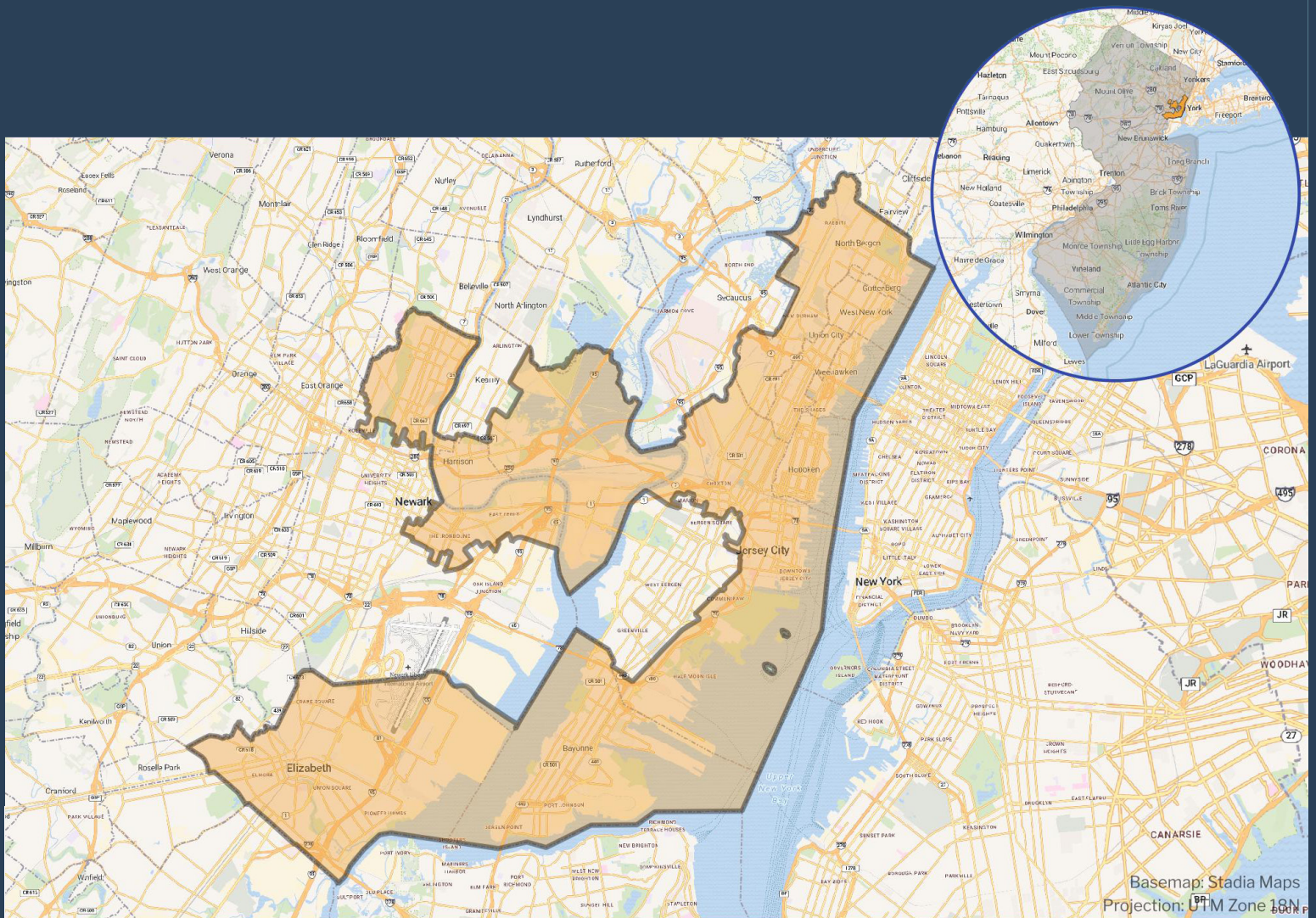


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# CD-8

## MENENDEZ V. ALI

In CD-8, incumbent U.S. Rep. Rob Menendez, Jr. faces challenger and former Jersey City School Board Member Mussab Ali in the Democratic Primary.

In the candidates' only debate, sponsored by the Hudson County View on May 6th, Ali repeatedly charged Menendez as part of the problem and an instrument of corporate donors. The congressman countered that Ali can only

cite donors because he can't attack the actual record of Menendez's office to demonstrate substantial contrast.

Of course, both Democrats running to represent a district that includes most of Hudson County made Trump – and Trump's policies - their favorite common target.

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abolishing ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement],” Menendez told moderator John Heinis.



“I’m grateful the congressman has joined our stance to abolish ICE,” said Ali, a Harvard educated lawyer. “He was on the train of reforming ICE and now he wants to abolish ICE. No one feels safer with ICE on our streets. ... These are people recruited to cause chaos in our communities.”

Menendez noted his record and consistent opposition to Delaney Hall, the Newark-based detention facility, including his presence on scene last year when law agents arrested Newark Mayor Ras Baraka and charged his colleague, U.S. Rep. LaMonica McIver (D-10).

Ali continued to object to the congressman.

“Democrats poll lower than Republicans because they’re uninspiring,” said the challenger. “They are funded by the same corporations that fund Republicans. When they are funding both sides, the people don’t feel represented.”

Menendez countered that he continues to champion a “bold housing policy.”

“The affordability message needs to be the focus of the next Democratic congress,” he said. “People are struggling out there. We’ve done what we can to address [their needs].”

Later, the congressman noted that he has opposed Trump’s Iran War “since day one.”

Ali took the issue back to his core argument. “We are in this war because of certain special interest groups and certain donors, many of whom have given to my opponent,” he said.

“My FEC records are transparent,” Menendez shot back.



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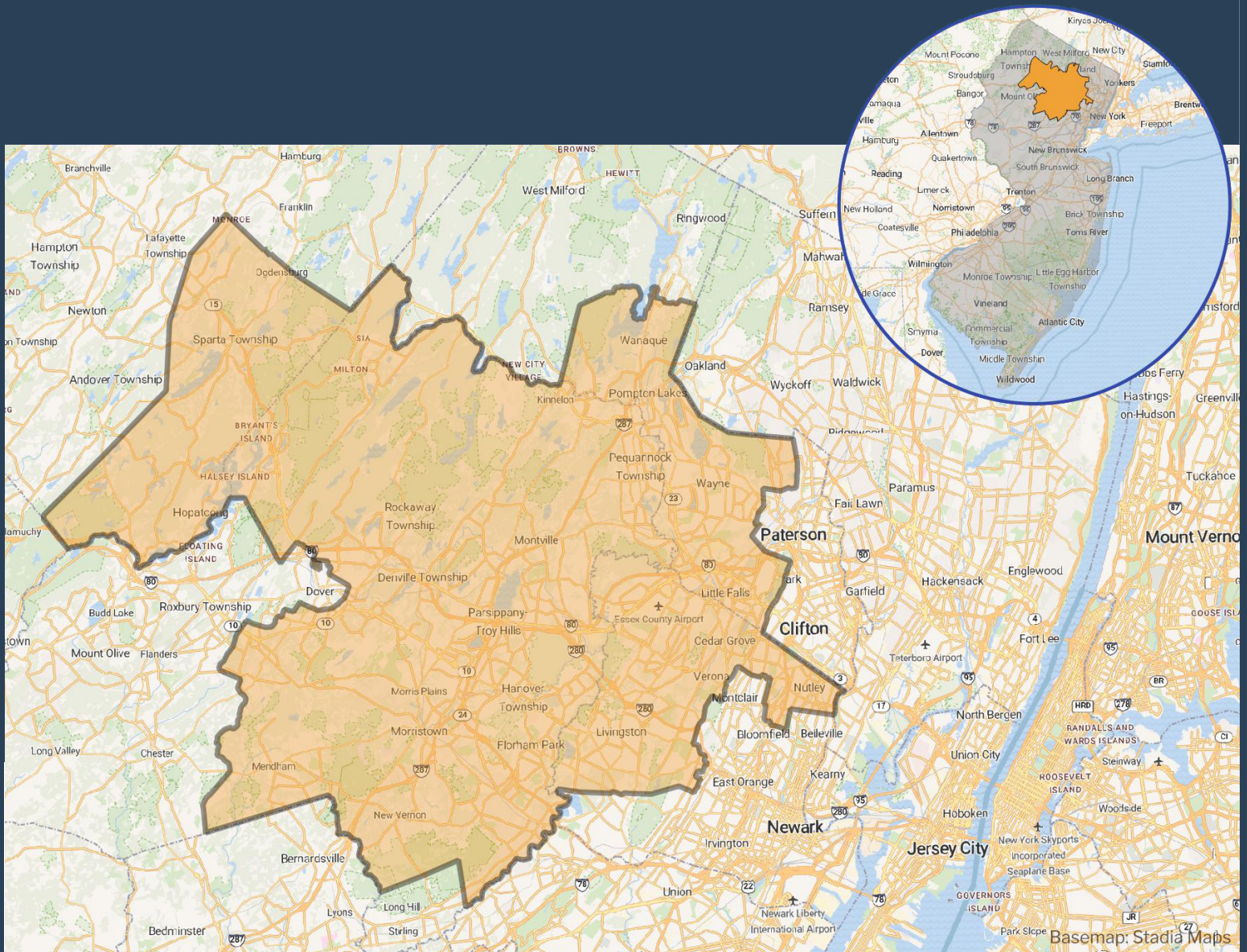
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**Eastern Atlantic States**

REGIONAL COUNCIL OF CARPENTERS



# CD-11

## CONGRESSWOMAN MEJIA

When a fire upended a city block in Belleville in early May, U.S. Rep. Analilia Mejia (D-11) went there in the immediate aftermath as the township's federal representative.

“My heart breaks for the families impacted,” said the Congresswoman. “But Belleville

is strong, and this community will rebuild together. My office is here as a resource for those affected.”

Having won the February special primary election and April special general election for the 11th Congressional seat vacated by Governor Mikie Sherrill, Mejia runs now as an officeholder, the officeholder – not a bullhorn-



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*Pictured above (l-r):*

Secretary-Treasurer Tina Dare, President Steve Beatty & Vice President Petal Robertson

wielding agitator - to secure the regularly scheduled primary race.

Rivals among one another for second place, Justin Strickland, Donald Cresitello, and Joseph Lewis, offer no credible resistance as Mejia seeks a November rematch with the nice-guy Republican she already steamrolled: Randolph Mayor Joe Hathaway.

Since her back-to-back wins, Mejia has – in the words of one of her allies – professionalized the political operation that in the early days of the short runway primary contest gave off more of a run-and-gun vibe. “You might say some of her allies were a little unprepared to win, and so now she’s staffing up well with lots of good people,” said the source.



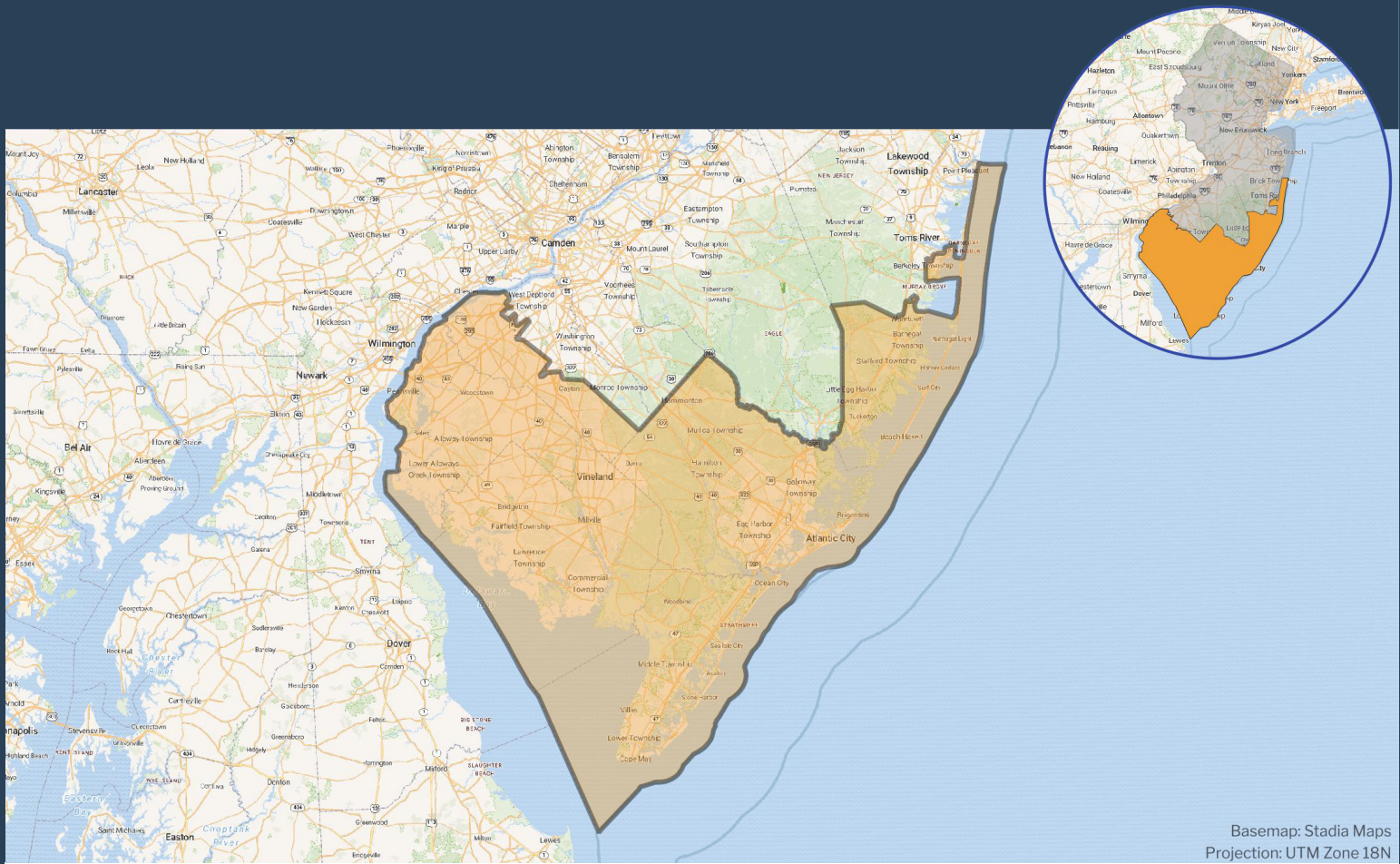
Hathaway has tried the use the socialism label to sink Mejia in the sedate New Jersey suburb, making fun of the former labor organizer’s attempt to mold herself into an orange section-slicing soccer mom.

But it didn’t work, as Mejia drubbed her GOP rival, 60-40%, in a district not too long ago occupied by Rodney Frelinghuysen, whose roots here go back to the American Revolution. Her ally James Gee said, “Congresswoman Mejia has built an army of people concerned about the future.”

As Hathaway and Mejia’s more so-called conservative rivals try to scare people away from her, the Congresswoman talks most cogently about the issues that most define her career: affordability, jobs, wages, the economy. Even those in the affluent district doing relatively well do not find themselves in many cases doing as well as their parents.

In Gee’s words, “Rather than getting caught in being a conservative or a progressive, Congresswoman Mejia shows that she is the person who is listening.” That includes attentiveness to Belleville, to find out what they need from the feds to rebuild in the aftermath of a nightmare.





Basemap: Stadia Maps  
Projection: UTM Zone 18N

# CD-2

## THE OTHER CD-7?

As Donald Trump nightmarishly implodes, Democrats see a chance this year to displace the President's chief New Jersey ally: the ever-MAGA-erstwhile U.S. Rep. Jeff Van Drew.

Certainly, if they can't get him out of there now, they would have to employ a larger strategy of Trump defiance, either by mapping Van Drew out of existence as part of a 12-0 congressional seat strategy or by mashing him together with U.S. Rep. Chris Smith (R-4) to give Dems an 11-1 statewide edge.

Short of redistricting, Jeff Van Drew's former party has a challenge in this district that 2025 GOP gubernatorial nominee Jack Ciattarelli won by seven points. Four candidates are convinced they can get him out of there in November: Former law enforcement officer/civil rights attorney Tim Alexander, Cape May Mayor Zack Mullock, former foreign affairs officer Bayly Winder, and former retail store manager/mom Terri Reese.

A 2022 defeated Van Drew foe, Alexander still has strong support among county organizations and key GOTV sources, like the 13,000-strong UNITE HERE Local 54.

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“Tim Alexander has been a union member, PBA #77, for over 4 decades and understands that when workers do better, our entire community does better,” said Donna DeCaprio, President of UNITE HERE Local 54. “He has consistently stood with working people, listened to our members, and fought for fair wages, safe workplaces, and dignity on the job. We are proud to endorse Tim Alexander because he will be a strong voice for South Jersey’s working families in Congress.”

The only elected official in the Democratic Primary, Mullock has impressed people with his accessibility and the professionalism of his campaign. He has the backing of the party organization in his home county.

“Cape May County residents are excited about the future with Mayor Mullock in this primary race,” said Cape May Democratic Chair Marie Blistan. “We look forward to helping him win the primary, winning the election, and having Cape May County Congressman Zack Mullock restore integrity back into that federal office.”

At a May 20th Stockton debate, the local mayor stayed away from a scrap between Alexander and Winder to keep his focus on the GOP. “He [Trump] has traded stocks every seven seconds of his presidency,” said Mullock. “We cannot allow this corruption to continue to happen. I am asking for a chance to take on Van Drew, beat Van Drew, and together we will take this country back.”

Winder came close to winning Atlantic County and has done well on the fundraising front, amassing a war-chest of \$600k.

He possesses the support of the New Jersey Citizen Action Political Action Committee (NJCA-PAC) on the strength, says the organization of his commitment to “affordability, economic equity, a

fair and transparent democracy, and accountability in government.”

“Bayly’s stance that NJ should have affordable healthcare for all, increased funding for rural clinics across CD2 to prevent closures, increased funding for maternal health, expanded Medicare to include dental, vision, and hearing, and lower prescription drug costs reflects NJCA’s ongoing fight for affordable healthcare, and people over billionaires,” said NJCA’s Executive Director, Dena Mottola Jaborska.

“Service is not a slogan to me, it is my life’s work,” said Winder. “This is a golden age for an elite few while you pay the bill.”

Reese, for her part, has the common touch, and a record of taking Trump angst to the streets, though she has not raised as much money as her rivals.

No extraordinary distance separates the candidates on substance as they elbow and claw through some personality-based fisticuffs. Winder collided with Reese at one point. Mullock drew some criticism for welcoming the support of state Senator Jim Beach, who infamously clashed with U.S. Senator Andy Kim (D-NJ).

“After June we will come together and support whomever wins of the four,” Atlantic County Democratic Committee Chairman Mike Suleiman told InsiderNJ. “A spirited primary is not a bad thing. We do have to keep it together and unite to defeat Jeff Van Drew.”

But will they come together?

Alexander and Reese have already said they wouldn’t back Winder, while Mullock made one pointed comment at the debate, not too obliquely aimed at the only candidate on the stage with federal level experience: “We need South Jersey in D.C. not D.C. in South Jersey.”

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# U.S. SENATE

**“DOES ANYBODY REALLY KNOW WHAT TIME IT IS? DOES ANYBODY REALLY CARE?” —CHICAGO**

Republicans who want to try to take out U.S. Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) this year have huddled up in a bitter and cutthroat battle, with the winner eventually set to command the unenviable position in New Jersey of defending the record of President Donald J. Trump.

Competing for the Republican nomination to the United States Senate in New Jersey are medical doctor Robert Lebovics, attorney and former Tabernacle Committeeman Justin Murphy, suspended New Jersey State Trooper Richard Tabor, and former News 12 Power and Politics host Alex Zdan.

“I basically got told that because I’ve decided to run for U.S. Senate, they want to suspend me

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from work for running,” Tabor complained in a Facebook video, basically blaming Democrats. And why not? That’s ultimately the target.

Zdan ran in the 2024 Republican Primary and lost to nominee Curtis Bashaw, who went on to lose to Andy Kim. “Cory Booker is a Washington elitist,” Zdan proclaims on his self-described “America First” website. “I’m an outsider fighting to hold the line in New Jersey. ...America is sick of Cory Booker.”

“Sick.”

Is there a doctor in the house?

Ear, nose and throat conservative Lebovics vows “to work for policies that reduce everyday costs, promote economic growth, and make it easier for families to live, work and build a future in the

Garden State.”

Then there’s Murphy.

“Donald Trump came into New Jersey in 2024 and with one visit to Wildwood, took almost two million votes out of this state,” Murphy told InsiderNJ. “We have to inspire those voters.”

If you don’t inspire them, you could end up like Tom Massie down in Kentucky.

A conservative former local elected official and a military veteran, Murphy wants to energize New Jersey’s Republican base. He is encouraged by the work of several new county party chairs. “I see them fighting pretty hard to make change in the culture,” said the candidate, who ran unsuccessfully for the GOP nomination for the United States Senate in 2024.

