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Good Luck to All of This Year’s Candidates!
Four years ago, New Jersey was at the center of the political universe. It’s not the largest state in the union. It’s not the swingiest, either. But with a U.S. Senate seat and no fewer than five congressional districts up for grabs, New Jersey played a more important role than nearly any other state in determining who would control Congress.

At the time, I was a college sophomore in rural Massachusetts, watching the election from a distance. I and a friend had organized a few absentee ballot tables, and I’d get a little thrill every time I helped someone who lived in a competitive state or congressional district apply for a ballot. I’d never lived in New Jersey, but I could name the leading players all the same: Andy Kim, Leonard Lance, Mikie Sherrill, Bob Hugin.

On election night, some states had mixed results, with Democrats falling short in lots of key Senate and gubernatorial contests.

But New Jersey, of course, was not among them, re-electing Senator Bob Menendez and electing four new Democratic House members. Democratic victories in New Jersey provided fully 10% of the 40 seats the party flipped across the country, a record near-miss in the 2021 gubernatorial election that Democrats have never run for office before.

Four years later, everything’s been flipped on its head.

Instead of an unpopular Republican president in the White House, there’s an unpopular Democratic president, with skyrocketing inflation and economic woes to boot. Instead of upstart Democrats getting to excoriate the actions of a Republican-controlled Congress, Democratic incumbents have to defend their record against a crop of lively challengers, some of whom have never run for office before.

State Republicans, excited after their near-miss in the 2021 gubernatorial election and their shocking state legislative gains, are seriously interested in flipping four congressional seats, all of which were Republican-held as recently as 2016. National polling has tilted increasingly in Republicans’ favor, and the continually rising cost of living has made it hard for Democrats to push back.

That said, there are several impediments to Republican success that could halt a red wave at the ramparts. For one, most Democratic incumbents have a financial advantage, something that was very much not true for Republicans in 2018. For another, while inflation is incredibly important for many New Jersey voters, so is abortion, an issue on which Democrats have had the upper hand since the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade.

But most importantly, there’s the state’s new congressional map, which was designed by Democrats on the Congressional Redistricting Commission to protect nearly every Democratic incumbent save one. It’s a sturdily designed map, one that could keep nine seats blue even if Republicans do very well nationwide.

In 2018, Democrats were able to flip four seats on a Republican-drawn congressional map, but that was in large part because the two parties’ coalitions had changed dramatically since the map was created in 2011. This time around, Democrats are defending seats drawn with extremely recent data, limiting how far Republicans can push into enemy territory.

Thanks to these various competing factors, 2022 could turn out to be something of a wash in New Jersey, in contrast with the dramatic events of 2018. But even if New Jersey isn’t the center of the political universe anymore, each House race has plenty of intrigue to go around.

The state’s premier contest has long been the 7th district, where Rep. Tom Malinowski (D-Ringoes) faces former State Senate Minority Leader Tom Kean Jr. (R-Westfield) in a rematch of their tight 2020 race.

Malinowski was the one vulnerable Democrat not given a better district by the redistricting commission, and Kean and outside Republican groups have hammered him hard on inflation and ethics. The congressman has fought to reframe the contest around abortion, but he’s not gotten much outside support and is the underdog for re-election.

To the south, the 3rd district contest between Rep. Andy Kim (D-Moorestown) and businessman Bob Healey, one of the best Republican recruits in the state, has also developed into a hotly contested race.

Thanks to some big donations from himself and his family, Healey has outspent Kim, though the blue tilt of the redrawn district and Kim’s own strengths as an incumbent may prevent Healey from getting across the finish line.

In North Jersey, two other Democratic incumbents – Reps. Josh Gottheimer (D-Wyckoff) and Mikie Sherrill (D-Montclair) – face underfunded foes in districts that were made far more Democratic. Neither Frank Pallotta nor Paul DeGroot is favored to be a member of Congress next year, but there’s certainly an opening for them under the right circumstances.

And around the rest of the state, there are eight other congressional contests leading the ticket; none are expected to change parties, but all have their own interesting dynamics and plotlines. Beneath them are two legislative districts, 61 county offices and countless local offices up for election, all of which could reshape how New Jerseyans’ everyday lives are governed.

With no statewide election on the ballot this year, something that happens in the state once every 12 years, it’s tough to write an overarching narrative of 2022. It’s also tough to predict how many voters will make the journey to the polls; with hundreds of thousands of people moved into new congressional districts, some of them might not even know what races they can vote in.

But no matter what happens in this election – be it a Republican wave, a Democratic wave, a shock Libertarian wave – you can trust the New Jersey Globe to cover it every step of the way. New Jersey is always the center of our universe.

Happy voting,

JOEY FOX
New Jersey Globe reporter
**CONGRESS**

**1ST DISTRICT**

**DONALD NORCROSS (D-INC.)**

**VS. CLAIRE GUSTAFSON (R)**

South Jersey has seen some intense political changes in the last few years. Two congressional districts have changed hands, one of them twice. Two longtime politicians have unexpectedly switched parties. And no fewer than five legislative districts have flipped from Democratic to Republican or vice versa, representing more than half of the region’s core delegation.

But whatever may be going on in the rest of South Jersey, it hasn’t yet reached the nice, calm 1st congressional district. Anchored in deep-blue Camden County, the district last elected a Republican to Congress in 1972, and it would be a major upset if that streak broke this year.

Rep. Donald Norcross (D-Camden), the 1st district’s representative for the last eight years, got his start as a union man. An electrician by trade, Norcross led the Southern New Jersey AFL-CIO for nearly 20 years, following in the footsteps of his AFL-CIO president father.

Norcross’ political rise was facilitated by his brother, South Jersey Democratic power broker George Norcross, who has amassed such significant power in the region’s Democratic politics that the Norcross name has become synonymous with political power. Donald Norcross was elected to an open Camden-based Assembly seat in 2009 and was appointed the district’s Senate seat all of seven days later – and his quick rise was only just beginning.

In 2014, Rep. Rob Andrews (D-Haddon Heights) resigned amid a House Ethics Committee inquiry into his usage of campaign funds. Andrews had served for more than two decades, first winning a 1990 special election to succeed Jim Florio, the last New Jersey congressman to be elected governor (and a longtime friend of the Norcross family).

With Donald Norcross conveniently representing the legislative seat at the heart of the 1st congressional district, George Norcross made sure his brother had a clear path to the congressional nomination as soon as Andrews was gone. No other major Democrats filed to run, and Donald Norcross dispatched Logan Township mayor Frank Minor and U.S. Marine Corps veteran Frank Broomell with 72% of the vote.

Norcross went on to win the general election with little difficulty against former NFL linebacker Garry Cobb even as Democrats nationwide struggled amid the 2014 Republican wave, and he hasn’t faced a close contest since.

Norcross has generally been regarded as a reliable liberal in Congress – he’s a vice chairman of the Congressional Progressive Caucus – with a particular focus on labor issues as a member of the Education & Labor Committee. (He’s also on the Armed Services and Science, Space, & Technology Committees.)

In 2020, Norcross defeated former Collingswood Board of Education member Claire Gustafson by a 63%-37% margin. Gustafson is back for another go this year (it’s her third House bid; she lost the 2014 primary to Cobb), and she’s hoping that inflation woes and South Jersey’s longer-term trend towards Republicans will power her to a closer finish.

Both Gustafson and Norcross dispatched minor primary challengers in June, clearing the way for one of New Jersey’s four rematches this cycle.

To support Gustafson’s contention that the 1st district is competitive, Republicans have actually released a district-level poll – a rarity this cycle even in hotly contested races. The poll, conducted by GOP firm Grassroots Targeting, found Norcross ahead of Gustafson by just five points, 48-43%.

The existence of those numbers should give some pause about whether Norcross is headed for another dominant victory this year. But internal polling tends to favor the party it was conducted for, sometimes to an extreme extent, and there are other reasons to believe Norcross is the prohibitive favorite.

For one, the 1st district was largely left alone by the Congressional Redistricting Commission and remains strongly Democratic. President Joe Biden carried the new lines by 24 points, and while Gov. Phil Murphy’s 14-point victory was substantially smaller, it still wasn’t anywhere close to a loss.

It’s true that parts of South Jersey are flipping red, but those communities are mostly located in the 2nd congressional district, not the 1st. Camden and Cherry Hill, as well as the dozens of smaller boroughs and townships in their orbit, still vote resolutely Democratic even in bad years like 2021.

For another, like most incumbents, Norcross has a major financial upper hand. He’s raised more than $2 million since the cycle began and spent $2.9 million, far ahead of Gustafson (who hasn’t even filed a third quarter campaign finance report.)

Though Norcross might win by less than he’s accustomed to this year, it’s nearly impossible to see a real path to victory for Gustafson given the facts of the race.

If there’s an open Senate seat in the next few years, the 63-year-old Norcross would be a serious contender to give South Jersey its first statewide elected official since Jim Florio. Of course, he’ll have to hold his congressional seat until then – but at least this year, it’s not looking like he’s in any real danger of losing it.
DONALD NORCROSS (D-INC.)
Photo: Kevin Sanders for the New Jersey Globe

CLAIRE GUSTAFSON (R)
Photo: Joey Fox for the New Jersey Globe
COUNTIES: Burlington, Camden, Gloucester
Burlington: Maple Shade, Palmyra
Camden: All

Incumbent: Donald Norcross (D)
Candidates: Donald Norcross (D), Claire Gustafson (R)
Allen Cannon, Patricia Kline, Isaiah Fletcher (Minor Parties)

Statewide Results
2020 President: Biden (D) 61.6% // Trump (R) 37.1%
2021 Governor: Murphy (D) 56.7% // Ciattarelli (R) 42.5%

Primary Results
2022 D Primary: Norcross 77.9% // Desantis 22.1%
2022 R Primary: Gustafson 68.0% // Galdo 32.0%

Previous Congressional Results (Occurred Under Old District Lines)
2020 Congress: Norcross (D) 62.5% // Gustafson (R) 37.5%
2018 Congress: Norcross (D) 64.4% // Dilks (R) 33.3%

Demographics
59.4% White // 19.4% Black // 14.9% Hispanic // 6.3% Asian

District Rating: Solid Democratic
The Eastern Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters is part of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America. It represents 41,000 highly skilled men and women, 2,500 businesses, 15 regional offices, 175 staff members, 22 Local Unions, 18 Training Centers and 4,000 apprentices living, working, and operating in Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Washington D.C., Virginia, and West Virginia.

Learn more at EAScarpenters.org
2ND DISTRICT

JEFF VAN DREW (R-INC.) VS. TIM ALEXANDER (D)

WILL DEMOCRATS forever maintain their red-hot rage at Rep. Jeff Van Drew (R-Dennis) for abandoning their party and embracing Donald Trump? Probably. Will that rage do anything to imperil Van Drew’s chances of re-election this year in the red-leaning 2nd congressional district? It’s not looking like it.

Tim Alexander, a civil rights lawyer and former prosecutor, is carrying the Democratic banner, but he’s struggled to convince national Democrats he’s worthy of their time and investment. Van Drew has by now spent more than three decades representing South Jersey in various offices, and if there’s anyone who finally dislodge him, Alexander’s probably not that person.

Van Drew, long ago a Dennis Township committeeman and Cape May County freeholder, entered the state-level political scene in 2001, when he flipped a State Assembly seat in the 1st legislative district. He moved up to the State Senate in 2007, defeating State Sen. Nicholas Asselta (R-Vineland) four years after Asselta had escaped without drawing any Democratic opponent at all.

Over the course of his legislative tenure, Van Drew established a reputation as a staunch moderate in tune with his relatively conservative district. He was among the last Democratic holdouts on gay marriage, for example, and had a 100% rating from the National Rifle Association.

He also built an intimidating Democratic operation along the way, guiding his running mates to commanding victories on what became known as the “Van Drew team.” From when Van Drew was first elected to the Senate in 2007 to when he left the legislature in 2018, Democrats only lost a 1st district race once: Sam Fiocchi briefly flipped an Assembly seat in 2013 only to lose it again in 2015.

When incredibly popular Rep. Frank LoBiondo (R-Ventnor) announced he would retire in 2018, Van Drew’s strong local brand made him an immediately formidable candidate to succeed him. LoBiondo, himself a moderate former 1st legislative district assemblyman, consistently won landslide victories in the closely divided 2nd congressional district, and Democrats hoped Van Drew would be able to build a similar local brand for their side.

It worked, at first. Van Drew flipped the seat in one of the cycle’s sleepiest races – though his 53-46% margin against former Atlantic County Freeholder Seth Grossman, regarded as one of the weakest Republican nominees in the country that year, was unexpectedly small.

Upon arriving in Congress, Van Drew told the party line on most policy issues, but he maintained a clear independent streak. He shunned Nancy Pelosi and voted “no” for House Speaker – a vote that the confused House clerk had to later clarify was a vote of “present” – and, more importantly, made it clear he firmly disapproved of the effort to impeach Donald Trump.

Van Drew’s heresies drew murmurs at home of a potential party-backed primary challenge, but the congressman beat them to the punch by shockingly announcing his switch to the Republican Party in December 2019. The reactions were immediate: Trump embraced him as an ally and held a rally for him in Wildwood, local Republicans scrambled to shore up his support, and Democrats vowed to make Van Drew pay for his betrayal in the 2020 elections.

Their hopes were pinned on Amy Kennedy, a mental health advocate and the wife of former Rep. Patrick Kennedy (D-Rhode Island). After defeating Norcross pick Brigid Callahan Harrison in the Democratic primary, Kennedy amassed a huge war chest that outpaced Van Drew’s and held small leads in most public polls of the race.

The race became one of the most closely watched House campaigns in the entire country, thanks in no small part to Van Drew’s bête noire status among Democrats furious at his party switch. But amid a surprisingly good night for House Republicans, Van Drew prevailed 52%-46%.

Since his party switch, Van Drew, a member of the Homeland Security and Transportation & Infrastructure Committees, has tried to find a balance between hardcore partisanship and moderation on certain issues.

He voted against the certification of the 2020 election, making him the only member of New Jersey’s delegation to buy into Trump’s false claims of election fraud, and has aligned with Republicans on most major votes. The final version of the bipartisan infrastructure bill, however, earned Van Drew’s support, as did a bill codifying marriage equality.

This cycle, Democratic hopes of defeating him fall on Alexander, a relative political unknown before this year who has touted his background in law enforcement and whose candidacy initially excited state Democrats. In a part of the state where Democrats have consistently nominated white candidates for competitive races, Alexander’s identity as a Black man is notable and may strike a chord with nonwhite voters, who make up around 36% of the district’s population.

Yet Alexander hasn’t drawn nearly the kind of fundraising or national interest that would put him into real contention this year. So far, he’s raised just $441,000 total for a mediocre campaign that’s confounded New Jersey politicos. That number, nowhere near enough to unseat a House incumbent these days, is artificially high since Alexander has managed to burn through cash without spending much on voter contact.

Van Drew has raised more than $3 million and has a huge cash-on-hand advantage in the final stretch: $746,000 to Alexander’s $46,000.
No one on the national stage has shown much interest in helping Alexander out for the general election, either. After spending around $11 million in 2020 on the 2nd district, the “Big Four” U.S. House PACs have completely ignored the district this time around.

Though Alexander was the pick of the district’s county Democratic Parties during convention season, he only beat underfunded newcomer Carolyn Rush 62%-38% in the June primary, a sign that most voters still had little idea of who he was. (Van Drew, an omnipresent figure in the district who has done a sterling job at marshaling South Jersey Republicans into his corner, beat two primary opponents with 86% of the vote.)

And after winning the primary, Alexander spent much of the summer and fall announcing endorsements from Democrats, many of them unknown to 2nd district voters.

Adding to Alexander’s difficulties is the state’s new congressional map. The 2nd district was mostly left alone under the new lines, but by adding a few deeply conservative towns in Ocean County, the district still shifted around two points more Republican.

The new lines were drawn by the state redistricting committee’s Democratic members, so it might seem odd that Van Drew’s seat would have been made safer, rather than more competitive. Indeed, Nancy Pelosi specifically called on her New Jersey allies to draw the lines such that 11 of New Jersey’s 12 House seats – among them the 2nd – would be winnable by Democrats, giving her a better shot at retaining the majority.

But the commission members who ultimately drew the map were more focused on shoring up the state’s Democratic incumbents (nine of them, at least), and were seemingly willing to sacrifice the 2nd district as a tradeoff.

Under the new lines, Trump would have won the district by five points, while 2021 gubernatorial nominee Jack Ciattarelli beat Gov. Phil Murphy in the district by an astonishing 21-point margin, 60%-39%. In a midterm election under a Democratic president, that’s not the kind of district that would be likely to oust a Republican incumbent.

Democrats still do well in majority-minority communities like Atlantic City and Bridgeton, and Alexander’s likely to follow suit – but those cities are increasingly drowned out by the red wall of rural territory around them.

Back when Van Drew first switched parties in 2019, there were genuine doubts from both sides about whether he’d made a smart decision. Would Republicans ever fully accept a longtime Democrat into their ranks? Would Van Drew be able to win the competitive district against an onslaught of Democratic cash?

Nearly three years later, though, Van Drew’s choice is looking like a wise one. Rather than facing a difficult Democratic primary followed by a general election in a district that’s steadily trending red, Van Drew gets to hold a favorable seat and serve in a party that likes him – so much so that Trump has even floated Van Drew as a potential vice presidential candidate.

If Alexander manages to keep the race close, it may bode well for his political future – he lives in the highly competitive 2nd legislative district – as well as for Democratic chances against Van Drew down the line. This year, though, the combination of a Republican-leaning district, a major fundraising disparity, and Van Drew’s personal strength as an incumbent means that no one should hold their breath for a Democratic upset.
COUNTIES: ATLANTIC, CAPE MAY, CUMBERLAND, GLOUCESTER, OCEAN, SALEM
ATLANTIC: ALL
CAPE MAY: ALL
CUMBERLAND: ALL
GLOUCESTER: CLAYTON, EAST GREENWICH (PT.), ELK, FRANKLIN, GREENWICH, HARRISON, LOGAN, NEWFIELD, SOUTH HARRISON, SWEDESBORO, WOOLWICH
OCEAN: BARNEGAT, BARNEGAT LIGHT, BEACH HAVEN, BERKELEY (PT.), EAGLESWOOD, HARVEY CEDARS, LACEY (PT.), LITTLE EGG HARBOR, LONG BEACH, OCEAN, SHIP BOTTOM, STAFFORD, SURF CITY, TUCKERTON
SALEM: ALL

INCUMBENT: JEFF VAN DREW (R)

CANDIDATES: JEFF VAN DREW (R), TIM ALEXANDER (D)
MICHAEL GALLO, ANTHONY PARISI SANCHEZ (MINOR PARTIES)

STATEWIDE RESULTS
2020 PRESIDENT: TRUMP (R) 51.9% // BIDEN (D) 46.8%
2021 GOVERNOR: CIATTARELLI (R) 60.0% // MURPHY (D) 39.3%

PRIMARY RESULTS
2022 D PRIMARY: ALEXANDER 62.0% // RUSH 38.0%
2022 R PRIMARY: VAN DREW 85.7% // BARKER 7.9% // PIGNATELLI 6.3%

PREVIOUS CONGRESSIONAL RESULTS (OCCURRED UNDER OLD DISTRICT LINES)
2020 CONGRESS: VAN DREW (R) 51.9% // KENNEDY (D) 46.2%
2018 CONGRESS: VAN DREW (D) 52.9% // GROSSMAN (R) 45.2%

DEMOGRAPHICS
63.9% WHITE // 13.7% BLACK // 17.3% HISPANIC // 4.5% ASIAN

DISTRICT RATING: SOLID REPUBLICAN
In the first three seconds, 83% of people who see this ad will look at the man in the white t-shirt and backpack first at the bottom of the image above. We developed InfluenceIQ™, a suite of tools and techniques that allow us to precisely target your audience, craft more compelling messaging, and build a deeper understanding of how your audience consumes media.
New Jersey’s congressional delegation is full of electoral overperformers, but out of all of them, Rep. Andy Kim (D-Moorestown) might be the most impressive.

First, in 2018, Kim went from an unknown and underestimated former Obama White House staffer to a serious contender in a tossup race to a congressman-elect, all in just over a year. Then, two years later, he managed to win re-election against a self-financing Republican opponent by eight points, making him one of just seven House Democrats around the country to win a Trump-carried district.

Can Kim keep up his winning streak this year as he runs for re-election in a more Democratic district? That depends on whether he can perform as well as he did in New Jersey’s 3rd district in the Trump-carried district. In the 3rd district, Kim won 50%-47% as Republicans swept New Jersey.

The contest is only the latest dramatic race the 3rd district has hosted; no other district in New Jersey has seen quite as many changes in representation in recent years.

The most recent representative to serve more than two terms was Rep. Jim Saxton (R-Mount Holly), who represented the Burlington, Camden, and Ocean County-based district (previously numbered as the 13th) from 1984 until 2009. During that whole time, Saxton never came close to losing.

When Saxton announced his retirement in 2008 due to health issues, however, the 3rd district was suddenly put in play. Democrats nominated State Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman John Adler (D-Cherry Hill), who had previously run against Saxton in 1990, and Republicans chose Medford Mayor Chris Myers in a contest that Adler won 52%-48%.

But the turnover was only just beginning. Adler only ended up serving for one term; in 2010, he lost to former NFL offensive tackle Jon Runyan (R-Mount Laurel) 50%-47% as Republicans swept races across the country and regained the House.

Runyan chose to retire instead of seeking a third term in 2014 after defeating Adler’s widow Shelley in 2012; Adler himself had tragically died in 2011 of a sudden illness. In an odd twist, the two Republicans who ran to succeed Runyan were both North Jersey politicians: former Randolph Mayor Tom MacArthur and former Bogota Mayor Steve Lonegan, both of whom owned homes in Ocean County.

MacArthur won the primary, and went on to win the general election 54%-44% against Burlington County Freeholder Aimee Belgard. After he easily won re-election in 2016 – his 59%-39% victory remains the district’s only race decided by more than 10 points since 2006 – it looked like, after so much turnover, the 3rd district might be MacArthur’s for the keeping.

When Kim, a Rhodes Scholar who had worked at the U.S. Department of State and ran the Iraq desk for the National Security Council, announced his campaign for the seat in June 2017, attention in New Jersey was largely focused elsewhere. Running against an incumbent in a district that had voted for Donald Trump by six points in 2016, Kim was able to snag the Democratic nomination largely because South Jersey Democrats didn’t care.

Then things started to go right for Kim. He hammered MacArthur on MacArthur’s role in the creation of the American Health Care Act, the Obamacare repeal bill that ultimately foundered in the Senate; MacArthur was also the lone New Jersey representative to vote for the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, which created a cap on the state and local tax (SALT) deduction.

Assisted by his Obama White House connections, Kim’s fundraising steadily picked up, and he raised more than $500,000 in the first quarter of 2018 – critical in a district split between the expensive Philadelphia media market and the truly extravagant New York City market. Polling, first from Democratic-aligned outlets and then from nonpartisan pollsters, showed a tight race.

Kim also learned how to campaign, overcoming an early gaffe when a MacArthur campaign tracker filmed him walking alone after a July 4 event carrying cotton candy and unable to remember where he had parked his car.

By the fall of 2018, the district had gone from the fringes of the House playing field to one of the country’s most closely watched races.

Adding fuel to the fire was a pair of controversial Republican ads that seemed to target Kim’s Asian heritage. One TV ad from the Congressional Leadership Fund called Kim “not one of us” – Kim was born and raised in Burlington County but lived in Washington, D.C. before running for Congress – while a Republican State Committee mailer used a font called Chop Suey to declare Kim was “real fishy.”

When all was said and done, Kim emerged victorious, 50%-49% – a margin of just 3,973 votes – making him the first Asian American to represent New Jersey in Congress. Kim dominated in Burlington County while MacArthur easily carried Ocean County, and since Burlington cast 50,000 more votes, the contest went to Kim.
There are no breaks in politics, and as soon as Kim took office, Republicans began suiting up to take him down. First there was Kate Gibbs, a former Burlington County freeholder who had narrowly lost her seat in 2018. Then, after Rep. Jeff Van Drew (R-Dennis)’s 2019 party switch, there was businessman David Richter, who switched from the 2nd district to the 3rd at the urging of Republican leaders (and who eventually beat Gibbs 61%-39% in the primary).

But Kim wasted no time either, quickly establishing himself as a thoughtful and pragmatic representative. He’s a member of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, unusual for a swing-district representative, and holds a seat on the Armed Forces Committee – an important spot for the district that’s home to Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst. (He also serves on the Small Business and Foreign Affairs Committees.)

That persona led Kim to an eight-point victory over Richter, who had deployed around $700,000 of his own money but failed to catch the interest of national Republicans. And shortly after Kim was sworn in for a second term, he was involved in the biggest news story of his career so far: the storming of the U.S. Capitol.

After the dust from the attack had cleared, a photo of Kim quietly cleaning up debris in the Rotunda went viral, and the suit he wore that day was donated to the Smithsonian Museum. In the hands of Kim’s family wasn’t apolitical – his wife worked on MacArthur’s re-election campaign – but he’s new to politics himself and has emphasized his own image as an outsider in contrast with Kim’s long service in government.

In order to reach Kim at all, Healey had to win the state’s strangest primary contest against Ian Smith, a bombastic right-wing gym owner who made a name for himself flouting Gov. Phil Murphy’s pandemic restrictions.

Smith accused Healey of representing more of the same, while Healey went after Smith’s personal troubles; Smith killed a teenager while driving under the influence in 2007, and remarkably was arrested for drunk driving once again two months before the primary. (The charges were recently dismissed.) Healey got all of the party lines, none of which Smith even contested, and also substantially outraced Smith with the help of self-funding.

Healey won the matchup 53-38%, but that was only the beginning of his uphill climb to represent the 3rd district.

For decades, the 3rd district has been largely composed of swaths of Burlington and Ocean Counties, which have little in common and tend to cancel one another out politically. Seeking to protect Kim, however, Democrats on the Congressional Redistricting Commission took a hatchet to the existing 3rd district and made it substantially bluer.

The new district has shed all of its Ocean County towns, instead stretching north to include Trenton suburbs like swingy Hamilton and deep-blue Lawrence as well as a series of modestly Republican towns in Monmouth County. Without Ocean County Republicans to pull the district rightwards, Joe Biden would have carried it by 14 points, and even Murphy managed to win it by around two points.

The lines carry some risk for Kim, who only represents around 55% of the new district’s voters and will have to introduce himself anew. But they are significantly more damaging to Healey, who began his campaign running in an evenly divided district and now finds himself in one that probably hasn’t supported a Republican for president in decades.

Still, Republicans see promise in Healey, one of two New Jerseyans the National Republican Congressional Committee has added to the “Young Gun” list of top-tier candidates.

Unlike many other New Jersey Republicans this cycle, Healey has accumulated the kind of money necessary to run a serious campaign. He’s raised $4 million in the cycle to-date, more than $2 million of which came from his own pockets, while Kim has raised $6.5 million.

And that’s not to mention the major assistance Healey’s gotten from a super PAC called Garden State Advance, which has spent nearly $3 million to boost Healey – almost all of it coming from Healey’s mom. Between Healey’s own spending and that of Garden State Advance, pro-Healey forces have actually outspent Kim, who has spent $5.2 million and hasn’t gotten any major outside aid.

Healey has kept his campaign laser-focused on economic issues, perhaps in recognition of the fact that 3rd district voters are unlikely to agree with some of his personal views on abortion, for example. Kim, meanwhile, has kept up his straightforward approach to politics and has run ads focusing on his family and his work in Congress, though he’s also attacked Healey on abortion and his family wealth.

The lone publicly released poll of the district had Kim ahead, but not by a huge margin. Back in August, a poll from RMG Research on behalf of U.S. Term Limits – a group unofficially aligned with Healey, who says he supports congressional term limits – gave Kim a six-point, 44%-38% lead. Regardless, both parties seem to think the race is close.

Should Kim win, it might scare away future serious challengers – if a strong Republican couldn’t beat Kim in a Democratic midterm, who could? – and set him up for a potential run for higher office in the future. Should Healey end up winning, on the other hand, it would be a testament to his political strength and a sign that a Republican wave did in fact materialize in New Jersey.

Either way, the 3rd district is bound to be represented by a potential rising star come 2023. Voters just have to decide which one.
ANDY KIM (D-INC.)
Photo: Kevin Sanders for the New Jersey Globe

BOB HEALEY (R)
Photo: Joey Fox for the New Jersey Globe
COUNTIES: BURLINGTON, MERCER, MONMOUTH
BURLINGTON: BASS RIVER, BEVERLY, BORDENTOWN CITY, BORDENTOWN TOWNSHIP,
BURLINGTON CITY, BURLINGTON TOWNSHIP, CHESTERFIELD, CINNAMINSON,
DELANCO, DELRAN, EASTAMPTON, EDGECWATER PARK, EVESHAM, FIELDSBORO,
FLORENCE, HAINESPORT, LUMBERTON, MANSFIELD, MEDFORD, MEDFORD LAKES,
MOORESTOWN, MOUNT HOLLY, MOUNT LAUREL, NEW HANOVER, NORTH
HANOVER, PEMBERTON BOROUGH, PEMBERTON TOWNSHIP, RIVERSIDE, RIVERTON,
SHAMONG, SOUTHAMPTON, SPRINGFIELD, TABERNACLE, WASHINGTON,
WESTAMPTON, WILLINGBORO, WOODLAND, WRIGHTSTOWN
MERcer: EAST WINDSOR, HAMILTON, HIGHTSTOWN, LAWRENCE, ROBBINSVILLE
MONMOUTH: ALLENTOWN, ENGLISHTOWN, FREEHOLD BOROUGH, FREEHOLD TOWNSHIP (PT.),
HOLMDEL, MANALAPAN, MARLBORO, MILLSTONE, ROOSEVELT, UPPER FREEHOLD
INCUMBENT: ANDY KIM (D)
CANDIDATES: ANDY KIM (D), BOB HEALEY (R)
GREGORY SOBOCINSKI, CHRISTOPHER RUSSOMANNO (MINOR PARTIES)
STATEWIDE RESULTS
2020 PRESIDENT: BIDEN (D) 56.4% // TRUMP (R) 42.3%
2021 GOVERNOR: MURPHY (D) 50.5% // CIATTARELLI (R) 48.9%
PRIMARY RESULTS
2022 D PRIMARY: KIM 92.5% // HENDLER 7.5%
2022 R PRIMARY: HEALEY 52.8% // SMITH 38.3% // FERRARA 8.8%
PREVIOUS CONGRESSIONAL RESULTS (OCCURRED UNDER OLD DISTRICT LINES)
2020 CONGRESS: KIM (D) 53.2% // RICHTER (R) 45.5%
2018 CONGRESS: KIM (D) 50.0% // MACARTHUR (R) 48.7%
DEMOGRAPHICS
63.5% WHITE // 14.6% BLACK // 11.3% HISPANIC // 9.8% ASIAN

DISTRICT RATING: TOSS UP
is proud to support
NEW JERSEY GLOBE
&
WOULD LIKE TO WISH
ALL OF OUR CLIENTS
SUCCESS THIS ELECTION DAY

Sean M. Darcy, President
PO Box 397, Belmar, NJ 07719 | 609-610-0543
For local issues and constituent service, pragmatic representative with a keen eye Smith has earned a reputation as a sooner rather than later. Smith has also broken with the majority of his caucus on a number of votes in recent years. He supported the bipartisan infrastructure bill, opposed both Obamacare repeal and the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act during the Trump era, and voted to certify Joe Biden’s Electoral College victory. The Lugar Center ranked him the 30th-most bipartisan member of Congress in 2021, putting him behind only Rep. Josh Gottheimer (D-Wyckoff) in New Jersey’s delegation.

But on social issues, especially abortion, Smith is deeply conservative. The overturning of Roe v. Wade this year was the culmination of a lifelong goal for Smith, a former New Jersey Right to Life anti-abortion activist who challenged Senator Harrison Williams in the 1976 Democratic Senate primary.

After such a long career, it’s hard not to see this year’s 4th district election as something of an afterthought.

The more dramatic part of the cycle came in the Republican primary, when Smith faced a spirited but underfunded challenge from podcaster Mike Crispi, who ran as a Trump acolyte and who accused Smith of being insufficiently conservative.

Crispi chose a smart year to run in. The Democratic-drawn map approved by the Congressional Redistricting Commission moved most Democratic-leaning parts of the 4th district, including Smith’s hometown of Hamilton Township (he’s now a Manchester resident), into other districts and replaced them with staunchly conservative towns in Ocean County. That makes the district far less likely to flip to Democrats, but it also meant Smith had to introduce himself to hundreds of thousands of new voters.

There was also some thought that Donald Trump might involve himself the way he did in other races around the country; Crispi’s campaign was directed by former Trump strategist Roger Stone, and he got the backing of other Trumpworld figures like former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn and Arizona gubernatorial nominee Kari Lake.

But a Trump endorsement never came, and Smith proved adept at continuing to win over some of New Jersey’s most conservative voters. Still, Smith’s 58%-37% victory wasn’t as big as it could have been given his financial and institutional advantages, and the congressman may have to watch his back if a stronger challenger comes along.

For now, though, Smith is entirely, utterly, flabbergastingly safe for another term in Congress. His Democratic opponent is Matt Jenkins, a Colts Neck resident who runs a contracting company.

There hasn’t been much reason to believe Jenkins’ campaign is especially strong; he’s been outraised by Smith $1.4 million to $41,000, and his most notable headline came when Wawa sent him a cease-and-desist letter over his goose-shaped logo.

But Jenkins could be the second coming of John F. Kennedy and still wouldn’t win. The district, which includes both Lakewood and Toms River, voted for Donald Trump by 22 points and for Jack Ciattarelli by 32, making it by far the reddest district in the state. Smith won his two previous contests against better-funded Democratic nominees 60%-38% and 55%-43%, and even those victories will count as close compared to what he’ll likely get this year.

The 1982 Almanac of American Politics predicted that Smith “will turn out to be a one-term congressman.” Now Smith holds the record as the longest-serving congressman in New Jersey history, eclipsing former Rep. Peter Rodino (D-Newark) in January 2021 when he passed the 40-year mark.

Having reached that milestone, now all that’s left for Smith is Dean of the House, a position that’s never been held by a New Jerseyan in all of congressional history. Provided he remains able to navigate the murky waters of modern Republican primaries, Smith is young enough that he may get the opportunity to become the first – quite the conclusion for a 25-year-old upset with no chance.
CHRIS SMITH (R-INC.)
Photo: Congressman Chris Smith

MATT JENKINS (D)
Photo: Matt Jenkins for Congress
COUNTIES: MONMOUTH, OCEAN
MONMOUTH: AVON-BY-THE-SEA, BELMAR, BRIELLE, COLTS NECK, EATONTOWN, FARMINGDALE, FREEHOLD TOWNSHIP (PT.), HOWELL, LAKE COMO, MANASQUAN, MIDDLETOWN (PT.), OCEAN, SEA GIRT, SHREWSBURY BOROUGH, SHREWSBURY TOWNSHIP, SPRING LAKE, SPRING LAKE HEIGHTS, TINTON FALLS, WALL
OCEAN: BAY HEAD, BEACHWOOD, BERKELEY (PT.), BRICK, ISLAND HEIGHTS, JACKSON, LACEY (PT.), LAKEHURST, LAKEWOOD, LAVALLETTE, MANCHESTER, MANTOLOKING, OCEAN GATE, PINE BEACH, PLUMSTEAD, POINT PLEASANT, POINT PLEASANT BEACH, SEASIDE HEIGHTS, SEASIDE PARK, SOUTH TOMS RIVER, TOMS RIVER

INCUMBENT: CHRIS SMITH (R)
CANDIDATES: CHRIS SMITH (R), MATTHEW JENKINS (D)
JASON CULLEN, PAM DANIELS, DAVID SCHMIDT, HANK SCHROEDER (MINOR PARTIES)

STATEWIDE RESULTS
2020 PRESIDENT: TRUMP (R) 60.6% // BIDEN (D) 38.1%
2021 GOVERNOR: CIATTARELLI (R) 65.4% // MURPHY (D) 33.9%

PRIMARY RESULTS
2022 D PRIMARY: JENKINS 100%
2022 R PRIMARY: SMITH 57.6% // CRISPI 37.0% // GRAY 4.0% // BLASI 1.3%

PREVIOUS CONGRESSIONAL RESULTS (OCCURRED UNDER OLD DISTRICT LINES)
2020 CONGRESS: SMITH (R) 59.9% // SCHMID (D) 38.3%
2018 CONGRESS: SMITH (R) 55.4% // WELLE (D) 43.1%

DEMOGRAPHICS
80.4% WHITE // 4.5% BLACK // 10.3% HISPANIC // 3.3% ASIAN

DISTRICT RATING: SOLID REPUBLICAN
Two years. Garrett rarely scored landslides and which guaranteed he would win every and Warren Counties, where Garrett lived in line with the prevailing mood in Sussex County’s genteel Republicans, it was well was in some ways an odd fit for Bergen (R-Demarest).

and State Sen. Gerald Cardinale Assemblyman David Russo (R-Ridgewood) her against two Bergen legislators, won the Republican primary to succeed chair) called it quits, and Garrett easily won the Republican primary to succeed her against two Bergen legislators, Assemblyman David Russo (R-Ridgewood) and State Sen. Gerald Cardinale (R-Demarest).

For over a decade before Gottheimer arrived on the scene, the 5th district was represented by a very different type of congressman: Rep. Scott Garrett (R-Wantage), an ardent conservative who was New Jersey’s rightmost member of Congress throughout his tenure. Garrett, a former state assemblyman, first got to Congress in 2002 after narrowly losing to moderate Rep. Marge Roukema (R-Ridgewood) in the 1998 and 2000 Republican primaries. Rather than face another grueling round against Garrett, Roukema (who had been passed over for the Financial Services Committee chair) called it quits, and Garrett easily won the Republican primary to succeed her against two Bergen legislators, Assemblyman David Russo (R-Ridgewood) and State Sen. Gerald Cardinale (R-Demarest).

Though Garrett’s social conservatism was in some ways an odd fit for Bergen County’s genteel Republicans, it was well in line with the prevailing mood in Sussex and Warren Counties, where Garrett lived and which guaranteed he would win every two years. Garrett rarely scored landslides – the only time he broke 60% of the vote was in the 2010 Republican sweep – but Democrats never got particularly close to beating him, either. Until 2016, that is. Long before the 2018 blue wave was in anyone’s sights, Gottheimer, a former Clinton White House speechwriter, sensed that the 5th congressional district might be interested in new representation.

Gottheimer focused his campaign on the issues where Garrett was most clearly out of step with his district, especially LGBT rights; Garrett had caught flak in 2015 for refusing to pay his National Republican Congressional Committee dues until Republicans stopped “actively recruiting homosexual candidates,” a stunt that lost him some Wall Street donors. With heavy support from national Democrats and millions of dollars in his campaign coffers, Gottheimer turned the previously safe district into one of the top races of the year.

Ultimately, even amid a disappointing night for Democrats overall, Gottheimer beat Garrett 51%-47%, becoming the first Democrat to represent the 5th district since it was created in 1982 (prior to that year, the current core of the district was split across three other districts). Given that the 5th district had voted for Donald Trump even as Gottheimer flipped it to Democrats, Republicans were keen on getting it back. But with Democrats ascendant throughout New Jersey in 2018, Republicans quickly realized they had far bigger fires to put out, and Gottheimer won re-election 56%-43% against former Cresskill Councilman John McCann without much fanfare. In the meantime, Gottheimer began establishing himself as a leading Democratic moderate, especially after Democrats took control of the House in 2018.

A member of Blue Dog Caucus with seats on the Financial Services and Homeland Security Committees, Gottheimer has staked out centrist positions on issues like taxation, congestion pricing, and national security. Most famously, in 2021 he led a moderate rebellion against Democratic leadership’s plan for two major spending bills, insisting that the House vote on the bipartisan infrastructure bill immediately rather than waiting.

According to the Lugar Center, Gottheimer was the second-most bipartisan congressperson in the entire House of Representatives in 2021, behind only Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-Pennsylvania).

That positioning earned him a primary challenge in 2020 from former Glen Rock Councilwoman Arati Kreibich. Kreibich excited some on the left, but she struggled to make a dent in fundraising or establishment support, and Gottheimer won 67%-33%.

The Republican primary held more drama, and brought another one of this year’s leading players to the fore. McCann wanted another go at Gottheimer, but standing in his way was Pallotta, an investment banker who pledged to self-fund his campaign. Pallotta got institutional backing everywhere but Bergen County, and it was enough to propel him to a 52%-32% victory. Unfortunately for Pallotta, Gottheimer was a far tougher opponent than McCann. Though Pallotta put around $1.5 million into his campaign, Gottheimer raised nearly $8 million to counter him, and national Republican groups focused their attention elsewhere. Gottheimer won 53%-46%, an underperformance compared to expectations but a solid victory nonetheless.

This cycle has in many ways been a rehash of the 2020 race, with a few key differences. Just like in 2020, Pallotta – who announced his rematch bid in April 2021 – faced a candidate favored by the Bergen establishment in the Republican primary. Nick De Gregorio, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran who was new to politics, entered the race in November 2021 and got the backing of the Bergen County Republican organization a few months later.

De Gregorio had a number of other advantages that McCann never did, including a big fundraising lead over Pallotta and the support of the NRCC. But with name recognition left over from his 2020 run and institutional backing in Passaic and Sussex Counties, Pallotta squeaked out a 50%-46% win, even coming close to carrying Bergen County.
Josh Gottheimer (D-inc.)

(Gottheimer also helped create his own luck, investing in the GOP primary to boost Pallotta, who was probably the weaker general election candidate. It’s not clear if Pallotta ever thanked Gottheimer for being his top donor.)

Also like in 2020, Gottheimer (who faced no primary opponents of his own) entered the general election with a major financial head start and with most outside observers seeing the race as a Republican reach opportunity at best.

But some things have indeed changed since then, most importantly the lines of the 5th district.

For decades, the 5th district has been home to a rather odd marriage between northern Bergen County and the hinterlands of Warren and Sussex Counties. The people of Alpine and Belvidere don’t have much in common with each other, aside from sharing a congressman for the last 30 years.

On the Democratic-drawn map going into effect this year, that strangeness is reduced, if not entirely eliminated. The new 5th district relinquishes rural areas to the west, and takes in more of Bergen County, making it a more resolutely suburban and Bergen-based district.

That trade shifted the district further into the Democratic column. The new lines would have voted for Joe Biden by 12 points, and for Gov. Phil Murphy by just under one percentage point (the old district was carried by Jack Ciattarelli). They also made the district a fair bit more diverse; 59% of the new district’s residents are white, compared to 66% on the old map.

Frank Pallotta (R)

The geographical advantage Democrats drew for themselves gives Gottheimer, already an electoral overperformer, a healthier cushion of votes to fall back on.

The financial picture is also more dire for Pallotta compared to 2020. The million-dollar investment he was willing to make last cycle is nowhere to be seen this time around; Gottheimer has raised more than $8 million this cycle and had $14 million left on-hand as of the final campaign finance reports, while Pallotta has raised $923,000 and had $263,000 left over. (And that’s not even taking into account the fact that Pallotta had to account the fact that Pallotta had to spend a fair bit of his cash to win the primary.)

Independent groups haven’t come to Pallotta’s aid, either, a sign that national Republicans don’t see the race as highly competitive. Gottheimer has gotten some outside support from former New York City Mayor Mike Bloomberg, possibly as a thank you for Gottheimer’s 2020 presidential endorsement, as well as from a moderate group called Center Forward.

Such an overwhelming monetary advantage has given Gottheimer the ability to define Pallotta completely uncontested on the airwaves. The congressman has released four ads flouting his bipartisan record and trashing Pallotta as an extremist.

Unhelpfully for Republicans, Pallotta actually is fairly conservative – he’s more of a Scott Garrett than a Marge Roukema.

Like many of the Democrats who flipped Republican congressional or legislative seats in recent years, Gottheimer is often mentioned as a potential candidate for higher office. The governorship, which is open in 2025, is seen as a particularly enticing option.

In the increasingly nationalized landscape of American politics, the fact that there’s a Democratic president in the White House and Gottheimer has a D next to his name means that Democrats should be at least a little nervous. It’s not yet clear what kind of environment 2022 will be – whether it’s a Republican wave or something more muted – but in the case of the former, districts like New Jersey’s 5th will likely host tight races.

Losing the 5th district this year would put a major damper on those plans – and would make Gottheimer regret leaving so many of his millions unspent. But thanks to Gottheimer’s six years of incumbency and the blue tilt of the new 5th district, that’s looking unlikely to happen.
COUNTIES: BERGEN, PASSAIC, SUSSEX

BERGEN: ALLendale, ALPINE, BERGENFIELD, BOgOTA, CLOSTER, CRESSKILL, DEMAREST, DUMONT, EMERSON, ENGLEWOOD, ENGLEWOOD CLIFFS, FAIR LAWN, FORT LEE, GLEN ROCK, HACKENSACK, HARRINGTON PARK, HAWORTH, HILLSDALE, HO-HO-KUS, LEONIA, MAHWAH, MAYWOOD (PT.), MIDLAND PARK, MONTVALE, NEW MILFORD, NORTHVALE, NORWOOD, OLD TAPPAN, ORADELL, PALISADES PARK, PARAMUS, PARK RIDGE, RAMSEY, RIDGEFIELD PARK, RIDGEWOOD, RIVER EDGE, RIVER VALE, ROCKLEIGH, SADDLE RIVER, TEANECK, TENAFLY, UPPER SADDLE RIVER, WALDWICK, WASHINGTON, WESTWOOD, WOODCLIFF LAKE, WYCKOFF

PASSAIC: BLOOMINGDALE, RINGWOOD, WANAKE, WEST MILFORD

SUSSEX: ANDOVER TOWNSHIP, BRANCHVILLE, FRANKFORD, FRANKLIN, HAMBURG, HAMPTON, HARDYSTON, LAFAYETTE, MONTAGUE, NEWTON, SANDYSTON, SUSSEX, VERNON, WANTAGE

INCUMBENT: JOSH GOTTHEIMER (D)

CANDIDATES: JOSH GOTTHEIMER (D), FRANK PALLOTTA (R)

LOUIS VELLucci, JEREMY MARcus, TREVOR FERRIGNO (MINOR PARTIES)

STATEWIDE RESULTS
2020 PRESIDENT: BIDEN (D) 55.6% // TRUMP (R) 43.2%
2021 GOVERNOR: MURPHY (D) 50.1% // CIATTARELLI (R) 49.2%

PRIMARY RESULTS
2022 D PRIMARY: GOTTHEIMER 100%
2022 R PRIMARY: PALLOTTA 50.2% // DE GREGORIO 45.6% // SKENDERI 2.2% // SCHNEIDERMAN 2.0%

PREVIOUS CONGRESSIONAL RESULTS (OCCURRED UNDER OLD DISTRICT LINES)
2020 CONGRESS: GOTTHEIMER (D) 53.2% // PALLOTTA (R) 45.6%
2018 CONGRESS: GOTTHEIMER (D) 56.2% // MCCANN (R) 42.5%

DEMOGRAPHICS
59.2% WHITE // 7.3% BLACK // 16.2% HISPANIC // 17.3% ASIAN

DISTRICT RATING: LEAN DEMOCRATIC
EP. FRANK PALLONE (D-Long Branch) may not have the name recognition of some other New Jersey representatives; he may not cause drama in his caucus or make headlines with his quips. But he has something no other New Jersey House member has: a committee chairmanship.

Since Democrats retook the House in 2018, Pallone has chaired the House Energy & Commerce Committee, a body that covers subjects as wide-ranging as health care, climate change, cybersecurity, and tourism. It is widely viewed as one of the most powerful committees on Capitol Hill.

This year, that chairmanship is essentially up for re-election; if Democrats lose the House, Pallone will have to settle for ranking member. Back at home in the Monmouth and Middlesex County-based 6th district, however, it’s not looking like Pallone has too much to worry about despite facing a theoretically strong opponent in Monmouth County Commissioner Sue Kiley.

Pallone got his start in Long Branch local politics before winning a State Senate seat in 1983, unexpectedly defeating State Sen. Brian Kennedy (R-Sea Girt). He only had to wait five years before he got his chance to move further up the political ladder: Rep. James Howard (D-Spring Lake Heights) died of a heart attack in 1988, leaving his Jersey Shore district (then numbered as the 3rd) open, and Pallone won the seat by a modest margin against former State Sen. Joseph Azzolina (R-Middletown).

Pallone held the seat in 1990, shortly after Gov. Jim Florio pushed through a $2.8 billion tax increase, by less than three points and 1,470 votes against an underfunded Republican, Asbury Park Councilman Paul Kapalko.

In 1992, Republicans on the brand new Congressional Redistricting Commission threw Pallone a curveball when they combined his district with the Middlesex-based 6th district, held by Rep. Bernard Dwyer (D-Edison). Dwyer chose to retire rather than go head-to-head against Pallone, and then-Assemblyman (and now-State Sen.) Bob Smith (D-Piscataway) took up the Middlesex mantle instead, a primary contest Pallone won 55-37%.

After defeating State Sen. Joe Kyrillos (R-Middletown) in the general election that year, Pallone hasn’t won by anything less than double digits since – in large part thanks to the GOP’s decision to redraw his district. The 6th district has stayed essentially the same since 1992 even as the state’s other districts have shifted far from their original boundaries, keeping Pallone’s home in Monmouth County joined with the Middlesex Dems who ensure he won’t lose re-election.

From his now-secure base in the 6th district, Pallone has also experimented with runs for higher office, but none have worked out.

Pallone’s first shot at statewide office came in 2002, when Senator Bob Toricelli suddenly dropped his re-election bid about a month before the general election. Pallone was offered the Democratic nomination, but at that point, a Republican named Doug Forrester had taken the lead in statewide polls and Pallone wasn’t ready to give up his House seat for an intense, unplanned campaign. Instead, the nod went to 78-year-old former U.S. Senator Frank Lautenberg, who won.

That same seat came open again in 2013, when Lautenberg died and a special election was called to replace him. This time, Pallone actually did run for the seat, but he was defeated in the Democratic primary by Newark Mayor Cory Booker, a rising star in the party.

Back at home, though, Pallone epitomizes the old Tip O’Neill adage that “all politics is local.” In addition to being one of the most influential Democrats in the House, Pallone is still the hands-on Democratic municipal chairman in Long Branch, and is the unofficial chief of staff to his brother, the mayor of Long Branch.

The 6th district got slightly more Democratic under the state’s new congressional map, gaining a few blue Shore towns like Neptune Township that had been uselessly stranded in the 4th district. Joe Biden would have carried the new lines by 20 points, while Phil Murphy would have won them by seven.

Numbers like those are daunting for Kiley, who has developed a strong local profile of her own.

A former mayor of Hazlet, Kiley was first elected to the Monmouth County Board of Freeholders in 2018. Coming off her landslide 2021 re-election, she announced her congressional bid in January of this year, hoping to ride a Republican wave and overcome Pallone’s long incumbency.

In order to face the congressman, Kiley had to beat 2020 U.S. Senate nominee Rik Mehta, but that was relatively easy; Mehta couldn’t convert the high profile he got from his Senate campaign into any real establishment support, and he got trounced by a 57-27% margin.

More challenging for Kiley has been the general election campaign that came afterwards. National Republicans simply haven’t put Kiley on their radar, and outside of some self-funding, Kiley’s fundraising hasn’t taken off. The commissioner has raised $374,000 since launching her campaign, more than one-quarter of which came from herself, while Pallone has raised $2.9 million.

Other potential signs of life from the Kiley campaign, such as major outside endorsements or a strong social media presence, also aren’t there. The National Republican Congressional Committee has added four Republican nominees to their lists of top-tier or promising candidates; Kiley isn’t one of them.

Kiley is likely to make Pallone sweat for re-election more than he has anytime recently, but given her disadvantages, it’s hard to see a scenario where she’d actually win. Though Pallone may not still be a committee chairman come 2023, all signs point to him still being a congressman.
FRANK PALLONE (D-INC.)
Photo: Joey Fox for the New Jersey Globe

SUE KILEY (R)
Photo: Joey Fox for the New Jersey Globe
COUNTIES: MIDDLESEX, MONMOUTH
  MIDDLESEX: CARTERET, EDISON, HIGHLAND PARK, METUCHEN, NEW BRUNSWICK, OLD BRIDGE (PT.), PERTH AMBOY, PISCATAWAY, SAYREVILLE, SOUTH AMBOY, SOUTH PLAINFIELD, WOODBRIDGE
  MONMOUTH: ABERDEEN, ALLENHURST, ASBURY PARK, ATLANTIC HIGHLANDS, BRADLEY BEACH, DEAL, FAIR HAVEN, HAZLET, HIGHLANDS, INTERLAKEN, KEANSBURG, KEYPORT, LITTLE SILVER, LOCH ARBOUR, LONG BRANCH, MATAWAN, MIDDLETOWN (PT.), MONMOUTH BEACH, NEPTUNE CITY, NEPTUNE TOWNSHIP, OCEANPORT, RED BANK, RUMSON, SEA BRIGHT, UNION BEACH, WEST LONG BRANCH

INCUMBENT: FRANK PALLONE (D)

CANDIDATES: FRANK PALLONE (D), SUE KILEY (R)
  TARA FISHER, ERIC ANTISELL, INDER SONI (MINOR PARTIES)

STATEWIDE RESULTS
  2020 PRESIDENT: BIDEN (D) 59.2% // TRUMP (R) 39.5%
  2021 GOVERNOR: MURPHY (D) 53.2% // CIATTARELLI (R) 45.8%

PRIMARY RESULTS
  2022 D PRIMARY: PALLONE 100%
  2022 R PRIMARY: KILEY 57.3% // MEHTA 26.5% // TOOMEY 16.2%

PREVIOUS CONGRESSIONAL RESULTS (OCURRED UNDER OLD DISTRICT LINES)
  2020 CONGRESS: PALLONE (D) 61.2% // ONUOHA (R) 38.8%
  2018 CONGRESS: PALLONE (D) 63.6% // PEZZULLO (R) 36.4%

DEMOGRAPHICS
  41.8% WHITE // 13.3% BLACK // 24.5% HISPANIC // 20.3% ASIAN

DISTRICT RATING: SOLID DEMOCRATIC
HELPING NAVIGATE THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE FOR 35 YEARS.

Federal & State Public Affairs
Marketing & Crisis Communications
Association Management

PPAG
Princeton Public Affairs Group
www.PPAG.com
The 7th district is a tale of countless stories wrapped up into one.

It’s the story of the suburbs in the Biden era, and whether the changes brought about by former President Donald Trump are here to stay. It’s the story of inflation and abortion, the two key issues of the 2022 election, and which one proves more salient for voters. It’s the story of redistricting, and how the map New Jersey’s redistricting commission drew will have profound political impacts for the next decade.

But at its core, it’s a story of two Toms.

First, there’s Rep. Tom Malinowski (D-Goosey). Born in Poland, Malinowski immigrated to the United States at age six with his mother, Joanna, who married the American journalist Blair Clark. Clark was a member of a prominent political family that goes back to the 1850s and Abraham Lincoln’s cabinet; Clark himself managed Eugene McCarthy’s 1968 presidential campaign that forced Lyndon Johnson out of the race.

Malinowski was raised in Princeton, and eventually became the Washington director of Human Rights Watch and the Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor.

After Donald Trump was elected president, Malinowski returned home to New Jersey and announced his bid for the 7th congressional district, then held by Rep. Leonard Lance (R-Clinton Township). The district was one of 23 around the country that had voted for Hillary Clinton while re-electing a Republican member of Congress.

Lance, a respected former minority leader of the State Senate, was the latest in a long line of moderate Republicans to represent the tony Central Jersey towns of the 7th district. Once an almost entirely Union County-based seat, the 7th district has stretched farther out into western reaches of the state with every new redistricting cycle, protecting its Republican incumbents for ten years more.

In 2018, it wasn’t enough. After a hard-fought campaign that received heavily around Trump, Malinowski unseated Lance 52%-47%, riding the blue wave that gave Democrats 11 out of New Jersey’s 12 congressional districts.

A member of the bipartisan Problem Solvers Caucus, Malinowski is among the more moderate Democrats in Congress, though he often uses more direct and partisan language than some of his fellow swing-district House members. He’s taken his foreign policy experience to the Foreign Affairs, Homeland Security, and Transportation & Infrastructure Committees.

Then there’s former Senate Minority Leader Tom Kean Jr. (R-Westfield).

In contrast to Malinowski’s immigrant story, Kean’s family played a prominent role in the nation’s founding, going back to the Revolutionary War and the Continental Congress; among his ancestors is William Livingston, the state’s very first governor after independence. More recently, Keans have served variously as representatives, senators, and in the case of Kean’s father Tom Kean Sr., beloved former governors.

A former congressional staffer for Rep. Bob Franks (R-New Providence), Kean was on a path to receive a doctorate at Tufts University when Franks gave up his 7th district House seat to run for the U.S. Senate in 2000; Kean returned to New Jersey and ran for Congress, but lost the Republican primary. He won a special election for State Assembly in 2001 and for State Senate in 2003, representing the well-off suburbs that make up the core of the 7th congressional district.

Those suburbs have been steadily shifting left for the entire 21st century, but it never put much of a crimp in Kean’s political fortunes. Buoyed both by his powerful last name and his local moderate appeal, Kean won by double-digit margins every cycle until 2017, and even his unexpectedly small 9.5-point margin that year was impressive given that his district had voted for Hillary Clinton by that same margin a year earlier.

As Kean’s political roots deepened at home in Union County, his stature also grew in Trenton, where he was elected Senate Minority Leader in 2008, ousting Lance. He set the Republican Senate agenda in the statehouse for more than a decade, guiding the party through three different governors.

In 2013, Kean survived a direct challenge from Gov. Chris Christie; after winning re-election, Christie decided he’d rather have State Sen. Kevin O’Toole (R-Cedar Grove) as minority leader, but Kean kept a majority of his caucus on his side and remained his caucus’ leader for another eight years.

Kean also made one more attempt at national office in the interim, running for the U.S. Senate in 2006. He won the Republican primary with little difficulty, but amid a nationwide Democratic wave, he lost to appointed Senator Bob Menendez by nine points in the general election.

The two stories of the two Toms became one in 2019, when Kean announced his campaign to take on Malinowski.

Kean’s entry to the race gave Republicans a serious chance to reclaim the 7th district; after all, he had spent two decades representing some of the district’s most Democratic areas in the legislature. To counter that advantage, Malinowski worked tirelessly to tie Kean to Trump, knowing that the top of the Republican ticket was far less popular than Kean himself.

The campaign was a slugfest. Malinowski raised $7.5 million to Kean’s $3.9 million, and outside groups also got heavily involved; Democratic and Republican committees each spent more than $4 million, mostly bashing the other party’s candidate.

Malinowski was generally viewed as a modest favorite, given that most national polls showed Democrats far ahead.
But Kean came shockingly close to scoring the upset, losing just 50.6%-49.4% – a margin of 5,311 votes – even as Biden was winning the district by ten points.

Many of the district’s upscale suburbs, thoroughly fed up with Trump, still proved willing to split their tickets in huge numbers, making the 7th district the closest district in the state and the closest Democratic-won House race in the entire country.

Since that narrow victory, a lot of things have gone wrong for Malinowski.

First, in spring 2021, Business Insider reported that Malinowski had failed to disclose dozens of stock trades worth at least $671,000 in the early days of the Covid pandemic. Under the STOCK Act, members of Congress are required to report stock transactions within 45 days, a deadline Malinowski missed.

The matter was sent to the Office of Congressional Ethics, which in turn forwarded it to the House Ethics Committee, a small, bipartisan committee that adjudicates ethics complaints against fellow House members. (In the meantime, Malinowski has put all of his stocks into a blind trust and pushed for a ban on stock trading among members of Congress, but that didn’t absolve his past indiscretions.)

Though the Ethics Committee hasn’t released a decision on the matter, it has also passed up several opportunities to dismiss it. The resulting limbo has been a top line of attack from Republicans, who dismissed it. The resulting limbo has been a top line of attack from Republicans, who dismissed it.

Adding even further to Malinowski’s troubles is the fact that his one-point victory happened in a year when Democrats won the House popular vote by around three points. This year, with a relatively unpopular Democratic president in office and inflation running amok, it’s unlikely Democrats are able to match that performance.

Just as happened in 2018 with Trump in the White House, voters will likely tie Malinowski to Biden for better or for worse, and the fact that he and Democrats have been unable to get a handle on economic issues will only make Republican messaging more potent.

All of these factors have combined to create a storm that will be difficult for Malinowski to weather. But Kean, too, has had his share of struggles leading up to the general election.

Kean launched his rematch campaign in July 2021, and from the outset, it was clear national Republicans were in his corner; House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy was even present at Kean’s campaign launch.

As the cycle went on, however, a number of more conservative Republicans decided they didn’t want to let Kean waltz away with the nomination the way he did in 2020. Chief among them were two leading figures of the New Jersey Republican Party’s right wing: 2021 gubernatorial candidate Phil Rizzo and Assemblyman Erik Peterson (R-Franklin).

Neither Rizzo nor Peterson – or any of the other four lesser-known candidates who also stepped in to challenge Kean – were ever able to dislodge Kean from his frontrunner status. Kean had a huge financial advantage, every county line, and the benefit of a split field, and no one thought he was at much risk of actually losing.

Even so, Kean had to work harder to win than he may have expected, and his ultimate vote percentage wasn’t overwhelming: 45%, with Rizzo in second at 23%. In fact, Rizzo managed to win one of the district’s six counties, Sussex, where there’s no formal county line system and where Rizzo got first ballot position. (Over on the Democratic side, Malinowski won 94%-6% against “pro-Trump Democrat” Roger Bacon.)

The primary also forced Kean to gesture to the right on some issues, most notably abortion. A semi-hidden section of Kean’s website distributed during the primary called Kean a “fierce defender of the sanctity of life” who would “protect the unborn from egregious abortion laws,” a position somewhat at odds with Kean’s self-identification as a pro-choice Republican – evidence of the complex balancing act required to win a Republican primary without throwing away the general election.

Still, whatever troubles he may have encountered along the way, Kean’s upper hand against Malinowski has never faded. From the moment New Jersey’s new congressional map was approved, prognosticators like the Cook Political Report have considered Kean the favorite, and national spenders have acted like that’s the case, too.

The top two House Republican expenditure organizations, the National Republican Campaign Committee and the Congressional Leadership Fund, have together shelled out more than $5.5 million and counting to attack Malinowski.

Top Democratic groups, on the other hand, have spent a little under $2 million to aid the congressman – a comparatively small amount and a sign they don’t see enough hope in the race to make it a top priority. If Kean pulls out a squeaker of a victory, there will be hand-wringing among Democrats over whether their own groups should have come to Malinowski’s aid more forcefully.

Malinowski is a strong enough fundraiser, though, to offset the advantage independent groups have given Kean. He’s raised $8.4 million in the cycle to-date, spent $6.9 million, and had $1.6 million left in the bank as of the most recent fundraising reports; Kean’s raised $4 million, spent $3.2 million, and had $849,000 left.

That kind of spending means that TV watchers from Toms River to Poughkeepsie have been inundated with messaging from both campaigns. The ads
from the two candidates have largely focused on their core issues: Malinowski has hit Kean hard on abortion, while Kean has focused on inflation and the cost of living.

In such an evenly divided district, those two issues may be what the race ultimately boils down to. Most polling shows inflation is top-of-mind for more voters, so Kean may have the advantage in the issue arena.

Speaking of polling, the 7th district has seen more publicly released data than any other in the state, though that’s not saying much.

The lone independent poll of the district, a July survey from RMG Research on behalf of U.S. Term Limits, found Kean up by eight points, 46%-38%.

Malinowski’s internal polling, on the other hand, has steadfastly found a tied race: 46%-46% in January, 48%-48% in September, and 47%-47% in a poll released just this month.

Being tied in your own internals generally means you’re actually down, and some Democrats have privately expressed skepticism that the race really is neck-and-neck. Republican polling has found Kean leading, though that data hasn’t been publicly released.

The Malinowski-Kean campaign is now in its fourth, and possibly final, year; no matter who wins, the chances of a rematch in 2024 seem low. It’s a battle that’s swallowed up millions of dollars, thousands of hours of manpower, and four years in the lives of two of New Jersey’s sharpest Toms.

Should Kean emerge victorious, as most signs indicate he probably will, he’ll join a Republican caucus very unlike the one he left behind in Trenton. On many key procedural issues, Kean has outed himself as a moderate; he firmly believes Biden was the rightful winner of the 2020 election, for example. How will a congressman like that mesh with far-right figures like Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Georgia)?

And moreover, how will Kean maintain a moderate enough image to keep winning in a competitive district even in years when Republicans don’t have the wind at their backs? Democrats drew the 7th district to be more Republican, but it isn’t secure for either party, and Kean will have to campaign hard for every new term.

The same can be said for Malinowski, though if he pulls out a win this year, he’ll have established himself as a force to be reckoned with. New Jersey Republicans, reduced to just two mostly secure seats, will always consider the 7th district a top target; the idea of permanently ceding all of New Jersey’s once-Republican suburban territory to Democrats is simply inconceivable.

In other words, New Jersey political watchers will have at least another decade of 7th district races to follow, analyze, and debate. Hooray for us – and condolences to the victorious Tom.
COUNTIES: HUNTERDON, MORRIS, SOMERSET, SUSSEX, UNION, WARREN
HUNTERDON: ALL
MORRIS: CHESTER BOROUGH, CHESTER TOWNSHIP, LONG HILL, MENDHAM BOROUGH, MENDHAM TOWNSHIP (PT.), MINE HILL, MOUNT ARLINGTON, MOUNT OLIVE, NETCONG, ROXBURY, WASHINGTON, WHARTON
SOMERSET: BEDMINSTER, BERNARDS, BERNARDSVILLE, BRANCHBURG, BRIDGEWATER (PT.), FAR HILLS, GREEN BROOK, HILLSBOROUGH (PT.), PEAPACK AND GLADSTONE, RARITAN, SOMERVILLE, WARREN, WATCHUNG ANDOVER BOROUGH, BYRAM, FREDON, GREEN, HOPATCONG, OGDENSBURG, SPARTA, STANHOPE, STILLWATER, WALPACK
SUSSEX: ANDOVER BOROUGH, BYRAM, FREDON, GREEN, HOPATCONG, OGDENSBURG, SPARTA, STANHOPE, STILLWATER, WALPACK
UNION: BERKELEY HEIGHTS, CLARK, FANWOOD, LINDEN (PT.), MOUNTAINSIDE, NEW PROVIDENCE, RAHWAY, SCOTCH PLAINS, SPRINGFIELD, SUMMIT, WESTFIELD, WINFIELD
WARREN: ALL
INCUMBENT: TOM MALINOWSKI (D)
CANDIDATES: TOM MALINOWSKI (D), TOM KEAN JR. (R)

STATEWIDE RESULTS
2020 PRESIDENT: BIDEN (D) 51.0% // TRUMP (R) 47.4%
2021 GOVERNOR: CIATTARELLI (R) 55.8% // MURPHY (D) 43.4%

PRIMARY RESULTS
2022 D PRIMARY: MALINOWSKI 94.0% // BACON 6.0%
2022 R PRIMARY: KEAN 45.2% // RIZZO 23.0% // PETERSON 16.1% // FLORA 5.8% // ISEMANN 5.1% // DORLON 4.1% // SCHWAB 0.8%

PREVIOUS CONGRESSIONAL RESULTS (OCCURRED UNDER OLD DISTRICT LINES)
2020 CONGRESS: MALINOWSKI (D) 50.6% // KEAN (R) 49.4%
2018 CONGRESS: MALINOWSKI (D) 51.7% // LANCE (R) 46.7%

DEMOGRAPHICS
70.8% WHITE // 6.3% BLACK // 12.2% HISPANIC // 9.6% ASIAN

DISTRICT RATING:
LEAN REPUBLICAN
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AN OPEN congressional seat—and, moreover, a solidly Democratic open seat—is something of a major event in New Jersey politics.

New Jersey is home to dozens of ambitious Democrats itching for higher office, but it’s rare for an opportunity to arise for advancement. Until Rep. Albio Sires (D-West New York) announced his retirement in December 2021, the last time a safely Democratic congressional seat had hosted an open race was in 2014, nearly a full decade ago.

And yet, despite the rarity of available seats, the campaign for Sires’ 8th district this year has turned into one of the least dramatic races of 2022.

Sires, a former speaker of the State Assembly, was first elected to the House in 2006. While he’s ready to leave Washington and the chairmanship of the House Foreign Affairs Western Hemisphere Subcommittee, Sires isn’t ready to give up politics. Next year, the 71-year-old Cuban-born former basketball star intends to run for mayor of West New York, a post he held for eleven years before becoming a congressman.

From the very outset of the race to succeed Sires in Congress, Port Authority Commissioner Rob Menendez established himself as the clear frontrunner, and he never came close to relinquishing that advantage.

Menendez accumulated the support of Gov. Phil Murphy, local elected officials, and, most importantly, the support of the Hudson County Democratic organization before he had even officially launched his campaign. More than almost any other county party in the state, Hudson Democratic leaders are in near-total command of their county, and their early decision to back Menendez was the single most important moment in his primary campaign.

Such dominance can be attributed in large part to the identity of Menendez’s father, U.S. Senator Bob Menendez. The elder Menendez, whatever his statewide troubles, remains an incredibly powerful and popular figure in New Jersey’s Hispanic community, and his word was always going to be gospel in New Jersey’s lone Hispanic-majority congressional district—a district the senator once represented for more than a decade.

But while Menendez the Father was a huge factor in clearing the path for his offspring’s ascension, Menendez the Son has proven himself to be no slouch.

The younger Menendez, who joined the Port Authority’s governing board in June 2021, raised more than $800,000 in his first quarter as a candidate, a huge sum for someone running in a safe seat without any prominent opponents. He’s demonstrated a sharp understanding of public policy, and he’s campaigned just as hard as a candidate in a competitive district.

Menendez’s dominance in fundraising and establishment support scared away even second-tier challengers, and the two candidates who ended up making it onto the Democratic primary ballot with him, David Ocampo-Grajales and Ane Roseborough-Eberhard, were both near-total unknowns before launching their campaigns.

Unlike countless other primary campaigns around the country that became a proxy war between the establishment and progressive wings of the Democratic Party, outside groups took virtually no interest in the 8th district campaign. Even reliable left-wing forces in New Jersey like the Working Families Party simply ignored the race, figuring it wouldn’t be worth wasting goodwill by endorsing candidates with no chance of winning.

Their prudence turned out to be wise. Powered by an absolutely dominant performance in the district’s heavily Hispanic towns, Menendez won 84% of the vote, while Ocampo Grajales limped into second place with 11%. Even in his worst municipality, Jersey City, Menendez still got 64% of the vote.

And, amazingly, that victory was the more difficult of the two contests Menendez has to win this year. New Jersey’s Hispanic communities may have moved right in the Trump era, but Joe Biden still won the 8th district by 45 points, and Menendez couldn’t lose to Republican Marcos Arroyo if he tried.

When he joins New Jersey’s congressional delegation, Menendez will be its new youngest member at 37 years old. Depending on whether former State Senate Minority Leader Tom Kean Jr. (R-Westfield) wins in the 7th district, Menendez also might be one of five representatives directly related to another major New Jersey politician, alongside Reps. Donald Norcross (D-Camden), Donald Payne Jr. (D-Newark), and Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-Ewing).

It’s not entirely clear what kind of representative Menendez will be. His district includes some of New Jersey’s most liberal-minded towns, and he’ll surely align with Democrats on major issues, but whether he’ll push further left than that remains to be seen.

Though it’s too early to speculate exactly how, the recent news that Bob Menendez is once again under federal investigation could complicate things for the entire Menendez family down the line. But it certainly won’t impact this year’s election; whatever else happens, Rob Menendez is a lock to be the 8th district’s next congressman.
ROB MENENDEZ (D)
Photo: Rob Menendez for Congress
No photo of Marcos Arroyo available

“We do not have government by the majority. We have government by the majority who participate.”
-Thomas Jefferson

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UNION: ELIZABETH

INCUMBENT: ALBIO SIRES (D)
CANDIDATES: ROB MENENDEZ (D), MARCOS ARROYO (R) PABLO OLIVERA, DAN DELANEY, DAVID COOK, JOANNE KUNIANSKY, JOHN SALIERNO (MINOR PARTIES)

STATEWIDE RESULTS
2020 PRESIDENT: BIDEN (D) 71.9% // TRUMP (R) 27.1%
2021 GOVERNOR: MURPHY (D) 73.7% // CIATTARELLI (R) 25.4%

PRIMARY RESULTS
2022 D PRIMARY: MENENDEZ 84.0% // OCAMPO GRAJALES 10.9% // ROSEBOROUGH-EBERHARD 5.0%
2022 R PRIMARY: ARROYO 100%

PREVIOUS CONGRESSIONAL RESULTS (OCCURRED UNDER OLD DISTRICT LINES)
2020 CONGRESS: SIRES (D) 74.0% // MUSHNICK (R) 24.6%
2018 CONGRESS: SIRES (D) 78.1% // MUNIZ (R) 18.7%

DEMOGRAPHICS
24.9% WHITE // 11.7% BLACK // 51.0% HISPANIC // 12.9% ASIAN

DISTRICT RATING: SOLID DEMOCRATIC
9TH DISTRICT BILL PASCRELL (D-INC.)
VS. BILLY PREMPEH (R)

Everyone in New Jersey knows about the Battle of the Toms. Less well-known is another symmetrical fight to the north: the Battle of the Bills.

Like the Tom-on-Tom Warfare, the contest between Rep. Bill Pascrell (D-Paterson) and Billy Prempeh is a rematch of 2020. But unlike the 7th congressional district, the plurality-Hispanic 9th district isn’t looking particularly competitive, and Pascrell will prevail in all but the most unexpected of scenarios.

Pascrell’s roots in North Jersey go deep. Born and raised in Paterson, Pascrell worked as a high school teacher and served on the Paterson school board before getting elected in short succession to the State Assembly in 1987 – a self-described late bloomer, Pascrell was 50 when he won his first election – and as mayor in 1990. In the era when New Jersey politicians could still hold two offices simultaneously, Pascrell was one of the many mayors who advocated for their towns directly from the halls of the statehouse.

While Pascrell was holding his dual offices, his congressman, one-term Rep. Herb Klein (D-Clifton), fell to Passaic County Freeholder Bill Martini (now a U.S. District Court Judge) in the 1994 Republican wave. Klein’s defeat gave Pascrell an opening to run for higher office and he took it: in 1996, a far more Democratic year, Pascrell unseated Martini 51%-48%. That remains the last close general election Pascrell has ever won.

In 2012, an entirely different sort of opponent arose to challenge Pascrell: Rep. Steve Rothman (D-Fair Lawn), whose home had been drawn into Rep. Scott Garrett (R-Wantage)’s Republican-leaning district. Rothman chose instead to run the newly drawn 9th district, which was split between Pascrell’s home base in Passaic County and Rothman’s in Bergen.

Rothman had represented slightly more of the new district and was initially considered the favorite in the Democratic primary, but he got dramatically outworked by Pascrell, and Pascrell won 61%-39%. Rothman carried the Bergen parts of the district 73%-27%, but even that seemed wimpy in comparison to Pascrell’s 90%-10% victory in Passaic.

Since then, Pascrell has continued humming along as one of New Jersey’s most indefatigable and quotable politicians.

Donald Trump provided the perfect foil for Pascrell’s brand of bombastic rhetoric, and the congressman spent much of the Trump era gleefully bashing the president and the Republican Party for their mounting breaches of ethics and norms. He’s become known in Washington as a man unencumbered by any filter who says exactly what he thinks; longtime fans in New Jersey recall him being exactly that way when he was 40 years younger.

In 2019, the Onion poked fun at the congressman by (satirically) writing that he’d asked to join “the Squad,” a collection of left-wing House members like Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-New York); Pascrell played along, and was welcomed into the Squad by AOC soon afterwards.

That kind of reputation has helped insulate Pascrell from primary challengers, and easily defeat the ones who do come along. Zina Spezakis put $300,000 of her own money into challenging Pascrell in the 2020 Democratic primary, but she lost by a punishing 81-17% spread.

In that year’s general election, Pascrell faced Prempeh, a young Air Force veteran. The race attracted virtually no attention outside of certain social media circles, and Pascrell won 66%-32%.

Prempeh, who announced his rematch campaign shortly after losing in 2020, has found a niche as a talking head on conservative TV, and he’s raised more money than most Republicans in this staunchly Democratic district. But his burn rate has been unreal, and he’s not spending money to swing unaffiliated voters his way.

Since Pascrell’s 2020 victory, the 9th district has been redrawn to be slightly more Republican; in order to shore up Rep. Josh Gottheimer (D-Wyckoff) to the north, many of the district’s bluest towns in Bergen County were removed and replaced by more competitive territory. Joe Biden would have carried the new lines by 19 points, and they went for Gov. Phil Murphy by eight points.

But those are still margins that should be safe for any standard Democrat, and Pascrell is far better than a standard Democrat in many parts of the district.

For example, Joe Biden won the city of Passaic 62-37% in 2020, but Pascrell simultaneously carried it 71-27%, a testament to Pascrell’s long history of representing Passaic and other cities like it. Even if Republicans have a great year, that sort of overperformance should keep Pascrell in the lead against Prempeh, though it’s very possible the congressman will fall below 60% of the vote for the first time since his first win in 1996.

The bigger question is who might come after Pascrell. At age 85, Pascrell is New Jersey’s oldest representative by almost a decade. When he does depart – that could still be more than a decade away – the fight for his district may be intense.

Until then, Pascrell should be able to hold down the 9th district for as long as he wants. The Battle of the Bills has a great ring to it, but those hoping for an underdog victory should look elsewhere.
BILL PASCRELL (D-INCL.)
Photo: Kevin Sanders for the New Jersey Globe

BILLY PREMPEH (R)
Photo: Joey Fox for the New Jersey Globe
COUNTIES: BERGEN, HUDSON, PASSAIC
BERGEN: CARLSTADT, CLIFFSIDE PARK, EAST RUTHERFORD, EDGEWATER, ELMWOOD PARK, FAIRVIEW, FRANKLIN LAKES, GARFIELD, HASBROUCK HEIGHTS, LITTLE FERRY, LODI, LYNDHURST, MAYWOOD (PT.), MOONACHE, NORTH ARLINGTON, OAKLAND, RIDGEFIELD, ROCHELLE PARK, RUTHERFORD, SADDLE BROOK, SOUTH HACKENSACK, TETERBORO, WALLINGTON, WOOD-RIDGE
HUDSON: KEARNY (PT.), SECAUCUS
PASSAIC: CLIFTON, HALEDON, HAWTHORNE, NORTH HALEDON, PASSAIC, PATERSON, POMPTON LAKES, PROSPECT PARK, WAYNE (PT.)
INCUMBENT: BILL PASCRELL (D)
CANDIDATES: BILL PASCRELL (D), BILLY PREMPEH (R)
SEAN ARMSTRONG, LEA SHERMAN (MINOR PARTIES)

STATEWIDE RESULTS
2020 PRESIDENT: BIDEN (D) 59.0% // TRUMP (R) 40.0%
2021 GOVERNOR: MURPHY (D) 53.6% // CIATTARELLI (R) 45.7%

PRIMARY RESULTS
2022 D PRIMARY: PASCRELL 100%
2022 R PRIMARY: PREMPEH 100%

PREVIOUS CONGRESSIONAL RESULTS (OCCURRED UNDER OLD DISTRICT LINES)
2020 CONGRESS: PASCRELL (D) 65.8% // PREMPEH (R) 31.9%
2018 CONGRESS: PASCRELL (D) 70.3% // FISHER (R) 28.9%

DEMOGRAPHICS
38.3% WHITE // 11.4% BLACK // 41.6% HISPANIC // 10.1% ASIAN

DISTRICT RATING: SOLID DEMOCRATIC
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Hotended to keep a lowkey profile in the succeed him. Quickly emerged as a top contender to the president of the Newark City Council, community their own voice in Congress. After an embarrassing incident caught on Zoom and the emergence of a well-funded primary challenger, Payne ran his first serious campaign in years, raising more money than he ever had before and forging new connections with voters.

Payne won the three-way Democratic primary in a landslide, and along the way, he found his voice. He’s all but guaranteed to win in November – and he’s set himself up to be a more active figure going forward.

Payne’s father, Rep. Donald Payne Sr. (D-Newark), was a trailblazer in New Jersey politics. When he was elected to Congress in 1988, he was New Jersey’s first-ever Black representative, at last giving Newark’s huge and growing Black community their own voice in Congress.

When Payne Sr. died a month before the filing deadline in March 2012, his son, then the president of the Newark City Council, quickly emerged as a top contender to succeed him.

Payne Jr. got the support of the Essex County Democratic organization, and beat State Sen. Ronald Rice (D-Newark), State Sen. Nia Gill (D-Montclair), and Irvington Mayor Wayne Smith by convincing margins in the double primaries for the safely Democratic seat. (Two primaries were held simultaneously, since there was also a special election to complete the remainder of Payne Sr.’s term; the two fields of candidates were mostly the same, but Gill only ran in the regular primary and not the special.)

New Jersey still hadn’t elected another Black member of Congress by the time Payne Jr. was elected, so he went down as the state’s second Black representative. He’d soon be joined by Senator Cory Booker and Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-Ewing), who were elected in 2013 and 2014, respectively.

Over the following decade, Payne diligently chugged along as a congressman, making few waves and fewer enemies. He sits on the Homeland Security and Transportation & Infrastructure Committees, and is chairman of the Transportation Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines and Hazardous Materials.

Payne caught some bad press in June 2021 when a live Zoom camera caught him unawares, in his underpants and a Captain America T-shirt, while in the middle of a committee hearing. The incident prompted criticism from Payne’s Republican House colleagues, and significant embarrassment back home in New Jersey.

Soon afterwards, a young Democratic challenger named Imani Oakley entered the race against Payne, hoping to harness the same progressive energy that had propelled other left-wing underdogs like Reps. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Jamaal Bowman to victory in next-door New York districts.

Recognizing that his political image had faded, Payne took the challenge seriously from the start, and began building his dormant campaign organization back up.

Needing 200 signatures to get on the ballot, he submitted nearly 10,000 – a symbolic gesture that reconnected his field team with the voters of the 10th district – and raised more than a million dollars, far more than in previous cycles. Under the tutelage of Democratic State Chairman LeRoy Jones, Jr. and Rep. Josh Gottheimer (D-Wyckoff), Payne became a fundraising powerhouse, relatively speaking.

Payne also made serious inroads with the left wing of the Democratic Party, which has never been fully in his corner but which distrusted Oakley far more. Assemblywoman Britnee Timberlake (D-East Orange) – arguably the most progressive member of the state legislature – and New Jersey Working Families both stumped hard for Payne in the leadup to the primary.

Because of the strength of the Democratic Party organization in Essex County, Payne would likely have beaten Oakley even if he’d been operating on autopilot. But his strong campaign netted him a huge win, garnering 84% of the vote with Oakley far behind at just 10%.

With that victory came newfound recognition from New Jersey Democrats that Payne was indeed a competent, hardworking lawmaker with real progressive chops.

Now, onto November. A general election will take place, and Payne will win it, just as he’s won his past five general elections with zero trouble. Joe Biden won the 10th district by 63 points, easily his largest margin in the state and a death knell for Republican nominee David Pinckney.

What will be most interesting to watch is how a few conservative-leaning suburbs that were recently added into the 10th district react to their new congressman. The core of the 10th district is still in Newark and majority-Black towns like Irvington and the Oranges, but redistricting added some mostly white towns like Caldwell and Kenilworth that are entirely new to Payne.

Essex Fells, for example, has long been in the more Republican-leaning 11th district, represented by a long line of Republicans and eventually Rep. Mikie Sherrill (D-Montclair). Even as Payne wins re-election in a landslide, the suburban town will most likely cast its lonely lot with Pinckney.

Whether the new and improved Congressman Payne takes a more active role in the House is yet to be seen. The 63-year-old Payne could still have a long political career ahead of him, if he wants it, and this year proved he’s willing and able to fight for it.
DONALD PAYNE JR. (D-INC.)
Photo: Kevin Sanders for the New Jersey Globe

DAVID PINCKNEY (R)
Photo: NJ Public Health Innovation PAC
COUNTIES: ESSEX, HUDSON, UNION
ESSEX: CALDWELL, EAST ORANGE, ESSEX FELLS, IRVINGTON, MONTCLAIR (PT.), NEWARK (PT.), ORANGE, VERONA, WEST ORANGE
HUDSON: JERSEY CITY (PT.)
UNION: CRANFORD, GARWOOD, HILLSIDE, KENILWORTH, LINDEN, ROSELLE, ROSELLE PARK, UNION

INCUMBENT: DONALD PAYNE JR. (D)
DEMOCRATS: DONALD PAYNE JR. (D), DAVID PINCKNEY (R), CYNTHIA JOHNSON, KENDAL LUDDEN, CLENARD CHILDESS (MINOR PARTIES)

STATEWIDE RESULTS
2020 PRESIDENT: BIDEN (D) 80.9% // TRUMP (R) 18.3%
2021 GOVERNOR: MURPHY (D) 78.0% // CIATTARELLI (R) 21.3%

PRIMARY RESULTS
2022 D PRIMARY: PAYNE 83.6% // OAKLEY 10.3% // KHALFANI 6.1%
2022 R PRIMARY: PINCKNEY 82.6% // STEWART 17.4%

PREVIOUS CONGRESSIONAL RESULTS (OCCURRED UNDER OLD DISTRICT LINES)
2020 CONGRESS: PAYNE (D) 83.3% // ZINONE (R) 13.9%
2020 CONGRESS: PAYNE (D) 87.6% // KHAN (R) 10.1%

DEMOGRAPHICS
18.8% WHITE // 53.7% BLACK // 21.4% HISPANIC // 7.2% ASIAN

DISTRICT RATING: SOLID DEMOCRATIC
if he had cancer, you would go to the ends of the earth to get him the best treatment.

Welcome to Capital Health.

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COMING SOON
THE 2022
NEW JERSEY GLOBE POWER LIST
YEAR IN REVIEW
IX YEARS AGO, the 11th congressional district, anchored by conservative Morris County, was a redoubt of New Jersey Republicans. Six years ago, soon-to-be House Appropriations Chairman Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-Harding) was at the pinnacle of his political career. Six years ago, no one in New Jersey politics had ever heard of Mikie Sherrill.

In retrospect, it’s hard not to lend Sherrill’s 2018 campaign a slightly mythical air: how a political neophyte raised millions of dollars, scared a 24-year incumbent into retirement, and beat a sitting assemblyman by 15 points in a red-leaning district. But for Sherrill, now finishing her sophomore term as a congresswoman, the work has gone on.

This year, Sherrill faces former Assistant Passaic County Prosecutor Paul DeGroot in a seat redrawn to substantially favor Democrats. The district could be home to the upset of the cycle, but the more likely outcome is that Sherrill continues her path to political stardom that began in 2017.

The son of former Rep. Peter Frelinghuysen (R-Harding) and the scion of several storied New Jersey families, Frelinghuysen got his own political start 50 years ago, when he won a seat on the Morris County Board of Chosen Freeholders. Ten years later, he won a seat in the State Assembly; another ten years after that, Rep. Dean Gallo (R-Parsippany) scrapped his re-election campaign for health reasons, and Frelinghuysen was tapped to take his spot on the 1994 general election ballot. Frelinghuysen got his own political start 50 years ago, when he won a seat on the Morris County Board of Chosen Freeholders. Ten years later, he won a seat in the State Assembly; another ten years after that, Rep. Dean Gallo (R-Parsippany) scrapped his re-election campaign for health reasons, and Frelinghuysen was tapped to take his spot on the 1994 general election ballot.

In 2017, with Donald Trump in the White House, the winds began to shift. In Washington, Frelinghuysen had just reached a major life milestone: with Rep. Hal Rogers (R-Kentucky) term-limited out of the chairmanship of the hugely powerful House Appropriations Committee, Frelinghuysen took his place, making him a top authority on every dollar Congress spent.

But back at home, the congressman faced increasing disaffection. Frelinghuysen’s leadership role in the Republican-controlled House and his unwillingness to hold town hall meetings with constituents prompted local progressive activists to organize, most prominently under the new group New Jersey 11th for Change. (Frelinghuysen did himself no favors when he complained to a local bank that one of its employees was a member of the group, creating further backlash.)

The efforts of the anti-Frelinghuysen crowd soon began to center around Sherrill, a political newcomer and former U.S. Navy helicopter pilot who received little notice until she filled out an Emily’s List online candidate recruitment questionnaire. Raising four kids in Montclair after working as a private practice lawyer and Assistant U.S. Attorney for a decade, Sherrill quickly captured the hearts and wallets of Democrats who wanted to rebuke Trump and congressional Republicans.

By the end of 2017, Sherrill had raised more than $1.2 million – chump change for the congresswoman now, but a huge sum for a first-time candidate in a tough district. Frelinghuysen, recognizing that Sherrill would give him a serious run for his money, announced in January 2018 that he would retire.

That marked the beginning of the end for 11th district Republicans. Assemblyman Jay Webber (R-Morris Plains) stepped in to fill Frelinghuysen’s shoes, but by then Sherrill had established a massive financial lead, and Republicans were too busy fighting for their lives in other districts to give Webber much of a hand. As a Democratic wave swept across the state, Sherrill won by an astonishing 57%-42% margin.

Her victory established the new congresswoman as a force to be reckoned with, and it boosted several of her key backers as well. Her campaign manager, Mollie Binotto, went on to run Gov. Phil Murphy’s re-election campaign; Saily Avelenda, the activist whom Frelinghuysen tried to intimidate at Lakeland Bank, is now the executive director of the New Jersey Democratic State Committee.

Sherrill’s first re-election campaign in 2020 actually ended up being quite a bit closer, but it was also far less dramatic.

Her opponent was Rosemary Becchi, an attorney who had started the cycle running in the 7th congressional district but was persuaded to switch to the 11th district instead to clear the path for State Senate Minority Leader Tom Kean Jr. (R-Westfield). With Sherrill once again establishing a dominant fundraising advantage, national Republicans focused their attention elsewhere, and Sherrill won 53%-47% in a race that wasn’t considered a major priority by either side.

Sherrill’s tenure in Congress has been marked by an ideological balancing act – so far, a successful one. One of two women in the state’s congressional delegation, Sherrill has been an outspoken liberal on abortion and other social issues, and the progressive activists who first propelled her to victory remain big fans of the now-congresswoman.

At the same time, Sherrill – who sits on the Science, Space & Technology, Armed Services, and Education & Labor Committees – is a member of the moderate Blue Dog Caucus, and the Lugar Center ranked her as the 40th-most bipartisan member of the House. As is the case for many of New Jersey’s swing-district representatives, one of her top causes in Congress has been repealing the state and local tax (SALT) deduction cap, which has increased taxes for many of her constituents.

SALT reform has also been a guiding light for DeGroot, Sherrill’s opponent this year. Recognizing that the national Republican Party brand may not be wildly popular in the 11th district, DeGroot has relied on two core issues – Sherrill’s failure to repeal the SALT cap and curbing rising crime rates – to power his underdog campaign.
DeGroot, a first-time candidate, is no stranger to upsets; his Republican primary victory in June was the most unexpected result in the state.

The Morris and Essex County lines had gone to Morris County Commissioner Tayfun Selen, after which several other prominent candidates dropped out of the race, deferring to Selen’s organizational support. But with the line in Passaic County, which makes up just a small fraction of the district, DeGroot forged ahead, and incredibly managed to pull out a 39%-35% victory. Although Selen narrowly won Morris and Essex, DeGroot’s 73% of the vote in Passaic was enough to overcome his second-place finish elsewhere.

State and national Republicans hadn’t taken sides in the primary, but they were probably disappointed in the result. Selen had an electoral record winning in swingy Morris County, and his modest fundraising abilities were still better than those of DeGroot.

He’s raised $661,000 in the cycle to-date and most recently had $103,000 left in the bank, a far cry from Sherrill’s $6 million raised and $1.5 million on-hand.

Two-thirds of DeGroot’s total also came from his own pockets, something of an ominous indication for his campaign. Money is money, and voters won’t care how DeGroot paid for the mailers that land in their mailboxes. But his inability to fundraise from donors is a sign that he has struggled to develop the kind of campaign infrastructure and message that most winning candidates have.

Sherrill’s financial edge has allowed her to blanket the airwaves with ads, most of them focused on abortion; DeGroot’s run one spot in response, but he simply doesn’t have the financial ability to reach very far.

National Republicans aren’t looking like they’ll be DeGroot’s financial saviors, either. The only outside groups that have dipped their toes into the 11th district’s waters did so on behalf of Sherrill: former New York City Mayor Mike Bloomberg has utilized the veterans-focused group VoteVets to aid Sherrill, who’s gotten around $3 million worth of outside help in total.

Given the state’s new congressional map, it’s perhaps not surprising that outside Republican groups see DeGroot’s campaign as a lost cause.

The core of the 11th district remains Morris County, but changes around the edges shifted it quite a bit towards Democrats. By dropping deep-red parts of Sussex and Passaic Counties and exchanging them for deep-blue Essex County towns like Maplewood and Millburn, Democratic members of the redistricting commission did their darndest to make sure even a less talented Democrat than Sherrill would be able to win the district.

One additional result of the new lines is that the Sherrill family home will finally be within the boundaries of the district; right now, it’s a stone’s throw away from the district boundary in northern Montclair.

Assuming she wins, Democrats are excited about the prospect of a future Sherrill statewide candidacy. DeGroot, on the other hand, may have a political future ahead of him even if he loses; some Republicans have talked up a potential legislative campaign for the Montville resident.

Despite the odds stacked against DeGroot, the fact that this is a midterm under a Democratic president leaves him a narrow window of opportunity. There hasn’t been any publicly released polling of the 11th district, so it’s tough to know for sure how voters feel about Sherrill and Biden – and how many of them have even heard of DeGroot.

But without the resources to build a brand of his own, DeGroot’s fortunes are likely riding on the possibility of a huge Republican wave that washes over New Jersey’s new congressional map. Absent that, Sherrill’s remarkable political story will get another chapter.
COUNTIES: ESSEX, MORRIS, PASSAIC
ESSEX: BELLEVILLE, BLOOMFIELD, CEDAR GROVE, FAIRFIELD, GLEN RIDGE,
LIVINGSTON, MAPLEWOOD, MILLBURN, MONTCLAIR (PT.),
NORTH CALDWELL, NUTLEY, ROSELAND, SOUTH ORANGE, WEST CALDWELL
MORRIS: BOONTON TOWN, BOONTON TOWNSHIP, BUTLER, CHATHAM BOROUGH,
CHATHAM TOWNSHIP, DENVILLE, DOVER, EAST HANOVER, FLORHAM PARK,
HANOVER, HARDING, JEFFERSON, KINNELON, LINCOLN PARK, MADIson,
MENDHAM TOWNSHIP (PT.), MONTVILLE, MORRIS, MORRIS PLAINS,
MORRISTOWN, MOUNTAIN LAKES, PARSIPPANY-TROY HILLS, PEQUANNOCK,
RANDOLPH, RIVERDALE, ROCKAWAY BOROUGH, ROCKAWAY TOWNSHIP,
VICTORY GARDENS
PASSAIC: LITTLE FALLS, TOTOWA, WAYNE (PT.), WOODLAND PARK

INCUMBENT: MIKIE SHERRILL (D)
CANDIDATES: MIKIE SHERRILL (D), PAUL DEGROOT (R)
JOSEPH BIASCO (MINOR PARTY)

STATEWIDE RESULTS
2020 PRESIDENT: BIDEN (D) 57.8% // TRUMP (R) 41.0%
2021 GOVERNOR: MURPHY (D) 51.8% // CIATTARELLI (R) 47.6%

PRIMARY RESULTS
2022 D PRIMARY: SHERRILL 100%
2022 R PRIMARY: DEGROOT 39.4% // SELEN 35.3% // ANDERSON 19.8% //
MCANDREW 4.1% // HALTER 1.4%

PREVIOUS CONGRESSIONAL RESULTS (OCCURRED UNDER OLD DISTRICT LINES)
2020 CONGRESS: SHERRILL (D) 53.3% // BECCHI (R) 46.7%
2018 CONGRESS: SHERRILL (D) 56.8% // WEBBER (R) 42.1%

DEMOGRAPHICS
61.6% WHITE // 8.0% BLACK // 16.5% HISPANIC // 13.4% ASIAN

DISTRICT RATING: LIKELY DEMOCRATIC
DEMOCRACY IS NOT A SPECTATOR SPORT.

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IN THIS VOTER’S GUIDE, the best was not saved for last. Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-Ewing)’s re-election fight against auto salesman Darius Mayfield is the least eventful in the state – neither of them even faced primary opponents – and Watson Coleman is assured of another term representing Central Jersey’s diverse communities.

That was anything but the case in 2014, when Watson Coleman first won her seat in Congress.

Rep. Rush Holt (D-Hopewell) announced in February 2014 that he would retire from the 12th district, which had once been competitive but which had been redrawn as a safe Democratic seat two years earlier. At that point, Watson Coleman had served 16 years in the state Assembly representing Mercer County, following in the footsteps of her father, former Assemblyman John Watson (D-Trenton).

Watson Coleman had some serious sway in New Jersey politics; she served as state Democratic chairwoman from 2002 until 2006, and as Assembly Majority Leader for four years after that.

But that didn’t scare off three other politicians – State Sen. Linda Greenstein (D-Plainsboro), Assemblyman Upendra Chivukula (D-Franklin), and a then-unknown physicist named Andrew Zwicker – from taking her on for the right to represent the 12th district.

The contest broke down largely along regional lines: Watson Coleman got the county line in Mercer, Greenstein got it in Middlesex, and Chivukula got it in Somerset. But since Mercer cast by far the most votes, and since she got a bonus county line in Union County, Watson Coleman won the primary with 43% of the vote.

Her three opponents have had mixed political futures since then. Greenstein remains a state senator, Chivukula got a seat on the Board of Public Utilities but was not renominated this year, and Zwicker won a competitive state legislative district in 2015 and now serves in the State Senate with Greenstein.

As for Watson Coleman, she’s now in her fourth term in Congress, holding down a seat on the powerful House Appropriations Committee and chairing the Homeland Security Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security. As often happens in New Jersey’s safe districts, once she won that initial primary, it was the last competitive contest of any kind Watson Coleman has had to face.

She’s the first woman of color to ever represent New Jersey in Congress, and until Rep. Mikie Sherrill (D-Montclair) was elected in 2018, she spent four years as the only woman in the state’s fourteen-member delegation. (It’s rather unbelievable that New Jersey, which nominated a woman for the U.S. Senate in 1930 and twice elected a woman governor, went from 2003 to 2015 with an all-male congressional delegation.)

Many members of the New Jersey congressional delegation can point to various progressive bona fides, but Watson Coleman probably claims the mantle for New Jersey’s most progressive representative. No other New Jerseyan in Congress has demonstrated quite the same ease with the party’s left wing – a wing dominated by women and people of color like Watson Coleman herself.

This year’s election is unlikely to amount to anything more than a blip on the story of Watson Coleman’s career. The 12th district remained largely the same after redistricting, stretching from Trenton to Plainfield, and it’s still deep-blue; it would have voted for Joe Biden by 34 points and for Gov. Phil Murphy by 23.

Mayfield, a first-time candidate who won the Republican nomination uncontested, has been an active campaigner, but he’s not an ideal fit for the 12th district. His appeals to supporting Donald Trump and fighting “woke ideology” in schools won’t win him many favors among the district’s liberal voters, nor do they set him up well for potential future local campaigns in East Brunswick, where he lives.

Like Rep. Bill Pascrell (D-Paterson) up in the 9th district, age is the only real limitation for the 77-year-old Watson Coleman, who beat cancer while serving in Congress. She’s still going strong this year, and her district will send her back to Congress with no complaints.
COUNTIES: MERCER, MIDDLESEX, SOMERSET, UNION
MERCER: EWING, HOPEWELL BOROUGH, HOPEWELL TOWNSHIP, PENNINGTON, PRINCETON, TRENTON, WEST WINDSOR
MIDDLESEX: CRANBURY, DUNELLEN, EAST BRUNSWICK, HELMETTA, JAMESBURG, MIDDLESEX, MILLTOWN, MONROE, NORTH BRUNSWICK, OLD BRIDGE (PT.), PLAINSBORO, SOUTH BRUNSWICK, SOUTH RIVER, SPOTSWOOD
SOMERSET: BOUND BROOK, BRIDGEWATER (PT.), FRANKLIN, HILLSBOROUGH (PT.), MANVILLE, MILLSTONE, MONTGOMERY, NORTH PLAINFIELD, ROCKY HILL, SOUTH BOUND BROOK
UNION: PLAINFIELD
INCUMBENT: BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN (D)
CANDIDATES: BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN (D), DARIUS MAYFIELD (R)
C. LYNN GENRICH (MINOR PARTY)

STATEWIDE RESULTS
2020 PRESIDENT: BIDEN (D) 66.5% // TRUMP (R) 32.2%
2021 GOVERNOR: MURPHY (D) 61.1% // CIATTARELLI (R) 38.1%

PRIMARY RESULTS
2022 D PRIMARY: WATSON COLEMAN 100%
2022 R PRIMARY: MAYFIELD 100%

PREVIOUS CONGRESSIONAL RESULTS (OCCURRED UNDER OLD DISTRICT LINES)
2020 CONGRESS: WATSON COLEMAN (D) 65.6% // RAZZOLI (R) 32.6%
2018 CONGRESS: WATSON COLEMAN (D) 68.7% // KIPNIS (R) 31.3%

DEMOGRAPHICS
39.8% WHITE // 18.1% BLACK // 21.5% HISPANIC // 20.7% ASIAN

DISTRICT RATING: SOLID DEMOCRATIC
COUNTIES and legislative special elections

Thanks to New Jersey’s system of staggered terms for county officeholders, every county holds at least one county election every year, for county commissioner seats as well as for clerk, sheriff, surrogate, and in some cases executive and register of deeds.

During the Trump era, Democrats took county elections by storm, retaining their dominance over New Jersey’s blue counties while making major inroads into counties long controlled by Republicans. Now, Republicans are seeking a reversal, aiming to flip back some of the counties they lost as well as expand into new South Jersey territory.

61 county offices are on the ballot this year; some are unopposed or deeply uncompetitive, while others are the most hotly contested races some voters will have on their entire ballots. Cumberland, Gloucester, Passaic, and Somerset Counties in particular have a number of close races, and several other counties are hosting sleeper races that could turn into election night surprises.

Additionally, two legislative districts, the 12th and the 28th, are hosting special elections to fill unexpired terms. Both Assemblyman Alex Sauickie (R-Jackson) and State Sen. Renee Burgess (D-Irvington) are locks for re-election, allowing their nascent legislative careers to continue into next year and beyond.
ATLANTIC

COMMISSIONER AT-LARGE: AMY GATTO (R-INC.) // HABIB REHMAN (D)
COMMISSIONER D1: ERNEST COURSEY (D-INC.) // VERN MACON (R)
COMMISSIONER D4: RICHARD DASE (R-INC.) // KATHLEEN GALANTE (D)

T

ough Atlantic County tends to vote for Democrats in most federal and statewide races, its county commission has long been dominated by Republicans, something that’s unlikely to change this year even with a new, more Democratic-friendly commission map in place. (The body has five district-based seats and four at-large seats; Democrats currently control one of each, for a total of two out of nine seats.)

Republican At-Large Commissioner Amy Gatto is up this year, but it’s unlikely Democrat Habib Rehman will be able to unseat her, and Republican 4th District Commissioner Richard Dase is even safer in his Galloway-based district.

Democratic 1st District Commissioner Ernest Coursey, meanwhile, faces what will likely be a closer race than he has in the past; his district is based in Atlantic City, but redistricting took out heavily Democratic Pleasantville and added more Republican towns in its stead. Coursey is still the clear favorite against Republican Vern Macon, though.

Even if Democrats did somehow sweep every seat up this year, they’d still be one seat of a majority. The real action in Atlantic will more likely come in 2024, when Republicans will have to defend the substantially redrawn 2nd district (which now includes Pleasantville) as well as an at-large seat in a presidential year.

BERGEN

EXECUTIVE: JIM TESDECO (D-INC.) // TODD CALIGUIRE (R)
COMMISSIONER (3 SEATS): THOMAS SULLIVAN (D-INC.), MARY AMOROSO (D-INC.), GERMAINE ORTIZ (D-INC.) // DOUGLAS HOLDEN (R), RONALD LIN (R), DIERDRE PAUL (R)

T

odd Caliguire, a Republican former Bergen County freeholder who has become something of a perennial candidate in recent decades, is running for county executive this year against incumbent Democrat Jim Tedisco, who is seeking a third term. Three incumbent Democratic commissioners are also running for re-election against a slate of Republican challengers.

Republicans haven’t won any countywide offices in Bergen since 2013, and Caliguire – who has been roundly criticized for a race-baiting mailer from 2007 – is an imperfect candidate. As the most populous county in the state, Bergen requires a lot of resources to run countywide, something Democrats have and Republicans do not.

Still, a Republican came within six points of flipping the county sheriff’s office in 2021, so if Democrats truly collapse this year, Bergen could theoretically be in play.
BURLINGTON

COMMISSIONER: ALLISON ECKEL (D-INC.) // JEFF FORTUNE (R)
SHERIFF: JAMES KOSTOPLIS (D) // MIKE DITZEL (R)

FRESH OFF OF FLIPPING every countywide office in Burlington over the last five years, Democrats will spend 2022 working to defend their gains against a spirited, if uphill, Republican campaign to reclaim a foothold in the county.

Democratic Sheriff Anthony Basantis is retiring after just one term, and Undersheriff James Kostoplis is the party’s nominee to replace him. Kostoplis’ running mate, County Commissioner Allison Eckel, is technically an incumbent, but only barely; the former Assembly candidate was appointed earlier this year to fill the vacant seat of now-Superior Court Judge Linda Hynes after an extended court battle. They’ll face Republicans Mike Ditzel and Jeff Fortune, respectively.

The ultimate result will likely depend quite a bit on the concurrent congressional race between Rep. Andy Kim (D-Moorestown) and Republican Bob Healey Jr., also a Moorestown resident. If Healey keeps that race close, Burlington Democrats may struggle, but if Kim performs as well as he did in 2018 and 2020, Republicans have little shot at victory.

CAMDEN

COMMISSIONER (2 SEATS): EDWARD MCDONNELL (D-INC.), VIRGINIA BETTERIDGE (D-INC.) // IAN GILL (R), JOE MILLER (R)

THE MOST IMPORTANT parts of this year’s county elections in Camden County are already in the past. Democratic Commissioners Edward McDonnell and Carmen Rodriguez easily dispatched progressive challengers in the Democratic primary; the New Jersey Globe later discovered that Rodriguez had resigned four days before she won her primary, and she was replaced as commissioner soon afterwards by former Runnemede Mayor Virginia Betteridge.

Betteridge now has to run for a full term alongside McDonnell against Republican challengers Ian Gill and Joe Miller, but that won’t be a difficult task in the prohibitively Democratic county, where Republicans haven’t won a county race since 1990.
CAPE MAY

COMMISSIONER (2 SEATS): MARIE HAYES (R-INC.), ANDY BULAKOWSKI (R) // JULIA HANKERSON (D)
SURROGATE: DEAN MARCOLONGO (R-INC.)

CAPE MAY COUNTY is Republican enough that Democrats only fielded one candidate for three different countywide seats up this year: Julia Hankerson, a 2021 Assembly candidate running for county commissioner. Hankerson has no real chance against Republican Commissioner Marie Hayes and her running mate, Andrew Bulakowski, a union leader who will likely succeed longtime Commissioner Gerald Thornton. Surrogate Dean Marcolongo is unopposed.

CUMBERLAND

COMMISSIONER (2 SEATS): DARLENE BARBER (D-INC.), PRISCILLA OCASIO-JIMENEZ (D) // DOUGLAS ALBRECHT (R-INC.), VICTORIA GROETSCH-LODS (R)

IN 2021, with State Sen. Michael Testa (R-Vineland) and Republican gubernatorial nominee Jack Ciattarelli running up the score in Cumberland, Republicans flipped two commission seats and brought the Democratic majority down to just 4-3. This year, one commissioner from each party is up for re-election, so Republicans would need another clean sweep to take control. Democratic Commissioner Darlene Barber and Republican Commissioner Douglas Albrecht are running alongside Priscilla Ocasio-Jimenez and Victoria Groetsch-Lods, respectively; both Ocasio-Jimenez and Groetch-Lods have waged unsuccessful campaigns for commission seats in the past.

In 2019, Barber and Albrecht managed to win alongside one another, and another split result is certainly a possibility. That would keep Democrats in control for the time being, but three Democratic-held seats are up 2023, so Republicans would get another crack at a majority before long.

ESSEX

EXECUTIVE: JOE DIVINCENZO (D-INC.) // ADAM KRAEMER (R)

ESSEX COUNTY EXECUTIVE Joe DiVincenzo, among the most powerful people in North Jersey Democratic politics, is up for re-election this year, but you’d be forgiven for not realizing an election was even happening. DiVincenzo, in office since 2003, will almost certainly trounce Republican Adam Kraemer in November and get a sixth term leading one of New Jersey’s most populous counties.
LAST YEAR, Gloucester County Republicans, who haven’t controlled the county since the 1980s, managed to flip the county sheriff’s office and two county commission seats, bringing the Democratic majority down to 5-2. This year, they’re gunning for the majority.

Commissioners Frank DiMarco and Denice DiCarlo, the latter of whom was chosen earlier this year to replace Commissioner Dan Christy despite being rejected by voters for a commissioner seat in 2021, are running for re-election against Republicans Adam Wingate and Stephen Pakradooni. Five-term Democratic County Clerk James Hogan is also up, facing Republican Tom Narolewski.

Gloucester swung way to the right in 2021, and there’s been some chaos in Gloucester Democratic politics since then. State Sen. Fred Madden (D-Washington) quietly stepped down as Democratic chairman in June, and the new chairman, Chad Bruner, is still trying to defuse an unpleasant scandal involving a Democratic Mantua committeeman and a K9 dog who died in his care.

A GOP super PAC is spending more than $100,000 on TV ads informing voters about the dog’s death, a sign that Republicans see the sad issue as a political winner – and, more broadly, that they’re deeply invested in flipping Gloucester this year.
Hudson

Two Hudson Democratic incumbents, County Clerk Junior Maldonado and Sheriff Frank Schillari, are both heavy favorites for re-election in November; Hudson hasn’t elected a Republican to countywide office since 1956, the longest such streak in the state.

2023 will bring more interesting county elections, with County Executive Tom DeGise stepping down and the county’s nine commissioners preparing to run in newly redrawn districts.

Hunterdon

Sometime in the future, suburban voting trends may finally engulf Hunterdon County and flip the county blue, a switch that has already happened in Somerset County and seems to be currently underway in Morris County.

But that day is still a long way off, if it ever arrives, and Hunterdon’s four Republican countywide officeholders up this year – Sheriff Fred Brown and Commissioners John Lanza, Zachary Rich, and Jeff Kuhl – are safe for another term. Kuhl is new to the board, having been appointed earlier this year to fill the remainder of former Commissioner Matt Holt’s term.
LAWRENCE COUNCILWOMAN Cathleen Lewis emerged victorious from a packed primary convention to succeed Commissioner Andrew Koontz; she and incumbent Commissioner Nina Melker are overwhelming favorites this November in solidly Democratic Mercer County.

Assuming both Melker and Lewis win, their victories would add Mercer to the growing chorus of Jersey counties with majority-female boards of county commissioners, joining Bergen, Middlesex, Union, and Somerset.

MIDDLESEX

COMMISSIONER (3 SEATS): CHANELLE SCOTT MCCULLUM (D-INC.), CHARLES KENNY (D-INC.), CLARIBEL AZCONA BARBER (D-INC.) // JOELLEN ARRABITO (R), MARTIN HERMANN (R), GERALD SHINE (R)

SHERIFF: MILDRED SCOTT (D-INC.) // BRIAN WOJACZYK (R)

Sheriff Mildred Scott and Commissioners Chanelle Scott McCulum, Charles Kenny, and Claribel Azcona-Barber, all Democrats, are set for another term in what is likely New Jersey’s second-most populous county. (2020 Census numbers put Middlesex 566 people behind Essex County, but 2021 estimates give Middlesex the edge.)

MONMOUTH

COMMISSIONER (2 SEATS): TOM ARNONE (R-INC.), NICK DIROCCO (R-INC.) // KRISTAL DIAS (D), BONNIE KASS-VIOLA (D)

SHERIFF: SHAUN GOLDEN (R-INC.) // LARRY LUTTRELL (D)

AFTER COMFORTABLY overcoming off-the-line primary challenges in June, Republican Sheriff Shaun Golden and Commissioners Tom Arnone and Nick DiRocco don’t have much chance of losing this November.

Golden, who is also the chairman of the Monmouth Republican Party, briefly looked like he wouldn’t even face an opponent after Democrats’ first option failed to meet residency requirements, but backup Democratic candidate Larry Luttrell wrangled enough write-in votes to get on the general election ballot.
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At all levels, New Jersey needs more leaders who support collective bargaining and expanding the bargaining rights of all workers.
MORRIS

COMMISSIONER (3 SEATS): DOUG CABANA (R-INC.), TOM MASTRANGELO (R-INC.), CHRISTINE MYERS (R) // JUDY HERNANDEZ (D), T.C. MCCOURT (D), ALICIA SHARMA (D)
SHERIFF: JIM GANNON (R-INC.)

THE ULTIMATE OUTCOME of this year’s Morris County elections isn’t really in doubt; county-level Republicans have weathered far more difficult years recently and still came out victorious, so they should be fine this year. The last time Democrats won a county race in Morris was in 1973.

Still, Morris is the only Biden-won county in the state that doesn’t have any Democrats in county office, and it will be worth watching the margins of this year’s commissioner contest as a harbinger for future years. (Republican Sheriff Jim Gannon is uncontested.)

The three-candidate slate that Republicans are running for county commissioner is the product of months of complex and often bitter infighting.

Commissioner Kathy DeFillippo announced in December 2021 that she was calling it quits, and incumbent Commissioners Doug Cabana and Tom Mastrangelo backed Pequannock Councilwoman Melissa Florance-Lynch to replace her. But Republican county committeemembers completely ignored their alliance, giving the line to Cabana, former Freeholder Christine Myers, and Mendham Township Committeeewoman Sarah Neibart instead.

While Florance-Lynch ended her bid there, Mastrangelo forged ahead with an off-the-line campaign – and he won, narrowly beating Neibart for the third spot in the Republican primary. Now, the cobbled-together slate of Cabana, Mastrangelo, and Myers faces Democrats Judy Hernandez, T.C. McCourt, and Alicia Sharma, and while all three Republicans are strong favorites, it will be interesting to see if Mastrangelo faces a general election penalty (or reward) for his difficult primary campaign.

OCEAN

COMMISSIONER (2 SEATS): JACK KELLY (R-INC.), GINNY HAINES (R-INC.) // CATHERINE PAURA (D), ROXANNE BARNES (D)
SHERIFF: MICHAEL MASTRONARDY (R-INC.) // EUGENE DAVIS (D)

AS SOON AS THEY BEAT a set of right-wing primary challengers backed by 4th congressional candidate Mike Crispi, Republican Commissioners Jack Kelly and Ginny Haines locked in another term in New Jersey’s most staunchly Republican county.

Sheriff Michael Mastronardy is up this year too, and his assured victory against Democrat Eugene Davis is something of a consolation prize following his failed campaign for Ocean GOP chairman in July. That election, ultimately won by former chairman George Gilmore, worsened deep rifts in the county party, but intraparty troubles won’t swing Ocean’s deeply conservative electorate away from Republicans.
PASSAIC

COMMISSIONER (2 SEATS): TERRY DUFFY (D-INC.), PAT LEPORE (D-INC.) // TROY OSWALD (R), ALEX CRUZ (R)
SHERIFF: RICHARD BERDNIK (D-INC.) // MASON MAHER (R)

While Republicans came close in a number of North and Central Jersey county offices in 2021, the only seat they actually flipped was in Passaic County, where Democratic Commissioner Assad Akhter narrowly lost to Republican Nicolina Gallo. Invigorated by that victory, Republicans are running hard for two county commissioner seats and the county sheriff’s office this year.

Passaic is a county sharply divided by geography and demographics; incumbent Sheriff Richard Bernik and Commissioners Terry Duffy and Pat Lepore will have to run up the score in Paterson and Passaic, while support for Republicans Mason Maher, Troy Oswald, and Alex Cruz will be based in Wayne, West Milford, and other right-leaning suburbs.

Oswald, the former chief of the Paterson Police Department, was originally the Republican candidate for sheriff, but his recent residence outside Passaic County precluded that campaign. Maher, a police lieutenant in Paterson, took his place, and Oswald later joined the commissioner race after 2021 candidate Bill Marsala dropped out. (Cruz is the president of the Paterson PBA, meaning Republicans are running an all-law enforcement slate.)

SALEM

COMMISSIONER (2 SEATS): CORDY TAYLOR (R), DAN TIMMERMAN (R) // CHARLES HASSLER (D), NELSON CARNEY (D)

In spite of how Republican Salem County has become in statewide and federal races, Democrats have retained enough downballot strength that there’s still a Democratic commissioner in office, and Democrats held a majority on the board as recently as 2018. But that lone commissioner, Lee Ware, is retiring from his seat this year after 21 years – a seat his brother held for decades before him – and Democrats have little chance of holding it.

Republican Commissioner Scott Griscom is also retiring, so both parties are running new slates: 2021 candidate Nelson Carney and former Freeholder Charles Hassler for Democrats, Planning Board member Cordy Taylor and surgeon Dan Timmerman for Republicans. Given that Republicans held two seats last year by a nearly 2-to-1 margin, there’s little doubt about the outcome.

SOMERSET

COMMISSIONER: MELONIE MARANO (D-INC.) // AMBER MURAD (R)
CLERK: STEVE PETER (D-INC.) // SUZANNE MAEDER (R)
SHERIFF: DARRIN RUSSO (D-INC.) // JOHN SHERIDAN (R)

Somerset County has undergone the swiftest transformation from red to blue of any county in New Jersey: from a fully Republican-controlled government in 2018 to a fully Democratic-controlled one by 2021.

Republicans want to snap that streak this year by flipping a commissioner seat, potentially setting them up to retake the majority in 2023, as well as two constitutional offices. Last year, Republican Michael Kirsh fell just 842 votes short of a commissioner seat, so Republican victories this year certainly seem plausible.

Commissioner Melonie Marano faces 2021 commissioner candidate Amber Murad; Clerk Steve Peter faces Manville Councilwoman Suzanne Maeder; and Sheriff Darrin Russo faces retired Hillsborough police detective John Sheridan. Republicans are hoping Somerset’s Republican ancestry makes a comeback, while the three Democratic incumbents will count on the county’s recent leftward turn being a lasting one.

A curious factor that could assist Republicans is the state’s congressional map, which splits Somerset County between the 7th and 12th districts. The most Democratic towns in the district are in the uncompetitive 12th district, while the more Republican-leaning towns are in the hotly contested 7th, meaning that Republicans could benefit from turnout disparity between different parts of the county.
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SURROGATE: CHRISTOPHER HUDAK (D) // PETER LIJOI (R)

AFTER AN OFF-THE-LINE slate managed by shadowy operative James Devine was booted from the ballot, Democratic Commissioners Rebecca Williams, Sergio Granados, and Betty Jane Kowalski won the June Democratic primary uncontested, and they’re all coasting to re-election. Republicans last won countywide office in Union in 1995, when Westfield and Summit were solid red instead of solid blue.

Sheriff Mike Strada didn’t draw any Democratic challenger at all, while appointed Commissioner Jill Space (the wife of Assemblyman Parker Space) and Republican state committeeman Bill Hayden will easily defeat their Democratic opponents for two commissioner seats.

SUSSEX

COMMISSIONER: JILL SPACE (R-INC.), BILL HAYDEN (R) // CAMILA DIRESTA (D), DAMARIS LIRA (D)
SHERIFF: MIKE STRADA (R-INC.)

Sussex is the only county that can realistically compete with Ocean for the distinction of being the state’s most Republican, and the three Republicans running for countywide office this year are completely safe.

The biggest county race in Warren County this year is for surrogate, where State Sen. Michael Doherty (R-Oxford) is running to succeed the late Kevin O’Neill, who died in April. Republicans initially picked Nancy Brown to succeed him, but she deferred to Doherty when he decided in August to move on from his legislative career; Doherty has virtually no chance of losing to Democrat Maureen McCabe in the deeply Republican county.

Commissioner Jason Sarnoski, Clerk Holly Mackey, and Sheriff James McDonald are also up for re-election this year; of the three, only Sarnoski faces a Democratic opponent.

WARREN

COMMISSIONER: JASON SARNOSKI (R-INC.) // THERESA BENDER CHAPMAN (D)
CLERK: HOLLY MACKEY (R-INC.)
SHERIFF: JAMES MCDONALD (R-INC.)
SURROGATE: MICHAEL DOHERTY (R) // MAUREEN MCCABE (D)

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Commissioner Jason Sarnoski, Clerk Holly Mackey, and Sheriff James McDonald are also up for re-election this year; of the three, only Sarnoski faces a Democratic opponent.
12TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

ASSEMBLY: ALEX SAUICKIE (R-INC.) // PAUL SARTI (D)

In July, Assemblyman Ron Dancer (R-Plumsted) died after a prolonged illness, having diligently served in the Assembly for almost 20 years. His death deprived the legislature of its preeminent equestrian champion – and meant that the 12th legislative district needed to elect a new assemblyman.

The 12th district is an odd, sprawling seat that includes Republican-leaning municipalities in Middlesex, Monmouth, Ocean, and Burlington Counties. Ever since the district was first drawn last decade, its three seats have been evenly balanced by Middlesex, Monmouth, and Ocean legislators, and because Dancer was from Ocean County, it was quickly decided that the new assemblyman would be from there too.

Who that Ocean legislator would be, however, was an open question. After some behind-the-scenes maneuvering, two main candidates emerged to the fore at the special Republican convention: Jackson Councilman Alex Sauickie and Plumsted Committeeman Dominick Cuozzo.

Cuozzo, a hard-right figure who also serves as the pastor of Bible Baptist Church, had the backing of Ocean County Republican Chairman George Gilmore, who had won a dramatic comeback earlier in the summer to regain his old post atop the Ocean GOP. But it was Sauckie, a more establishment-oriented Republican, who built a winning alliance, getting 106 county committee votes to Cuozzo’s 44.

Sauickie was sworn in as an assemblyman in September, and now faces a general election against Democrat Paul Sarti for the remainder of Dancer’s term. In a district that voted for Donald Trump by 14 points, Sauickie is near-guaranteed to win.

28TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

SENATE: RENEE BURGESS (D-INC.) // JOY FREEMAN (R)

Sauickie isn’t the only new member the legislature has added this year. State Sen. Ronald Rice (D-Newark), a giant in the Senate and the longest-serving Black legislator in state history, announced in August that he’d be stepping down for health reasons, leaving his solidly Democratic seat up for grabs.

Even more so than in the 12th district, the battle for the 28th district was fought almost entirely behind closed doors.

Newark politicians, long accustomed to having two seats in the Senate, wanted a Newark candidate like Assemblywoman Cleopatra Tucker (D-Newark) to take Rice’s place. But the other towns in the district, which held a numerical majority of county committee seats, weren’t keen on the 79-year-old Tucker and instead pushed for Irvington Council President Renee Burgess.

Recognizing they didn’t have the votes, Newark committee members acquiesced; Burgess was elected unanimously at a September special election convention. She’s the first-ever state senator from Irvington, and at 51 could have a long legislative career ahead of her.

In her general election bid for a full term, Burgess faces Newark South Ward Republican Vice Chair Joy Freeman. The 28th district routinely votes for Democrats by more than 80 points, so the outcome isn’t in doubt.
CONTINUOUSLY ACHIEVING RESULTS
LOCAL RACES

Hundreds of municipalities across New Jersey are hosting local elections this year, elections that will determine the future of cities and towns across the state (and help create a bench of elected officials for both parties).

There’s no feasible way for the Globe, or any news outlet, to cover each and every one. Since New Jersey has so many towns that tilt strongly in favor of one party, many are uncontested or uncompetitive anyways. But a few races stand out from the rest; here’s a non-exhaustive guide to some of the most interesting races to watch on election night.
CALDWELL

Caldwell is one of the long-Republican towns where Democrats broke through in the Trump era, and now the party is fighting to defend the mayor’s office and its 4-2 council majority. Democratic Mayor John Kelley isn’t running for a second term, and former Councilman Francis X. Rodgers III is running in his stead against Republican Garrett Jones; two Democratic council incumbents are running for re-election.

CLIFTON

Clifton features one of New Jersey’s more chaotic methods of local elections: seven nonpartisan at-large council seats are elected all at once, with the top vote-getter becoming mayor. (The latter part is tradition, not law.)

This year, five incumbents are running for re-election, but one of the two who isn’t is Mayor James Anzaldi, a Republican and the city’s leader for the last 32 years. In addition to the five incumbents, another 12 candidates are on the ballot, and it’s anyone’s guess who will emerge on top.

CRANFORD

The Cranford township committee is currently split 3-2 in Democrats’ favor, and one seat held by each party is up this year. Republican Committee woman Mary O’Connor, a Republican, and Mayor Kathleen Miller Prunty, a Democrat, are both running for re-election; if Republicans win both seats, they’d flip control of the committee.

Evesham

It was a big deal in 2018 when Democrats in Evesham, the most populous municipality in Burlington County, managed to take control of the township council.

Now, the three women who won that year – Mayor Jaclyn Veasy and Councilwomen Patricia Hansen and Heather Cooper – face strong Republican opposition for a second term. With only five seats total on the council, the three seats decide who controls the majority.

FLEMINGTON

The mayor’s race in Flemington is among the most interesting in the state, featuring a collision between two candidates with very different backstories.

Incumbent Mayor Betsy Driver, a Democrat, is a former journalist who unseated Republican Mayor Phil Greinier by 26 votes in 2018, becoming the first openly intersex person to win public office anywhere in the country. Her opponent this year is former State Sen. Marcia Karrow, a centrist Republican who left office in 2009 and who wants to bring Flemington back to its Republican roots.
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THE DAYS OF Millburn being a Republican town at the federal and statewide level, or even a highly competitive one, are over. Gov. Phil Murphy won the suburb 66%-33% last year, and that’s low compared to the numbers other Democrats like Joe Biden have gotten.

But local elections remain competitive, and thanks to a split in the local Democratic Party, this year’s committee elections are especially high-stakes. The Democratic nominees are Annette Romano and Michael Cohen, running against Republicans Oyin Owolabi and Frank Saccomandi; also in the race is a third independent slate led by incumbent Councilwoman Dianne Thall Eglow, a former Democrat.

MAYOR RICHARD DILUCIA switched parties from Democratic to Republican earlier this year – and then promptly lost the Republican primary in a landslide to 2010 and 2014 mayoral nominee Sam Miles. Miles and his slate will now go up against Councilman Gregory Wolfe, with control of both the mayor’s office and the council majority on the line.

The second-largest town in Gloucester County, Monroe hasn’t elected a Republican as mayor since 1990. But as Republicans try to press their advantage in South Jersey, Monroe would be a big prize – and a very winnable one.

NEW PROVIDENCE’S Republican mayor, Al Morgan, is running for a fifth term leading the swingy Union County borough; his opponent, attorney Harry Clewell, was a toddler when Morgan was first elected to the borough council. Democrats haven’t even fielded a candidate for mayor in decades, so it’s tough to know what the baseline is, but the borough has become bluer in recent statewide and federal races.

THE BOROUGH OF North Caldwell has been controlled by Republicans for 100 years; this year, several former Republicans want to change that.

Incumbent Republican Mayor Joseph Alessi’s Democratic opponent is Joshua Raymond, a former two-term Republican councilman. Following two Democratic victories in 2020 and a party switch earlier this year, the council is split 3-3, with one seat from each party up this year.
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Pictured above:
Sean M. Spiller
President (center)
Steve Beatty
Vice President (right)
Petal Robertson
Secretary-Treasurer (left)
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14TH AMENDMENT
UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION
RATIFIED JULY 28, 1868
PALISADES PARK

In 2021, Republican Stephanie Jang unexpectedly won a seat on the Palisades Park Borough Council, and one year after her surprise victory, she’s gunning for the mayor’s office. Her opponent is Democratic Councilman Chong Paul Kim, who defeated incumbent Mayor Christopher Chung in the Democratic primary. Chung himself first got to office by unseating Mayor James Rotundo in the 2018 primary, signaling the rising political power of Korean Americans in the borough.

PARAMUS

Democratic Mayor Richard LaBarbiera isn’t running for a fourth term leading Paramus, and Democrats picked Councilwoman MariaElena Bellinger to succeed him in the highly competitive town. In her bid to become the borough’s first-ever woman mayor, she’ll face Republican Councilman Christopher DiPiazza, and her council slate will try to make a dent in the current 5-1 Republican majority.

PERTH AMBOY

Three rival slates are duking it out for three at-large seats on the Perth Amboy City Council, each of which includes one incumbent councilmember – making for an exciting campaign even before bribery allegations rocked the race. A staffer working for council candidate Jeanette Ramos was charged in late October with offering gift cards to voters if they let her fill out their absentee ballots; Mayor Helmin Caba and the Perth Amboy Democratic organization are backing a rival slate led by Councilwoman Milady Tejada.

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THE TOP CONTEST in Trenton’s nonpartisan election is for mayor, where incumbent Mayor Reed Gusciora faces two councilwomen, Council President Kathy McBride and Councilwoman Robin Vaughn. A former state assemblyman, Gusciora was first elected in 2018 and has warred repeatedly with both McBride and Vaughn since then; Vaughn at one point called Gusciora, who is gay, an “an old pedophile running around with little boys.”

Recognizing that a victory by McBride or Vaughn would be a blow to the capital city, prominent Democrats like Gov. Phil Murphy and Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson (D-Trenton) have closed ranks around Gusciora, who’s likely favored to win another term.

All seven seats on the city council are also up, including three at-large seats and four ward-based seats — and all but one have no incumbent running, meaning that the council will look drastically different no matter what come 2023.