

Burlington County Times

3rd district campaign heating up

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Burlington County Times

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Incumbent Democrat John Adler is in the lead, but he has a fight on his hands.

So suggests the first independent poll of the 3rd Congressional District race pitting Adler against Republican challenger Jon Runyan.

The poll, conducted by Rutgers University's Eagleton Institute of Politics, gave Adler an overall lead of 31 percent to Runyan's 25 percent, with 4 percent supporting independent Peter DeStefano of Mount Laurel and 34 percent still undecided. Six percent did not answer the poll.

In a contest without DeStefano, Adler leads Runyan 35 percent to 28 percent, with 23 percent undecided and 13 percent not voting.

The poll is based on a telephone survey of 421 registered voters in the 3rd District, which is made up of large parts of Burlington and Ocean counties along with Cherry Hill in Camden County. It had a margin of error of 4.8 percentage points.

Although the poll gave Adler the overall lead, it found that Runyan had a slight edge, 36 percent to 35 percent, among voters who are following the race "very" or "somewhat" closely. He was also the choice among the 22 percent of voters who favor a political outsider over an experienced candidate.

Conversely, Adler's lead over Runyan increased 10 percentage points, 40 to 30, among voters who claimed they were either "very" or "somewhat" likely to vote in November, with 22 percent undecided and 8 percent saying they would not vote in the race.

Adler also led among voters who prefer an experienced candidate, and he had a slight edge among independents.

Runyan, a former lineman for the Philadelphia Eagles who resides in Mount Laurel, is attempting to unseat Adler, a Cherry Hill resident who became the first Democrat in more than a century to represent the district.

Adler enjoys a large fundraising advantage but could be hampered by an atmosphere of dissatisfaction with the federal government.

Also Tuesday, the National Republican Congressional Committee announced that Runyan had risen to the top tier of its "Young Guns" program, a status that designates his campaign for extra assistance from the national party.

David Redlawsk, Rutgers-Eagleton polling director and political science professor, declared the race "essentially a dead heat" based on the poll findings as well as other factors.

"As a well-funded incumbent, John Adler could be expected to start off with an advantage in the election," Redlawsk said. "Even so, given the general sense of frustration voters are expressing, Adler's very close win two years ago, and the competitive nature of the 3rd District, he has a fight on his hands."

Both campaigns offered their own spin on the poll results.

Geoff Mackler, Adler's campaign manager and spokesman, said the results favor the incumbent.

"Despite a tough environment for Democrats nationally, John Adler holds a commanding lead because of his independent-minded centrist approach in Congress," Mackler said in a statement. "Local families, seniors and small-business owners know that Congressman Adler is fighting to find bipartisan ways to spark private-sector growth and reduce the deficit. Jon Runyan's strategy of hiding from voters and promoting a self-serving agenda is failing."

Runyan campaign consultant Chris Russell called the poll results "embarrassingly bad for any incumbent congressman."

"We feel great about these numbers," Russell said. "They prove that our campaign has all the momentum in this race and that John Adler's economy-wrecking track record of higher taxes, runaway spending, and irresponsible debt will send him into retirement this November. You can bet this will only ramp up the desperation in Adler's camp and intensify their torrent of negative, personal attacks against Jon Runyan in the weeks ahead."

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