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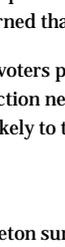
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Poll: Rep. John Adler has narrow lead former Philadelphia Eagles Tackle Jon Runyan.

Tuesday, August 10, 2010

BY MATT FRIEDMAN
 STATE HOUSE BUREAU
 STATE HOUSE

A poll released this morning shows freshman U.S. Rep. John Adler (D-3rd Dist.) with a narrow lead over his Republican challenger, former Philadelphia Eagles Tackle Jon Runyan.

Among all registered voters, Adler leads Runyan 35 percent to 28 percent, according to the Rutgers University-Eagleton Institute poll.

The race, in a traditionally Republican South Jersey district that runs from the Ocean County coast to the Delaware River in the West, is expected to be the most hotly contested in the state this years. In 2008, Adler became the first Democrat to win the district since the 1880s.

The controversial candidacy of self-styled tea party candidate Peter DeStefano, who South Jersey tea party groups disavow and who Runyan's campaign has accused of being a plant by Democrats to sap conservative votes from the Republican, appears to have a negligible effect on the race. DeStefano gets 4 percent of the vote – within the poll's margin of error. But the poll did not label him a "tea party" candidate, instead just calling him an independent.

"Despite the debate over the DeStefano candidacy, our polling suggests that he is not currently much of a factor, and if anything, affects Adler slightly more," said pollster David Redlawsk. "It seems unlikely that DeStefano's presence on the ballot would greatly affect the dynamics of the race."

With DeStefano included, Adler's lead over Runyan is 31 percent to 25 percent.

Among voters who are paying the most attention to the race, Runyan pulls just about even with Adler, leading him 36 percent to 35 percent. Adler's lead expands to 10 percentage points with voters who consider themselves likely to vote, but Redlawsk warned that it's too early to come up with an accurate likely voter model.

"While likely voters put Adler up strongly, it's more realistic to analyze those who follow the election news," said Redlawsk. "In a midterm election, these are the voters most likely to turn out. If that pattern holds, then the race is essentially a dead heat."

Rutgers-Eagleton surveyed 421 registered voters by telephone from Aug. 5-8 and has a margin of error of 4.8 percent.

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