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Poll: Adler ahead of Runyan in congressional race

By Cynthia Burton

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U.S. Rep. John Adler is outrunning his Republican challenger, former Eagles tackle Jon Runyan, in New Jersey's tightest congressional race, according to a Rutgers University poll released today.

The freshman Democrat was favored by 31 percent of respondents compared with Runyan's 25 percent in a survey of 421 registered voters conducted Aug. 5 to 8. Third-party candidate Peter DeStefano had 4 percent.

Rutgers pollster David Redlawsk found that DeStefano took slightly more votes from Adler than from Runyan, who is making his first bid for elected office.

Without DeStefano on the ballot, 35 percent of respondents chose Adler compared with 28 percent for Runyan. The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 4.8 percentage points.

DeStefano, who calls himself a tea party candidate and is running under the moniker "NJ Tea Party," was not identified as such in the poll.

Tea party groups in the district, which runs through Burlington and Ocean Counties and includes Cherry Hill in Camden County, have disavowed DeStefano's candidacy and say that they do not support him.

"There's little doubt in my mind that if we called [DeStefano] a tea party candidate that he would pick up a few votes," said Redlawsk, who conducted the poll for the Eagleton Institute of Politics.

He decided not to name DeStefano a tea party candidate because of the controversy surrounding his candidacy and a lack of university polling resources, Redlawsk said.

Within the district, 26 percent of poll respondents said they favored the tea party while 38 percent saw it in an unfavorable light, he said.

Anti-incumbent fervor is sweeping the country, he said.

"It almost doesn't matter which party you are in as an incumbent," Redlawsk said. "There is such a distrust of everybody in Washington that all incumbents need to be careful."

But Adler is benefiting from being the incumbent, even in a historically Republican district, Redlawsk said. He has higher name recognition and more money than Runyan.

The Democrat has raised \$2.5 million compared with Runyan's \$654,000, of which \$300,000 came from the Republican's own pocket.

The party would like to change that. On Tuesday, the National Republican Congressional Committee announced that it had improved confidence in Runyan's candidacy and promoted him to the top tier of its "Young Guns" program, which signals regular party donors that Runyan is a good bet.

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