

Rep. Smith appears cruising to re-election in 4th District

Republican seeking a 16th two-year term

By **MATTHEW McGRATH** • STAFF WRITER •
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Mr. Smith most likely will go to Washington for another two years.

Rep. Christopher H. Smith is running for his 16th consecutive term as congressman from New Jersey's 4th District. The 4th District includes parts of Monmouth, Ocean, Mercer and Burlington counties. According to expert accounts, the 57-year-old Republican is going to win re-election, easily.

"No one is invincible," said Ruth Mandel, the director of the Rutgers University Eagleton Institute of Politics. "But if you can be invincible, he's as close as you get."

Smith's strong position is anecdotal. There have been no independent polls conducted regarding the 4th District, and it is unlikely there will be a poll.

"It's so under my radar screen," said Patrick Murray, the director of the Monmouth University Polling Center. "I have umpteen districts to consider before I would do that one."

That's because Smith is a "shoo-in," Murray said.

Smith has won general elections by nearly 2-to-1 margins in at least the past four general elections. He also handily defeated Alan Bateman, a Tea Party-backed candidate, for the Republican nomination in the June primary.

"Over time, he has seen more aggressive challenges than he has this year," said Ben Dworkin, of Rider University's Rebovich Institute for New Jersey Politics. "He's beat them back every single time."

Smith even sailed to victory two years ago when the presidential election gave Democrats a boost nationwide. The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee listed Smith's campaign against Josh Zeitz as "one to watch."

His Democratic challenger, Howard Kleinhendler, 47, of Lakewood, isn't getting that kind of national support this year. He's raised only a little more than

\$100,000 as of last week. It mostly has come from individual donations, according to figures on the Federal Election Commission website.

Smith has raised nearly \$550,000.

Part of Smith's success is the "conventional wisdom" about his incumbency, said Mandel of Rutgers. That is, he's well known for constituent services and championing local issues and bringing them to the national stage, she said.

Smith helped bring national awareness to autism when families in Brick came to him with concerns about a "pocket" of autism there. He is doing the same with Lyme disease now. He fought together with former Rep. Jim Saxton of the 3rd District to keep Fort Dix, McGuire Air Force Base and Naval Air Station Lakehurst open. And he fought to keep civilian housing off of Naval Weapons Station Earle.

"He always seems to grab the big headline," said Murray of Monmouth University. "It always shows him in a favorable light."

The latest of those big headlines was Smith's part in a fight to return Sean Goldman from Brazil to his father, David, in Tinton Falls. Sean came home last December.

Now, Smith has begun to turn that experience into legislation. The House of recently passed a resolution that calls for Japan to resolve 95 cases of child abduction involving 136 American children.

In an interview Thursday, Kleinhendler attacked Smith

on his foreign policy work. He said Smith is far too concerned with people in African nations and should be more concerned with the people in the 4th District. Smith is on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and he's a staunch human rights advocate.

But, Kleinhendler's main issue is getting commuter rail service from Lakewood to the Northeast Corridor in Middlesex County. He said Smith has lacked leadership on the issue.

Smith denies the charge. In an interview Friday, he said he helped get the \$4 million to study the Middlesex-Ocean-Monmouth rail line.

"The only thing left is to build it," Smith said. "Officials in Monmouth and Ocean counties wanted it, but it was blocked by Democrats in Middlesex County."

Kleinhendler also is opposed to Smith's rigid anti-abortion position. Kleinhendler said he believes that abortions could be performed under certain circumstances.

Smith's anti-abortion stance is the one issue Democrats attack each election year. Smith founded and is chairman of the House Pro-Life Caucus. Yet the attacks have almost no effect on Election Day.

"It's a question of whether you can attack Chris Smith, and whether an attack will be effective," said Dworkin of Rider University. "People might agree or disagree with a candidate's stance on an issue, but whatever the attack is will fall on deaf ears."

That's because after 30 years as a congressman a perceived "personal relationship" could develop for Smith with his constituents, Mandel said.

"The question is: Can someone offer something that's an alternative to Smith and be what people are looking for?" Mandel said.

It is that question that is at the heart of Kleinhendler's campaign.

"What do we really get with another two years of Chris Smith?" he asked.

Kleinhendler will square off with Smith on Tuesday afternoon at a meeting with the Asbury Park Press editorial board.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: We invited municipal candidates to submit a statement as a way to reach you, the voter. Go to our website, www.app.com/electionpreview, beginning Friday to read these unedited statements from candidates in the municipal races.

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