

## U.S. Congressional Race: District 5

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After redistricting, state's northernmost district doesn't get the race it was looking for

By **Matt Manochio**, May 22, 2012 in

New Jersey's northernmost congressional district, the 5th, has been in Republican hands for nearly 70 years.



Rep. Scott Garrett

U.S. Rep. Scott Garrett, the current G.O.P. occupant and a resident of Sussex County, was first elected to the House of Representatives in 2002 and appears primed to strongly defend the seat. He faces a primary challenge from two Bergen County residents, Michael Cino and Bonnie Somer, both of whom concede the odds of winning are against them.

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The Democrats also have a contested primary. Teaneck's Deputy Mayor Adam Gussen, former U.S. Marine Jason Castle and Lyndon LaRouche Democrat Diane Sare are vying for their party's nomination on June 5.

But that contest won't provide the matchup Republicans had envisioned when they drew the new district lines last December, putting U.S. Rep. Steven Rothman, who currently represents the 9th District, into Garrett's GOP-leaning 5th.

Despite Democrats' pleas, Rothman opted to move to the newly constituted 9th and challenge fellow Democrat and U.S. Rep. Bill Pascrell, who currently represents the state's 8th District but whose home was redrawn into the 9th District.

"I think the fact that Congressman Rothman, and to some extent Pascrell, decided it would be better to fight a fellow Democrat rather than take [Garrett] on suggests there's some recognition that he's there to stay," said John Weingart, associate director of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University.

"And that the perception about whether he's [Garrett] too conservative for the district -- whether right or wrong in the past -- it seems to be wrong now," Weingart added.

The 5th Congressional district wraps around the top of New Jersey like a sideways L. It encompasses most of Warren and Sussex counties, a few Passaic County municipalities, and parts of Bergen County.

Essentially, the largely rural 5th District lost some Warren towns to the newly drawn 7th District and gained some of Bergen's municipalities: Lodi, Bogota, Hackensack, Maywood, Fair Lawn and part of Teaneck. Democrats have the registration advantage in some of these communities.

Bob Yudin, chairman of the Bergen County Republican Organization, said the additional potential Democratic voters wouldn't be enough to threaten the seat from changing political hands.

"All of northern Bergen County -- Wyckoff, Franklin Lakes, Mahwah, Oakland -- these are Republican towns," he said. "Also, the possible competition, its all second- and third-tier Democrats"

Gussen, who earned the Democratic Committee of Bergen County's endorsement, said Republicans might be overlooking the change in voter registration numbers that favor his side.

"Without a question, it's ... more competitive," Gussen said. He said that 10 years ago the split in voter registration in Bergen County was 60/40 in favor of the GOP. Now it's 52/48 in favor of the Republicans.

"It's a huge reshaping of the voter registration that really makes this -- number one -- a winnable district for a Democrat," Gussen said. "And a district that Scott Garrett is no longer right for."

In a statement issued by his campaign office, Garrett offered a different take. "The people in the six Bergen County towns added to the 5th Congressional District will finally have a representative in Washington who understands that government should not spend more than it takes in," Garrett said.

The incumbent is focused on the general election. In addition to name recognition, he has a great financial advantage over his primary opponents: Garrett's campaign committee had more \$1.8 million cash on hand as of March 31, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

On the Democratic side, the Center for Responsive Politics had one financial report for Sare -- who raised roughly \$10,590 by the end of March, and had spent \$9,797, leaving her with \$793 cash on hand. There were no reports for Gussen or Castle during the same time period.

Whoever wins the Democratic primary will have not only a monetary disadvantage, but also an historical one. The last Democrat to represent New Jersey's 5th District in the House of Representatives was Percy Hamilton Stewart, who served from 1931 to 1933.

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