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TOP STORY

ELECTION 2020

What's next in the 2nd Congressional District race?

MICHELLE BRUNETTI POST Staff Writer

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Callahan Harrison

Craig Matthews / Staff Photographer/



KENNEDY

Amy Kennedy / provided



Rep. Jeff Van Drew stands next to President Donald Trump at a Keep America Great campaign rally in Wildwood, NJ on Tuesday, Jan. 28, 2020. Van Drew switched over to the Republican Party. (Heather Khalifa /The Philadelphia Inquirer via AP)

Heather Khalifa/

Tuesday's rally by President Donald Trump in Wildwood cleared the GOP field in this year's 2nd Congressional District race for U.S. Rep. Jeff Van Drew, R-2nd, and drove home for Democrats "what they are up against in the election," according to one political analyst.

Seeing the president of the United States "come to your district to embrace (Van Drew) — such a major media event ... you're realizing you are going up against quite a bit of firepower," said John Froomjian, executive director of Stockton University's William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy.

About 160,000 tickets were requested for the event, according to the Trump campaign, more than for any other rally Trump has held. Seven thousand were admitted, and thousands more stood in the cold to watch the rally on large screens just outside the Wildwoods Convention Center.

"On the Republican side, it essentially cleared the field. While Bob Patterson is still in the mix, Van Drew's best-funded challenger has left for another district, and everyone else left the race," Froomjian said.

From here, the Democrats go into a primary race, working to differentiate themselves from the pack while shoring up money and organizational power.

Van Drew and the Republicans, on the other hand, can start focusing on the general election and the 40% of voters in the district not affiliated with either party.

Two Democrats have recently established themselves as the strongest, said Carl Golden, a former political consultant to moderate Republican candidates Tom Kean and Christie Todd Whitman who is now a senior contributing analyst with the Hughes Center.

They are Longport's Brigid Harrison, a Montclair State University professor and the first to enter the race, and Brigantine's Amy Kennedy, a mental health advocate, former teacher and member of the nationally powerful Kennedy family.

"A primary is different," Golden said, because those who vote are party diehards who tend to follow direction from party leaders. "Two things are most important: money and people on the ground. Kennedy and Harrison have that."

Other Democrats, like Atlantic County Freeholder Ashley Bennett, West Cape May Commissioner John Francis, and House Oversight Committee staffer and Vineland resident Will Cunningham, will find it difficult to raise the kind of money needed and to gather and build the organization and professional staff to win a primary, Golden predicted.

And for Brigantine's Robert Turkavage, a retired FBI agent who just changed parties from Republican to Democrat, the hopes of getting organizational support are slim.

Early on, Harrison got the endorsement of six of the eight county party chairs in the district, as well as from state Senate President Steve Sweeney and Atlantic County Democratic Assemblymen Vince Mazzeo and John Armato, and from unions like Unite Here Local 54.

"She started earlier (than anyone) and locked up a lot of organizational support, including the support of the Senate president, which signals the support of the Camden County political organization and George Norcross," Froomjian said.

Kennedy countered with the endorsement of the Atlantic City Democratic Committee, controlled by the Callaway political organization. She also underscored her family's connections to famous national leaders by bringing Martin Luther King III with her to the Trump rally protest.

"I have to say, Harrison seems to be in a stronger position in terms of organizational support. That's really important in a primary," Froomjian said.

Now, Kennedy has to spend money in the primary to counteract that, he said.

We won't know how much she has raised until the Federal Election Commission releases financial reports April 15, Froomjian said.

"Right now, Kennedy has her name associated with American political icons. How strong that is in 2020 remains to be seen," Froomjian said.

Much will depend on whether Kennedy can swing Atlantic County Democratic Chairman Mike Suleiman to her side, both Golden and Froomjian said.

“If Atlantic County were to swing to her, it would be a major development,” Golden said.

Suleiman said Friday he has no intention of endorsing anyone until after the Atlantic County Democratic Convention on March 8, when municipal chairs, elected officials and members of the county committee will vote on who gets the group’s backing and the best spot on the primary ballot.

Vote margins will be narrow, Golden predicted.

“No one is going to run away with this. Obviously that raises a question about being able to put (the party) together again in time for November,” Golden said.

While it’s typical to have a “unity breakfast and hug over bacon and eggs” after a primary fight, Golden said, it’s also typical to “then leave and do what you feel like anyway.”

“If they start attacking each other, the eventual leader may come out damaged,” Froomjian said. “You can be sure the Van Drew campaign will be watching every name-calling and nasty broadside. ... It just makes it harder for the eventual nominee to get going and to unite the party.”

REPUBLICANS

Incumbent: Jeff Van Drew

Congressman Jeff Van Drew, R-2nd, made national news in his freshman year in Congress, which he started as a Democrat and ended as a Republican.

Long known as a moderate in the state Assembly and Senate, many thought Van Drew would continue to be a solid Democrat who occasionally deviated from the party on issues like gun rights, after he was elected in 2018 to fill the seat of longtime Congressman Frank LoBiondo, a moderate Republican.

But right from the start, Van Drew set himself apart by voting "no" for Nancy Pelosi for Speaker -- fulfilling a campaign promise but confusing those on the House floor. He was supposed to call out a name of someone for speaker, so his "no" vote was recorded as "present."

Then he was one of the few Democrats calling for bipartisan compromise on a budget to end what became the longest federal government shutdown in history.

Later, he visited the southern border and came back saying there was, indeed, a crisis there. He supported both some funding for a border wall, and increased funding for housing and services to undocumented migrants. Van Drew was also one of just two Democrats to first vote against proceeding with an impeachment inquiry, and to vote against both articles of impeachment against President Donald Trump.

And on Dec. 19, 2019, he announced his party change to Republican while sitting next to Trump in the Oval Office.



Van Drew

Craig Matthews / Staff Photographer///

Dropped out: Brian Fitzherbert

Brian T. Fitzherbert (dropped out of race Jan. 24, 2020), 30, of Egg Harbor Township, founded the Atlantic County Young Republicans and ran in 2018 in the Republican primary, but withdrew before the primary that was won by Seth Grossman.



Fitzherbert stresses his knowledge of technology and aviation as an advantage for him to help develop those industries in South Jersey. He is a Program Manager for defense contractor L3Harris, working on multimillion dollar programs for military vehicles. Previously, he developed drones, ground control stations, electronic warfare testers, simulators, and area attack weapons supporting the Warfighter at Textron Systems.

Fitzherbert
Provided

He graduated from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, and completed his graduate studies at the Whiting School of Engineering at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, studying systems engineering and project management.

He has racked up endorsements from a wide variety of local officials, including former Assemblyman and Cumberland County Freeholder Sam Fiocchi and Northfield Mayor Erland Chau.

Switched districts: David Richter

David Richter, 53, the former CEO of Hill International in Philadelphia, is an engineer, lawyer and businessman. He recently moved to Avalon from Princeton, but summered much of his life in the Cape May County town.

He switched races to the 3rd Congressional District, which covers Ocean and Burlington counties, on Jan. 27.

“I understand what it takes to get things built,” said Richter. “In Congress, I plan to work hard to ensure the federal



government is investing in South Jersey's infrastructure — expanding our transportation network, keeping our environment clean and maintaining our coastline.”

Richter
David Richter / provided

Richter earned two bachelor's degrees and a law degree from the University of Pennsylvania, as well as master's degrees from Oxford and Harvard universities, he said.

He and his wife, Michelle, have been married for 20 years and have four daughters.

Bob Patterson

Patterson has homes in Haddonfield and Ocean City, and ran in 2018 against Congressman Donald Norcross, D-1st, in the district that covers Camden and its surroundings.

Patterson, a strong supporter of President Donald Trump, said he is running for Congress to protect conservative values and make South Jersey great again. His priorities are protecting American jobs, restoring manufacturing in South Jersey, ending unfair trade deals, and securing the nation's borders.

Patterson recently worked in the Trump administration as a senior adviser and acting associate commissioner at the Social Security Administration. Prior to



PATTERSON
Bob Patterson / provided

that he worked as vice president for government relations at the U.S. Business & Industry Council (USBIC), an organization committed to strengthening U.S. manufacturing and opposing unfair trade deals.

DEMOCRATS

Ashley Bennett

Ashley Bennett, a Democrat elected to the Atlantic County Board of Chosen Freeholders in 2017, faces re-election in 2020 as she runs for the right to challenge Congressman Jeff Van Drew, R-2nd.

A psychiatric emergency screener at Cape Regional Medical Center, she decided to run for freeholder after the 2016 election of President Donald Trump, and in response to a Facebook posting by then-Atlantic County Freeholder John Carman. It was about the Women's March in January that questioned whether the women would be home in time to make dinner. Bennett ran for and won Carman's seat.



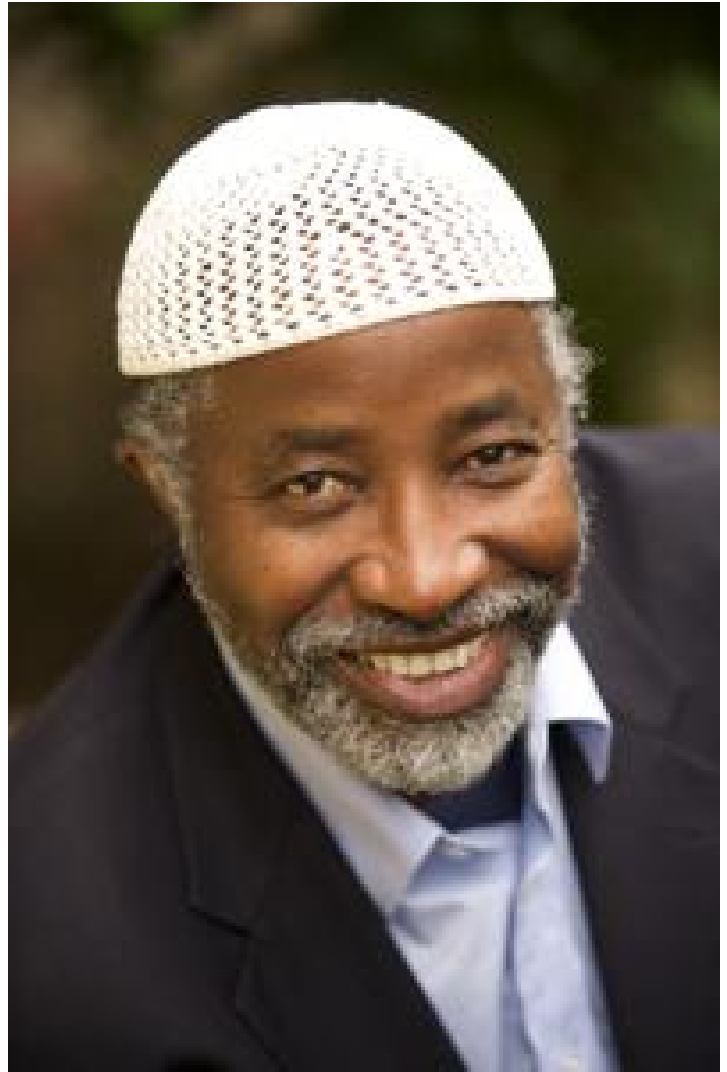
BENNETT

Provided

John Francis

West Wildwood Commissioner John Francis, 73, has a colorful and unusual biography, and he wrote about it in a book published by National Geographic called, "Planet Walker: 22 years of walking, 17 years of silence." Francis spent many of his younger adult years refusing to ride in cars or other vehicles that use fossil fuels, after seeing the results of an oil spill on the Pacific coast. He also stopped speaking for 17 years, in order to learn to listen, he said. During that time, however, he earned a bachelor's, master's and doctorate, became an expert in oil spill cleanup, and worked for the Coast Guard. Now he travels the world as a motivational speaker, he said.

He learned in his silent travels about the interconnectedness of all issues, Francis said. "Really it's all about people and how we treat each other. It's going to manifest in the physical environment." So he said his focus in Congress would not just be on environmentalism, but on human and civil rights, gender equality and economic equity and human relationships "as the foundation for what happens in the environment. You have to be really interested in everything."



FRANCIS
BECKY HALE / provided

Brigid Callahan Harrison

Longport's Brigid Callahan Harrison is a professor of politics and law at Montclair State University in Essex County. She has been endorsed for by State Senate President Steve Sweeney, by six of the eight county Democratic chairs in the Second Congressional District, and by others.

Long a commenter in the media about New Jersey politics, this is Harrison's first run for office.



Brigid Callahan Harrison, Professor, Montclair State University at Murphy's Marks: The Governor's Freshman Report Card at the Atlantic City Convention. Nov. 14, 2018, (Craig Matthews / Staff Photographer)

Craig Matthews / Staff Photographer

Amy Kennedy

Amy Kennedy, of Brigantine, is a former teacher and the wife of former Rhode Island Congressman Patrick Kennedy, with whom she has five children. She announced Jan. 6 she will run in the 2020 Democratic primary.

Kennedy, now a mental health advocate, said she and her husband have supported Van Drew in the past, "but he has clearly lost his way."

"Our nation is in crisis. Our political system is in crisis. Our environment is in crisis," Kennedy wrote in a press statement. "We have serious



KENNEDY

Craig Matthews / Staff Photographer

unaddressed needs in our schools and in our mental health and addiction system. Our economy, though strong, is not meeting the needs of the underserved and middle class.”

Jack Surrency

Jack Surrency, of Bridgeton, is a Democratic freeholder in Cumberland County.

He was first elected to the Bridgeton City Council in 2010 as part of a slate headed by Mayor Albert Kelly, and served on the Bridgeton Board of Education from 2002-2010, according to his resume.

He attended the Tuskegee Institute from 1976-1978, majoring in chemistry with a business minor. He also holds a master's degree in Community and Economic Development from New Hampshire College in Manchester.



Freeholder candidate Jack Surrency at the Ramada Inn during Election Tuesday, Nov. 8, 2016 (Craig Matthews / Staff Photographer)

Craig Matthews / Staff Photographer

Robert Turkavage

Robert Turkavage, 64, is a former FBI agent and manager out of New York. He has recently switched parties to become a Democrat, after a lifetime in the GOP.

Turkavage last ran in the 2018 Republican primary for the 2nd District race, losing to Seth Grossman, and this time is running as a Democrat.

He changed his party affiliation because the Republicans have increased the national debt by \$3.1 billion as a result of tax cuts that benefited the wealthy, he said, and because of President Trump's attacks on the press and the intelligence community.

“It’s going to be challenging,” Turkavage said Tuesday of breaking through in a crowded Democratic field. “I will be knocking on doors every day from January till primary day” on June 2.



TURKAVAGE
Robert Turkavage / provided

Will Cunningham

Will Cunningham, 34, a native of Vineland who has worked for Sen. Cory Booker, D-NJ, and now works for the House Oversight Committee in Washington, D.C., announced Jan. 8 he was entering the Democratic primary for the 2nd Congressional District.

He ran against Van Drew in the Democratic primary in 2018, and said he has the most experience in Washington, D.C., of all the candidates in the race of either party.



Will Cunningham, a Vineland native and former staffer for U.S. Sen. Cory Booker, is running for the Democratic nomination for Congress in the 2nd Congressional District.
Provided

Cunningham said he was homeless for a time as a teen when his mom lost her job. He said his mom is still an hourly worker in Cumberland County, making \$11.50 an hour. Yet with hard work and the help of government programs, he was able to get an Ivy League college education at Brown University. He also has a law degree from the University of Texas at Austin.

"Despite my accomplishments, I have not lost touch with how folks struggle to make ends meet," Cunningham said. "I don't have to look far."

Contact: 609-272-7219

mpost@pressofac.com

Twitter @MichelleBPost



Democrats call on Trump, Van Drew to reimburse Wildwood for rally



Trump praises Van Drew in Wildwood campaign rally



+2

Kennedy releases new TV ad; Harrison endorsed by AFT NJ arm



Last GOP challenger to Van Drew hits back on rally day



Richter exits 2nd District race, will run for Congress in 3rd



The latest on the 2nd District Congressional race



More than a rally: Wildwood Trump event cements Van Drew support



Martin Luther King III to visit Atlantic City school, Wildwood protest



Local 54 endorses Democrat Brigid Harrison for Congress



Fitzherbert drops out of Van Drew race, Richter may switch districts

Michelle Brunetti Post

Staff Writer

In my first job after college got paid to read the New York Times and summarize articles for an early online data base. First reporting job was with The Daily Record in Parsippany. I have also worked in nonprofits, and have been with The Press since 1990.