

## Democrats Lead GOP Challengers in 1<sup>st</sup> Legislative District

Economy, taxes and state budget are top issues

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**GALLOWAY, N.J.** - Incumbent Democratic state legislators lead their Republican challengers in the state Senate and Assembly elections in the 1<sup>st</sup> Legislative District, according to a Stockton University Poll released today.

In the Senate race, incumbent Democrat Jeff Van Drew holds a commanding 33-point lead over Republican Mary Gruccio. Including voters who lean toward one candidate or the other, Van Drew leads with 61 percent to 28 percent for Gruccio, with 11 percent undecided or preferring neither major-party candidate.

Van Drew, a former Cape May County freeholder and assemblyman who joined the Senate in 2008, enjoys favorable ratings from 65 percent of poll respondents with only 22 percent unfamiliar with him. Gruccio, the Vineland schools superintendent, is largely unknown throughout the district, which covers all of Cape May County, much of Cumberland County and a small part of rural Atlantic County. She is unfamiliar to 63 percent, according to the poll of 430 likely 1<sup>st</sup> Legislative District voters.

The race for two state Assembly seats is closer but still tilted toward the Democratic incumbents. Assemblyman Rob Andrzejczak (pronounced Andrew-zack) leads with 32 percent, followed by Assemblyman Bruce Land at 26 percent. Republican Jim Sauro garners 19 percent, and GOP running mate Robert Campbell receives 18 percent, with 5 percent undecided or not expressing a preference.

The Stockton Polling Institute of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University called landline and cell phones to interview 430 likely 1<sup>st</sup> Legislative District voters from Sept. 13-18, 2017. The poll's margin of error is +/- 4.7 percentage points.

None of the Assembly candidates enjoys strong name recognition. Andrzejczak is viewed favorably by 46 percent, the same percentage who say they are not familiar with him. He is the best known of the four. Two-thirds (67 percent) are unfamiliar with Land, close to the 69 percent not familiar with Jim Sauro, a Cumberland County freeholder. Robert Campbell, a businessman and mayor of Downe Township, is unfamiliar to 84 percent of poll respondents.

Sharon Schulman, the Hughes Center's Executive Director, said that having a well-known veteran legislator like Van Drew at the top of their ticket could help his lesser-known Democratic running mates.

However, only 57 percent in the district say they have been following the election somewhat or very closely, noted John Froomjian, who manages the Polling Institute. He said strong get-out-the-vote efforts are extremely important if voter turnout is not high.

District voters favor Democrat Phil Murphy for governor over Republican Lt. Gov. Kim Guadagno 47 percent to 36 percent, with 8 percent preferring an independent or third-party candidate and 10 percent undercided.

The economy, taxes and state budget issues dominate when respondents are asked to name their top issue in the state elections. One in five cite property taxes (16 percent) or education funding (4 percent) as their priority. Fourteen percent identify taxes in general, with another 5 percent citing the state income tax. State pensions and benefits are named by 7 percent and the state budget by 3 percent. Five percent say the economy is their top issue, and 4 percent cite jobs. Combined, these tax, economic and budgetary issues represent 57 percent of all responses.

Meanwhile, the district's likely voters give higher job performance ratings to President Donald Trump than to Gov. Chris Christie, who is rated as excellent or good by 16 percent and fair or poor by 83 percent. Trump, who won 2016 presidential voting in Cape May County and tied in the First District's Cumberland County towns, receives positive ratings of 37 percent and fair or poor by 61 percent.

Also, district voters support a proposed constitutional amendment to dedicate pollution case settlements to environmental cleanup or protection by an 83-13 percent margin. A smaller margin of 51-44 percent favor a ballot question to borrow \$125 million for library construction.

See full poll results at: <https://stockton.edu/hughes-center/polling/polling-results-2017.html>

## **Methodology**

The poll was conducted by the Stockton Polling Institute of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy. Live interviewers on the Stockton University campus called both landlines and cell phones from Sept. 13-18, 2017. The poll was conducted with 430 adults who are likely voters in New Jersey's 1<sup>st</sup> Legislative District. The poll's margin of error is +/- 4.7 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence level. MOE is higher for subsets. Data are weighted based on United States Census Bureau demographics for the 1<sup>st</sup> District population.

### **About the Hughes Center**

The William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy ([www.stockton.edu/hughescenter](http://www.stockton.edu/hughescenter)) at Stockton University serves as a catalyst for research, analysis and innovative policy solutions on the economic, social and cultural issues facing New Jersey, and promotes the civic life of New Jersey through engagement, education and research. The center is named for William J. Hughes, whose distinguished career includes service in the U.S. House of Representatives, Ambassador to Panama and as a Distinguished Visiting Professor at Stockton. The Hughes Center can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/StocktonHughesCenter> and can be followed on Twitter @hughescenter.

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