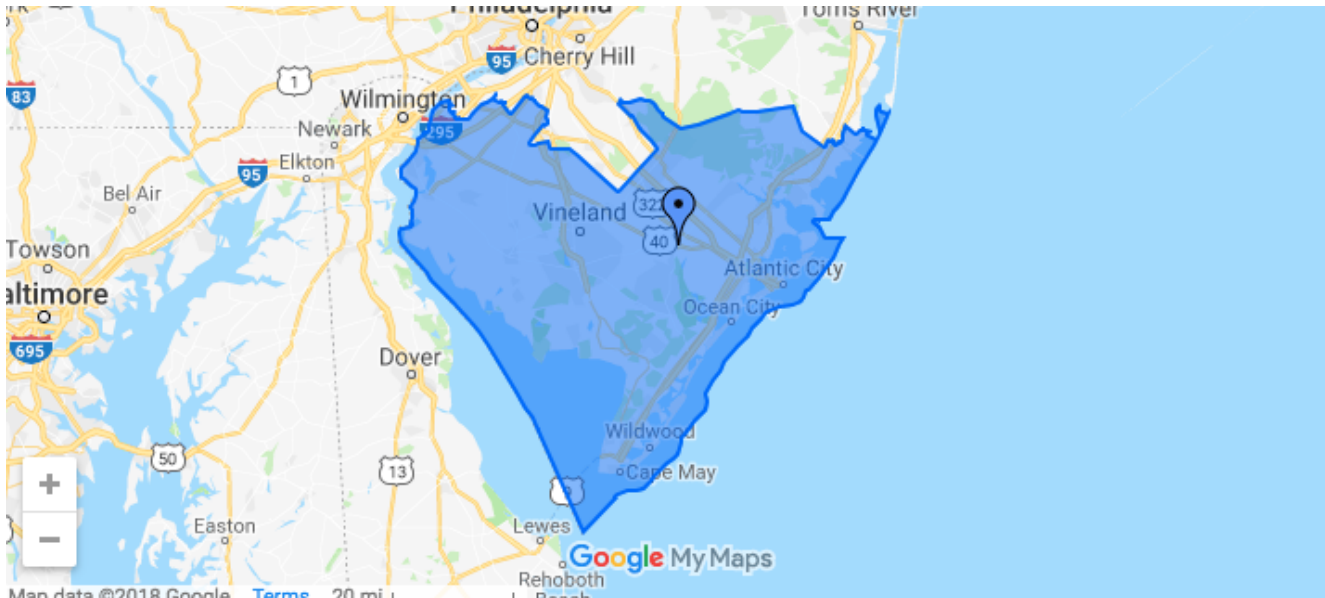




ELECTION 2018

## New Jersey congressional district that voted for Trump likely to go Democratic

By [Bill Barlow](#) · November 2, 2018



New Jersey's 2nd Congressional District is up for grabs on Tuesday. Incumbent Republican Congressman Frank LoBiondo is not seeking reelection. (Google Maps)

With Democrats hoping to take control of the House of Representatives this midterm election, one South Jersey district looks almost certain to flip from Republican to Democrat on Tuesday.

If it does flip, it won't be viewed as an upset because this contest is over an open seat.

U.S. Rep. Frank LoBiondo, a Republican, decided after 12 terms and 24 years in Congress, it was time to call it quits.

The Democratic candidate, state Sen. Jeff Van Drew, has long been eyed as a likely congressional candidate, but he held off until the seat opened up. In the spring, the self-described moderate bested primary challenges from his left by a comfortable margin.

Republican candidate Seth Grossman, a former Atlantic County freeholder, has been dogged by accusations of racism since his win in a crowded GOP primary field. In fact, the National Republican Campaign Committee ended its support of Grossman in July, saying bigotry has no place in society or the House of Representatives.

In the primary, Grossman campaigned on his unabashed support of President Donald Trump, arguing that the president needs strong allies in Congress to help with his agenda. That message resonated with primary voters, and Grossman has continued

touting his affinity for Trump in the general election campaign. But polls indicate that many of Trump's positions are now unpopular in the district.

Grossman has tried to connect Van Drew with unpopular Democrats on the national scene. In Washington, he said, Van Drew will caucus with the Democrats "and put Nancy Pelosi and Maxine Waters and Adam Schiff and all those radical Democrats into key committee positions, who will obstruct and resist and impeach President Trump."

Van Drew, who has said he will not support Pelosi for House Speaker, has cultivated a reputation for bipartisanship throughout a political career that began as mayor of rural Dennis Township. He went on to become one of the few Democrats ever elected to the Cape May County board of freeholders, a GOP stronghold. Later, he worked his way from the state Assembly to the Senate, changing the makeup of his district's representation from entirely Republican to entirely Democratic in the process.

"I think there's something to be said for compromise," he said. A Second Amendment supporter who has also backed abortion rights, Van Drew described himself as a moderate Democrat — though some see him as a conservative.

Van Drew said voters are tired of no holds-barred partisanship.

"We can do so much better than this in America, the name calling, and the demeaning, the lack of tolerance, the constant litmus tests on both sides," he said.

A recent Stockton University poll puts Van Drew 17 points ahead of Grossman. Not surprisingly, Grossman said he distrusts those polls. "In my opinion, it's a very close race," he said.

#### The district

Voters in New Jersey's 2nd Congressional District backed Trump in the 2016 presidential election. But its voters also supported Barack Obama twice and they have toggled back and forth between Republicans and Democrats through the years.

"What helped Frank LoBiondo coming up, and I think what's helping Jeff Van Drew looking to replace him in Congress, is having served in the state legislature first," said Michael Klein, the interim executive director of the Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton. "I think that the idea of getting name recognition, of being a known entity, people getting to know the candidate and know their position, goes a long way."

Building name recognition across such a wide area can be difficult, said Klein.

"It's a lot of shoe leather," he said. Going back to the primaries, Van Drew has been ubiquitous, Klein said. "He's in diners, he's at shopping malls. He's going to show up at your local chamber of commerce. He's very recognizable."

Grossman has gotten his voice out there as well, Klein said, but Van Drew has the advantage.

Money has played a big part in the race. Van Drew is far ahead in fundraising, according to a recent report showing him with \$1.6 million. A Federal Election Commission report shows Grossman with less than a quarter of that, raising \$240,000.

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