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South Jersey saw overwhelming turnout for 2018 midterms

DAVID DANZIS Staff Writer Nov 7, 2018



U.S. Rep.-elect Jeff Van Drew gave his victory speech at 10:30 p.m. Tuesday at The Claridge Hotel in Atlantic City. 'Thank you South Jersey!' he tweeted at 10:01 p.m. upon declaring victory over Republican Seth Grossman.

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Although his name was not on the ballot, President Donald Trump helped drive increased voter turnout in South Jersey for the 2018 midterm election.

In Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland and Ocean counties, Election Day turnout increased by at least 5 percent and, in some cases, went up by double digits compared to the 2014 midterms.

In the 2nd Congressional District, which includes all of Atlantic, Cape May and Cumberland counties as well as portions of Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, Ocean and Salem counties, the number of voters who showed up to the polls increased by nearly 10 percent compared to four years ago.

John Froonjian, senior researcher at the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University, said several factors could have contributed to an increase in voter turnout, but without exit polling they were difficult to identify.

However, Froomjian said, the most obvious was the electorate's feelings about the occupant of the White House.

"Midterm elections are almost always a report card on the president," he said. "This year's turnout was almost all related to Donald Trump and opposition to him and a GOP majority or support of the president and his policies."

"Every vote matters," Tom Smith, 67, of Galloway, said Tuesday. "I've seen elections that were decided by 10 votes. Every vote matters."

Voter turnout in Atlantic County was 45 percent this year compared with 38 percent in 2014. In Cape May County, turnout increased from 46 percent four years ago to 58 percent, while the 12 percentage-point increase was similar in Cumberland County, where 45 percent of registered voters went to the polls.

GALLERY: Congressman-Elect Jeff Van Drew Wins

Congressman-Elect Jeff Van Drew wins during ElectionDay2018 night at the Claridge AC. Nov. 6, 2018, (Craig Matthews / Staff Photographer)

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Ocean County had the largest increases in South Jersey in both the number of actual voters (80,163) who went to the polls this year and percentage of registered voters (17 percentage points) compared to 2014.

Sarah Azegzan accompanied her mother, Bouchra Lkniksi, both of Egg Harbor Township, to the polls Tuesday morning. At 17 years old, Azegzan isn't eligible to vote yet, but she's looking forward to it.

"A few years ago, there weren't as many young people who voted," she said. "I'm going to come out and vote like a proud woman, and get that sticker."

Voters in South Jersey ultimately contributed to the so-called "Blue Wave" that allowed Democrats to take control of the House of Representatives for the first time since 2011. Three congressional districts in New Jersey — the 2nd, 7th and 11th — flipped from Republican-held seats to Democrats.

At least 10 of New Jersey's 12 congressional districts will be represented by Democrats beginning in January. Democrat Andy Kim declared victory in the 3rd District Wednesday night, but incumbent Tom MacArthur did not concede.

Voter turnout in the 2nd District — where Democrat Jeff Van Drew defeated Republican Seth Grossman — increased from 38 percent four years ago to 47 percent in 2018.

Froonjian said the tighter-than-predicted result of the congressional race was due to increased voter turnout in areas more favorable to Republicans.

"It appears there was strong Republican turnout on Election Day that made the 2nd Congressional District race closer than expected," said Froonjian. "Turnout based on votes cast in the congressional election was high in Republican-leaning counties such as Cape May and Ocean and areas where Grossman performed well, including Salem and Gloucester."

Meanwhile, he said, in counties where Van Drew won big, turnout was significantly lower, such as Atlantic and Cumberland.

"Higher turnout in those counties would have likely run up Van Drew's victory margin," Froonjian concluded.

Voting figures for 2018 are unofficial until certified by the Board of Elections.

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