

Shelley Adler announces candidacy for 3rd District seat

By David Levinsky Staff writer | Posted: Tuesday, January 31, 2012 5:00 am

Shelley Adler, the widow of former U.S. Rep. John Adler, announced Monday that she intends to run for the 3rd Congressional District seat her husband held.

Adler said she would run as a Democrat for the largely Burlington County seat. She is in the process of putting together a campaign organization and plans to file the required Federal Election Commission paperwork later this week.

A formal campaign kickoff is expected sometime next month, she said.

An attorney and former Cherry Hill councilwoman, Adler said she hopes to continue the service of her husband, who died unexpectedly last April at age 51 from complications related to an infection around his heart.

John Adler served in the state Legislature for 16 years and represented the 3rd District in the U.S. House of Representatives for one term. He was unseated in 2010 by Republican Jon Runyan.

"For several months, I weighed running for the seat formerly held by my late husband to continue his legacy of public service. When I speak to people, they share their struggles with me and are frustrated by politicians playing games in Washington. They want a new direction," Adler said in a statement.

"In Congress, I will fight to create new jobs and to restore accountability by rooting out wasteful spending. I will also push for tax incentives to help small businesses create jobs in new industries, to improve benefits for our veterans, and to preserve benefits for our seniors," she said.

Adler's announcement makes her the front-runner to secure the Democratic nomination to run against Runyan, the likely Republican nominee.

Runyan, a former Philadelphia Eagles lineman from Mount Laurel, said Monday that he looked forward to a spirited contest this year.

"I welcome Mrs. Adler into the race," he said Monday afternoon. "If she is ultimately the Democratic nominee, I look forward to a spirited campaign on the issues that matter to the residents of Burlington and Ocean counties."

"I intend to run on my record of standing up to President Obama's failed big-government agenda, fighting to restore fiscal responsibility and implement pro-growth economic policies that create jobs and opportunity for all Americans, preserving and strengthening Medicare for current and future generations, and strongly supporting our veterans, active military and the operations at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst," Runyan said.

Adler promised a campaign that would focus on many of the same issues her husband championed.

"My pledge is to fight for middle-class tax cuts and protect Social Security and Medicare," she said. "Politicians in Washington need to end the practice of giving tax breaks to billionaires and big corporations, and creating billions of dollars in subsidies for big oil at the expense of middle-class families and seniors."

Adler lives with her four sons in Cherry Hill, but she intends to move to Burlington County to represent the district, said Michael Muller, a Democratic spokesman for her campaign.

Cherry Hill previously was part of the 3rd District, but the traditional Democratic stronghold was moved by the New Jersey Congressional Redistricting Commission to the 1st District, which is represented by Democrat Rob Andrews.

Federal election laws do not require candidates to live in the district they represent prior to being sworn in to office.

Although Adler's candidacy in the district is legal, Chris Russell, a campaign consultant and frequent spokesman for Runyan, still compared her to former Olympian Carl Lewis, whose bid to run for the state Senate last year was cut short when a federal court ruled he did not meet New Jersey's four-year residency requirement.

"After the Carl Lewis fiasco and the public backlash toward him, you would think candidates would be more wary of seeking elected office in a district that they don't actually live in," Russell said.

In addition to Cherry Hill, the 3rd District lost Long Beach Island and other towns in southern Ocean County when the redistricting commission redrew the state's congressional boundaries.

The district did pick up Burlington County towns, including Riverton, Shamong and all of the northern section. It also added Brick and Mantoloking to its already large Ocean County territory.

The redistricting changes appear to make the traditionally Republican 3rd District even tougher for a Democrat.

John Adler was the first Democrat to represent the district in more than a century when he narrowly won the seat in 2008 over Republican Chris Myers. Another close battle followed in 2010, when Runyan narrowly beat Adler to take back the seat for the Republicans.

Daniel Douglas, director of the Hughes Center for Public Policy at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, said Shelley Adler's entry likely would make the 3rd District a hot race again.

"A lot will depend on how (Obama) runs in the district, but the Adler name still has a lot of positive connotations in the district. So she's not starting from scratch," Douglas said. "The name recognition from her husband and her own political career gives her a fighting chance, even with the district's changes."

Adler also will have the backing of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, which pledged to support her bid against Runyan.

"Shelley Adler promises to be a strong independent voice for New Jersey by working to protect Medicare and Social Security and fighting for middle-class tax cuts. Congressman Jon Runyan has quickly built an extreme record of ending Medicare while protecting tax breaks for billionaires and big oil, so the contrast between the two couldn't be more clear," said Josh Schwerin, regional press secretary for the Democratic committee.

In August, Adler and her family established a memorial fund in her husband's honor at Harvard University to help fund research related to veterans' affairs and policies.