

Runyan and Adler campaigns continue to battle for voters

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Six weeks remain before Election Day, and the two major campaigns fighting it out in New Jersey's 3rd Congressional District continue to try to sway voters.

On Tuesday, Democratic challenger Shelley Adler released her second football-themed television commercial attacking incumbent Republican Jon Runyan, this one for his votes on House budget proposals that she claims favor the wealthiest Americans and corporations that outsource jobs overseas.

The ad features the same helmet-clad figure who blocked and tackled senior citizens in an earlier campaign commercial, only this time he smashes into office workers and douses a family with a bucket of ice water.

"Congressman Runyan is not on the side of middle-class families, and his record has failed Americans struggling to make ends meet during these tough economic times," Adler said about the spot. "His reckless agenda would actually encourage American businesses to ship jobs overseas by providing tax incentives when large corporations outsource our jobs."

Runyan's campaign responded by releasing part of an internal poll that puts the former Philadelphia Eagles lineman a whopping 17 points ahead among likely voters.

The poll by McLaughlin & Associates is based on a telephone survey of 400 likely voters randomly selected from the 3rd District, which includes almost all of Burlington County and most of northern Ocean County. It found that 51 percent favored Runyan, compared with 34 percent for Adler and 16 percent undecided.

The poll gave Runyan an 80-8 percent lead among Republicans and a 47-30 percent edge among independents. Adler led among Democrats polled, 68 percent to 23 percent.

The surveys were conducted Sept. 17 and 18 and have a margin of error of 4.9 percent, according to a McLaughlin memo released by Runyan's campaign.

Runyan spokesman Chris Russell said the poll demonstrates that Adler's attack ads are backfiring and that Democratic Party leaders no longer consider the race to be among their top contests. He pointed to a Sept. 4 National Journal interview with Nancy Pelosi in which the House minority leader said the party expects to win back control of the House by taking Republican seats in Arizona, California, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Maryland, Nevada, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas and Washington.

Pelosi did not mention New Jersey, where Adler's challenge is forecast to be the most competitive congressional contest.

"When the Democrats' biggest cheerleader publicly admits that New Jersey's 3rd Congressional District isn't even on the radar screen of national Democrats, it says a lot about how badly things are going for the Adler campaign," Russell said in a statement that accompanied the McLaughlin memo. "Shelley Adler's negative ads are backfiring, while Jon Runyan's record of reaching across party lines is resonating with Republicans, Democrats and independents in Burlington and Ocean counties. The solid 51-34 lead in our latest internal polling makes that very clear."

Russell credited Runyan's support among organized labor groups for the poll's finding that 23 percent of

Democrats favor the Republican incumbent.

The Republicans' internal poll was taken after Adler's campaign released its first attack ad and the same day that Runyan's campaign launched its own ad criticizing Adler for voting in support of budgets that hiked property taxes during her four years as a Cherry Hill councilwoman.

"The more the people of Burlington and Ocean counties learn about Shelley Adler's record of repeatedly voting to increase property taxes, including a 65 percent increase in just one year, to fund out-of-control government spending in Camden County, her campaign will completely collapse," Russell said.

Adler spokesman Michael Muller called the Republican poll "laughable" and said its release raises red flags about Runyan's campaign.

"Frankly, it reads like a work of fiction," Muller said, noting that the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee has designated Adler among 53 top Democratic challengers that it intends to support through Election Day.

The release of internal polling data is a fairly common practice in both parties, but the information is typically viewed with skepticism by political watchers.

Two years ago, the campaign of Adler's late husband, Rep. John Adler, released an internal poll in July that gave the Democratic incumbent a 17-point lead over Runyan in a three-way contest that included independent Peter DeStefano of Mount Laurel.

Runyan wound up winning.

Earlier this summer, the campaign of Republican U.S. Senate candidate Joe Kyrillos also released an internal poll that put him within four percentage points of Democratic incumbent Robert Menendez. But an independent poll released the next day gave the Democrat a 10-point advantage.

No independent poll for the Runyan-Adler race has been released so far, but at least one is expected this fall by the newly formed Stockton Polling Institute at the Hughes Center for Public Policy at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey.

So far, the two candidates also have agreed to face-off during two debates scheduled for Oct. 11.

The first will be taped in Philadelphia on the set of the Comcast Cable Network show "Larry Kane: Voice of Reason," with the veteran news anchor acting as moderator.

The second debate will be hosted by the Burlington County Chamber of Commerce at the Hotel ML on Route 73 in Mount Laurel. Tickets are \$30 for members and \$40 for nonmembers and walk-ins.