



## N.J. congressional races could help determine control of House

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By **Jarrett Renshaw/Statehouse Bureau**

**TRENTON** —The swivel chair seemed to be losing the battle to contain John Runyan's 6-foot-7-inch frame as he compared playing offensive lineman in the National Football League with life as a freshman congressman.

Since riding a flush of Tea Party support, and **upsetting** Rep. John Adler, the Democratic incumbent, in 2009, Runyan has kept a low profile in Washington with positions on the veteran and military affairs committees — neither one a hotbed of partisan wrangling — and focusing on bread-and-butter constituent services.



File photos

John Runyan, 38, and Shelley Adler, 52 are shown in these file photos.

"Just like my last career," the 38-year-old Runyan said in a recent interview at his makeshift campaign office, in a strip mall in Evesham Township. "I am a work horse."

His opponent in the general election, Shelly Adler, 52, says Runyan's low-key presence belies his conservative agenda, and one that is out of step with the moderate district that straddles Burlington and Ocean counties.

"He agrees with Paul Ryan's vision for America, and that's not something residents of the 3rd District want," said Adler, whose 51-year-old husband, John, a veteran state legislator, **died unexpectedly in April 2011** after undergoing heart surgery.

The showdown in New Jersey's 3rd District is among 12 congressional races this November and the first election since party leaders hammered out new district maps last December. Republicans won the once-a-decade battle, tilting two swing districts their way and shielding incumbents — and forcing a bitter primary battle between two Democratic veterans.

The race between Runyan and Adler is one national Democrats had their eye on in the hope of picking up 25 seats and retaking control of the House. The congressional campaign committees in both parties have lent financial support, although Republicans scaled back spending last week in a sign that they were confident of a Runyan victory.

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The Stockton Polling Institute said last week Runyan was leading Adler among likely voters 49-39 percent.

The 3rd District, which stretches from the Philadelphia suburbs to the Jersey Shore, is a classic swing district that now tilts Republican since Democrat-leaning Cherry Hill was replaced in redistricting by Brick Township, a Republican stronghold.

Adler lives in Cherry Hill, about a mile and a half outside the new district and Runyan has made it an issue, saying she is out of touch with it.

"He can make the argument all he wants," said Adler, a lawyer and mother of four boys. "When he's a single mom, he can worry about moving a family."

The district is also one of the grayest in the country, and Medicare is a central issue in the race. While Adler, 52, has played down its problems, saying they are years away and require only "minor fixes," Runyan and his fellow Republicans support a plan of Rep. Paul Ryan of Wisconsin, the Republican vice presidential candidate, to make Medicare a voucher program.

Adler says the Ryan plan would cost recipients an additional \$6,400 in out-of-pocket expenses. For his part, Runyan, an all-pro lineman who played for the Philadelphia Eagles for eight years, said Adler "has a lack of ideas."

"All she can do is say Jon Runyan is going to pull the rug out from seniors, and that's just not the case," he said.

The 12 incumbents have raised a total \$13.39 million since June 30, while their major challengers have scraped together just \$1.63 million, according to reports filed with the Federal Election Commission. Six of the challengers have yet to report raising a single dollar, and two others have collected a total of less than \$5,000.

"I don't think we're going to see a lot of surprises," Ross Baker, a political science professor at Rutgers University and an expert on congressional affairs, said.

While the 3rd District race seems less competitive, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee recently upgraded the race in which Urpenda Chivukula is challenging U.S. Rep. Leonard Lance, the Republican incumbent, to an "emerging campaign."



Chivukula, 61, an electrical engineer who migrated from India in 1974 to attend college, has raised \$442,992 since entering the race in April, about half as much as his competitor.

He says Lance, who is serving his second term, has drifted to the right since leaving the state Legislature and is out of touch with his district. He cited Lance's vote against the Affordable Care Act, his opposition to gay marriage, his support for converting Medicaid



Star-Ledger file  
photo

Republican Leonard Lance is running against Democratic challenger Upendra Chivukula to represent New Jersey's 7th district

into a block grant program and his willingness to allow states to cut programs for the poor.

"One wonders if he really represents the district or has he gone out on his own," Chivukula said in an interview.

It may be Chivukula who is out of step with the new district. In 2008, Obama won the 7th District with 51 percent of the votes, but he would have lost in the newly configured district — a large, affluent region that embraces parts of Essex, Hunterdon, Morris, Somerset, Union and Warren counties — according to figures provided by the Lance

campaign.

"I am confident that my views represent the district that I serve," Lance said in a recent interview. "I've always been a fiscal conservative."

As a state senator, Lance said he opposed former Gov. Christie Whitman's pension borrowing and successfully sued former Gov. James McGreevey for taking loans to cover routine state costs.

"That's the difference between myself and Mr. Chivukula," Lance said, noting that his challenger also voted against a landmark bill last year that forced public employees to pay more for their health and pension benefits.

To help balance the federal budget, an issue over which Democrats and Republicans are deeply divided in Washington, Lance supports eliminating tax deductions for the wealthy, including mortgage interest write-offs on second homes. He also said Congress needs to look at agricultural subsidies.

He said lawmakers in both parties also need to look at controversial changes to Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid programs because they are financially unsustainable. Lance declined to say what his position was on same-sex marriage, adding he would "let my successors in the Statehouse decide that."

One of the biggest questions heading into the congressional election season was answered in June, when Rep. Bill Pascrell (D-9th) soundly defeated his one-time friend, Rep. Steve Rothman, in a bitter Democratic primary.

The redistricting commission was forced to reduce the state from 13 to 12 congressional districts because of the state's declining population. As a result, Rothman decided not to challenge U.S. Rep. Scott Garrett in the Republican-leaning 5th District.

"I am sure Rothman is second-guessing his decision," Brigid Harrison, a political science professor at Montclair State University, speculating that he could have knocked off Garrett in a presidential election year."

Instead of Rothman, Garrett is facing Adam Gussen, 39, deputy mayor of Teaneck, who has yet to report raising any



Star-Ledger file  
photo

Democratic challenger Upendra Chivukula says his opponent doesn't represent the views of the 7th district

money, making it difficult to present the case that Garrett's conservatism is out of step with the district.

"We are playing the cards we are dealt," Gussen said. "I would like for him to not have the money, but that's not the case. We don't have a penny to waste, so we have to be disciplined."

*Jarrett Renshaw: (609) 989-0379 or [jrenshaw@starledger.com](mailto:jrenshaw@starledger.com)*

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