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LoBiondo challenger Shober runs hard in tough district

November 01, 2012 | By Jacqueline L. Urgo, Inquirer Staff Writer

The sprawling Second Congressional District is New Jersey's largest geographically and perhaps its most varied politically.

In its glimmering beach towns, streets are lined with expensive real estate. But some of its inland hamlets exhibit the economic and environmental scars of a long-gone industrial age.

There are places within the district where Republicans outnumber Democrats by 2-1, and others that have been Democratic strongholds since the 19th century. There are 9,000 more registered Democrats than Republicans, but the two together are outnumbered by unaffiliated voters.

The campaigns of the two major-party candidates vying to represent the region in Congress reflect its have-and-have-not dichotomy:

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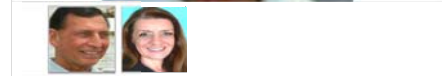
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Running for his 10th term is Republican U.S. Rep. Frank LoBiondo, 66, of Ventnor, a political powerhouse who this year has amassed \$1.4 million in campaign funds.

Lacking the largesse of LoBiondo's supporters, his closest competitor in the race - Democrat Cassandra Shober, 45 - has spent about 10 percent of what he has.

LoBiondo's longevity in the job is attributable in part to his cross-aisle appeal: He routinely garners the endorsements of both the National Rifle Association and the National Wildlife Federation.

In the House, he has served on high-profile panels, including the Armed Services and Transportation and Infrastructure Committees. He is also credited with helping retain key military installations in the region, such as the 177th Fighter Wing of the New Jersey Air National Guard and Coast Guard Training Center in Cape May.

LoBiondo's near-legendary fund-raising machine has kept the Democrats on their heels - some years not even financially backing a candidate.

He probably has a job in Congress as long as he wants one, according to John Weingart, associate director of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University.

But this year, even if she is still just a long shot, Shober, an exuberant political newcomer from Ventnor, is giving LoBiondo a bit of a run for his money. Though she has raised under \$60,000 and spent a meager \$47,500, she is cutting into LoBiondo's margins - at least a little bit.

Since he was first elected to Congress in 1994, LoBiondo has consistently garnered more than 60 percent of the popular vote.

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