

LoBiondo margin of victory not as big as congressman's previous landslides

By DEREK HARPER Staff Writer | Posted: Wednesday, November 7, 2012 6:58 pm

U.S. Rep. Frank LoBiondo won re-election to a 10th term in congress Tuesday with his smallest landslide ever, a margin apparently narrowed by President Obama's victory and his visit to the district following Hurricane Sandy.

The 66-year-old Republican got 156,835 votes to the 108,312 received by his 45-year-old Democratic challenger Cassandra Shober. The nearly 18 percentage point gap is a landslide, but it's hardly the thumpings the congressman delivered in 1998, 2000 or 2002, when he more than doubled his opponents' totals.

These results may change because state election officials extended mail-ballot deadlines and broadened the number of ways hurricane refugees could vote, including by fax and email. Few races are expected to change, but the issue remains open until later this month.

For now, LoBiondo's totals are about one percentage point narrower than in 2008, the congressman's next-closest race. That result came after redistricting that added the consistently Republican southern Ocean County to the 2nd District.

"I think you can attribute some of that to President Obama doing well in the state as well as the president being in the state so close to the election," said Daniel J. Douglas, the director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. Douglas added that LoBiondo's 59 percent to 41 percent margin may end up being smaller, but is still significant. "It may suggest that most voters are looking for bipartisan cooperation in the state," he said.

The president toured the region following the hurricane last week, viewing the damaged parts of the coast. Republican Gov. Chris Christie warmly greeted him on the ground in Brigantine.

The storm also put a temporary hold on campaigning, since Shober and LoBiondo, both Ventnor residents, had to seek refuge. Shober agreed that Obama had an impact on the race.

"With him coming down, it really gave a lot of people a lot of hope, and for a change South Jersey was really being taking care of," Shober said, crediting Christie and Obama for working together.

Obama ultimately won New Jersey by more than 560,000 votes, about 7 percent less than in 2008. Surging Democrats captured county and municipal seats around the state and region.

Douglas added that Shober had relatively little funding.

Shober, who has never held elective office, ran a barely funded campaign that included small-group meetings and jaunts around the 2,000-square-mile district. All but ignored by national Democratic organizations, her campaign had spent almost \$48,000 by Oct. 17, according to Federal Election Commission filings.

This is a fraction of LoBiondo's totals. his campaign spent \$1.1 million — more than 24 times as much as Shober's.

“Ms. Shober, with very little resources, tried to run a very active campaign, against all odds,” Douglas said. The time spent traveling around the district reduced the time she could spend with voters.

“If you connect all the Wawas together, it's still a long trip around the district,” he said.

LoBiondo's aide Jason Galanes pointed out LoBiondo won all eight South Jersey counties in the sprawling 2nd Congressional District.

Atlantic County, the largest county in the district, provided more than a third of the ballots cast. There, Obama and U.S. Sen. Bob Menendez, both Democrats, both won. So did LoBiondo.

“It demonstrates that he puts people first and not politics, and that is why I think you see a lot of cross-ticket voting,” Galanes said, saying the results did not show weakness getting out the vote.

But now Democrats are wondering what could have been.

“It's probably getting toward the time that if we had a better-funded campaign, the kind you see where they're boxing on TV, it could make quite a difference,” said Chuck Chiarello, a long-time Atlantic County Democrat who won a seat on the Buena Vista Township committee Tuesday.

“Had more resources become available,” Chiarello said, “it might even have been a tighter race.”

Shober on Wednesday said that more money would have been nice, but she said the campaign made efficient work with what it had and thanked the local donors who she said made up the bulk of contributions.

“We ran because we felt that there was a voice that was not being represented,” she said, adding “You haven't hear the last of me.”

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