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Published on *Hyphen Magazine* (<https://hyphenmagazine.com>)

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Franny Choi - November 2, 2018



Andy Kim is drawing on his South Jersey roots to appeal to voters, as his opponent Tom MacArthur faces ongoing criticism for his votes on health care and tax reform. (Photo courtesy of andykimforcongress.com.)

In the lead-up to the midterm elections, Hyphen is profiling a handful of Asian American candidates in key races. Be sure to catch up on our coverage of Texas's [Gina Ortiz Jones](#) [1] and Arizona's [Anita Malik](#) [2].

KEY PLATFORM STANCES:

- **Reform taxes to give permanent cuts to the middle class**
- **Expand affordable health care, including protections for people with preexisting conditions**
- **Hold monthly town hall meetings**

New Jersey's 3rd District is home to the Trump administration's biggest ally in the state's congressional delegation: Representative Tom MacArthur. MacArthur, who won his district by a 20-point landslide in [the last election](#) [3], worked with President Trump both to try to repeal the Affordable Care Act and to pass the GOP tax bill. Now, the Republican incumbent's track record on those issues may cost him his House seat — and Andy Kim, a former White House national security advisor, seems prepared to take his place.

Kim is running for elected office for the first time, but he's no stranger to national politics. He served as both a strategic advisor to General Petraeus in Afghanistan and as a counterterrorism advisor in the White House under President Obama. But his campaign is focusing less on foreign policy and more on the domestic issues that are dominating the midterm elections in districts across the country: taxes and health care.

The district, which spans communities along the shore and the Philadelphia suburbs, is split fairly evenly between two counties, one mostly Republican, one mostly Democrat. In his campaign, Kim has painted himself as a South Jersey boy through and through, talking to voters about family dinners at Friendly's and his love for the convenience store chain Wawa. He has also pledged to hold monthly in-person town hall meetings and not to accept money from corporate PACs.

"I grew up in New Jersey's Third District," he says on his [campaign website](#) [4]. "It's where I hit my first home run, earned my first paycheck and received an incredible public school education that helped me become a Rhodes Scholar, a national security advisor and a father of two trouble-making baby boys."

Cultivating a down-home boy image is an important strategy for Kim, a child of South Korean immigrants running in a largely white district. And it's been particularly crucial in the face of Republican opposition that has attempted to paint Kim as an out-of-touch outsider, drawing attention to the years he lived in Washington, D.C. and airing ads with less-than-subtle racial subtext.

One such [ad](#) [5], funded by the Republican super PAC Congressional Leadership Fund, ends with the tagline, "He's not one of us." More blatantly, the New Jersey Republican Party distributed campaign [mailers](#) [6] that read, "Something is real fishy about Andy Kim" — with text printed in a font called "Chop Suey." The flyer features an image of several dead fish displayed on ice.

In [an interview](#) [7] with the Philadelphia Enquirer, MacArthur has denied the racist nature of the ads, saying, "Now we're politicizing fonts? It's not a racist font, it's a font meant to stand out."

MacArthur called such criticism "race-baiting at its worst" and often brings up his two adoptive Asian American sons in his defense.

"Does he think he loves his Korean children more than I love mine?" he said, about Kim.

Kim, for his part, has focused his campaign on the issues of taxes and health care, both of which have been sources of controversy for MacArthur. The Republican representative received flack last year for being the only member of New Jersey's delegation to vote for the GOP's tax overhaul. The law has been a major issue among voters in New Jersey, where property taxes are high. According to the Tax Policy Center, the state has the highest percentage of households that will see a tax increase as a result of the new law.

MacArthur also received heavy criticism for his role in GOP efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act. He authored an [amendment](#) [8] to the American Health Care Act which became the crucial last piece that allowed the bill to pass in the House last year. The amendment, which would have allowed states to apply for waivers in order to alter coverage for people with preexisting conditions, drew serious ire from some of MacArthur's constituents.

Following the vote, [footage](#) [9] circulated on cable news networks of angry New Jerseyans confronting MacArthur at an hours-long town hall meeting. One constituent, Geoff Ginter, went viral for his fiery, 12 minute rebuke against MacArthur.

"You have been the biggest single threat to my family in the whole world," said Ginter, whose wife has cancer. "You are the reason I can't sleep."

Kim has appealed directly to these concerns, using clips from the town hall meeting in his campaign launch video. He is pledging to work to expand affordable health care, ensure coverage for people with preexisting conditions and lower costs of prescription drugs. His platform also heavily emphasizes economic reform, including tax cuts for the middle class and expansion of Social Security.

The most recent [polls](#) [8] suggest that the race will be neck-and-neck, which is significant given that Kim represents the first real challenge to MacArthur in years; the previous Democratic candidate raised a mere \$600 in campaign funds. The [Cook Political Report](#) [10] calls the race a toss-up, despite Trump's winning the district by 6 points in 2016.

"In a race this close, whoever does a better job of turning out their voters will have a big advantage," said Michael W. Klein, interim executive director of the Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University. Given the closeness of the race, both campaigns are sure to be hitting the streets hard in these final days before Tuesday's election.

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 - [8] https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/politics/wp/2017/04/27/this-amendment-could-revive-the-gop-effort-to-reform-health-care-here-is-its-potential-impact-explained/?utm_term=.451697f3e6cb
 - [9] <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2017/05/13/n-j-rep-tom-macarthur-faces-angry-town-hall-over-health-care/321197001/>
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