

Dems hold lead in 1st District; most unfamiliar with candidates

JOHN DeROSIER Staff Writer Sep 22, 2017



NJ State Assemblyman Bob Andrzejczak (D) speaks at the annual Pearl Harbor Day remembrance service in North Wildwood. NJ State Senator Jeff Van Drew (D) is in the back. Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 5941 North Wildwood, held its annual remembrance service for Pearl Harbor Day along Hereford Inlet at St. Demetrios Church. It is the 75th anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack and the 25th consecutive year North Wildwood has held the ceremony. Wednesday Dec. 7, 2016. (Dale Gerhard / Staff Photographer)

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Incumbent Democrats in New Jersey's 1st Legislative District hold commanding leads over their Republican challengers less than two months before Election Day, according to a new poll from the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University.

The 1st Legislative District covers all of Cape May County, most of Cumberland County, and Corbin City, Estell Manor and Weymouth Township in Atlantic County.

Sen. Jeff Van Drew holds a 33-point lead over Republican Mary Gruccio, 61 percent to 28 percent, with 11 percent of the electorate undecided.

Gruccio, who is superintendent of the Vineland School District, has struggled with name recognition, according to the poll. More than 60 percent of the electorate polled said they don't know much about her.

Only 22 percent of the people polled were unfamiliar with Van Drew, and 65 percent had favorable views of him, according to the poll.

The Assembly races are closer in the poll, but much of that is due to the fact that people are unfamiliar with the candidates, including the two incumbents.

Democratic incumbents Bob Andrzejczak and Bruce Land led with 32 percent and 26 percent of the poll, respectively. Republicans Jim Sauro and Robert Campbell had 19 percent and 18 percent, respectively. The two candidates who get the most votes overall will be elected to the Assembly.

All four candidates, however, struggle with name recognition, according to the poll. Two-thirds of those polled were unfamiliar with Land. Nearly half of them were unfamiliar with Andrzejczak.

The Republicans are even less known. Nearly 70 percent of the people polled didn't know Sauro, who is a Cumberland County freeholder. More than 80 percent were unfamiliar with Campbell, who is a businessman in Downe Township.

Sharon Schulman, the Hughes Center's executive director, said in a statement that having a well-known veteran legislator such as Van Drew at the top of their ticket could help his lesser-known Democratic running mates. Van Drew is a former Cape May County freeholder and assemblyman who joined the Senate in 2008.

Voters in the district said the top issues heading into the election are the economy, taxes and state budget issues, which include school funding and pension payments.

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