



Andrews Appears Certain to Win Election to 12th Term in Congress

In heavily Democratic 1st District, ethics questions deemed unlikely to dampen enthusiasm for longtime incumbent

By **Tara Nurin**, October 9, 2012 in **More Issues**



Rep. Rob Andrews

Facing investigations by the Federal Elections Commission and the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Ethics over allegations he improperly spent campaign funds for personal use, Rep. Rob Andrews, D-1st, is being forced to divert part of his attention in the weeks leading up to Election Day to defending his actions instead of campaigning.

Yet though the controversy has cost him at minimum the more than \$30,000 he voluntarily repaid to his campaign fund and political action committee, political observers feel certain the ethics charges will not cost the overwhelmingly popular Democrat **election to his 12th term** in his solidly "blue" South Jersey district, even though he faces three opponents.

"The allegations haven't turned into specific charges. It's not a big issue (for voters) right now," said Daniel Douglas, director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. In late August, the House ethics commnO1(e et3d37.37(,2-10.1(753T J-/-)9 c)- 2(g)501(753T14c)- (l)g)7.7s7.4 TJ0 -1.188 any wrongdoing and asserts that he would not have known the groom whose wedding he attended in Scotland were it not for the groom's volunteer work on behalf of his campaign.

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In a statement released last month in response to the ethics office's findings, Andrews asserted, "As the Committee continues its review, the record will show that I have followed all rules and met all standards of the House." He previously said no taxpayer money was used for the trip.

"I followed every law and disclosed every dollar," Andrews told NJ Spotlight before the primary election last June.



Greg Horton

But that's not keeping his opponents from wielding the controversy as a weapon against him. In a statement released just after the ethics committee's decision, **Republican challenger Greg Horton**, a flat-tax proponent from Haddonfield, said Andrews' decision-making demonstrates an overall disconnect in Washington that cries for more responsible leadership.

"Rob Andrews has become the poster child of what is wrong with Washington, D.C., and the out-of-touch politicians that habitually fail to rein our ever-expanding government," wrote Horton, who did not respond to requests for an interview. Andrews' two independent challengers, Reform Party candidate Margaret Chapman and Green Party candidate John Reitter, echoed the "out-of-touch" sentiment.

"I just feel our politicians have lost touch, and if they don't talk to the people, how can they represent the people?" said Chapman.

But John Weingart, associate director of Rutgers University's Eagleton Institute of Politics, said these arguments aren't likely to resonate with voters, who he said have a high threshold for dishonesty in their incumbent candidates and who vote primarily on issues and party allegiances versus character.

"The character of the candidate is a nice bonus," he explained. "They know when they vote they're not anointing someone for sainthood."

Where Andrews may feel the impact slightly, Weingart said, is in the overall vote count – a total that will dip if a small number of Democrats choose to protest his behavior by pulling the lever for an opponent or not voting for the congressional seat at all. But those numbers will be small and inconsequential, he said, compared with the number of voters who might punish Andrews if he one day chooses to run again for statewide office, as he did in 1997 and 2008.

A high school athletic director, Horton, 46, serves as a Camden County GOP Committee Member Co-Chair for Haddonfield. He ran unsuccessfully for state legislative office last year. He calls himself an "American Commoner" and supports term limits, limiting campaign contributions, tort reform and "freedom from a biased media," according to his website.

Chapman is a 56-year-old legal secretary from Pine Hill with an associate degree and a belief that "we're put on this earth to help people."

Reitter, 71, is a retired tour operator and spends so much time volunteering he's made it his profession. He is a self-described college dropout from Glassboro and a recent Democratic émigré who said he feels betrayed by President Obama's acceptance of lobbyists into his administration. Reitter is running under the Green Party banner with the message that his party advocates for issues that go far beyond the environmental platform on which it was founded.

"Even though I'm in the Green Party, I want people to know that it isn't just about hugging trees. It's about women's rights, workers' rights, and children's rights," he said.

As the only mainstream party opponent, Horton has greater resources than the other two challengers, though his fundraising trails far behind the incumbent's. As of June 30, Horton had raised less than \$3,000,

compared with Andrews' more than \$1 million. Neither of the third-party candidates had raised more than the \$5,000 FEC threshold for mandatory reporting, although Chapman maintains that she's doing more campaigning with her nearly nonexistent funds than is Horton with his thousands.

"A lot of his interaction has been with the Republican clubs," she said.

By contrast, she said, she's been trying to build name recognition by planting trees, speaking at organized functions and crisscrossing the district with the message that she's a populist, just a regular person.

"I'm not paid politician. I'm not supported by party bosses. I've had tax issues and health insurance scares. I've had to worry about my retirement and my investments just like everyone else in this district," said Chapman, who has run twice against Andrews as an independent.