

## **Can --- or will --- Obama help Adler?**

**By Carl Golden**

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With the overhaul of the nation's health insurance system now law, President Obama is off on a victory lap around the country to convince Americans that the performance of the fundamentally changed system will exceed the rhetoric used to win its approval and that those members of Congress who displayed the courage to vote for it should be rewarded with re-election.

The presidential tour fulfills his commitment to put his prestige on the line on behalf of those Democrats who feared that a vote for the health care package would damage their political futures but who were swayed by promises of campaign help, particularly financial.

It recognizes that the Administration fully appreciates the

Neither of those conditions exist this year and Adler will face an opponent --- retired Philadelphia Eagles player Jon Runyan --- who has name recognition, adequate campaign funds, and, though he faces primary opponents, the unified support of the party organizations in Burlington and Ocean counties, the bulk of the district.

If Adler --- an opponent of the signature accomplishment of the Obama presidency --- appeals to the White House for help, will his plea be answered?

He can make the case that he is, after all, a Democrat who could be relied upon to help advance the Obama agenda and that his opposition to the health care overhaul was dictated by the political realities of his district and the strong challenge anticipated from Runyan.

Conventional wisdom has it that the greatest opportunity to defeat an incumbent member of Congress occurs in his freshman year. After that, entrenchment sets in, campaign funding is more readily available, and organizational support strengthens.

While Runyan is an untested candidate, he'll benefit from a unified party and --- just as importantly --- from the historic trend that the party in power loses Congressional seats in midterm elections, and from Adler being caught up in the anti-Washington, anti-incumbent fervor sweeping the nation.

While Adler must decide whether to risk the President declining his call for help, he must also reach a political judgment about whether a presidential visit to his district would outweigh the perception that Obama is dropping in simply to rescue a dependable ally for the future, notwithstanding the Congressman's negative vote on health care.

It would play to Runyan's strong suit and enable him to characterize Adler as someone willing to blindly support the Obama agenda of bigger government, greater spending, and higher taxes, a message certain to resonate among district voters.

For the veteran Pallone, the call is an easy one. For Adler, not so much. Carl Golden served as press secretary to Govs. Kean and Whitman and is a senior contributing analyst with the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton College.

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