



POSSIBLE ETHICS ISSUE CLOUDS FORECAST FOR DEMOCRATS IN 1ST LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

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Democratic Sen. Jeff Van Drew

In the 1st Legislative District, Democratic Sen. Jeff Van Drew is running for reelection under the cloud of an ethics scandal he didn't cause and wasn't directly involved in. Republicans vying to unseat him and his two Democratic General Assembly running mates -- incumbents Nelson Albano and Bob Andrzejczak -- are trying to cast doubt on Van Drew's integrity because of his alliance with Albano, who is under investigation by the Joint Legislative Committee on Ethical Standards. Albano is accused of distorting the truth in an attempt to seek retribution against a state trooper who refused to let him out of a speeding ticket.

The Cape May County Regular Republican Organization, which supports Republican challengers Susan Adelizzi-Schmidt for Senate and Kristine Gabor and Sam Fiocchi for Assembly, has run attack ads against Van Drew because his name appears on the district letterhead Albano used to write a formal complaint about the officer to State Police Superintendent Col. Rick Fuentes.

Police video of the traffic stop shows Albano lied to the superintendent about the officer's conduct. The GOP also accuses Van Drew of misleading voters by placing a "dishonest" newspaper ad announcing that the ethics committee had declined to find wrongdoing by Albano when in fact, the committee had agreed to review the case and rule by January.

With polling numbers that place him ahead of his Republican opponent 58 percent to 29 percent, race watchers don't expect Van Drew to lose his seat. The signs are less clear for Albano and Andrzejczak, who are beating Gabor and Fiocchi by a margin of four-to-eight points.

"The Assembly seats are a little bit more of a mixed bag as to who's more vulnerable. They're pretty much within a margin of error [in polling], but all of them have relatively low name recognition. Less so Albano, but part of that is on the negative side," said Daniel Douglas, director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. "You don't want to be running with an allegation like that hanging around your neck."

Republicans in Trenton say they believe they have a strong chance of picking up seats in the 1st District.

But Democrats in this Republican-leaning district, which includes all of Cape May County and parts of Atlantic and Cumberland counties, do hold a distinct advantage in addition to their incumbency: money.

The Fund for Jobs, Growth and Security, a Washington, D.C., Super PAC that was founded earlier this year with big union money and is widely believed to be supported by powerful South Jersey democrats like Cooper University Health Care chairman George Norcross, is pouring unprecedented amounts of money into competitive districts. By October 9 the fund had spent \$2.57 million to lobby for candidates and ballot questions, with \$16,000 going to support District 1's incumbents during the primary campaign season.

Andrzejczak has never been tested in an election, having been appointed to his position after Milam abruptly resigned seven months ago.

Andrzejczak's appointment angered some fellow Democrats who complained that Van Drew and local party leaders had surprised them by announcing Andrzejczak's nomination minutes after Milam unexpectedly stepped down. Cumberland County Democratic Committee member Paul Sungenis threatened a lawsuit and quit the party in protest, causing Andrzejczak's backers to quickly withdraw their nomination and endorse