

Candidates: U.S. Congress Democrats District 1

With its predictable ending, a retired social studies teacher tries to change Camden County's 'boring' election story into a page-turner

By **Tara Nurin**, May 31, 2012 in

There's a reason why virtually nothing has been written about the Democratic primary in New Jersey's 1st Congressional District this year.

"This is one of the most boring districts in the state this election cycle," said David Wasserman, House editor of The Cook Political Report.

Boring, he says, because the race pits 21-year incumbent Rob Andrews against Francis X. Tenaglio, a retired teacher who last held public office in 1978.

Andrews is expected to have little trouble steamrolling Tenaglio in the June 5th primary in the heavily Democratic, Camden County-based district.

Backed by South Jersey's political establishment, Andrews had raised nearly \$800,000 as of May 16. Tenaglio, a former Philadelphia social studies teacher and one-term Pennsylvania Representative, is funding his campaign out of his own pocket. His campaign manager is his wife.

Despite his long odds, Tenaglio is earnest about his mission.



Francis Tenaglio

"My intention is to give Democrats a choice because the incumbent didn't have anyone running against him," said Tenaglio, whose sole endorsement has come from the Progressive Democrats of New Jersey.

It's not the first time the Haddon Township resident has brought challenge to power. In 2005, he ran against then-U.S. Sen. Jon Corzine in the Democratic gubernatorial primary out of frustration that, according to Tenaglio, Gov. James McGreevey had ignored his pleas for a meeting to discuss his proposal for a single-payer healthcare system.

His pluck did little to advance his cause. Not only did Corzine, once in office, continue his predecessor's dismissiveness, but also Tenaglio said, his campaign against the party-backed Corzine cost him any future relationship with the state's power-wielding Democrats.

"George Norcross has blacklisted me," accuses Tenaglio, who once held the top position in Chester, Pennsylvania's Democratic committee. "State Senator Jim Beach, when he was co-chairman of the Democratic committee in Camden County, told me I can't talk to any Democratic officials anymore. Every time I've ever tried to contact any Democrat I get no response."

Norcross replied via email, "I've never heard of this person," and Beach did not respond to a request for comment.

Tenaglio's accusation loosely reflects the one he levels against his current opponent.

"Andrews hasn't stood up for the Democratic agenda," he said, including him among mainstream Democratic members of Congress whom he charges with failing to properly defend against attacks from the political right. "They never once got up and said, 'This is what we want to do, here's how we're going to do it.'"

Andrews' record shows him to be a mainstream Democrat.



Rep. Rob Andrews

According to Opencongress.org, Andrews voted with his party 93 percent of the time in the current congressional session and enjoys strong support from organizations that champion human and abortion rights, education, the environment and labor.

His scores trend much lower -- or are more mixed -- from conservative groups and those working in the fields of energy policy, farming, taxes and government reform, and he's repeatedly received a failing lifetime achievement grade from the National Rifle Association. The National Journal's 2011 Liberal Composite Rating assigns him a score of 74 percent, which places him squarely in the ideological middle of his Democratic colleagues but makes him the third most liberal member of New Jersey's House delegation, behind only Rep Frank Pallone (D-6) and Rep. Rush Holt (D-12).

As a ranking member of the Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor and Pensions and a member of the Committee on Armed Services, Andrews maintains that his primary goal is to bring jobs to his constituents. He prioritizes funding for building and infrastructure projects that create the need for construction workers and tradesmen.

"Construction money is shown to ripple through the economy," he said. "Construction is the key to economic recovery."

On the national level, Andrews recently voted to extend the payroll tax cut and implement a cost of living adjustment for Social Security recipients. He also was behind a plan to speed up housing lenders' decisions on short sales, a move he says will help prevent foreclosures and spark growth in the housing market.

Locally, Andrews has most recently brought money back to his district through a number of grants and projects. He worked to channel federal funds

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to rehire the 20 remaining firefighters laid off in Camden last year. He helped save 900 jobs by lobbying to keep the U. S. Postal Service's South Jersey Processing and Distribution Center in Bellmawr open. He worked to land a new clean-fuel processing plant in West Deptford. He helped secure transportation dollars to repair and upgrade the Delair Bridge between Pennsauken and Philadelphia, which he says will create 1,700 construction jobs and 2,500 permanent jobs. And he lobbies for \$1.55 million to build affordable housing projects in Woolwich and Camden.

Political observers say these types of projects have made Andrews so popular with voters that he shouldn't suffer at the polls for the controversy caused by questionable spending of \$100,000 in campaign money. He reportedly used the money to pay a speeding ticket, host a graduation party at his home, donate to Philadelphia's Walnut Street Theatre, bring his family to a donor's wedding in Scotland, and travel to California on many dates that coincided with his daughter's music recording sessions in Los Angeles. The watchdog group Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington has filed a complaint with the Federal Elections Commission. Although the FEC has not yet issued a ruling, Andrews has reimbursed his campaign \$13,000 for the costs of the Scotland trip.

He denies his activities were illegal and asserts that no taxpayer money was used. "I followed every law and disclosed every dollar," Andrews said.

"I think that money should have been used only to run that campaign," Tenaglio said. "If there was money left over I would have given it to other Democrats to run their campaigns. That's a symptom of what kind of politician he is, what's most important in his life."

Still, political observers say the spending is not likely to hurt Andrews.

"The news stories about Andrews' spending, questioning some of his expenditures, certainly haven't helped him," said John Weingart, associate director of the Eagleton Institute for Politics at Rutgers University. "But I don't see that close to a magnitude to threaten his re-nomination and re-election."

Tara Nurin is a freelance journalist based on the Camden, NJ, waterfront. Since leaving a ten-year career as a TV news reporter, she's worked as a national columnist, city editor, features reporter, publicity director and documentary producer specializing in Philadelphia-area destination coverage, travel, craft beer and dining trends. The award-winning reporter has lived all over the world and is fluent in Spanish and French.