



PART 1: PA House – 10-of-20 Top Races to Watch

In the first of a two-part series, we take a dive into the top races in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. The current composition of the Pennsylvania House features a Republican majority of 109-93, with one vacant seat that will be filled on Election Day. Despite Republicans holding 109 seats, there are only 103 districts where Republicans have more registered voters than Democrats. At the same time, President Trump won the majority of votes in 119 PA State House districts in 2016.

As with the Republican led Senate, the House has been at odds with Governor Wolf over current COVID-19 restrictions. Despite some bi-partisan effort, the Republican-led House has been unable to put together a veto override to overrule the Governor, despite multiple bills originally passing the House with the needed votes. This theme has been reoccurring in the many campaign mailers, radio spots, and television/media ads that have filled mailboxes and flooded airwaves. While the top of the ticket will surely have an impact down-ballot, when it comes to issues, the PA House election seems to be a referendum on Wolf's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Democrats, however, are hoping to build upon slight gains made during the 2018 midterm elections. House Democrats need a net gain of nine seats in order to become the majority party, and with national polling in Pennsylvania currently favoring Democratic candidates at the top of the ticket, a trickledown effect into the down ballot races provides enthusiasm.

In numerical order, below are the first ten House races to watch heading into November 3:

District 18 – K.C. Tomlinson (R*) vs. Harold Hayes (D) (Registration: 38-R/48-D/14-I—2016: 53% Clinton)

Pennsylvania's 18th House District (Bucks County) features a rematch of the March 17 special election between Republican K.C. Tomlinson and Democrat Harold Hayes. After holding the seat since 1995, former Rep. Gene DiGiorlamo (R) resigned in January 2020 to serve as Bucks County Commissioner, resulting in a special election to fill the vacancy. Despite Democrats holding a ten-point registration advantage, Tomlinson won the seat by over ten points (55.2-44.8). In a presidential election year—which means increased voter turnout compared to a special election—Hayes will look to narrow this gap by utilizing the Democrat advantage in the district. In order to win reelection, Tomlinson seeks to build a coalition around the voters who first carried her to victory in March.

District 28 – Rob Mercuri (R) vs. Emily Skopov (D) (Registration: 47-R/37-D/16-I—2016: 52.5% Trump)

The lone vacant seat, Pennsylvania's 28th House District (Allegheny County) has remained unfilled since the resignation of former Republican Speaker of the House Mike Turzi on June 15. Rob Mercuri seeks to keep the seat in Republican hands after handily winning the party primary election in June. Mercuri is a West Point graduate, U.S. Army Captain, and current Senior Vice President and financial risk manager at PNC Bank [1].

Democrat Emily Skopov looks to flip the seat in 2020, after first running as the Democrat nominee for the 28th District against Turzi in 2018, falling short by almost nine points. Despite a ten-point Republican registration advantage, President Trump narrowly carried the district in 2016. Name identification and top-of-the-ticket trickle down will be the two driving factors in what will be a close contest.

District 29 – Megan Schroeder (R*) vs. Marlene Katz (D) (Registration: 45.5-R/39.5-D/15-I—2016: 50.5% Trump)

First time incumbent Republican Meghan Schroeder looks to defend her seat in Pennsylvania's 29th House District (Bucks County). Schroeder won a tight contest in 2018 by only 4.4 percent (52.2-47.8), and is looking at another tightly contested race against Democrat challenger Marlene Katz. Before running the 29th District, Katz was a small business owner in the wellness industry and served as the Deputy Chair of the

Bucks County Democratic Committee [2]. Schroeder will look to capitalize on the slight Republican advantage in the district, while Katz will need to make headway with a large number of independent registered voters in order to flip the seat.

District 30 – Lori Mizgorski (R*) vs. Lissa Geiger Shulman (D) (Registration: 42.5-R/44.5-D/13-I—2016: 51.5% Trump)

Pennsylvania's 30th House District (Allegheny County) is a toss-up district in every sense. Democrats hold only a slight registration advantage with 13% independent voters, while President Trump won the district with only 51.5% of the vote in 2016. Incumbent Republican Lori Mizgorski is seeking a second term in office after first winning the seat by 4.6 points in 2018. Democrat Lissa Geiger Shulman, a former schoolteacher and former legislative chief of staff for a PA House Representative Dan Miller, is looking to flip the seat

District 44 – Valerie Gaydos (R*) vs. Michele Knoll (D) (Registration: 42.5-R/43-D/14.5-I—2016: 53.25% Trump)

Look for the trend lines to be similar in PA-30 and PA-44. With the number of registered Democrats and Republicans nearly even, and 14.5 percent of voters registered as independents, PA-44 is about as even as district can be. President Trump did carry the district in 2016, but only slightly. Incumbent Republican Valerie Gaydos is another first term representative, having been a business leader and community volunteer. She seeks reelection having first won the seat in 2018 by 3.4 points (51.7-48.3). Rep. Gaydos is challenged by Democrat Michele Knoll, "an Educator, School Board Director, Non-Profit Founder and Community Advocate." [4] Both PA-30 and PA-44 have not had these two incumbents seeking reelection in a Presidential cycle and this will be a case study for political trends in Western PA.

District 45 – Danny DeVito (R) vs. Anita Kulik (D*) (Registration: 30-R/57.5-D/12.5-I—2016: 49.75% Clinton)

Representing the 45th House District (Allegheny County) since 2016, Rep. Anita Kulik is facing reelection with an opponent in the general election for the first time. After running unopposed in 2016 and 2018, Kulik is challenged by Republican Danny DeVito, whose chief platform is supporting the natural gas industry and opposing any proposed severance tax [5]. Kulik has lacked a Republican challenger in recent elections due to the considerable Democrat registration advantage in PA-45. Despite

Democrats holding a 27.5 point registration advantage, Hillary Clinton barely carried the district in 2016 and failed to achieve 50% of the vote share.

DeVito will need PA-45 to move towards Trump again in 2020, as western Pennsylvania continues to engage in a political realignment, if he is to challenge for this seat. Kulik will look to capitalize on two terms as an entrenched incumbent and the strong Democrat performance in the 2018 midterms.

District 55 – Jason Silvis (R) vs. Joe Petrarca (D*) (Registration: 43.5-R/44.5-D/12-I—2016: 65.25% Trump)

Pennsylvania's 55th House District (Westmoreland, Armstrong, Indiana) is another western PA district in the midst of a political transformation. Incumbent Rep. Joe Petrarca has been serving PA-55 since 1995, with constituents almost evenly split between registered Democrats and Republicans. However, President Trump carried PA-55 convincingly, capturing over 65% of the vote share. Petrarca is opposed by Jason Silvis, who has spent the last 22 years working as a stunt performer and stunt coordinator for movies and television, but advocates for "no more stunts in Harrisburg". [6] Petrarca did not face a General Election opponent in 2016, so the GOP will be testing how far down-the-ballot momentum will affect long-time Democratic incumbents in Western PA.

District 72 – Howard Terndrup (R) vs. Frank Burns (D*) (Registration: 44.5-R/46.5-D/9-I—2016: 70.25% Trump)

Incumbent Rep. Frank Burns has represented Pennsylvania's 72nd House District (Cambria) since 2009 in yet another district in Western PA experiencing political fluctuations. Despite a slight Democrat registration advantage, President Trump won over 70% of the vote in PA-72. Burns' most recent election victories also highlight this trend. In 2014, Burns defeated his challenger convincingly by 25.2 points; 2016 resulted in a 15.4 point victory; 2018 was only a 4.8 point win.

With the President at the top of the ballot, Republican Howard Terndrup is looking to flip the seat from the longtime incumbent. Terndrup has taught chemistry at Bishop Carroll High School for 30 years while owning a landscaping contracting company. [7] Campaigning as a conservative and supporter of the President, Terndrup is looking to turn the support for President Trump in PA-72 into an election victory and oust a six-term Democratic incumbent to grow the GOP's majority in the PA House.

District 77 – Steve Yetski (R) vs. Scott Conklin (D*) (Registration: 31.5-R/48-D/20.5-I)—
2016: 60.75% Clinton)

Pennsylvania's 77th House District (Centre County) is represented by incumbent Scott Conklin, who has held the seat since 2007. In a district with a sizable Democrat registration advantage, PA-77 has an unusually high number registered independent voters—20.5 percent. One of the reasons for this is the large number of college students as PA-77 encompasses downtown State College and much of the University Park campus. Being that a large number of students may not be in the district on Election Day, it's unknown if they will be registered at their school or home address. With such a large, transient voter population, this could make the long-time incumbent's seat especially volatile. Conklin is opposed by Republican challenger Steve Yetsko of Bald Eagle.

District 105 – Andrew Lewis (R*) vs. Brittney Rodas (Registration: 48-R/38.5-D/13.5-I)—
2016: 52% Trump)

Pennsylvania's 105th House District features a race between first term Republican incumbent Andrew Lewis (Dauphin) and Democrat challenger Brittney Rodas. Lewis first won the seat by just over 500 votes in 2018—only 1.6 percent. President Trump also won this district, but only with 52 percent of the vote. Rodas is currently a member of the Dauphin County Democratic Committee and former policy research analyst in the PA House of Representatives.

This area of the Commonwealth is among the most hotly contested political battle grounds in the country. PA House District 105 falls within PA Senate District 37 (John DiSanto* vs. George Scott), with both of these districts being within the 10th U.S. Congressional District (Scott Perry* vs. Eugene DePasquale). This is a district, within a district, within a district, in a Presidential cycle; the epitome of a political science election class case study. Keep all eyes on this close race on November 3rd.

This is part-one of this two-part series. Keep an eye out for the next set of PA House Races in an upcoming PA Prosperity Project newsletter.

*incumbent

[1] <https://www.robmercuri.com/about>

[2] <https://www.marlenekatzforpa.com/my-background/>

[3] <https://lissaforpa.com/meet-lissa/>

[4] <https://knoll4pa44.com/about/>

[5] <https://dannyydevitopa.com/about-1>

[6] <http://silvisforpa.com/>

[7] <https://www.temdrup4pa.com/>