

Legislative District 3

A district of contrasts, the heavily Democratic 3rd is solidly behind the governor and boasts a redistricted Republican assemblyman

By Colleen O'Dea, October 17 in

He's the most powerful Democrat in Trenton but helped shepherd Gov. Chris Christie's benefits overhaul through the Senate last spring. He's a long-time incumbent from a heavily Democratic district where support for the governor is solid. He's a union organizer without the support of two key unions.

Whether because of or in spite of all that, Steven Sweeney holds a commanding lead in his latest bid for Senate from the 3rd District, which covers large areas of Cumberland, Gloucester, and Salem counties. A recent Richard Stockton College/Zogby Poll of likely voters found 48 percent leaningn9t.5\(\epsilon\))11a7cs

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place like home' in the 3rd Center for Public Policy, which commissioned the poll.

Mulligan, a Salem County attorney making his first run for office, acknowledged as much. "I'm probably a long-shot," he said. "But I have a problem finding anyone here who says they like Sweeney.... My candidates being very well-received."

"This year, the people will decide whether they want a government that fights tooth and nail for the richest Republican incumbent in the neighboring 4th District whose hom.8.5()12 c Assembly.

And with 56 percent of the 3rd district's voters giving Christie the thumbs-up, Republicans feel they have reason to hope. Further, the teachers and state worker unions have vowed revenge against Sweeney for helping pass the benefits overhaul. Two months ago, the New Jersey State AFL-CIO and the New Jersey Education Association voted not to endorse Sweeney or his running mates—even though Sweeney is a union organizer for the International Association of Ironworkers.

"We applaud our sisters and brothers in the labor movement for standing by those who stood with us and making the tough decision to hold politicians accountable to their principles," said Hetty Rosenstein, New Jersey area director of the Communications Workers of America, which represents thousands of public

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employees.

The motto on Mulligan's campaign website seems to play off that anger, stating: "The State Senate is no place to give preferences to Political Bosses at the expense of the taxpayers and hardworking public employees!"

However, the Democratic assembly candidates have polling leads almost as commanding as Sweeney's. Of those polled, 44 percent said they would vote for Riley and 43 percent for Burzichelli, while DiCicco got the support of 29 percent and Villare, 28 percent.

Burzichelli, the deputy speaker of the assembly, first took office in 2002. He also chairs the Assembly Regulatory Oversight and Gaming Committee. Riley is the first woman to represent the 3rd District, and the first woman from Cumberland County to serve in the Legislature.

Villare is a surgeon at The Memorial Hospital of Salem County. In 2009, he won a contested Republican

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