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Election Time: PA-10

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UPDATE: The race in PA-10 has not really focused on issues, and incumbent Democrat Chris Carney needs to keep it that way. The district ranks a +8 GOP rating on the Cook Partisan Index, so Carney would have a tough time in this district in the current climate with so many energized GOP voters. But, unlike the race in PA-3, Carney has drawn a deeply flawed opponent, Tom marino, whose previous ethical problems have damaged his candidacy.
Cook Political Report still has the race rated as a toss-up, in part because Marino's fundraising has also been lackluster. Outside money has poured into the race, but it may not be enough. Real Clear Politics rates the race as "Lean Republican." Only two polls have been published in October. A public poll showed Marino up by 6 points and a Democratic poll had the race a tie. This will be a classic case of Democratic GOTV vs. GOP-friendly political environment. How it turns out will give us an early indication on election night as to how big the GOP wave will be.
ORGINAL POST: Two weeks ago, I considered Kathy Dahlkemper?s race [1]in PA-3, which is in the northwest corner of the state, centered on Erie. It turns out that many of the same issues are in play in the opposite end of the state, in Pennsylvania?s 10th Congressional District which snakes around Scranton taking in most of the northeast corner of the state.

Incumbent Democrat Chris Carney was elected in 2006; Dahlkemper in 2008. Both are young, vigorous, attractive. Both are Roman Catholic. Both are among the ?Whole Life Heroes [2]? endorsed by Democrats for Life because they supported the health care overhaul and they are pro-life. Both were shifted from ?Lean Dem? to ?Toss-Up? on the Cook Political Report earlier in the year, although RealClearPolitics still has PA-3 leaning to the Dems while Carney?s race is rated a toss-up.

PA-10 is one of the most Republican leaning districts to be represented by a Democrat. It has a R+8 rating on the Cook Partisan Voting Index. A visit to Carney?s website [3]shows how his political positions reflect the rural, conservative instincts of his constituents. After discussing the need to create jobs by helping small businesses, the second item on his list of issue concerns is the Second Amendment. This is hunting country.

Carney also lays out why he supported the health care overhaul, a stance that has cost him heavily in this Republican leaning district. At the time the law was passed, Carney said, ?As a Roman Catholic father of five, I believe it is important to reach consensus on the fact that this legislation would continue the longstanding ban on federal funding for abortion. This agreement ensures that. For three decades, the Hyde Amendment has restricted public funding for abortion. This Executive Order puts to rest any fears that the health insurance reform bill would direct federal dollars toward abortion services.? That stance has made him a hero to progressive pro-life groups. Interestingly, the Susan B. Anthony List has so far not endorsed Carney?s opponent.

Tom Marino, a former U.S. Attorney, is the Republican challenger and his campaign has suffered from rookie mistakes. Most important of these has been the fact that as of the June 30, FEC filings, Marino had only $11,000 dollars in the bank, compared to $792, 891 cash-on-hand for Carney. There are a variety of reasons a candidate

cannot raise money. Sometimes, a district has been represented for a long time by someone from the other political party, and so challengers have gone once too many times to the well of limited opposition donors. Sometimes, and understandably, a candidate rebels from the hard, and humiliating task, of sitting in a room dialing for dollars for six hours a day, calling strangers and asking them to give specific amounts of money. Other times, a political party?s base is not excited and they keep their wallets in their pockets.

It is not clear why Marino has not raised more money. Certainly, the GOP base is plenty worked up. The one poll in the district, a partisan GOP poll conducted at the end of July, shows him leading Carney by the margin of 52 percent to 37 percent. I am not sure how solid those numbers are, and neither is anyone else. Of course, in a rural district like this, with local television very inexpensive, money is not as determinative as it would be in other districts, but still, $11k is ridiculous.

One problem facing Carney is that he does not have Bob Casey at the top of the ticket. Casey, from nearby Scranton, beat incumbent Sen. Rick Santorum in 2006 by a whopping 18 percent. This year, Republican Congressman Pat Toomey is leading his opponent, Democrat Joe Sestak, in every poll and, in the governor?s race, Republican Tom Corbett is trouncing Democrat Dan Oronato as well. Pennsylvanians are not afraid to split their ballots, so it is impossible to measure the down-ballot effect of these other races, but in terms of enthusiasm, all of it is with the GOP in the Keystone state this year.

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