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## Meet Lloyd Smucker: Amish-born congressman seeking a second term on tax cuts and conservative record



SAM JANESCH | Staff Writer Oct 21, 2018



Congressional candidate Rep. Llyod Smucker walks along the route during the community parade in Millersville or 2018.

ANDY BLACKBURN | Staff Photographer

WASHINGTON, D.C. — U.S. Rep. Lloyd Smucker is hustling down a dizzying spiral staircase in the United States Capitol. He's cutting through the cavernous basement hallways and around security guards, up more stairs and down others.

And the large group trailing at his heels is drawing more than a few curious glances.

It's a crew of nearly 20 Amish men, women and children — dressed in the traditional hats, suspenders and dresses — in town for an event where Smucker's speaking to push legislation that would expand farmers' ability to produce and sell raw milk and dairy products.

Most of them had never visited Washington, D.C., and while on a tour of the Capitol they had just stopped by their congressman's office for a quick "hello" a few minutes before he needed to vote on the House floor.

The clock was ticking but Smucker couldn't resist. He had to show them the view from the House speaker's balcony overlooking the National Mall and Pennsylvania Avenue on this sunny late-September day.

When they walk out onto it, a young boy stretches to get a peek over the railing, and one of the men asks about President Donald Trump. Smucker points out at the mall, explaining how the crowds gathered on the lawn during the inauguration.

Nearly two years after that historic day, the [Amish-born congressman](#) is once again looking for a reason to celebrate after election day.

The West Lampeter Township Republican is up for a second term on Nov. 6 in what is now the 11th Congressional District, covering all of Lancaster County and southern York County.

His re-election campaign is focusing on what he boasts is the "booming economy." It's a campaign about tax cuts and regulatory relief, votes to destruct the Affordable Care Act and legislation to bolster the district through workforce development and national recognition.

He's running on [a record](#) that has put him not only squarely in line with the conservatives that came before him in the historically red district, but also firmly among the crowd of congressional Republicans backing Trump through nearly every part of his first two years in Washington.

"I have delivered on things that I said I would do," Smucker said last year, even before the passage of the historic tax cuts to businesses and individuals. "(I said I would) vote for strong national security; I would vote to repeal and replace Obamacare; I would vote to decrease the overreach of government into businesses into our lives. We've accomplished all that.



U.S. Rep. Lloyd Smucker gestures to the National Mall while showing a group of Amish men from Quarryville and Paradise the House speaker's balcony at the U.S. Capitol to on Sept. 26, 2018. Smucker is running for re-election to represent the 11th Congressional District.

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## Tax cuts and legislation

With Lancaster Democrat Jess King opposite him on the ballot next month, Smucker says he believes the stakes are higher than ever before.

“There’s a greater difference in our philosophies than with any other opponent I’ve had,” says Smucker, who spent two terms in the state Senate before his 2016 congressional bid.



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Smucker has boiled down his own philosophy to one that may be familiar to regular Republican voters — “less government is better;” it should spend only what it can afford and leave the private sector to be in charge of job creation and health care.

He touts the Republican-led tax cuts as the top legislative achievement of this session, and said in an early October interview that the federal government is “already making up the revenue” hole left by the \$1.5 trillion cuts.

But an update from the Treasury Department a few days later painted a different picture. On Monday it said the deficit was at its highest rate in six years, up to \$779 billion, and on its way to \$1 trillion by the end of next year. “So far at least — tax cuts have restrained government revenue gains,” [the Wall Street Journal reported](#).

Smucker believes the economy will continue to grow at a pace where the tax cuts will eventually pay for themselves. In the meantime, he’s spoken out and voted against Republican budgets that have led to increased spending.

“Even as Republicans our record over the last two years in that regard isn’t great,” he admits.

In terms of his own personal legislative wins, Smucker singles out three of his bills in particular.

The first bill was aimed at making it easier for states to waive non-safety licensing standards to allow children to be more easily placed in the foster care of relatives. In June 2017, it became Smucker’s [first standalone bill to pass the House](#). And the following February it became law when it was incorporated into the budget and another larger foster care bill, the Family First Prevention Services Act, which has been called the most extensive foster care system overhaul in 40 years.

The second “win” that Smucker acknowledges isn’t “quite all the way to the finish line” is establishing Lancaster and York counties as the [Susquehanna National Heritage Area](#).

Picking up on Democratic U.S. Sen. Bob Casey’s same decade-long effort, Smucker’s bill passed the House earlier this year but faces an uncertain future. The Trump administration has lobbied against designating any new heritage areas under the National Park Service.



If enacted, it would mean national exposure and up to \$300,000 in funding to boost tourism in the river region — and Susquehanna Heritage president Mark Platts has hailed Smucker’s leadership in the cause.

The third bill focused on expanding apprenticeship opportunities for military veterans re-integrating into the workforce.

## The unlikely Amish-born congressman

Above the desk in his Capitol Hill office, framed by the American and Pennsylvania flags standing on either side, hangs a painting portraying Smucker’s Amish roots.

It’s a scene from the farm near Weavertown where Smucker was born into a family of 12 children in 1964. His late father, Daniel, is instructing the oldest son, Sam, as he tills the farm with four horses at sunset — their barn and home in the distance.

That same son would grow up to be a **renowned pastor and religious leader** in Lancaster County, and who, after his recent retirement, delivered the opening prayer on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives as his congressman brother stood nearby and five other Smucker brothers watched from the gallery.

The Smucker family left the Old Order Amish when the future politician was 5 years old.



U.S. Rep. Lloyd Smucker speaks at a roundtable discussion on tax reform in November 2016.

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DAN MARSCHKA | Staff Photographer

U.S. Rep. Lloyd Smucker

Age: 54

Party: Republican

Residence: West Lampeter Township

Family: wife Cindy; daughters Paige and Regan, son Nicholas

Education: Attended but no degrees from Franklin & Marshall College and Lebanon Valley College, earned credits toward liberal arts with a concentration on business.

Occupation: Congressman since January 2017.

Previous experience: State senator in the 13th district, 2008-16; owned a family-operated drywall and contracting business for 25 years; West Lampeter Township supervisor and planning commission member for 4 years.

He went on to become the first in his family to attend high school, earning his Lancaster Mennonite High School tuition by hanging drywall at his brother's business, which he bought after graduation at the age of 17 for \$1,000. He took night classes at Franklin & Marshall College and Lebanon Valley College but didn't earn a degree.

Meanwhile, the drywall and contracting company grew, under his 25-year leadership, to employ 150 people — a part of his resume that eventually helped secure him a spot on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. A T&I subcommittee chairman, U.S. Rep. Sam Graves, said at a Lancaster event in April that Congress needs “more people who understand construction,” like Smucker does.

“He's in the middle of all the transportation conversations. He's in the middle of making the decisions,” Graves said at the event that came a few months before a long-awaited infrastructure spending bill was officially pushed back until 2019.

## **A conservative record**

In 2016, Smucker **won** under the old 16th Congressional District boundaries to replace the retiring 10-term **U.S. Rep. Joe Pitts**, a staunch conservative who was heavily involved in efforts to throw out President Barack Obama's signature achievement, the Affordable Care Act.

“Lloyd is a good conservative who has the same values I had and who is doing a terrific job for us in Washington,” Pitts said this spring, almost a year after Smucker cast his own vote to dismantle the ACA.

Smucker's approval of the GOP's American Health Care Act was perhaps the most controversial of the 1,125 votes he's cast so far as a congressman.

It later failed in the Senate, but Smucker says he believes it would have lowered costs through more private-sector competition and protected coverage for pre-existing conditions. Many of his colleagues, including Republicans in Pennsylvania, [disagreed](#).



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SAM JANESCH | Staff Writer

In a recent interview, he says “we need to go back” to trying to disband the ACA’s individual marketplace “and create more of that competitive environment.” His opponent’s preference for “Medicare-for-all,” he says, is “the wrong prescription.”

The rest of Smucker’s voting record has aligned with his party and Trump’s agenda 96 percent of the time — a stat he was proud to mention while his Republican primary challenger Chet Beiler [accused him of not being conservative enough last spring](#).

## **'Where's Lloyd?' — 'Here's Lloyd!'**

Sitting on the edge of his desk chair in his Capitol office, Smucker puts pen to paper as he reads through drafted responses to hundreds of letters and emails his office received this week.

“This statement is too strong,” he says, instructing staffer Chris Eddowes to make an adjustment.

“Make it more personal,” he says of another response that will bear his signature. “I want to see the rewrites of those two.”

During this half-hour “working block” before the next round of votes at 5 p.m., the congressman receives a thick yellow folder of the correspondence. The cover sheet displays a tally of the most frequent topics that week — reauthorizing the Land and Water Conservation Fund, Tax Reform 2.0 and the Everglades Restoration Plan Funding.

Other letter topics range from constituents’ co-sponsorship requests to someone who believes 9/11 was “an inside job.”

Smucker doesn’t have time to read everything that comes in, but he has to check the responses that go out.

“We have been 100 percent accessible,” he says in a later interview. “We have been very transparent about my views, about my votes. And we have taken input from anyone who wanted to provide input with how they felt or their reaction to my positions.”

But Smucker’s level of direct constituent contact has become one of the loudest and most consistent concerns his critics have raised.

His opponents — both the Democrats who launched campaigns against him and his Republican primary challenger Beiler — have made his lack of **in-person town halls** a top issue.



Protesters held a sit-in inside the Lancaster office of Congressman Lloyd Smucker May 11, 2017. Protesters also stood in the hallway outside Smucker’s office.

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BLAINE SHAHAN | Staff Photographer

Lancaster Stands Up, the progressive grassroots group that arose in the wake of the 2016 election, earlier this year unveiled a refurbished cherry-red van with “Where’s Lloyd?” printed on the sides along with a cartoon image of Smucker and an updated tally of the days he’s gone without holding a town hall.



A few weeks later, Smucker's office launched a section on his website titled, "Here's Lloyd!" — with a map of the various constituent meetings he's held. The site lists 502 meetings with constituents in his offices, 158 events and 1,808 completed constituent cases that returned \$640,478 back to their bank accounts.

Still, the calls for a town hall haven't ceased.

In a July telephone town hall — a method Smucker routinely touts as a viable alternative — a woman said she wanted to bring her children to a town hall to hear him speak.

"I'd love for you to come to my office and you can bring your kids," Smucker replied, adding that probably 2,000 people were listening to the call right then.

The woman, identified as Jamie, said "a public town hall engages people where they are," and she was recently able to bring her kids to a familiar venue for a Jess King town hall. Smucker responded as he's often done, saying he's "not interested in a roomful of people screaming at one another." And without mentioning them by name, he referenced Lancaster Stands Up, which he believes is intent on creating a "spectacle" at his events.

Group members have **held sit-ins** at his Lancaster office and **disrupted a few of his public speaking events**, such as a Lancaster Chamber breakfast a month after he was sworn into office.

Smucker, when asked in an interview if he would continue to re-evaluate and consider town halls among his options in the next term, says he would, but again mentions "a group that really didn't want a discussion."

## **The campaign for term two**

When the Pennsylvania Supreme Court threw out the current congressional district boundaries earlier this year and enacted new ones for the impending 2018 elections, Smucker **became one of the biggest Republican beneficiaries**.

His district — which covers all but seven eastern Lancaster County municipalities along with Reading in Berks County and parts of western Chester County — was reconfigured to drop Berks and Chester while expanding to all of Lancaster County and adding southern York County.

A historically red seat became even more Republican, one where GOP voters outnumber Democrats by 100,000 and Trump won by 26 points in 2016.

A loss for him now would mean “one of the biggest upsets in the country,” says longtime Lancaster County politics observer G. Terry Madonna.

Still, King is a first-time candidate who is widely considered to have created the most comprehensive grassroots field campaign Democrats have ever seen in Lancaster County. Hundreds of volunteers are out contacting thousands of voters every weekend, and King had an unprecedented \$429,000 cash advantage as of Sept. 30.

Smucker has also been out knocking on doors and hitting the Lancaster County fair and parade circuit. His \$250,000 in television ad-buys in September was more than he spent in the same race two years ago, when he won by 11 percentage points.

But it’s been a “safe campaign,” Madonna says, with Smucker keeping a relatively low profile while trying to energize his base with television ads saying King “would rule us like a king” because of her support for single-payer health care.

While polls show the country as a whole supports “Medicare-for-all,” Smucker is counting on his constituents to reject what he calls “socialist” and “radical” policies — and to stand their ground in a conservative district even as he acknowledges the surging excitement among Democrats.

“There’s a lot of enthusiasm on the Democratic side. But you know what? There’s more enthusiasm right here in this room tonight,” he exclaimed at the Republican Committee of Lancaster County’s annual fall dinner last week.

“And we’re going to win this thing. I have no doubt about that. We are going to win.”



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