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Race for state Senate: Scott Martin and Greg Paulson would bring different perspectives to Harrisburg

SAM JANESCH | Staff Writer Oct 26, 2016



Democrat Greg Paulson, left, and Republican Scott Martin, right.

Scott Martin and Greg Paulson are far from freshmen to the Lancaster County political scene.

One, a Republican committeeman who became the head of the county's Youth Intervention Center, most recently served eight years as a county commissioner.





The other, a veteran lawyer who unsuccessfully ran twice for city council, led the city Democrats for a dozen years and works as chief of staff to the highest-ranking state legislator from the county.

Now, they're going head to head for one of the most prominent positions on the Nov. 8 ballot: representing 260,000 Lancaster County residents in the 13th state Senate district. The district covers the southern half of the county and has been represented for eight years by Lloyd Smucker, who is seeking higher office in the 16th Congressional District race.

RELATED: [Race for Congress in Lancaster County: What to know about the candidates and what to watch for](#)



And though the Martin-Paulson matchup may seem low-key compared to the vitriolic television advertisements and massive spending that are propelling the presidential, U.S. Senate and House races at the top of the ticket — the stakes aren't low.

In the last year and a half, Pennsylvanians have consistently said the commonwealth is headed in the wrong direction.

They say the most important problem facing the state is government and the politicians who make it up.

Faced with the option to send someone new to Harrisburg, voters here will decide between two very ideologically different candidates who could help send the state's direction in very different paths.

Contrasting the candidates

Partisan gridlock dominated much of the first two years of Democratic Gov. Tom Wolf's administration with a large Republican majority in the Legislature.

An unprecedented nine-month-long budget impasse was fueled by divisions on education funding increases, a severance tax on natural gas drillers, solving a massive debt to state employee pensions, and much more.

Like the governor, Paulson — chief of staff to Lancaster city Rep. Mike Sturla, who is the House Democratic policy chairman — has said his number one priority is fully funding public education. Martin has focused on more equitable formulas to dispense school funding, something outgoing Sen. Smucker championed as chairman of the Senate Education Committee.

On the natural gas tax, Paulson, is a proponent. Martin, like many current Republicans in the Capitol, said he believes the tax would risk having drillers leave the state because of high costs.

Among other major issues in recent years, Martin, 44, of Conestoga Township, and Paulson, 70, of Lancaster city, are similarly divided among party lines.

Paulson supports the Affordable Care Act, believing in health care as a fundamental right, while Martin opposes it.

Martin supports organizations that seek to stop abortions, while Paulson is “unequivocally pro-choice.”

Paulson is in favor of gun-control measures and Martin is not.

Paulson has also said he would back a \$15 minimum wage proposal. Martin says raising the minimum wage could lead to job losses and he would prefer helping low-wage earners get skills training so they can get better “family-sustaining jobs.”

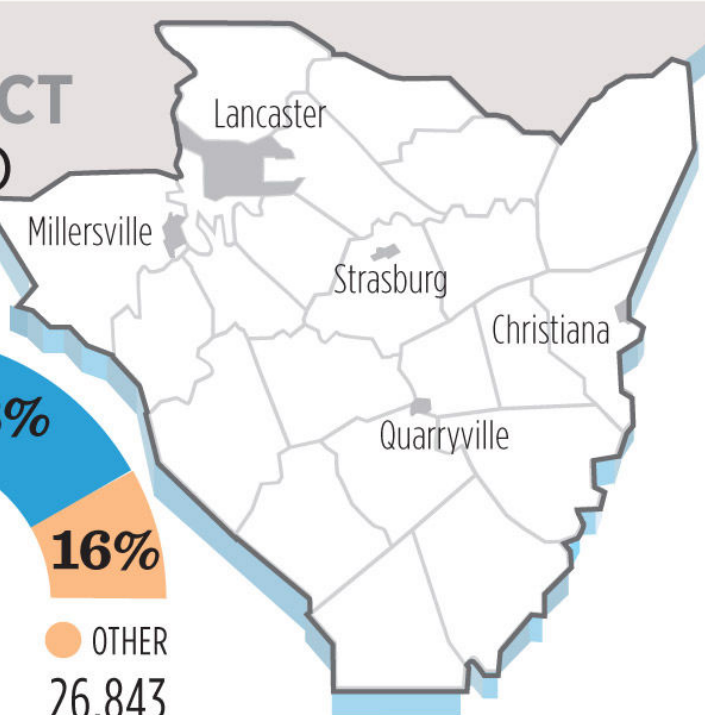
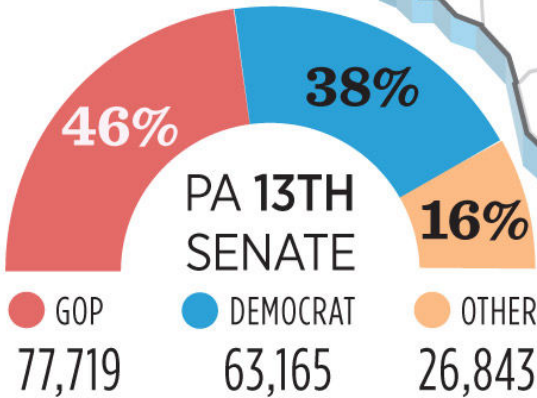
Who has the edge?

The 13th district, which covers the entire southern half of the county including Democrat-packed Lancaster city, has a voter registration breakdown closely mirroring that of the congressional district that Smucker is now running for.

It has 127 of the county's 240 precincts, covering Lancaster city; Christiana, Millersville, Quarryville and Strasburg boroughs; and Bart, Colerain, Conestoga, Drumore, East Drumore, East Lampeter, Eden, Fulton, Lancaster, Leacock, Little Britain, Manheim, Manor, Martic, Paradise, Pequea, Providence, Sadsbury, Salisbury, Strasburg, Upper Leacock and West Lampeter townships.

It is made up of 46 percent Republican, 38 percent Democratic and 16 percent independent or third-party voters, according to the latest voter registration information.

PA. SENATE 13TH DISTRICT REGISTERED VOTERS (As of Oct. 18)



Smucker, a former West Lampeter Township supervisor, has represented the district for two four-year terms —winning his elections with 56 percent in 2012 and 57 percent in 2008 (when the district lines were drawn slightly differently).

Preceding Smucker was Republican Gib Armstrong, who represented the district for 23 years, and Republican Richard Snyder who held the district seat for 22 years before that.

Shifting demographics, namely growth in proportions of Democrats and independents in the city and suburbs, have led to some better chances for Democratic candidates in the last two decades.

Trump effect?

While Martin holds the advantage in terms of voter registration and the history of the district, the looming uncertainty this year — for everything from U.S. Senate and House races to state legislative ones — is how the top of the ticket will affect down-ballot Republicans.

“Mike Pence and Donald Trump are the right people at the right time in history coming from the outside to shake up Washington and this country,” Martin passionately told 6,000 fans of the GOP presidential ticket at a rally in Manheim earlier this month.

Martin pledged before the April primary to support whoever became the eventual party nominee and has since appeared at Trump’s recent rally at Spooky Nook, and at vice presidential nominee Pence’s town hall here in early August.

And while Trump’s political outsider campaign has caused some concerns for experienced party members, Martin’s own primary win earlier this year may be evidence to debunk that effect. The former commissioner defeated two Republican challengers, coming a few thousand votes ahead of Neal Rice, an Iraq War veteran and lawyer who gained surprising support while running on a political outsider message.

But with Trump trailing Democrat Hillary Clinton — who Paulson supports — by six points in Pennsylvania according to RealclearPolitics average of recent polls, it’s unclear how much Republicans like Martin will feel the heat.

The final stretch

With 16 days left before election day, voters should watch for a few more key moments from Martin and Paulson.

The pair will debate for the second and final time Thursday in an event hosted by LNP Media Group and the Lancaster Chamber of Commerce & Industry. It will be held at 7 p.m. at Millersville University.

In a debate earlier this month, Paulson held a copy of Martin’s campaign finance report and critiqued him for taking donations from the same companies that were awarded county contracts when he was a commissioner.

RELATED: [In state Senate debate, Greg Paulson slams Scott Martin over fundraising](#)

Martin responded by saying that county contracts are awarded based on strict rules that require the lowest competitive bid to be accepted. He said he would not be “influenced by the money” in his legislative decision-making.

More campaign finance information — fundraising and spending — is also something to watch for in the next two weeks. The candidates’ final fundraising report deadline is later this week. They will also be required to begin releasing daily reports based on some last-minute donations and spending.

Martin raised slightly more than \$91,000 from mid-May to mid-September, according to his latest available campaign finance information. In that time period, he spent \$48,685 and had \$50,770 left.

Paulson’s financial information is not yet available for that time period because he was not required to file the mid-September report. But he said in an interview he has received an average donation of \$93 from roughly 430 individual donors since the beginning of January.

That would bring his total from individuals to around \$40,000. He said he has also received some donations from local political committees and labor organizations but declined to say his total fundraising until he files his report with state officials this week.