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Jess King is the only Pennsylvania candidate for Congress drawing a salary from her campaign



SAM JANESCH | Staff Writer Jul 20, 2018



Jessica King announces her run for Congress on Tuesday, July 18, 2017.

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Citing her campaign's ardent theme of supporting a working-class person for Congress, Democrat Jess King is taking a bite out of her own [campaign funds](#) to help support her family while she runs in the 11th district.

The former Lancaster nonprofit director, whose campaign is buoyed by an intense volunteer-led grassroots network and thousands of small-dollar donations, is the only congressional candidate in Pennsylvania paying herself a campaign-issued salary, new campaign finance reports show.

King receives \$1,901.94 every two weeks — up from original payments of \$1,418.61 in April and May — while she also pays the salaries for seven campaign workers, the records show.

Her biweekly rate would equate to \$49,450, if paid over a full year.



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The practice of a candidate drawing a salary is allowed, though not necessarily common. Political scientists say it gives individuals who are not independently wealthy a chance to run for office full-time.

But there's also an ironic dynamic with the idea, political scientists say. Wealthy candidates don't need to take a salary from their campaigns, and the others who might do it out of financial necessity are sometimes afraid to do so, fearing negative public reaction.

“A candidate of ordinary means can't win if they don't run in the first place due to financial hardship,” said Stephen Medvic, a Franklin & Marshall College political science professor.

King, who ran the economic development nonprofit Assets, earned a \$75,175 salary, according to 2016 tax filings. Her financial disclosure filed September 2017 also reports \$123,175 earned income in the previous year and \$72,000 that year. Her husband, a

Mennonite pastor, earned \$60,707 in 2017 from Partners for Sacred Places, according to the disclosure.

According to FEC guidelines, candidates' campaign-funded salaries must not exceed the annual salary of the office they're seeking or the amount the candidate earned in income the previous year — whichever is less.

“Working people often don't think we can run for office because we can't afford to go without pay and lose our healthcare for over a year,” campaign manager Becca Rast said in a statement. “And so the political establishment in both parties recruits the already wealthy and well-connected to run instead. But it doesn't have to be that way. We're proud to run a campaign that does what it can to support a working person to run for Congress while raising her family and making ends meet.”

U.S. Rep. Lloyd Smucker, the first-term Republican whom King is [hoping to unseat](#), is not permitted to take a campaign salary because he is an incumbent. He also did not take a campaign salary while running for the first time in 2016, when he was then a sitting state senator continuing to receive a roughly \$84,584 salary.

This year, of the 23 non-incumbent candidates running in Pennsylvania's 18 congressional districts, King is the only one using campaign funds for a personal salary, according to an LNP review of Federal Election Commission filings.

She's also one of the only candidates in that group paying salaries at all. King had seven campaign staffers, who took the rare step in unionizing earlier this year, receiving biweekly payments by the end of June.

Among the 23 non-incumbent congressional candidates in Pennsylvania, six Democrats and two Republicans have at least one person on staff receiving salary payments.

King's seven salaried employees are the second-most, and their biweekly pay ranges from \$1,285 to \$1,538, according to her FEC report. All of them, including King, got a raise starting May 30.

The salaries and payroll taxes made up about half of her \$122,272 in expenses between late-April and the end of June.

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