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Why did Lancaster DA Craig Stedman get 57K more votes than any other GOP Superior Court candidate?



SAM JANESCH | Staff Writer May 18, 2017



Lancaster County District Attorney Craig Stedman comments about the number of drug overdoses during a press conference in November 2016.

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Four months after Craig Stedman **tepidly threw his name into consideration** for a statewide judicial opening, he came out far and away the Republican leader in Tuesday's primary for Superior Court.

In a field of five candidates, the Lancaster County district attorney finished with 371,029 total votes — nearly 58,000 more than his closest competitor.

“It’s certainly humbling and an honor but ... the goal is November,” Stedman said in an interview Wednesday.

The [top four GOP candidates](#) will go up against four Democrats on the November ballot.

But how did Stedman, a former prosecutor and the only candidate who is not a judge, become the leading vote-getter on Republican ballots for the state’s second-highest appellate court?

“It could have been a whole array of things,” said G. Terry Madonna, longtime state politics observer and director of the Center for Politics and Public Affairs at Franklin & Marshall College.

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Madonna said the statewide judicial races are difficult to analyze because of the lack of polling and because voters know extremely little about the candidates.

Still, Stedman likely benefited from being one of four candidates [endorsed by the Republican Party of Pennsylvania](#) and from his potential statewide connections through his work as district attorney, Madonna said.

Geography also likely played a role, Madonna said.

"People realize Lancaster’s a fairly conservative county so if they’re not familiar with any of the candidates, they might assume that Stedman is going to be a conservative judge."

Kyle Kopko, political science professor at Elizabethtown College

According to election returns, Stedman’s candidacy seemed to benefit from a geographic combination of where he works and where most Republicans in the state live.

In that region, he was the leading vote-getter in Lancaster, Chester, York and Berks counties — all of which fall in the top 10 counties in the state in terms of number of Republicans registered to vote.

Among the rest of the top 10, he either came first or second in total votes. He also performed the best in neighboring Dauphin and Lebanon counties, which fall within the top 20 in GOP registrations.

In all, he came out in front in 36 of 67 counties.

Previously: [Lancaster County DA Stedman earns GOP endorsement for statewide judge](#)

“It depends on where the votes are coming from,” said Kyle Kopko, professor of political science at Elizabethtown College. “If they’re from Chester or York or Dauphin, they’re going to be a little more on the conservative side and more familiar with District Attorney Stedman.”

Stedman, in the interview, acknowledged name recognition in central Pennsylvania could have played a role. He also noted his “deep connections to many parts of the state,” having been born in Lawrence County, raised in Bucks County and schooled at Penn State’s Dickinson Law school.



Lancaster County District Attorney Stedman 'highly recommended' for state Superior Court seat

Stedman may have also been more familiar to voters, Kopko said, because of the nature of his more public role as district attorney compared to the other candidates, who are already lower court judges and aren't as often in the spotlight.

And even if voters didn't know Stedman's name on the ballot, seeing Lancaster County under his name may have given them an indication that he would be more conservative.

“People realize Lancaster’s a fairly conservative county so if they’re not familiar with any of the candidates, they might assume that Stedman is going to be a conservative judge,” said Kopko.

Stedman, 52, of Manheim Township, announced in January he would run for one of the Superior Court openings only if he got the state Republican Party’s endorsement, which he acquired in February. He has said he will remain in his position as district attorney through the campaign.

If he is elected in November, which would be midway through his third term, an interim district attorney would be appointed by County Common Pleas judges.



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