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FEATURED

Van Drew, Kennedy keep things civil in congressional debate at Stockton

Michelle Brunetti Post
Oct 8, 2020



Congressman Jeff Van Drew and challenger candidate Amy Kennedy during New Jersey's 2nd congressional district debate Thursday Oct 8, 2020, at Fannie Lou Hamer Room on the campus of Stockton University in Atlantic City, NJ. Edward Lea Staff Photographer / Press of Atlantic City

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LIVE: NJ 2nd Congressional District Debate | NJ Decides 2...



ATLANTIC CITY — Congressman Jeff Van Drew, R-2nd, and Democratic challenger Amy Kennedy, of Brigantine, had few strong disagreements in a debate Thursday night at Stockton University’s Atlantic City campus, until the subject of defunding police arose.

Van Drew said he did not support defunding police but believed they need more funding and more support as they risk their lives for the rest of us.

“I don’t believe the average law enforcement officer hates anyone of color. Many are people of color,” Van Drew said.

Kennedy said Van Drew had misrepresented her position on the issue, as her voice rose in anger for the first time.

“You said I supported defunding police. You’ve used it in every ad in mailers about me,” Kennedy said. “You are willing to put words into my mouth I have not even said.”

She said she had instead said there was merit in discussing how we provide funding to police and how we can reallocate funds to make healthy communities.



Van Drew, Kennedy to debate as vote begins

She also said the attack ads from Van Drew were unfair.

“I am cut and pasted into Republican talking points ... slamming me as a phony, liberal, elitist radical,” she said. “I think people go to my web page and say, “That doesn’t seem to fit that schoolteacher.””

Van Drew said there was more to her than a homespun schoolteacher, “and I don’t mean that in a negative way. You are attempting to achieve something different and your family is a little different.”

Their feelings on fracking also brought out some clear differences, with Kennedy favoring ending it and Van Drew supporting continuing fracking to support U.S. energy independence.

The 2nd District race is one of the most important House races in the nation, said moderator John Froomjian, executive director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton. The district, which encompasses all or part of the state's eight southernmost counties, is expected to be tightly competitive, with the national Cook Political Report calling it a toss-up in which either party could win.

A Monmouth University poll recently found Kennedy five points ahead, but Van Drew said he didn't trust the results because it even had him behind in his home county of Cape May, a Republican stronghold in the state.



Latest Monmouth poll says Kennedy leads Van Drew in Congressional Second District race

Van Drew won his seat in Congress in 2018 when he ran as a moderate Democrat but left the party in December 2019 after refusing to vote to impeach President Donald Trump.

Kennedy, a former Northfield teacher and mental health advocate, handily won the July 7 Democratic primary for the right to challenge Van Drew, defeating four other candidates.

On new federal COVID-19 relief, Kennedy said much more is needed for state and local governments, small businesses, the airline industry and individuals.

Van Drew said he believes Trump will sign measures to provide aid to airlines and \$1,200 payments to taxpayers. He also said a bill should have already passed to provide that aid, but that Democrats added extras like support for the environmental Green New Deal in legislation that Republicans and even some Democrats could not support.

There were also differences in how the two feel about New Jersey's mostly vote-by-mail election.



Campaigning in a pandemic, Van Drew and Kennedy are ready for anything

Kennedy said it will result in more participation by voters, while Van Drew said he worried about massive numbers of ballots being sent out without being requested.

“It’s not good. We are sending live ballots in the mail — millions of them,” Van Drew said.

Kennedy said she supports expansion of the Affordable Care Act, while Van Drew said he would not vote to end it without having a better replacement. Both vowed to protect those with pre-existing conditions.

The debate started at 8 p.m. in the Fannie Lou Hamer Room at Stockton's Atlantic City campus, with only the two candidates in the room with Froonjian and questioners from the state's public television station NJTV. No members of the public were admitted, and media were kept in a separate room watching on a monitor.



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Democrat Amy Kennedy and U.S. Rep. Jeff Van Drew, R-2nd, debate Thursday in the Fannie Lou Hamer Room at Stockton University's Atlantic City Campus.

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 2 comments

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Staff Writer

In my first job after college got paid to read the New York Times and summarize articles for an early online data base. First reporting job was with The Daily Record in Parsippany. I have also worked in nonprofits, and have been with The Press since 1990.