

Faso's seat a popular one: 7 Dems enter 19th District race

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It's going to be a really crowded field of candidates in the Democratic primary for New York's 19th Congressional District this June.

Seven Democrats submitted petitions last week to compete for the nomination to run against Republican Rep. John Faso this fall. Eager contenders started jumping into the race more than a year ago, just months after Faso took office, and the lineup has stayed large and has amassed huge sums of campaign cash for what is expected to be a highly competitive race.

Four of the would-be challengers are from Ulster County, which has about 30 percent of the Democratic voters in the 19th District's 11 counties. The Ulster residents are: Patrick Ryan, 36, a Kingston native who lives in Gardiner; David Clegg, 65, of Woodstock; Gareth Rhodes, 29, an Esopus native who lives in Kerhonkson; and Jeffrey Beals, 41, of Woodstock.

The other three Democrats in the race are Antonio Delgado, 41, of Rhinebeck; Brian Flynn, 50, of Hunter; and Erin Collier, 34, of Cooperstown.

Collier joined the race in March and is the most recent entry and the only woman in the Democratic field.

Ulster County Democratic Chairman Frank Cardinale said Friday that party leaders would have preferred fewer prospects for their voters to weigh, but also respected the evident fervor in their party and didn't try to winnow the field. "We want to embrace the enthusiasm," he said.

The challenge for whoever wins the June 26 primary, Cardinale said, will be making better inroads than past Democratic candidates among voters in the

more Republican areas outside Ulster, which is the only Democratic-majority county in the 19th District. He dismissed the assumption among some Democrats that the nominee is certain to prevail in November against Faso, who faces the headwinds of a potential Democratic wave, anti-Trump sentiment and the vulnerability of any freshman.

“It isn’t going to be a piece of cake for anyone that’s running against him,” Cardinale said. “It’s going to be a very difficult race.”

The six Democrats who have been running since last year have collectively drummed up more than \$6 million in campaign donations, an impressive sum for a group of political newcomers. Two candidates — Delgado and Ryan — both outraised Faso in the third and fourth quarters of 2017, and Delgado recently announced that he collected more than \$460,000 in the first three months of 2018. He had the biggest war chest of all of the candidates, including Faso, as of the end of 2017.

“It’s probably going to be the most expensive race in the country this year,” said Ulster County Republican Chairman Roger Rascoe, predicting Faso will win re-election once he makes his case to voters about his record.

SUNY New Paltz political scientist Gerald Benjamin said the outcome of the Democratic primary will likely hinge on which candidates have established social networks they can tap and how well they can identify and rally supporters in each community. Big campaign accounts and the TV commercials they can buy will be less of a factor in reaching a relatively small and scattered audience of Democratic primary voters, he said.

“It’s really a ground-game proposition,” he said.

At least one third-party candidate may compete in the general election. Steve Greenfield, 56, of New Paltz filed a petition last week to run as a Green Party candidate for the 19th District.

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