



Tim Gomes announces challenge to Peter King for Congress

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Tim Gomes, owner of a Holtsville lighting and electrical supply business, on Thursday will become the first Democratic candidate to formally challenge veteran Republican Rep. Peter King next year.

Gomes, 57, of Sayville, describes himself as a businessman who solves problems. He said he sees job creation as the prime issue, and he backs a ban on assault weapons and attachments that allow semiautomatic weapons to fire ammunition much more rapidly.

"We need new energy, new blood," Gomes said.

"Twenty-five years is too long," he said of King's tenure.

King, 73, of Seaford, is in his 13th term. The boundaries of his 2nd Congressional District have shifted east; 69 percent of the vote comes from Suffolk and the rest from Nassau. Democrats have a 2,293-voter edge in party registration. "Someone has to run and whoever it is, it is," King said of opponents.

King said he will run on his record, including funding for superstorm Sandy recovery, health care funding for 9/11 victims, and leading the fight against the MS-13 gang by bringing in President Donald Trump and U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions to Suffolk to speak about the gang issue.

"I'm fighting for the district every day," King said.

However, Gomes could be hurt by his repeated party switches.

He was not aligned with a party when he first registered in 1988; he became a Republican in 1997 and a Democrat in 1999. He said he voted for Barack Obama for president in 2008 and 2012, but also registered as a Republican in 2008. He enrolled as a Democrat in December after Republican Donald Trump's election as president. That change will take effect after Nov. 7.

Gomes said his past switches occurred because "each party seemed more concerned about

improving their own electoral interests rather than . . . improving our lives.” If he is elected to Congress next year, “my only loyalty will be to the people who sent me there, not the party.”

Ron Widelec of Long Island Activists, a nonprofit progressive group, said Gomes’ changes show he is on “far right edge of the Democratic Party. It’s, ‘I’m a wealthy guy, I run a business, I should be congressman.’ ” Gomes will experience a “huge pushback from the progressive grass roots,” Widelec said.

Gomes said he expects the race to cost \$2 million to \$3 million but declined to say how much of his own money, if any, he may spend. His company, Topaz Lighting, which started in a Shirley three-car garage, has 225 employees — 150 on Long Island — and had \$120 million in sales in 2016.

While not directly been involved in politics, Gomes said he is a member of a corporate advisory board of the Environmental Defense Fund to show how business can work with environmentalists, as well as a member of Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence.

Jay Jacobs, Nassau Democratic chairman, called Gomes “certainly a formidable candidate” who “merits serious consideration.”

But Suffolk Democratic leader Richard Schaffer said Gomes’ party switches mean “he has a lot of explaining to do” to grass-roots Democrats. “It’s the kind of thing that doesn’t go over too well in a primary,” Schaffer said.

Presiding Officer DuWayne Gregory (D-Copiague), who lost to King 62.5 to 37.5 percent last year, said he has not made a final decision but is “leaning against” a challenge because turnout is likely to be lower in an off-year election. Luba Gretchen-Smith, another potential contender, did not return calls for comment.