



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on February 7, 2022

Defiant New Jersey Gym Owner Running for Congress

Ian Smith, co-owner of the Atilis Gym located in Bellmawr, New Jersey, just outside Philadelphia, [announced on Thursday](#) his candidacy to represent the state's 3rd Congressional District.

He should have no problem with name recognition, a key to any political victory: he and Frank Trumbetti defied New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy's command that they shut down their facility during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the left-wing media covered the story repeatedly. Smith even appeared on *Tucker Carlson Tonight*.

Along the way Trumbetti and Smith incurred more than \$1 million in fines and over 80 citations from local and state authorities. For the record, the gym remains open, although the owners are on probation after pleading guilty to breaking in to their own facility after the state boarded it up.

Smith told the packed crowd at a nearby bar on Thursday:

I will fight [Covid] mandates at the federal level as a congressman, and I will use my bully pulpit in Congress at the state and local level to help my constituents fight back. We must end mandates and embrace medical freedom.

He declared he is not part of the establishment:

I am not part of the establishment. People are looking for something different. They are hungry for something different. For far too long we have been left with the lesser of two evils as a choice for our political candidates.

This is unacceptable....

I have entered the political arena to ensure that the government of the people, by the people, for the people, does not perish from this earth.

Together, we can make sure that does not happen.

But, he added, "We have a lot of work to do."

Indeed, he and his supporters have some serious obstacles to overcome. First, Smith proved his independence by refusing to seek an endorsement from the local Republican Party, thus surrendering the top-line position on the primary ballot to his opponent, Robert Healey.



AP Images
Ian Smith



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Healey's campaign responded to Smith's challenge by calling him "unfit," "a 9/11 conspiracy theorist," and "a convicted murderer."

Out of the three, Healey got two right: Smith has publicly claimed that the federal government has never come clean about the 9/11 attacks, and he did serve five years after pleading guilty to vehicular homicide while driving under the influence. That was 15 years ago, but it is another of the obstacles Smith faces.

The next obstacle, if Smith wins the primary, is the Democratic incumbent, Rep. Andy Kim. Kim, a former Obama staffer, sports a Freedom Index rating of just eight out of 100, but has more than \$3 million in his campaign war chest. He also has the advantage of redistricting.

Back in 2020 Kim beat his Republican challenger by eight percentage points, and the new district went for Biden over Trump by 14 points.

However, Smith also has some serious advantages: In addition to name recognition, his campaign is being masterminded by Steve Kush, the political consultant who ran the campaign of Ed Durr, who surprised pundits with his victory last fall over the state's Democratic Senate President Steve Sweeney.

Another advantage is that the establishment has used him as an example of what happens if one tries to buck the system. As one of the T-shirts he has for sale [on the gym's website](#) says: "If our voice held no power, they wouldn't be trying to silence us."



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