



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on March 15, 2018

## Two “Republicans” Divide Vote in Pennsylvania’s Special Election

[The New York Times](#) fairly chortled when it reported on Democrat Conor Lamb’s victory over Trump-endorsed Republican Rick Saccone in Tuesday’s special election in Pennsylvania. The liberal *Times* wrote:



Conor Lamb, a Democrat, pulled off a narrow but major upset by winning a special House election in the heart of Pennsylvania Trump country. Mr. Lamb won in the state’s 18th Congressional District, a reliably Republican seat in recent elections and an area that Donald J. Trump won by nearly 20 percentage points in 2016. The victory is an ominous sign for Republicans ahead of this year’s midterm elections.

What the *Times* failed to mention is that Conor Lamb won because he sounded more like a Republican than the Republican, taking pro-gun, pro-life, pro-tariffs, and — ready? — anti-Nancy Pelosi stands. Those stands are a warning to Democrats seeking to repeat Lamb’s victory: They will have to adopt much more conservative positions than usual to win in November.

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Republican Representative Mike Kelly of Pennsylvania’s 3rd District said Lamb was “more like a Republican” in his positions. House Speaker Paul Ryan said the race was unique: “This is something that you’re not going to see repeated because [Democrats] were able to pick a candidate who could run as a conservative.” Republican strategist Charlie Gerow reiterated the claim: “Here [is] a Democratic candidate that tailored himself to that district, making himself sound much more like Donald Trump than Nancy Pelosi ... in fact saying [that] he won’t vote for Nancy Pelosi when he gets to Washington.” RNC spokeswoman Kayleigh McEnany agreed: “He [Lamb] is pro-gun. He says he’s personally pro-life. He says he’s pro-coal, he’s pro-tariff. He says he’s anti-Nancy Pelosi.”

Other considerations make the race unique. With just 627 votes (out of 228,000 cast) separating the two candidates, some are suggesting that a recount is in the offing. The reality is that, even after counting mail-in and military ballots, Lamb has secured the victory. But it could have gone the other way. The Libertarian candidate got 1,379 votes, many of which would likely have gone to Saccone if the Libertarian didn’t run.

There was also the “Murphy effect,” which likely turned off many Republican voters, causing them either to skip voting or to vote for the Libertarian. The special election resulted because of Representative Tim Murphy’s resignation in disgrace, being found to be a hypocrite: He said he was strongly pro-life but asked the woman he had committed adultery with to abort their child. That rank hypocrisy, not to mention moral turpitude, didn’t sit well with many in the 18th District, and could have



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shifted the election to Lamb all by itself. Political science professor Kyle Kopko said: “Tim Murphy’s behavior was a very hypocritical matter, to say the least, and that really harmed the Republican brand.”

Democrats delighted to conclude that the election was a thumping of Trump who not only endorsed the Republican candidate but sent in family members and the vice president to salvage his election efforts. The facts are that Lamb was at least six points ahead of Saccone before Trump’s troops arrived on the scene, but the election was decided by less than two-tenths of a percentage point. So Trump’s so-called “coattails” did have some significant impact in the final days of the contest.

Saccone was perceived to be weak, partly in comparison with Lamb whom some suggested the Democrats had picked out of central casting for his good looks and his articulation. In an off-moment, even the president called him a “weak” candidate. Saccone also suffered from taking the correct position in the wrong district: In a heavily union district he supports right-to-work laws, which infuriated union members and galvanized them to oppose him in the special election.

What’s also unique is that, thanks to the ruling by the state supreme court that the gerrymandering of Pennsylvania’s districts in favor of Republicans was illegal, the 18th District won’t exist in a few months. The irony is that, thanks to that decision, both Saccone and Lamb could possibly wind up representing Pennsylvania voters in the House next year.

If there is a lesson to be learned from the special election in Pennsylvania, which won’t be confirmed until March 26 after the mail-in and military ballots are officially counted, it is this: In order for Democrats to win in November, they are going to have look and sound a lot more like Republicans.

Photo of Pittsburgh: [Clipart.com](#)

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