

Know Before You Go: FL-15 District Primer

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Republican Dennis Ross is retiring, creating an open race. With your help, we're going to win this seat for the Democrats in 2018.

About the Republican Candidate

Introduction: Republican Ross Spano has served in Florida's House of Representatives since 2012. He attended University of South Florida and has a law degree from Florida State. He ran for state Attorney General before deciding to run for Congress in April. He is also a partner at Spano & Woody, a law firm in Riverview. He is 52, and he has four children and one grandchild.

Issues: Spano is focused on eliminating regulations and cutting taxes. He's pledged to always cut spending and taxes when given a choice. He emphasizes protecting small businesses and bringing jobs to the district. He is also a strong supporter of President Trump. Spano has campaigned on fully repealing Obamacare and opposes any type of gun control; he voted against a gun control bill after the tragic Parkland school massacre and offered a free concealed-carry permit class to his constituents.

Recent Elections: Retiring incumbent Republican Dennis Ross has served FL-15 since 2013. In 2016, Ross won the district by 15%; Trump won the district by 10%.

Strengths. Spano has sponsored multiple bills dealing with human trafficking and he serves as the chair of the Florida Human Trafficking Group. He also has strong ties to the district; he was born there, went to college nearby, and now owns a business in FL-15.

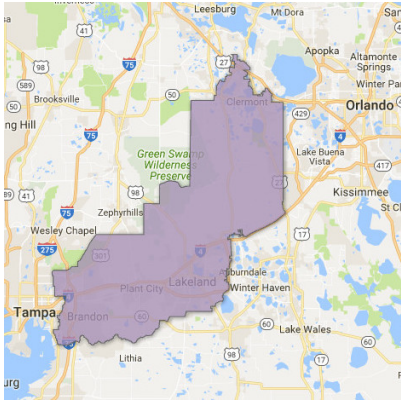
Potential Weaknesses Spano "liked" a pornographic tweet two days after filing a bill in the Florida Legislature that declared pornography a public health crisis. He voted against the Florida School Safety Gun Control Bill that passed in the Florida House the month after the Parkland school shootings. He also voted against repealing Florida's ban on unmarried men and women living together.

About the Democratic Candidate

Introduction: Democrat Kristen Carlson, the daughter of military veterans, lived in many places as a child before settling in Florida. She holds degrees from the University of Florida and Stetson College of Law and has been a practicing attorney for over 40 years. She was Senior Attorney and General Counsel for the Florida Department of Citrus in Lakeland for 12 years before entering private practice. She is the mother of two sons and is regularly joined on the campaign trail by her 97-year-old mother.

Issues: Carlson is an advocate for workers. She will fight for local agriculture in the Farm Bill and supports a proposed \$15/hour minimum wage. She strongly opposes Trump's tax cuts which, when fully implemented, will increase the taxes of middle-class Americans while giving the top one percent 83% of the benefits. Carlson is an advocate for the environment who recognizes the economic potential of investing in alternative energy. Carlson also supports the health and safety of Americans. She wants to improve the Affordable Care Act and protect those with pre-existing conditions. As a person with type-1 diabetes, she understands what it's like to be uninsurable. She is pro-choice and opposes any efforts to defund women's health care service providers like Planned Parenthood. Carlson supports universal background checks and a ban on high-capacity magazines and military-style assault weapons.

Strengths: Carlson has been endorsed by Emily's List and the Tampa Bay Times. She has received the Moms Demand Action Gun Sense Candidate distinction. Carlson is an integral member of her community and has been essential in the agriculture industry, working to protect consumers and producers. Her extensive knowledge of local agriculture and the threats posed to it by Trump's tariffs makes her credible as someone who will protect her constituents from destructive trade wars.



FL-15: Facts & Stats

Population Centers

- Tampa Bay area, 2.9 million
- Brandon, 105,000
- Lakeland, 99,000
- Plant City, 35,400
- Clermont, 29,000
- Four Corners, 29,000

2016 Presidential Results

- Clinton: 144K (43%)
- Trump: 178K (53%)

2016 House Results

- Lange (D): 135K (43%)
- Ross (R): 183K (57%)
- Registered, didn't vote: 155K
- Eligible, not registered: 125K

2014 House Results

- Cohn (D): 85K (40%)
- Ross (R): 129K (60%)
- Registered, didn't vote: 209K

FL-15: Better Know the District

Geography

FL-15 straddles the Interstate 4 corridor that connects Orlando and Tampa, bridging eastern Hillsborough County (including Tampa suburb Brandon and Temple Terrace), northern Polk county (Lakeland), and southern Lake County (Clermont). The western part of the district is mostly suburban; the rest of the district is mostly rural.

Citizenry

District 15 is fairly ethnically diverse: it's approximately 65% white, with substantial black and Hispanic populations. The district is socioeconomically diverse. The eastern part of the district leans Democrat, where many residents commute to high-income jobs in Tampa. The rest of the district leans Republican: in Lakeland, many jobs are provided by Publix Supermarkets' headquarters and Lakeland Regional Health, in addition to jobs in call centers (like Geico Insurance) and logistics distribution centers (like Amazon). In the rural parts of the district, many residents work in agriculture (berries, tomatoes, citrus, livestock) and mining (phosphate extraction). The Ledger is the main local newspaper; the Tampa Bay Times and the Orlando Sentinel are large regional papers.

Elections

FL-15 leans Republican. Republicans have won the district for the past three presidential elections. The geographic area constituting FL-15's current boundaries has elected Republican representatives since at least 2001. Dennis Ross has been the area's representative since 2011, and for the full period of its currently drawn boundaries; Ross ran unopposed in 2012.

Higher Education

There are nine small colleges and universities in the district. Two community colleges have the largest enrollment: Polk State College (20,000 students) and Hillsborough Community College (43,000). Students are a great voter registration opportunity!

Industries & Economy

The Great Recession's real estate crash caused a substantial increase in poverty in FL-15. An influx of new residents — in particular, a new crop of retirees — are helping propel the district's recovery. The largest white-collar employers in the district are Publix Supermarkets, Wal-Mart Stores, and Lakeland Regional Health. Logistics services are increasingly drawn to the region, given geographic proximity to major Florida markets. Amazon, FedEx, and Walmart have announced plans to establish distribution facilities in the area. Agriculture and phosphate extraction were historically important to the district's economy; both industries have declined in recent years. Small farmers are a source of pride for the region, especially citrus farmers—but citrus greening disease has hurt these farmers, who have increasingly switched to farming blueberries and peaches.

Tourism

FL-15 is close to major theme parks in Orlando and Tampa, making the district a choice destination for budget-conscious travelers. Legoland Florida recently opened in nearby Winter Haven, which will only increase the area's tourist traffic.