

# Know Before You Go: FL-18 District Primer

*September 2018 • Researched, summarized, and edited by Swing Left's all-volunteer research team!*

**In the last election, Republican Brian Mast won this district by 39,570 votes (10.5%).**

With your help, we're going to win this seat for the Democrats in 2018.

## About the Incumbent

**Introduction:** Republican Brian Mast, a decorated Army veteran, was elected to his first term serving FL-18 in 2016.

**Issues:** Protecting and preserving the St. Lucie River water source is the district's most pressing issue. Rising water levels in Lake Okeechobee discharge into the St. Lucie River and the Indian River Lagoon, causing massive toxic algae blooms. Mast has pledged support for a plan to buy 60,000 acres of land south of the lake in order to build a reservoir that would divert those discharges. Mast supports defunding Planned Parenthood, repealing the ACA, and privatizing schools. Although he believes in climate change, he doesn't support regulations on greenhouse gas emissions.

**Committees:** Mast serves on the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Transportation & Infrastructure Committee, which is responsible for approving the Everglades and Indian River Lagoon restoration projects.

**Strengths:** Mast's military service record appeals to many voters.

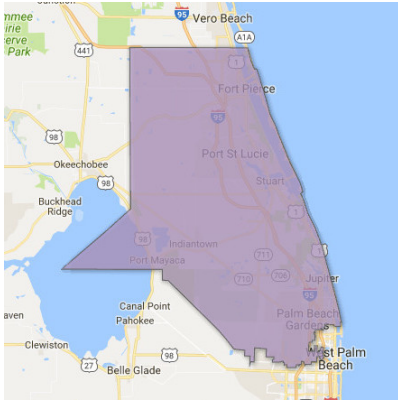
**Potential Weaknesses:** Mast's unwavering support for Donald Trump could alienate moderate Republicans and Independents. Since Trump took office, Mast has voted with him 93% of the time. Despite his commitment to addressing the district's environmental issues, Mast adopts party-line stances opposing government spending to spur economic growth and to accelerate investment in renewable energy. These ideological positions make it unlikely that Mast would support bills that would create jobs and clean up the environment in FL-18.

## About the Challenger

**Introduction:** Democrat Lauren Baer is a native of FL-18. An attorney and foreign policy expert, she is a graduate of Palm Beach County public schools. She holds a B.A. from Harvard, a J.D. from Yale Law School, and an MPhil from Oxford. After starting as a litigator, Baer served for six years as a foreign policy adviser in the Obama State Department under Secs. Hillary Clinton and John Kerry, and UN Ambassador Samantha Power, advising on issues affecting national security, human rights and international law. Currently she is a consultant at a global strategy firm while she and her wife raise their young daughter in Palm Beach Gardens.

**Issues:** Baer advocates for preservation/improvement of the ACA, including protections for people with pre-existing conditions. She supports universal background checks for gun purchases, a minimum purchase age of 21, and an immediate ban on bump stocks. She supports Medicare and Social Security and believes deficits created by the Trump tax cuts will be used to justify cuts to these programs. She believes Lake Okeechobee must be protected from pollutants that cause toxic algal blooms, wants to fast-track the Everglades reservoir, and understands the connection between environmental preservation and the area's economy. She supports reproductive choice, gender equality at work, and comprehensive immigration reform, including a pathway to citizenship for Dreamers.

**Strengths:** Baer's personal story resonates on many levels: as a working mom concerned about the world we're leaving our kids, seeking work/life balance, and caring for an aging parent, she's very relatable. She offers a solid check on the Trump administration's efforts to dismantle progress in areas important to the district: healthcare, gun safety, economic policy and environmental regulations.



## FL-18: Better Know a District

### Geography

FL-18 lies along the Treasure Coast, a strip of Atlantic Ocean-facing land north of Palm Beach and south of Cape Canaveral. The region encompasses an abundance of inland rivers and lakes, including Lake Okeechobee and the Indian River Lagoon.

### Citizenry

FL-18 includes St. Lucie and Martin Counties, and a large portion of Palm Beach County. St. Lucie County has 74,000 registered Democrats, compared to 56,000 registered Republicans; 70% of county residents are white, and 19% are black. Conversely, Martin County is 89% white and 5% black, and hasn't supported a Democrat for president since FDR. While Palm Beach traditionally swings Democratic, the portion of northeast Palm Beach included in FL-18 is more conservative.

## FL-18: Facts & Stats

### Population Centers

- Port St. Lucie (167,000)
- West Palm Beach (100,000)
- Jupiter (56,000)
- Palm Beach Gardens (49,000)
- Fort Pierce (42,000)

### 2016 Presidential Results

- Clinton: 169K (44%)
- Trump: 204K (53%)

### 2016 House Results

- Perkins (D): 162K (43%)
- Mast (R): 201K (54%)
- Other: 13K (3%)
- Registered, didn't vote: 135K
- Eligible, not registered: 135K

### 2014 House Results

- Murphy (D): 151K (60%)
- Domino (R): 102K (40%)
- Registered, didn't vote: 232K

### Elections

In 2016, Brian Mast won with 53.6% of the vote. He defeated his opponent, Democrat Randy Perkins, by wide margins in Palm Beach and Martin Counties, while barely edging out Perkins in St. Lucie County. Prior to 2016, the seat was held for two consecutive terms by Democrat Patrick Murphy, who vacated the seat in a failed attempt to win Marco Rubio's U.S. Senate seat. Murphy was elected in 2012 following a redistricting of FL-18, which previously included large swaths of South Florida, including Miami-Dade and the Florida Keys. Republican Ileana Ros-Lehtinen represented the district for over two decades (1989-2013). Following redistricting, Lehtinen won the open seat in FL-23, while Murphy won the FL-18 seat in a contentious campaign — the most expensive House race in U.S. history — against Tea Party firebrand Allen West. Murphy won with 50% of the vote and a razor-thin margin of just over 2,000 votes. He was reelected handily in 2014 with 59% of the vote. In 2016, Trump won Marin County with 61% of the vote.

### Higher Education

Several community colleges are located in the district. With five campuses in total, Indian River State College's main campus is in Fort Pierce. IRSC shares their Fort Pierce facilities with Florida Atlantic University so FAU can have a presence on the Treasure Coast. Palm Beach State College in Lake Worth is another community college in the district.

### Industries

The major industries in the district are health care, retail, construction, and tourism. The sugar industry is one of the biggest employers in the region through companies like Florida Crystals and U.S. Sugar.