

Know Before You Go: ME-02 District Primer

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In the last election, Republican Bruce Poliquin won this district by 34,000 votes (10%). With your help, we're going to win this seat for the Democrats in 2018.

About the Incumbent

Introduction: Republican Bruce Poliquin is a sophomore congressman representing Maine's 2nd district. A former businessman, he touts his background managing pension funds as qualification to help him cut spending, balance budgets, and create jobs.

Issues: Poliquin is a traditional conservative, supporting a balanced-budget amendment to the Constitution and cuts to taxes, spending, and regulation. He supports repealing the ACA. Poliquin is in favor of "improved barriers to tighten" US borders and opposes "amnesty" for undocumented immigrants. He's leading efforts to strip federal aid to low-income children and adults.

Committees: Poliquin serves on the House Financial Services and Veterans' Affairs committees. He's a founding member of the Congressional Bipartisan Task Force to Combat the Heroin Epidemic.

Recent Elections: Poliquin lost a gubernatorial bid in 2010. He became State Treasurer under Governor LePage, then lost a 2012 Senate. In 2014, he defeated state senator Democrat Emily Cain, and again in 2016, a campaign notable for record-setting political spending and ubiquitous attack ads on both sides. Though pre-election polls showed a close race, Poliquin beat Cain by 10%.

Strengths: In ME-02, an incumbent hasn't lost in 100 years; Poliquin's incumbency may be his greatest strength. As a third-generation Mainer hailing from Waterville, his family's roots have helped him weather accusations of being out of touch, inauthentic, or a creature of Wall Street.

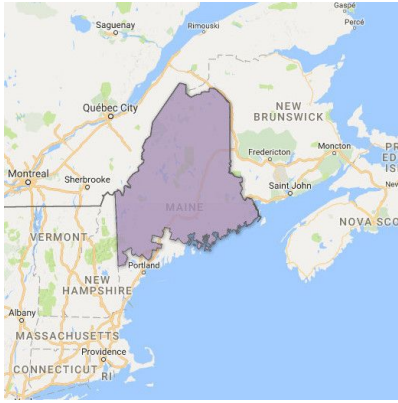
Potential Weaknesses: Poliquin has come under fire for avoiding public stances on issues both national (e.g., Trump's travel ban) and local (e.g., Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument).

About the Challenger

Introduction: Democrat Jared Golden was born and raised in the district. He is a second-term state legislator representing Lewiston, Maine's largest population center, and currently serves as Assistant Majority Leader. Golden served 4 years in the U.S. Marines, with combat tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. He later returned to Afghanistan as a teacher and worked for Senator Susan Collins on the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee.

Issues: Golden is running on a platform of economic fairness and political reform. A strong advocate for veterans' issues, he supports Medicare for all, strengthening unions, investments in infrastructure, renewable energy, and in the traditional industries of the Maine economy as ways to increase wages and protections for working- and middle-class households.

Strengths: Golden's deep roots in ME-02 are essential in a region known for being wary of outsiders. Voters should respond well to Golden's military background, and his openness in sharing his own post-deployment struggles with PTSD and a well-meaning but dysfunctional VA system. His strong support for expanding healthcare access and protecting the federal social safety net will resonate in this district, where a majority of voters recently approved Medicaid expansion. His appeal to end "political games," shift power from special interests to voters, and work across the political aisle is apt to resonate with voters, many of whom avoid strict affiliation with political party for a more fluid, independent status.



ME-02: Facts & Stats

Population Centers

- Lewiston, 36,540
- Bangor, 32,900
- Auburn, 23,040
- Presque Isle, 9,570

2016 Presidential Results

- Clinton: 145K (41%)
- Trump: 181K (51%)

2016 House Results

- Cain (D): 159K (45%)
- Poliquin (R): 193K (55%)
- Registered, didn't vote: 159K
- Eligible, not registered: 130K

2014 House Results

- Cain (D): 119K (42%)
- Poliquin (R): 133K (47%)
- Other: 31K (11%)
- Registered, didn't vote: 209

ME-02: Better Know the District

Geography

District 2 is expansive, covering the northern four-fifths of the state. It includes the cities of Bangor and Lewiston-Auburn, but 72% of the population lives in rural areas. Geographically diverse, the district encompasses a long stretch of coastline (the “midcoast” and “downeast” regions), the Western lakes and mountains, the wooded and wild “Maine Highlands,” and the agricultural reaches of Aroostook County.

Citizenry

With an aging population and the lowest median income of any New England district, this is an economically stressed area, and wealth tends to concentrate along the coast. The dichotomy of “Mainers” and those “from away” is important to some citizens. Those born in Maine to non-native-Mainer parents may even be labeled as “from away.” Demographically, the district mirrors the state at about 95% white. However, pockets of diversity exist, with Lewiston being home to a prominent Somali community, a small population of Hispanic farmworkers in Washington County, and all five of Maine’s federally recognized Indian tribes being within the district. Initially, growing immigrant populations led to tension between long-term and newer residents, but it has decreased in recent years.

Economy

The shrinking workforce is a critical concern for rural District 2 communities, and the need to attract skilled, working-age people to the district is a front-and-center issue. Formerly reliant on paper mills and shoe manufacturing, the district now looks to healthcare and tourism as major sources of employment. Five of the top 10 employers in the district are hospital networks, and a sixth, Jackson Laboratory, performs medical research. Agriculture and fishing remain important industries. Union participation is down, though the Maine Education Association, at 23,578 members, remains one of the largest unions in the U.S.

Elections

In the last two years, the district swung from reliably blue to red. Poliquin’s election in 2014 was the first for a Republican representative in twenty years. Mainers have a reputation for valuing “independence” and eschewing party affiliation, making District 2 a true “swing district.” Despite voting blue in the six prior presidential elections, Trump won by 10% in 2016. The relative economic decline of the district, coupled with the perception of Trump as a political outsider, likely contributed to the victory. Democrats should focus on their candidate’s personal roots in the district, as well as economic policies directly related to the district’s struggles.