

September 1, 2022

Issue 20

## Race in the Spotlight: PA 77<sup>th</sup> Legislative District

### The District

The 77<sup>th</sup> District was somewhat redrawn during the recent redistricting. The District includes Port Matilda and Philipsburg; the Townships of Ferguson, Patton, Halfmoon, Huston, Rush, Taylor and Worth; and, a portion of the State College Borough.

### The Candidates

The Incumbent: Rep. Scott Conklin (D)

The Challenger: Steve Yetsko (R)

Let's begin with the Incumbent, **State Representative Scott Conklin**

<https://www.facebook.com/ConklinForPA/>

Rep. Conklin serves as the Democratic Chairman of the Gaming Oversight Committee and the House State Government Committee. He also serves on the House Democratic Policy Committee, and is a member of the Alternative Energy, Early Childhood Education and Veterans Caucuses as well as several others. First elected in 2006, Rep. Conklin is seeking his ninth term.

A Philipsburg native, Rep. Conklin studied Carpentry at the Clearfield County Vocational Technical School. His professional experience includes being the owner and operator of Conklin's Corner Antique Mall in Philipsburg. Prior to his service in the General Assembly, he was a two-term Centre County Commissioner. Rep. Conklin ran unsuccessfully for the U.S. House of Representatives in 2001 and for Pennsylvania Lt. Governor in 2010.

### Legislative Accomplishments (2021-2022 Session)

Rep. Conklin was one of multiple sponsors of 231 House bills and the primary sponsor of two bills. The two bills which he sponsored dealt with revision of the 1937 PA Election Code – providing for powers and duties of the Secretary of the Commonwealth and other election entities and voting by qualified absentee and mail-in electors and ballots.

Of the 231 bills, 13 have been signed/enacted, eight of which designated bridge memorial naming. Interestingly, there were 90 House bills to amend the Election Code during this session, most of which are still in committee. 16 House bills are in cross-over status (i.e., bill passed by one chamber then “crosses-over” to the other chamber).

### Key Votes

Vote Smart tracks members of the PA Legislature. Operation Wildfire found Rep. Conklin's key votes at this link: <https://justfacts.votesmart.org/candidate/9854/scott-conklin>.

Rep. Conklin **opposed** legislation that:

- Establishes a Philadelphia Gun Violence Task Force.
- Expands concealed carry laws that allows Pennsylvanians to carry a concealed firearm without obtaining a license.
- Prohibits transgender girls from playing on female sports teams.
- Requires all school districts to post curriculums online.

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- Limits Governor's emergency declaration powers.
- Prohibits vaccine passports and limits powers of the Secretary of Health.
- Establishes certain immunities for small businesses in frivolous Covid-19 lawsuit cases.
- Requires legislative committees to audit ballots cast in the 2020 general election.
- Requires voters to present a valid ID before voting in a primary or general election.
- Establishes state legislative authority over elections.
- States there is no right to taxpayer-funded abortions.
- Urges the Governors of New York and New Jersey to end anti-pipeline policies that block Pennsylvania natural gas from reaching markets in New England.

Rep. Conklin **supported** legislation that:

- Authorized college athletes to profit from their name.
- Authorizes nurses to hold licenses in multiple states.
- Expands 5G Wireless Broadband Access to Rural Pennsylvanians.
- Increases penalties for fleeing the police on foot.
- Authorizes gun owners and organizations to challenge local gun laws that are stricter than state laws.
- Extends the Statute of Limitations for Childhood Sexual Abuse.
- Prohibits sexual and elder abuse in senior care facilities.
- Amends marijuana laws to make it easier to remove yeast or mold contaminants.
- Establishes work search requirements to receive unemployment compensation.
- Authorizes retail stores to remain open with one staff and one shopper during disaster emergency declarations.

### On The Issues

Rep. Conklin completed the 2022 Political Courage Test. You can view his positions on issues that matter to you at this link: <https://justfacts.votesmart.org/candidate/political-courage-test/9854/scott-conklin>. Here's a snapshot:

- Government Reform: Supports term limits for State Senators and Representatives as well as the Governor (Operation Wildfire Note: The Governor is already term-limited.). Impose spending limits for state level campaigns.
- Crime: End parole for repeat violent felons; prosecute juveniles as adults for murder and violent crimes; and, strengthen penalties for sex and drug offenders.
- Abortion: Abortions should be legal only when pregnancy resulted from incest, rape or when the life of the woman is endangered. Late term abortions should be prohibited. (Operation Wildfire Note: Pennsylvania abortion law did not change as a result of the U.S. Supreme Court ruling. Abortion for medical and personal reasons is legal in the first 23 weeks of pregnancy. Once a pregnancy reaches 24 weeks an abortion can only be performed if the mother's life or health are endangered by continuing the pregnancy.)
- Energy: Require use of cleaner burning fuels; recycle programs should be funded.
- Taxes: Decrease property and capital gains taxes; maintain sales, alcohol and cigarette taxes.
- Slightly decrease gas and income taxes (those making <\$75,000).

Rep. Conklin's stated legislative priorities include:

- Creating a more favorable business climate; specifically, an increase in grants and loans for small businesses, as well as a repeal of cumbersome regulations and a decrease in certain tax levels.

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- Increasing the State's commitment to basic and higher education through more equitable and increased funding (which will in turn lower property taxes), and continued commitment to technology initiatives in the classroom.

## Endorsements & Rankings

Rep. Conklin has been endorsed by the following organizations:

- Pennsylvania AFL-CIO
- PA Conference of Teamsters
- AFSCME District Council 83
- Moms Demand Action

Learn how Rep. Conklin is ranked by organizations on the left, right and middle. Operation Wildfire found those rankings at this link: <https://justfacts.votesmart.org/candidate/evaluations/9854/scott-conklin>

## The Challenger: Steve Yetsko

<https://letsgowithyetsko.com/about-steve>

Steve Yetsko has been a resident of Centre County for more than 20 years. He is an active volunteer with the Boy Scouts of America and youth athletics. He is a lifelong member of Brush Mountain Sportsmen's Association.

Mr. Yetsko graduated from The Pennsylvania State University in 1987 with a B.S. in Economics with Honors.

Mr. Yetsko has held various positions in marketing and consulting, including Magnum Broadcasting, WJAC-TV, 234 Motorsports and VideoMining Corporation. He currently sells advertising for Cunningham Broadcasting – Fox 8 and ABC 23.

Having never held public office, Mr. Yetsko prides himself on being a businessman, not a politician. He first ran for office in 2020. In that race, Mr. Yetsko beat Rep. Scott Conklin on his home turf (Philipsburg and Rush Township) by 1,904 votes. This race is a rematch where the battle may well be fought in the Centre Region in the townships of Patton, Ferguson and Halfmoon.

Mr. Yetsko has not yet taken the 2022 Political Courage Test that identifies candidate issue positions. However, his website lists his priorities. Among them, listening to his constituents and standing for freedom. His legislative priorities include:

- Focus on our local economy and beat inflation.
- Promote reliable and affordable energy.
- Improve education to help our kids succeed.
- Support election integrity.

Steve and Lori Yetsko live in Julian where they have raised their two sons, Ben and Max.

Sources: Billtrack50.com, Letsgowithyetsko.com, pahouse.com, StateCollege.com, Votesmart.org (includes 2022 Political Courage Test), LinkedIn, Facebook.com/ConklinforPA, ABC27, Findlaw.com