

## **For Real Grueling Contest, Try 1960**

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COLONIE — The still-contested seesaw election results of the Scott Murphy-Jim Tedisco race for the 20th Congressional District seat might seem like a marathon already, but they're a long way from historic status.

The distinction of the closest election in the history of the U.S. House of Representatives goes to the epic 1960 battle between Republican George O. Chambers and Democrat John E. Roush for Indiana's 5th District seat, according to the Office of the House Historian.

Chambers was originally declared the winner by Indiana polling officials by a difference of three votes following the Nov. 8, 1960 election.

But the lead kept changing between the one-term incumbent Roush and the Republican challenger as ballots were recounted in the days after an election night the year John F. Kennedy narrowly defeated Richard M. Nixon for the presidency.

The Chambers-Roush recount dragged on for seven months, voting fraud was alleged and a special House subcommittee was formed to oversee the proceedings.

In February 1961, the subcommittee ordered a full recount of the 5th District. While the recount was taking place, both candidates remained in the Capitol to give a semblance of representation to the 5th District.

The Democratic-controlled body finally seated Roush on June 14, 1961 in the House of Representatives for the 87th Congress.

According to the House historian, the final tally was 107,357 votes for Roush to 107,258 for Chambers, a margin of victory of 99 votes.

"It was the closest House race ever and I helped settle it," former Gov. Hugh L. Carey recalled in a recent telephone interview from his home in Manhattan.

Murphy had a 273-vote lead over Tedisco Friday, but more than 1,500 ballots remain unopened due to objections yet to be sorted out.

Carey won his own squeaker of a congressional election in 1960 by narrowly defeating four-term Republican incumbent Francis E. Dorn for the House seat from the 12th

District in Brooklyn. Both candidates graduated a few years apart from St. Augustine Diocesan High School in Brooklyn.

Carey, a World War II veteran who served two terms as New York's governor from 1975 to 1983, was dispatched as a freshman congressman by the special House subcommittee to conduct voting reconnaissance in Indiana's 5th District.

"We found ballots dumped in haystacks, in ash cans, hidden away in grocery bags," recalled Carey, who collected the wayward ballots and delivered them to Indiana election officials.

Back in Washington, Carey squared off in a legal battle against Rep. John B. Anderson, a Republican. Carey was a graduate of St. John's University Law School and Anderson, a University of Illinois law grad, earned a master's of law from Harvard University.

"We were debating the ground rules for the recount and whether service ballots would be counted," Carey recalled. "I said it wouldn't be fair to reject a ballot from one of our fine soldiers in harm's way."

Anderson was reluctant. "He didn't trust servicemen to vote Republican," Carey said.

In the end, Carey prevailed.

"I guess I proved a better lawyer," Carey said of his face-off with Anderson, who went on to become a third-party Independent candidate for president in 1980.

Carey noted that the outcome was ironic, since Roush proved anything but a party-line vote in the House.

"People would come up to me afterwards and say, 'Why'd you bring that guy in for? He never voted for a single Democratic program,' " Carey said with a snort.

Roush won five terms in the House from 1959 to 1969 and was re-elected after a hiatus to three more terms from 1971 to 1977, before being defeated by Dan Quayle. Roush later served as director of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and as interim president of Huntington College in Huntington, Ind. He is credited with helping to establish the 911 emergency telephone system. The Huntington Reservoir was renamed the J. Edward Roush Lake in his honor. He died in 2004 at the age of 83.

After his failed congressional campaign, Chambers practiced law for five decades until his retirement in 1983. He died of lupus in 1990 at the age of 87.

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