

Insurance pro challenges Smith-Wade-El in 49th

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Four years after his election to the Pennsylvania House, Lancaster Democrat Izzy Smith-Wade-El again faces a Republican challenger in Millersville Borough resident Vanessa Acosta.

Smith-Wade-El ran unopposed in 2024 after securing 67% of the vote two years earlier against Lancaster Township Republican Anne Rivers in a race for the newly created 49th House District.

The odds favor Smith-Wade-El again this year. The district, which covers southern Lancaster city, Lancaster Township and Millersville Borough, is one of the few Lancaster County House districts where Democrats have an edge in voter registration. Fifty percent of registered voters in the district are Democrats, while just 24% are Republicans.

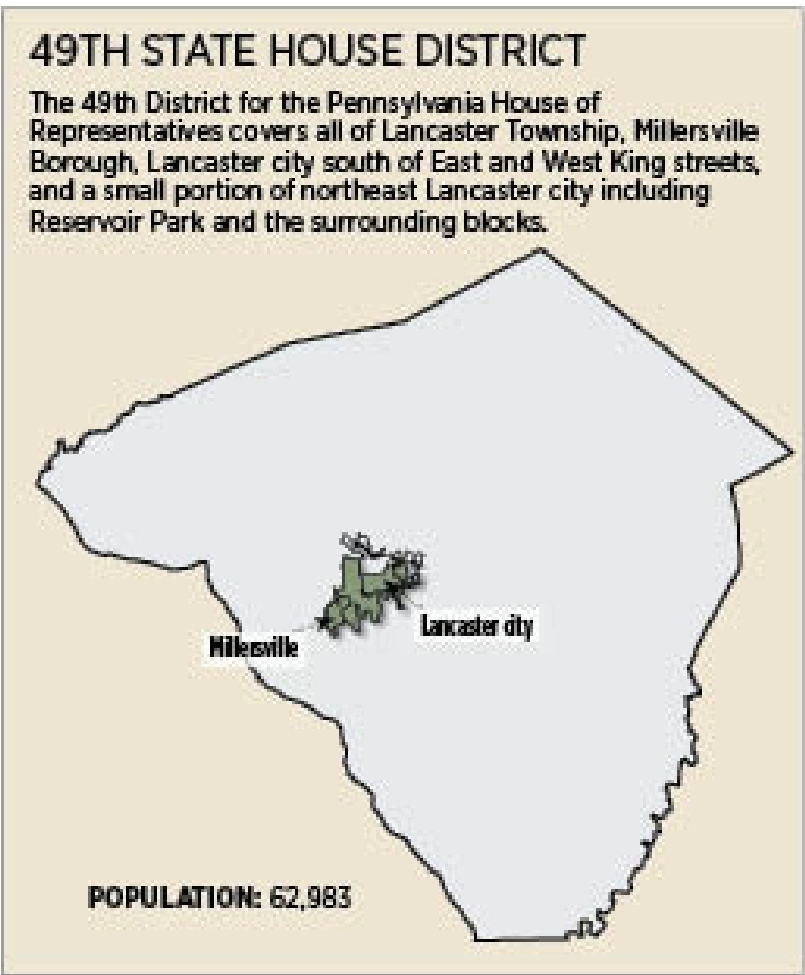
Smith-Wade-El served as Lancaster City Council president before his election to the state House and is a leader in the local Democratic Party.

Acosta is a first-time candidate and, in the spring, said she received help securing signatures to get onto the ballot from one of Smith-Wade-El's previous political opponents, Janet Diaz, who ran against him in the 2022 Democratic primary.

Acosta and Smith-Wade-El were asked to respond to a short list of questions ahead of the general election. Below are their responses.



VANESSA ACOSTA (R)
Age: 43.
Residence: Millersville Borough.
Education: Attended Fairmont State College.
Occupation:



Insurance professional with about 20 years of sales experience.
Family: A single mother with a son, daughter-in-law and granddaughter.

What uniquely qualifies you to represent your district?

I'm a real person, not a career politician. My background in insurance, sales and customer service has taught me the importance of honesty, accountability and listening to others. As a single mother, I understand the challenges families face. I'm willing to take risks, keep an open mind and bring real-life experience and a genuine desire to make things better for our families and communities.

What are the most important issues to address in the 49th District?

Protecting children, keeping our communities safe, supporting families and addressing the rising cost of living are among my top priorities.

How do you plan to address affordability concerns in Lancaster County and across Pennsylvania?

I would work to reduce unnecessary tax burdens, address rising housing costs and promote accountability in rental housing practices so working families have a fair chance to get ahead.

What is your position on data center development and regulation in Pennsylvania?

I oppose data center development that threatens our farmland, local economy and the traditional Amish way of life. We must protect our agricultural heritage, preserve our land and ensure that development does not come at the expense of our communities and future generations.

IZZY SMITH-WADE-EL (D)



Age: 36.
Residence: Lancaster city.
Education: Bachelor's degree in anthropology and theater, Carnegie Mellon University.
Occupation: State representative.
Family: An older brother.

What uniquely qualifies you to represent your district?

Lancaster is my home. This is the place that raised me. I have its people as my first priority, and I refuse to give up on my neighbors, even those most vulnerable. Yes, I've served on City Council and worked for the Homelessness Coalition. I know the institutions and issues and fight like hell for them. But the thing that most qualifies me is that in successive elections, the people of Lancaster city, Lancaster Township and Millersville have chosen me to represent them.

What do you see as the most important issues to address in the 49th District if elected?

Housing, of course. A Lancaster where students get the education they deserve, where a couple can start a small business without

fearing the loss of their home, where the arts thrive, companies can recruit employees, and young adults choose to stay — starts and ends with a home. Our goals as a community, to say nothing of our moral obligation to care for our neighbors, rely on us making opportunities for people and families to come home here.

How do you plan to address affordability concerns in Lancaster County and across Pennsylvania?

Working Pennsylvanians pay too much in taxes, too much for gas and too much for groceries. We have a tax system in which billionaires don't pay their fair share, schools suffer as they must raises property taxes on already struggling people, and we punish municipalities for fiscal success. In my first term, I delivered legislation expanding property tax and rent relief for low-income seniors. Now, we work to fully fund schools, make billionaires and tech companies pay their fair share and relieve municipalities from state preemption, empowering them to lower costs.

What is your position on data center development and regulation in Pennsylvania?

I have supported a moratorium on new data centers and legislation to empower communities, rather than developers, to decide on whether to build them in the future. It's also critical that we repeal the sales tax exemption that data centers enjoy on equipment. Tech billionaires should pay the same taxes that ordinary Pennsylvanians do.

● To read the candidates' complete responses, visit lancasteronline.com/election.

97th District: Suburbs

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Pennsylvanians. We can also help people better afford life by working to reduce the amount of taxes they pay to the government so they have more of their money to use on themselves. That is why I voted against the gas tax. And voted for "tax holidays" and an historic cut on energy taxes; both of these cuts would help reduce everyday costs and put more money back in your pocket.

What is your position on data center development and regulation in Pennsylvania?

I was an opponent of the governor's original GRID proposal because it was a fast-track vol-

untary program that put developers before communities. Now that the governor has significantly changed his position, I hope he will join in the efforts I already support: removing the sales tax exemption enjoyed by data center developers; allowing local municipalities to place a moratorium on data center development to give them the time to properly study proposals; making sure data centers can support their own energy needs; and ensuring that any data centers are located in industrial areas away from homes.

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43rd District: Challenger

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fied. I have met many people who may very well be perfect for the position but I do feel that being someone from a large family, lower income background, military service and with family in the corpo-

rate medical, education and agriculture fields, I can bring a different view that many others have not or cannot.

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Governor: Shapiro, Garrity, Krawchuk

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with budget deals landing past the June 30 deadline — and in some years, creating major hardship for nonprofit organizations that rely on timely state funding.

As a result, Shapiro has used executive orders in his first term to enact certain policies without legislative approval. On his first day in office, for instance, the governor signed an executive order to remove the four-year college degree requirement for thousands of state government jobs.

Since then, he's also signed executive orders to speed up the process for obtaining occupational licenses; develop a master plan for improving access to services for older Pennsylvanians; and create a new office to redesign state websites to make them more user-friendly.

Beyond executive orders, Shapiro has used his executive powers to usher in portions of his agenda, including his administration's 2023 decision to implement automatic voter registration.

Still, the Democratic governor has managed to find common ground with the Legislature on certain priorities, namely, increased funding in the state budget for public schools.

Recent polling shows Shapiro with strong approval numbers, and he is the clear favorite to win in November. A poll commissioned by the Philadelphia Inquirer, The New York Times and Siena University in late August found 60% of Pennsylvania voters have a favorable opinion of him. The poll also showed the Democratic governor held a 16-point lead over Garrity among likely Pennsylvania voters.

His popularity, in part, can be explained by how visible Shapiro has made himself throughout his first term. He has a near-constant presence on social media and has shown a penchant for taking his message — and, as the

case may be, his brand — directly to voters, and often in nonpolitical settings.

He's a frequent guest on sports talk radio and regularly attends high-profile sporting events (from football to NASCAR to the Special Olympics). He's also been a cheerleader for the state to play host to major events (think this past summer's World Cup games).

But given his rumored presidential aspirations, he's never far from politics. He's a frequent guest on national television, appearing more often than not to criticize President Donald Trump's policies and actions in office.

In fact, the governor has made pushback against Trump a cornerstone of his first term, touting among other things the number of times he's sued the president and won. Many of those suits have challenged the loss of federal funding, while others have targeted the Trump administration's requests for personal data of Pennsylvania residents.

Shapiro has also turned his opposition to Trump — and Garrity's alignment with the president on certain issues — into a campaign platform. Democrats supportive of the governor have attempted to paint her as a threat to elections and reproductive rights, among other areas, highlighting past statements disputing the results of the 2020 election and celebrating the U.S. Supreme Court's overturning of Roe v. Wade. The Democratic governor's campaign has also tried to portray Garrity as a proponent of little to no regulation for data centers (though both Shapiro and Garrity's positions on the issue are far more nuanced).

His running mate is Democratic Lt. Gov. Austin Davis, a former state lawmaker from Allegheny County.

His top donors include billionaire former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg; Philadelphia-based Local

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98th District: Woods, Darlington, Deering vie for vacant seat

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How do you plan to address public education if elected?

I strongly support public education. Investing in our public schools means investing in our young people, workforce and communities. I am proud to have the support of the Pennsylvania State Education Association. Young people have different strengths and goals. I know that from experience. I went to vo-tech before Penn State and a career in arboriculture. College is one path. Career and technical education, apprenticeships, agriculture, skilled trades and military service are others. Every student deserves a fair shot at finding what they are good at and building on it. Teachers know what's happening in their classrooms. Students and families know what they need. Listen to them and bring their voices into decisions about our schools. Connect education with local jobs and careers. Give young people opportunities to build a future, stay here if they choose, raise families and strengthen our communities.

JOSHUA DEERING (I)



Age: 53.
Residence: Mount Joy Borough.
Education: Penn Manor High School; bachelor's degree, Pennsylvania State University.
Occupation: Quality engineer.
Family: Engaged to Jennifer Hawn; cat Maggie and West Highland white terrier Fergus.

What is your position on data center development and regulation in Pennsylvania?

We should not give a blank check to large corporations without considering their impact on the community. We should recognize the recent impact of warehouse development and consider the economic and environmental impact those will have. If a data 'warehouse' wants to come to PA, it needs to make sense for

the community where it occurs. We need to protect the residential electric customers, protect local control, protect farmland, have a transparent and upfront conversation and process and protect the water resources.

What do you see as the most important issues to address in the 98th District if elected?

My top priorities would include: affordability and property tax reform; responsible growth and land use; data center development; agriculture and farmland preservation; government accountability; infrastructure and transportation; housing affordability; energy costs and reliability; small business and local employers; public safety and emergency services; environmental stewardship and recreation; open primaries.

How do you plan to address affordability concerns in the region?

The property tax debate goes hand in hand with school funding

because the bulk of property tax is going to school districts. Perhaps, (for) skill games, a reasonable fee could be added to the tens of thousands of machines, and some of that money earmarked for school funding, but the current 52% that's been floated out there is too high. Utility costs have skyrocketed. New industry should incorporate infrastructure costs to operate rather than the residents. There should be policies for renewable energy to help with the strain on the grid and eventual decline in fossil fuels. Government spending needs to be looked at to determine if there are proven results. Stop passing unfunded mandates to municipalities without a funding mechanism. Economic growth is important but should benefit the people who already live here with the goal of (creating) communities where people can afford to buy a home and raise a family.

How do you plan to address public education if elected?

I feel all students deserve a

quality education. We need to make sure the dollars spent on education make it to the classroom and teachers. We need strong academics, strong career and technical programs, safe schools, quality teachers that are fairly compensated and accountability of taxpayer dollars. I think the formula used for funding cyber charter schools should be looked at: Does it cost as much to educate a student who attends one of these programs? I don't think it does, and this would also offer some relief to the home district which in turn should offer some relief to taxpayers. Currently, if a family decides a charter school is the right choice for their child (I do believe there is a role for these programs in education), the home district pays the charter school the amount it would cost to educate the student in the brick-and-mortar school.

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