

Five Democratic challengers to Collins ramp up their efforts

By [Robert J. McCarthy](#) | Published 8:05 a.m. January 10, 2018

Just about every national handicapper lists Republican incumbent Chris Collins as favored to win re-election in the 27th Congressional District this year. But local Democrats don't seem to be paying attention. At least five candidates are now ramping up their activity to unseat Collins in the state's most Republican congressional district as the state's early calendar for federal elections spurs the process. The latest developments include:

- Grand Island Supervisor Nathan McMurray slating an official announcement for noon Sunday at Brickyard Brewing in Lewiston.
- McMurray continuing his early efforts by meeting with national Democratic Party and congressional operatives Tuesday in Washington.
- The newest Democratic candidate, Joan Seamans, is set to announce her candidacy Thursday at 7 p.m. at the New York Beer Project in Lockport.
- Democratic leaders from throughout the eight-county district will stage a candidates forum 6 to 8 p.m. Tuesday at the Lancaster Opera House where the five prospective challengers to Collins are expected to participate.

They include McMurray, Seamans, former Erie County Assistant District Attorney Sean B. Bunny, Mumford businessman Nicholas Stankevich, and engineer Thomas P. Casey of Erie County.

McMurray said that he gained encouragement from party leaders during his meetings, though influential groups with money and manpower such as the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee have yet to pledge solid support. But McMurray also said he believes he can win following several weeks of "due diligence" that included discussions with potential donors and volunteers. "No matter what the numbers say, we have a real opportunity here," he said. "People want something different."

Erie County Democratic Chairman Jeremy J. Zellner said the Tuesday event in Lancaster is sponsored by Democratic leaders from throughout the district as well as several Democratic groups, including Turn 27 Blue, a consortium of progressive organizations aiming at unseating Collins in November.

Zellner, noted, however, that it remains uncertain how the eventual candidate will be selected. An endorsement by party leaders could pave the way for a unity candidate, he said, but nothing has been settled.

"If the group comes together, we could do an endorsement," he said. "If not, there might be an open primary."

Designating petitions are expected to begin circulating in early March.