



Grand Island Town Supervisor Nathan McMurray, a Democrat, is considering running against Rep. Chris Collins, R-Clarence, for Congress in 2018. (Sharon Cantillon/Buffalo News)

Grand Island supervisor considers run for Congress vs. Chris Collins

By [Nancy A. Fischer](#) | Published 6:00 a.m. December 15, 2017

Grand Island Supervisor Nathan D. McMurray said Thursday he is being recruited by Democratic officials to run against Republican Rep. Chris Collins, and he's considering it although he doesn't live in the 27th Congressional District.

McMurray, said when he was approached by leaders in the Democratic party to run as an underdog against the well-financed Collins in the state's most Republican congressional district, he was taken aback. But he said he feels that this may be the right time to do it.

"We need more people to stand up. Right now there is a dearth of leadership — people willing to take their views and stand up," said McMurray. "This is a gerrymandered district and set up for someone like me to lose, but I think if our message is strong and we approach people in a way they understand we can beat the odds."

Erie County Democratic Chairman Jeremy J. Zellner said Thursday he met with McMurray last week and finds the prospect of his candidacy "very intriguing."

"He's a very hard working, outside-the-box type of candidate who actually gets things done on Grand Island — an overwhelmingly Republican town," he said.



Rep. Chris Collins, R-Clarence, with Vice President Mike Pence at Performance Advantage Company in Lancaster on Oct. 17, 2017. (Derek Gee/News file photo)

McMurray has a reputation for crossing party lines to work on various projects, Zellner said, adding he believes the supervisor could pose a threat to the incumbent.

"He's got a real bone to pick with Chris Collins," Zellner said, "and I think we'll be hearing a lot more from him."

The chairman also said he has discussed McMurray's candidacy, as well as those of several others, with the Turn 27 Blue group comprised of county leaders and representatives of progressive organizations. Neither he nor any other county leaders are yet ready to endorse, he said, but will be ready in time for designating petitions to start circulating in March. Zellner also said the party leaders hope to hold a candidates forum in mid-January to start the endorsement process.

Right now Collins, of Clarence, is under a cloud of [ethical controversies](#) including his sponsorship for a federal judgeship of John L. Sinatra Jr., the brother of a business partner and his sponsorship of legislation benefiting an Australian pharmaceutical company in which he was a leading stockholder. Collins has denied there has been any wrongdoing.

Collins was the first member of Congress to endorse Donald Trump's candidacy for president, in February 2016, and he remains a staunch supporter of the president.

McMurray has only been in public office for two years, but has made the news frequently. He campaigned to remove the Grand Island tollbooths and less than two years later he stood by Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo's side as Cuomo announced that the tollbooths were coming down and cashless tollbooths would come to the island. He also fought to bring the Western New York Welcome Center to Grand Island. Construction of the \$20 million regional center is now underway and is expected to be completed in 2018.

McMurray, 41, is vice president of development at Delaware North in Buffalo. Prior to that role, he had gone back and forth between Asia for the past 18 years, studying law in Seoul, Korea, on a Fulbright scholarship. He graduated from law school in San Francisco and went to China to continue his studies, later working as senior legal counsel for Samsung.

He said he was always anxious to return to Western New York and now would like the area to take advantage of missed opportunities, which he called heartbreaking.

"I still think we are just scratching the surface of what Western New York can be," said McMurray. "If you want to stay in office for the rest of your life you just hide under your desk and don't come out until it's safe — that's what we do. If you want to get things done you have to get out there and take abuse and stand up for what you believe in."

Grand Island is not in the 27th District, but under state law any resident of the state may run for Congress in any district in the state, provided they move into the district once they are elected. McMurray, who grew up in North Tonawanda, one of seven raised by a single mother after his father died of cancer, said moving into the 27th District was something he was prepared to do.

"It's just literally across the river," said McMurray of the neighboring district. "I grew up in his district. Most of my family still lives (in North Tonawanda) and my brother is on the school board."

If McMurray officially enters the race as expected, he will join three other Democrats who have already tossed their hats into the ring. They include former Erie County Assistant District Attorney [Sean Bunny](#) (who is actively raising funds for his effort), businessman [Nicholas Stankevich](#) and engineer [Thomas P. Casey](#).

On Thursday, Republican small businessman Larry Piegza announced he planned to challenge Collins, a move considered unlikely to succeed in light of the congressman's strong party support.