



Joe, wife Susan, and daughter Alexandra

From left to right are Class of '74 Grads Mark Petersen, Chris Perrien, Joe Sestak and Bill Walsh on Election Night (John Odegaard left before the wee hours of the morning)

## Joe Sestak Wins Congressional Seat

On November 7th, former Vice Admiral Joe Sestak (Class of '74) became Pennsylvania's 7th Congressional District's next Congressman. Fellow Naval Academy graduate Bill Walsh (Class of '74) aided in the effort, serving as Joe's campaign manager. Other Class of '74 grads, Chris Perrien, Mark Petersen, and John Odegaard were there on Election Day to help in the efforts (John left before the wee hours of the morning and is missing from the above picture). Throughout the campaign, Joe received the support of numerous other members of the Class of '74, and for that he is greatly appreciative.

Joe's message of change, and of a new direction, resonated throughout the 7th District. He took the district 56% to 44%.

Joe entered the race this past February because he believed our country was headed in the wrong direction, and we needed a new course. Joe ran on the belief that national security begins at home in the health, education and economic promise of our people, as well as defense security.

According to the House historian, Joe Sestak is the highest ranking former member of the military ever to serve in the US House of Representatives.

**How Sestak Did It**  
**Delaware County Daily Times**  
By [William Bender](#), Of the Times Staff  
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**Joe Sestak wasn't just smiling for the cameras Tuesday night when he walked into the lobby of the Radnor Hotel with his daughter perched on his shoulders and his wife by his side. He was smiling because all the Election Day indicators were pointing toward victory.**

The retired Navy admiral's staff and volunteers had executed his get-out-the-vote operation with military-style precision, breaking the 7th District into six regions and phoning in field reports throughout the day.

"It wasn't perfect, but it was darned good," Sestak said Wednesday from this campaign headquarters in Media.

By cross-referencing the turnout with previous election data, the campaign was able to postulate the results long before the polls closed. His staff had not predicted, however, that Sestak would defeat U.S. Rep. Curt Weldon by such a wide margin.

Unofficial results show the Democrat won by 12 percentage points, or nearly 33,000 votes. He carried large Delaware County municipalities such as Upper Darby, Haverford, Radnor, Springfield, Nether Providence and Marple and cleaned up in Montgomery County 62-38. In the Chester County section of the district, Sestak won 54-46.

Estimated turnout among registered voters was 56 percent throughout the district and 58 percent within the Delaware County portion.

"This was a very strategic plan toward a goal, with an alternative message. And we did this campaign on the issues," he said. "We responded to critiques on us,

but we spoke on the issues and only responded when we had to."

After entering the race in February, Sestak first had to put some money behind his campaign, which included finding contributors outside the Ed Rendell-Bob Casey network. He raised \$427,000 in 38 days and more than \$3 million over nine months.

"We had to mine in new places, and the vast majority of our money came from Pennsylvania and from individuals," he said. "This was a homegrown effort. Of course we had money from elsewhere, but this was not where national money poured in."

Through mid-October, 85 percent of Sestak's money was contributed by individuals and 75 percent from within the state. By contrast, Weldon raised the majority of his money out-of-state, 57 percent from individuals and 42 percent from political action committees.

The first phone call Sestak made after his family was to Bill Walsh, a former Navy captain with whom he had served. As campaign manager, Walsh handled the ground operation.

"I said, 'Bill, you have the ground war,'" Sestak said.

On Election Day, that included a rapid-response legal team to address problems at the polls and an effective door-to-door effort. The "unreachables" in apartment complexes and "unwalkables" in the west and north were contacted by phone.

Sestak came out as a strong critic of the Iraq war, which he believes intensified voters' disapproval of rising health care and education costs and other pocketbook issues.

"If we are having these kinds of issues at home, why are we wasting our national treasure over there?" he said of Iraq. "It was the poster child for the failure of this Congress and this president to address the priorities that the constituents were concerned about."

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld resigned Wednesday, which Sestak called a "needed step for an administration that is not noted for listening. Perhaps this is a sign that they are now."

"The public has been leading the nation's leaders on Iraq," he said. "You saw it here in the district and in this nation in the way that they voted."

Sensing early voter interest in the race, Sestak hit the air before Weldon with a TV ad that said he was opposed to the war and considered affordable health care his "top priority."

He continued with pre-dawn train station visits on most weekdays and issues-based coffee klatches that put his face in the newspapers often.

"We were on the offensive on the issues," he said.

By the time Nov. 7 rolled around, the campaign had built on Delaware County's existing Democratic infrastructure and energized legions of new supporters. It proved to be far more than Weldon and the GOP establishment could handle.

"People were coming up to say 'congratulations' and 'way to go, Joe' and 'we need a change,'" Sestak said of his first post-election stop at the Wayne train station Wednesday morning. "It was inspiring. It was moving."

With 31 years of Navy experience, including a stint as the first director of the "Deep Blue" antiterrorism group, Sestak said he is willing to sit on House defense and national security committees if asked by the Democratic leadership. But he would prefer to serve on health care and education committees. He hasn't yet decided where his district office would be located or whom he would name chief of staff.

Weldon did not respond to a request for comment Wednesday and declined to be interviewed Tuesday at the Springfield Country Club after he conceded defeat. He will return to Washington for a lame-duck session during which Congress is expected to pass the nation's remaining spending bills.