

# Queens Main Stage For State Senate Control Battle In 2008

The momentous battle for control of the state senate in next year's elections could fall squarely on Queens, where four of the borough's six senators are likely to face stiff opposition as they seek re-election.

The scenario is developing, in part because the Republicans, who presently hold a slim majority, last week declared that they will go on the offensive next year against two Queens Democratic incumbent senators, John Sabini and Toby Ann Stavisky, as part of their effort to retain or broaden their control of the senate.

As for the Democrats, rest assured that the party will do everything necessary to deliver victories for Sabini and Stavisky. Given the challenge from the Republicans, the Democrats would be fools not to retaliate by mounting strong opposition against GOP incumbent Senators Frank Padavan and Serphin Maltese.

That would leave the borough's two remaining senators, Minority Leader Malcolm Smith (D-Jamaica) and George Onorato (D-Astoria) without re-election opposition.

Queens Democratic Party leaders for a long time have made no secret of their desire to depose Padavan, who has held his Northeast Queens seat for 34 consecutive years. They're failed in several recent attempts, but in view of the gains the Dems made in last year's elections, whittling the Republican majority from 33 to 29, the stage is set for them to make an all-out assault on Padavan next year.

Not only would Maltese's and Padavan's defeat fulfill a longheld Dem ambition, it also would dovetail with Governor Eliot Spitzer's announced objective of dethroning Majority Leader Joseph Bruno.

Last but not least, next year's presidential election will motivate both sides to pull out all the stops, especially if there's a top-of-the-ticket battle between Hillary Rodham Clinton

and Rudy Giuliani.

Putting all of these considerations aside, however, Sabini and Stavisky and Padavan and Maltese will, if challenged, be very difficult to defeat.

Sabini and Stavisky represent heavily Democratic districts. Rousing their constituents to get to the polls on Election Day will not take too much of an effort for the candidates and Democratic leaders, especially in a presidential election year.

As for Padavan and Maltese, each has been able to win re-election despite facing high numbers of registered Democrats. Incumbents have a built-in advantage of high voter recog-

inition to make them winners.

In announcing their plans last week to go on the offensive in next year's elections in their effort to retain control of the senate, state Republican Party leaders announced they would challenge 10 Democratic incumbents, including Stavisky and Sabini.

They also announced that they had nearly \$2.6 million on hand to wage the battle, as opposed to the \$626,000 senate Democratic leaders have reportedly banked.

Meanwhile, both party organizations will have new leaders directing election activities next year. The Democrats chose Congressman Joseph Crowley as their leader following the death of Thomas Manton. Republicans picked Philip Ragusa as their new leader when Maltese resigned as county leader recently.

At the outset, Ragusa announced in his plans to run the organization he included conducting a "candidates school" to try to flush out any latent GOP candidate talent in the borough. Perhaps the novel approach he took will provide some new challengers next year.

**HEVESI RETALIATES:** Former State Comptroller Alan Hevesi, stung by charges made by his successor, Thomas DiNapoli, that Hevesi and members of his staff "engaged in unethical, irresponsible and possibly criminal activity", responded last week that DiNapoli had shown "a lack of professionalism and personal weakness" for allegedly participating in a smear campaign against him.

Hevesi also accused state Attorney General Andrew Cuomo of leaking confidential information about a continuing investigation into

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## Weiner: Increased Medicare Coverage Needed To Keep Mammogram Clinics Operating

BY JOHN TOSCANO

Despite the established effectiveness of yearly mammograms in fighting breast cancer, there has been a sharp decline in the percentage of women getting them, Congressman Anthony Weiner stated as he announced introduction of legislation to reverse the disturbing trend.

Weiner (D-Queens/Brooklyn) said that the root of this decline has been the alarming rate at which mammogram facilities are closing down because of a combination of factors.

To try to solve the problem, Weiner will propose a bill to increase Medicare reimbursement payment for mammogram coverage.

"The increased reimbursement rate is long overdue in order to make sure that practitioners no longer lose money performing mammograms and stay in the field to maintain an adequate workforce supply than can screen patients," the lawmaker declared.

Increased Medicare reimbursement, he explained, has an impact throughout the insurance market because private plans use these rates as a baseline for their negotiations with employees.

Weiner pointed out, "New advancements in technology and treatment for breast cancer have given women a better chance than ever to survive breast cancer. However, stagnation as the result of closures and wait times have hindered these achievements. The time has come to reverse this trend."

Citing statistics, Wiener said that this year, more than 240,500 new breast cancer cases will be detected in women throughout the U.S. and one in eight women in the U.S. will develop breast cancer in her lifetime.

The American Cancer Society recommends that women 40 years of age and older should have a mammogram every year. "Early detection through mammograms can give women hope by significantly increasing their chance of survival from breast cancer," the lawmaker pointed out.

Over the last seven years, due to better technology, the number of breast cancer cases that have been diagnosed has increased by 20 percent, but the percentage of women receiving mammograms has been on the decline since 2000 because so many mammogram facilities are closing down.

Besides facilities closing, wait times for mammogram appointments at hospitals and clinics have increased. A survey of facilities in Queens and their wait times done by Weiner's office staff, found that waiting time at area hospitals and radiological facilities ranges from one to four weeks.



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