

Queens Dems' Challenge To GOP Incumbents In 2008 Taking Shape

Challenges by Queens Democrats against the borough's two longtime incumbent Republican state senators, Frank Padavan and Serphin Maltese, pushed by Governor Eliot Spitzer, are taking shape for the elections slated for 2008.

Spitzer, still locked in a bitter battle with Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno, has made it clear he'll do all he can to end Bruno's reign as GOP leader of the senate in the 2008 elections. Republicans presently hold a two seat majority.

At present, city Councilmember Joseph Addabbo Jr. (D-Ozone Park) has been telling associates that he's going to run against Maltese, who represents a Western Queens district. A large portion of Addabbo's council district coincides with the senate district and his name is still associated with the popularity his father, the late Congressman Joseph Addabbo Sr., earned while he was in office.

Addabbo, a councilmember since 2002 whose two-term career will end in 2009 because of term limits, has hinted that he thinks Maltese will be offered a job by Spitzer to get him out of the Senate, and ease the way for a Democrat to replace him. It's a strategy Spitzer has employed in the past.

If that happens, Addabbo said, he's prepared to run for the Maltese seat in a special election if it's vacated.

If it doesn't happen, he's ready to run against Maltese in 2008. Maltese has said he will definitely seek re-election to the post he has held for 20 years, beginning in 1989.

As for Padavan, now in his 35th year in the senate representing Northeast Queens, highly placed Republicans in the borough expect he will be challenged in 2008 by Councilmember James Gennaro (D-Fresh Meadows).

Gennaro finds himself in the same position as virtually all Queens councilmembers—facing the term limits law which will end his eight-year career Dec. 31, 2009.

Queens Democratic leaders have been itching for a chance to unseat the popular Padavan for the past several elections, but have been unable to do it. But there's a good prospect that U.S. Senator Hillary Clinton (D-New York) will be the presi-

dential candidate next year, and with her topping the New York State ticket, the high Democratic turnout should be even greater than usual and whoever else is on the ticket—Gennaro or Addabbo—should benefit by it.

Padavan is ready to meet any challenger, he has said, so a clash with Gennaro or any other Democrat would be very exciting and interesting.

Padavan, of course, as the incumbent would benefit from his long experience and popularity but as we've already pointed out, the race, occurring in a presidential year, would help the Democratic challenger, as would the support of the Democratic governor.

Prospects of a Padavan-Gennaro clash two years hence set off some fireworks last week as Gennaro charged that Padavan failed to support a bill which was seen as a vehicle to help the community oppose a new high school in Kew Gardens Hills.

Community leaders and lawmakers berated the Department of Education for allegedly "sneaking" the school into the community. Gennaro and the others charged that Padavan failed to support legislation that would have helped their cause. Padavan countered that the legislation they cited would not have helped the locals' campaign. He said he also had introduced a bill which would have helped their cause, but Democrats in the Assembly refused to help get it passed. We can expect more of the same controversies in the run-up to the 2008 election.

LONG-RANGE ENDORSEMENT: The race for city comptroller in November 2009 is still about 26 months away, but endorsements are beginning to roll in. Last week, one prospective candidate, City Councilmember Melinda Katz (D-Forest Hills), was endorsed by Plumbers Local 1/Mason Tenders PAC and the United Food and Commercial Workers, Local 1500. Katz' experience as an Assemblymember and councilmember was cited in the endorsements.

Queens could be a major battleground for the comptroller's seat. Katz' council colleague, David Weprin (D-Hollis), has also announced his intention to seek the post of the city's chief fiscal officer. Incumbent William Thompson Jr. (D-Brooklyn), is expected to run for mayor in

2009.

PHEFFER PLANNING QUEENS BP RACE: Assemblymember Audrey Pheffer (D-Rockaways) has formed a fund-raising committee to run for Queens borough president in 2009. Pheffer, who's been in the Assembly for 20 years, says it's time to seek greener pastures, but first she'll run for re-election to another term in the Assembly next year.

In what could be a crowded field to succeed Borough President Helen Marshall, who will leave office because of term limits, Councilmember Leroy Comrie (D-Jamaica) has said he will also seek the post.

QUESTION SPITZER'S NYRA REC: Several newspapers have questioned Governor Eliot Spitzer's recommendation to give the New

York Racing Association another franchise to operate the state's three thoroughbred racetracks. Spitzer, as state attorney general, investigated NYRA operations and said it ran "a corrupt system". The organization, which has run the tracks since 1955, has also had to defend itself against several scandals. It also went bankrupt several years ago, but will be bailed out by the state.

Finally, the Manhattan law firm of Getnick & Getnick, a Spitzer campaign contributor, under a court order, worked for the NYRA by overseeing NYRA operations and served as the NYRA integrity consultant during the six-week Saratoga racing meet. Getnick & Getnick and the NYRA also recently signed a five-year, \$125,000-a-year, no-bid contract for the law firm to monitor NYRA conduct and compliance.

Thompson Finally In Race Next Major Challenge For Rudy

BY JOHN TOSCANO

After months of testing the waters, Fred Thompson made his long-awaited entry into the presidential race—flat out anti-climactic, from his drab entry on a late-night television talk show to the subdued receptions he received on his early campaign stops.

The real interest surrounding the towering Tennessee pol's late gamble on winning the nation's highest political office is whether he can make any difference in what has thus far been a fairly easy effort by Rudy Giuliani to take the lead toward winning the Republican nomination.

The former New York City mayor has held a comfortable and fairly consistent lead over U.S. Senator John McCain and former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney since the beginning of the year, even though many questions have been raised about his real appeal as a conservative stalwart.

Now that Thompson has moved from the sidelines to center stage to join the other GOP hopefuls, he will have the opportunity to subject Giuliani to still another test for the far right's loyalties.

Although Giuliani has at times appeared to be unruffled by his new challenge, saying at one point after Thompson dropped his hat into the ring, "It's exactly the same campaign that it was a week ago," the reality is that he will have to battle Thompson to retain his claim of being the top man on the GOP totem pole.

The first place where the lanky, 65-year-old TV actor might be able to show some dazzle could be in South Carolina. Thompson's strategy is to play to his natural strength by gaining a campaign foothold in the southern states.

After several lackluster appearances on the campaign trail after he formally entered the race last Wednesday, Thompson finally got a friendly, wall-to-wall welcome at a South Carolina campaign stop this past Monday. He's been leading in the polls here for several months and is expected to score his first primary triumph in the first test after New Hampshire.

Then we'll settle into the day-to-day campaigning that will get Rudy and Fred and Mitt and John to show what they can do to break free from the pack. It's still a long way and lots of primaries before it's known who will get the GOP nod.



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