

Peter Koo Announces Candidacy For State Senate Opposing Stavisky

Just as the fight for control of the state senate in Albany crept into the headlines again, Queens Republicans elbowed their way in by announcing a challenge this year to incumbent Democratic Senator Toby Ann Stavisky in the Flushing/Whitestone area.

Launching the challenge is Peter Koo, the 55-year-old owner of a chain of drug stores who has a long list of affiliations in community and business organizations.

Surrounded by a crowd of local Republican leaders last Thursday morning in the new party headquarters in Whitestone, Koo announced his candidacy for the 16th District seat.

Leading the festivities was Queens Party Chairman Phil Ragusa, who announced that Koo had the party's unanimous support.

The announcement was a special feather in Ragusa's cap because it helped to fulfill a promise he made when he took over the party reins last year that he would field more challengers to Democratic incumbents in election years.

Koo stepped up to the microphone and declared, "I love Queens and I'm running for the state senate because I believe we need better representation in Albany. I can be your independent, responsible and accountable voice in New York state's government."

Koo will join two of the borough's incumbents on the campaign firing line shortly.

Senators Frank Padavan of Bellerose and Serphin Maltese of Middle Village are part of the Republican two-seat majority headed by Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno.

By Wednesday morning, that majority may be down to one because a special election was held yesterday to fill a vacancy in far upstate New York. If the Democratic candidate wins that election, Governor Eliot Spitzer will be trying his utmost to produce one more anti-Bruno vote and take over control of the senate.

On Election Day, November 4, Queens Democrats hope to have City Councilmember James Gennaro (Fresh Meadows) on the ballot

opposing Padavan and Councilmember Joseph Addabbo Jr. (Ozone Park) opposing Maltese. It's expected those four candidates will engage in a furious battle, and the Koo-Stavisky tussle will also see a fierce campaign fight on both sides.

In his announcement speech last Thursday, Koo listed better education, improved health care, improvements for seniors, a vibrant economy and a tough crime policy among his target issues.

A healthcare professional, Koo said he would work to preserve more than \$13 million for local hospitals and nursing homes by opposing cuts in services and would fight for Medicaid and Medicare reform to save billions of tax dollars lost to Medicaid-Medicare fraud.

Born in Shanghai, Koo immigrated from Hong Kong in 1969 and worked at low-paying jobs at fast food outlets until he was able to enter the New Mexico College of Pharmacy, from which he graduated in 1975.

Koo and his wife, Bernadette, eventually settled in Queens. His son, Timothy, a Princeton graduate, is now in the Duke University medical school; his daughter, Tiffany, is following in her dad's footsteps, studying pharmacy at St. John's University.

Koo serves as CEO of the Starside Drugs Pharmacy chain, is chair of Program Services in the Flushing BID, president of the Flushing Chinese Business Association, and a member of Community Board 7.

Among those present at his announcement were Padavan, Queens Republican Party Executive Vice Chairman Vince Tabone, Koo's district leader, Stephen Graves, and several other local leaders.

HIGH PRAISE FOR LANTOS: Congressmember Joseph Crowley praised recently deceased Congressmember Tom Lantos of California, as a person who "devoted his life to fight for those with no voice".

Crowley, who served with Lantos on the Foreign Affairs Committee since he entered

Congress in 1998, paid tribute to him as a close friend and colleague who was a great mentor. "I will miss his guidance and leadership," Crowley said.

At his death, Lantos was chairman of Foreign Affairs, a post he assumed in 2006 after serving as ranking member for the previous five years.

Lantos was the only Holocaust survivor ever elected to Congress. Crowley recalled being the only member of Congress present when Lantos spoke at the United Nations' first official event recognizing the Holocaust.

"He was also one of the world's greatest champions of human rights and one of the fiercest advocates for the oppressed," Crowley declared. "He was a true leader whose legacy will be remembered by the millions of people he helped around the world." Lantos' other great passion, Crowley said, was caring for his family—his wife Annette, to whom he was married for 58 years, his two daughters, Annette and Katrina, and his 18 grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

SPITZER LAUNCHES FOOD STAMP INITIATIVE: A program to dramatically expand and simplify Food Stamp eligibility statewide to working families to help them achieve economic security was launched recently by Governor Eliot Spitzer.

The changes will be made by improving the efficiency of the program and streamlining the enrollment process, the governor said.

As of January 1, New York state has waived limits on the amount of savings an income-eligible person can have and still receive Food Stamp benefits. This will allow individuals to save money without jeopardizing their Food Stamp benefits, a Spitzer release explained.

"If we can help hard-working, low-income households achieve a greater degree of economic stability by providing nutritional support and encouraging savings, we will help develop a workforce that is more dependable, stable, and ready to meet the demands of the new Innovation Economy," the governor declared.

CONGRESSMEMBERS SCORE WELL ON ENVIRONMENT: Queens Congressmembers, all Democrats, scored well in their votes on environmental issues during 2007,

The New York League of Conservation Voters (NYLCV) reported recently. Congressmember Carolyn Maloney scored a perfect 100 percent; Joseph Crowley came in at 95 percent; Anthony Weiner and Gregory Meeke were a notch below at 90 percent, and Gary Ackerman got an 85 percent rating.

Senator Charles Schumer scored 97 percent and Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton 73 percent.

Among the issues that came up during the 110th Congress were the passage of the Energy Independence and Security Act, which raised overall fuel economy of cars and light trucks to 35 miles per gallon, the first increase since 1973, creating a savings of 1.1 million barrels of oil per day and significantly reducing pollution contributing to global warming.

Another significant issue was an increase in environmental funding; a third was adoption of a resolution calling for mandatory limits on global warming pollution.

EARLY RETIREMENT FOR SOME TEACHERS: A bill previously passed by the Assembly, allowing certain teachers in New York City public schools to retire earlier than presently allowed and with no reduction in benefits, was recently passed by the state senate, where it was sponsored by Senator Serphin Maltese (R-C, Middle Village).

The improved benefits provided by the change would be absorbed entirely by the teachers opting for the early retirement, with no additional cost to the city, Maltese said.

Under current law, Maltese explained, Tier 2 and Tier 4 members of the Teachers Retirement System and the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) must be at least 65 years old, or 55 years old and must have 30 years of service to retire and receive their full allowance.

Under the new rule, those who seek early retirement would have to be 55 years of age with 25 or more years of service to qualify.

Maltese stated that teaching in the city school system can be a demanding and formidable job. He feels teachers should be rewarded for their service and dedication.

Senator Frank Padavan (R-C, Bellerose) also voted for the bill. He explained it had resulted from a long negotiation between the UFT and the Bloomberg mayoral administration.

On March 9, Padavan, along with Borough President Helen Marshall and City Councilmember James Gennaro (D-Fresh Meadows), will be honored by the Hillcrest Jewish Center in Fresh Meadows for support of the center's youth programs.

WOOD-HIGHTS DEMOCRATIC CLUB DINNER: Councilmember Eric Gioia (D-Long Island City); Maureen Allan, longtime executive assistant to Assemblymember Ivan Lafayette (D-Jackson Heights) and Michael J. McGuire, Mason Tenders Union official; and the Russo Family, operators of Dante Caterers in Jackson Heights, will be the honorees at the Wood-Heights Democratic Club dinner-dance on April 17 at Dante's, 75-07 31st Ave., a fixture in the community since 1959.

The club is headed by Michael Den Dekker and Ellen Raffaele, 34th AD, Part B District Leaders. The District is split between Woodside and Jackson Heights. Honoree Maureen Allen is the Democratic State Committeewoman in the 34th AD.

Tickets for the dinner are \$65 per person.



Queens GOP Unites Behind Koo



Koo, center, is joined by supporters and officials, from left, Bart Haggerty of the Forest Park Republican Club, District Leader Stephen Graves (Flushing), Senator Frank Padavan (R-Bellerose), Koo, Queens Republican Chairman Phil Ragusa, District Leader Linda Gritsch (Fresh Meadows), District Leader Mei Lin Tan (Flushing), District Leader Phil Sica (Queens Village), and Executive Vice Chair Vince Tabone.