

Democrats confident about 5th District race

by Aaron Troisi and Kelly Snyder

If the Democrats ever had a chance to snag Pennsylvania's 5th Congressional District—a seat held by Republicans since 1978—this year may be it.

U.S. Rep. John Peterson (R-Pleasantville) announced his retirement from the Congress in early January, leaving his seat open for the 2008 election. Since then, 12 candidates—nine Republicans and three Democrats—have entered the race for Peterson's spot.

With the 5th District contested for the first time in more than a decade, a large increase in Democratic voter registration and no obvious Republican shoo-in, the Democratic candidates and their supporters are hopeful.

"The numbers have shifted," said Centre County Democratic Party Chairwoman Dianne Gregg. "The registration and attitude in the country are favoring Democrats."

"And it's an open seat, so there's no incumbency advantage," she said of the 5th District race.

Clinton County is one area of the district that recently flipped from red to blue, giving Democrats an advantage for the first time in more than a decade.

"Democrats are doing better than Republicans," said pollster G. Terry Madonna, director of the Center for Politics and Public Affairs at Franklin and Marshall College. "There are definitely more people

saying they're Democrats."

In addition, none of the Republican primary candidates seems to represent a guaranteed win against a Democrat in November. Only one of the nine Republicans currently holds an elected office, and none of the Republicans or Democrats in the race is a legislator.

"We're all equally handicapped in name recognition," said Rick Vilello, mayor of Lock Haven and one of the three Democratic candidates. "In a heads-up race with any of the nine Republicans, I think that any of the three of us can win in November."

The Democratic nominee in the general election may also benefit from the national political atmosphere.

"People are fed up," said former Centre County Democratic Party Chairman Bob Shepherd. "A lot of people are really sick and just disgusted with what Bush has done. The Republicans may become a disappearing species."

"I don't think you're looking at a party with a lot of enthusiasm," Madonna said. "They're not adding voters. Overall, I don't exactly see among the Republican voters and members any optimism."

But it will take more than optimism for a Democrat to win the 5th District in November.

Despite the Democrats' recent spike in voter registration, numbers in the district still favor Republicans. Republican registration is 217,156, compared to 167,810 for

Democrats.

"It will be a tough seat for the Democrats," Madonna said. "Arguably, it's the most conservative and rural in the state."

"The district is favored by a Republican edge," said former Centre County Commissioner Chris Exarchos, one of the Republicans vying for his party's nomination to run in the 5th. "It's a tough district. It takes a lot to get your message out. When it comes to campaign war chests, not all candidates are equal."

Businessman and Republican candidate Matt Shaner has already spent more than \$720,000 of his own money on the race.

"I don't believe that you can buy an election," said Vilello, who hopes to raise \$50,000 by "begging and pleading."

"Anyone who runs for Congress needs to raise money," said John Saylor, former Centre County commissioner and current Pennsylvania Democratic Party Committee member. "In a district with no centralized newspaper or television station, you need money just to get your name out there."

Though he is not running, Peterson's ability to raise money may harm a Democratic candidate in the upcoming race. Since the last election cycle, he has amassed about \$280,000, which, according to the Federal Election Commission, he can donate to any candidate he chooses.

Peterson has not yet endorsed a candidate, but whomever he chooses will benefit from more than just his money. A public endorsement from Peterson, who held the

5th District seat for 12 years, would go a long way in boosting name recognition for any of the Republican primary candidates.

Both Republicans and Democrats are finding it difficult to improve their name recognition in the district, in part because of its sheer size. The district takes up almost one fourth of the state and is the second largest congressional district east of the Mississippi River.

"It presents a challenge to any of the candidates running," said Clearfield County Commissioner and Democratic candidate Mark McCracken. He said he enjoys the advantage of being from Clearfield, which is "right in the central heart of the district."

"If a Democrat wants to win," Shepherd said. "It will require a very heavy on-the-ground, door-to-door campaign. Then they have to raise a whole lot of money."

Despite these impediments, all three Democratic candidates—Vilello, McCracken and Iraq war veteran Bill Cahir—remain hopeful that their party will steal the seat in November.

"This is the year that a Democrat can take the district," Vilello said. "Republicans are saying the same old stuff: They scare you with oil, with immigration; they scare you about health care. I don't think that's what America is supposed to be about. We need to quit being frightened and start being Americans."

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Tosti-Vasey makes ammends with Centre County progressives

by Ben Brewer

Joanne Tosti-Vasey, Democratic candidate for state House in the 171st District, seems to have made up with Centre County progressives.

Two years ago, as president of the Pennsylvania chapter of the National Organization for Women, she brokered a controversial endorsement of Democratic candidate for the U.S. Senate Allen Sandals.

Because of the anti-abortion stance of Bob Casey, who later clinched the nomination and went on to beat U.S. Sen. Rick Santorum in November, competition for the NOW endorsement was between Sandals and Chuck Pennacchio, a favorite among

local progressives.

Both Sandals and Pennacchio met all of the requirements except one. NOW opposes both parental notification and parental authorization when a minor seeks an abortion. Pennacchio refused to modify his pro-notification stance. Sandals, who had previously supported authorization, changed his position to secure the NOW endorsement.

"Allen did a flip-flop, and he caught the NOW endorsement," Pennacchio told *Voices*. He said Tosti-Vasey, who conducted the endorsement interviews, attempted to play the two candidates off of each other.

"She told me, 'I know Allen's position is to the right of yours. I'll bet you I'll be able to get Allen to flip on this issue,'"

Pennacchio said of Tosti-Vasey.

The endorsement didn't go over well with Pennacchio supporters, among them State College Borough Councilman Peter Morris, who, two years later, endorsed Tosti-Vasey for the 171st District race.

"That was a mistake," Morris said. "Not that I disagree with Joanne on the issues. She's good on the issues. But that was a tactical mistake."

Tosti-Vasey said she didn't play the candidates off of each other.

"We spent a lot of time talking to both Chuck and Allen and explaining our concerns. And Allen got to talking with us and said we were probably right," Tosti-Vasey said. "Chuck did not. That's his right. But in

general, Chuck is very good on issues of concern to progressives."

Pennacchio, who is currently working to promote single-payer health care legislation in Harrisburg, endorsed Tosti-Vasey. Many of his former supporters have followed suit.

One of them is Mary Vollero, now on Tosti-Vasey's campaign staff. Vollero, also chairwoman of Concerned Voters of Centre County, said she likes Tosti-Vasey's support of single-payer.

"She's progressive on the issues," Vollero said. "And she was one of a few people who volunteered to help with exit polls. She stood outside from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. in freezing weather last November. I thought that demonstrated her commitment."

*Voices in labor***Education workers deserve more than poverty wages**

by Pat Weaver

In many communities, workers can earn more working at fast-food restaurants than they do working with students in public schools.

These education workers—teacher aides, secretaries, custodians and bus drivers—are an integral part of the educational process. They are the heart and soul of our local public schools.

These workers cook the meals, answer phones, work with students in the classroom, monitor students on the playground, clean the rooms, drive buses and much more. In many cases, they are the first and last person to see students each day. As committed and caring members of the school community, they have an enormous impact on the lives of students.

Yet, many of these workers do not make enough money to pay their bills and have to rely on public or private assistance to make ends meet. In many of our communi-

ties, school support workers have to work two or even three jobs to feed and take care of their families. Many live below the poverty level.

The Pennsylvania State Education Association represents more than 35,000 educational support professionals in the state. In Centre County, PSEA represents the support staff workers in the State College, Bellefonte, Penns Valley and Philipsburg school districts. Support staff workers are the largest growing segment of PSEA.

One way that PSEA and other unions are trying to help these workers is by conducting living-wage campaigns. These are grassroots movements to obtain wages sufficient to allow people to live without assistance. Simply put, a living wage is the amount of money required to cover basic needs, such as food, housing, transportation, utilities, child care, taxes and health care.

Living-wage campaigns rely heavily on

communities pressuring the employer and public officials to provide compensation packages needed by the workers. Often, school boards will decide how to respond to these campaigns based on the involvement of the association and community and whether they will gain or lose politically.

A living wage permits workers to obtain the dignity and respect they deserve and to break the cycle of poverty that many local school districts perpetuate through low wages.

Around the country, many union associations have been successful with their living-wage campaigns, including in the Seneca Valley School District in Allegany County, where workers won a 50 percent pay increase over three years.

Raising the wages of support-staff workers is especially critical because of the increasing accountability that is being placed on some of these workers through new state and federal regulations. The No Child Left Behind Act now requires that

some teacher aides or paraprofessionals be highly qualified, which means they must have completed the equivalent of two years of postsecondary study.

In addition, new state regulations adopted this year will require many education workers to have at least 20 hours of additional training each year. Yet in many school districts, these positions start at minimum wage, and there is no financial support for additional education or training.

When going public with their campaigns, support workers often have to face misguided arguments from the public or school board. Some common arguments are that some support workers work only nine months a year, or that their positions are secondary to a family.

Even worse, some school boards argue that many of the support workers are women who want to work the same sched-

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Soulful Sundown**April 6, 2008, 7:30 PM***"Spring Cleaning and Renewal"***May 4, 2008, 7:30 pm** "Poetry about Justice"

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www.uufcc.com/ssundown.shtml**State College Peace Center**www.scppeacecenter.org

April 6, Sunday, 2:00 PM: "UNCOUNTED", The story of election fraud in 2000, 2004, and 2008. **Marybeth Kuznik**, featured in the film, will lead a discussion afterward.

Garman Conference Room, Bellefonte, Cherry Alley, behind the Garman Theatre.

April 10, Thursday, 7:30 PM: "Thirst", This film asks fundamental questions about water, as it becomes the most valuable global resource of the 21st Century.

State College Municipal Building, 243 S. Allen St., room 201.

April 24, Thursday, 7:30 PM: "Ghosts of Abu Ghraib", Acclaimed filmmaker Rory Kennedy looks beyond the headlines to investigate the psychological and political context in which torture occurred. State College Municipal Building, 243 S. Allen St., room 201.

Stand for PEACE and against WAR at the Allen Street Gates College Ave. and Allen Streets, Wednesday 5:00-6:00 and Saturday 1:30-2:30



- Creating jobs in the green technology sector
- Improving our public education system at all levels
- Providing state-paid health insurance for all children
- Making our government truly open and accountable

I'd like your support, so together we can find solutions to the problems facing our communities. Hope to see you as I campaign.

Visit my web site to find out about campaign events.

Remember to vote April 22nd

Common Sense Solutions For The 171st Districtwww.ElectTimWilson.com

Paid for by the Committee To Elect Tim Wilson

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"For years, the Republicans have been making it easier for people to inherit money, while making it harder for people to earn money," Cahir said. Helping the people who work for a living is one of his main goals, he said.

McCracken said balancing the federal budget would be one of his top priorities if he were elected.

"Once we get that underway," he said, "then we can look at domestic issues such as health care."

Both McCracken and Vilello said that they would vote for single-payer health care. Cahir, who worked on the health care bill proposed by U.S. Sen. Harris Wofford (D-Pa.) in 1993, said he does not support a "single-payer takeover."

"Universal health care has to be our goal," he said, "but we will get torn to pieces if we just do it in one fell swoop."

Like Peterson, all of the primary candidates oppose the tolling of Interstate 80.

Other important issues in the election are the war in Iraq and the failing economy.

All of the candidates support the with-

drawal of troops from Iraq. Cahir, who received an age waiver to serve two deployments in the war as a Marine, and McCracken advise gradual withdrawal. Vilello calls for the United States to "get out now."

"We won the war, but we're losing the occupation," Vilello said. "We need to start removing troops immediately."

Vilello, a Lock Haven resident for 19 years, is endorsed by state Rep. Michael Hanna (D-Lock Haven) and State College Borough Councilman Peter Morris. He said he hopes that voters in the primary will recognize his "track record of winning in conservative areas."

"I've won a contested race in a Republican area, over a Republican machine, in the city of Lock Haven," he said. "In this last election, I won 85 percent of the vote."

Cahir moved to Bellefonte in January and enjoys the public support of Saylor and Democratic National Committee member Ruth Rudy, who ran for the 5th District seat against Peterson in 1996. Cahir said his experiences working on Capitol Hill and as a Marine give him an advantage over other candidates.

"We have a lot of veterans in Pennsylvania, and I'm the only veteran in the race," he said. "No one else has done so much as a push-up at boot camp, let alone two deployments."

McCracken has lived in Clearfield County for 44 years. He is endorsed by Keith Bierly, secretary of the Pennsylvania Milk Marketing Board, and Jefferson County Commissioner Jeff Pisarcik.

"I think it's important that I am from central Pennsylvania and know the issues firsthand," he said. "I know the district because I've lived here all my life. I don't think that's an overwhelming issue, but I think the voters need to consider that."

Voters also need to consider which of the candidates is most likely to take the congressional seat in November. This year, the Democrats seem to have more of a chance than ever before at winning in the 5th District. But it's not a sure thing.

"It'll take hard work and good ideas," said former Jefferson County Commissioner Don Hilliard, the Democrat who lost to Peterson in 2006. "But we got a couple good candidates, and if they can get their ideas and their message out, I still believe that one of them can win."

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ule as their children. School boards will often also threaten to cut positions if wages are increased.

To determine the living wage of workers in your community, check the Pa. self-sufficiency standard at <http://sixstrategies.org>

Another source is the Poverty in America Project at Penn State (<http://livingwage.geog.psu.edu>), which has a calculator to estimate the living wage in your community. Enter your location, and you'll see living wages for various family sizes in your community, how your local living wage compares to the minimum wage and the federal poverty wage, as well as typical wages for a number of jobs in your community.

As a PSEA leader and 35-year educational support-staff worker in the State College public schools, I encourage all support staff to learn more about living-wage campaigns and to get involved in local campaigns.

Pat Weaver is president of the State College Educational Support Personnel Association and the Central Division of the Pennsylvania State Education Association.

Joanne Tosti-Vasey

Caring for our families, our health, our jobs, and our homes.



**Democrat
for PA
171st
House
District**

"Families in our district are struggling to pay for food, gas, and health care. No one should have to fight for health care or struggle to pay for their basic needs.

Nineteen years ago, I had to fight our health care system in order to be here today. I am asking for your support to help ensure that our families have secure jobs, affordable homes, quality education, and health care for all."

Chuck Pennacchio, *Executive Director, Health Care for All Pennsylvania*, endorses Joanne saying:

"Joanne Tosti-Vasey is a dynamo on the question of healthcare. She understands, crystal-clear, that the only proven means of achieving quality, comprehensive, affordable healthcare for all is through our publicly-funded, privately-provided, "Family and Business Healthcare Security Act" (House Bill 1660). Joanne has the clarity of thought to know what works, and the courage of conviction to fight for what's right. I heartily endorse her candidacy for the State House of Representatives."

- Joanne is also endorsed by **Pennsylvania NOW PAC** and **Peter Morris**, member of the State College Borough Council.

Join the Tosti-Vasey Team: <http://tosti-vasey.com>
Email: info@tosti-vasey.com or call (814) 360-7585