

# Jersey Boys

The Garden State Senate race is just one midget short of a circus.

By W. James Antle III

IF THE INCUMBENT is re-elected, he will be 90 by the end of his term. To accomplish this feat, he first must get past the South Jersey Democratic Party bosses, the owner of a nightclub called Kiss and Fly who likes ski trips and adult beverages, a Ron Paul revolutionary, a dentist turned right-wing state legislator, and a Republican ex-congressman who may get kicked off his party's primary ballot. This isn't a reality TV series or a story in the *Onion*. It isn't even another California recall election, although Gary Coleman and a porn star are the only missing elements. It's just business as usual in this year's New Jersey Senate race.

Garden State politics is frequently messy. Eighty-four-year-old Democratic Sen. Frank Lautenberg is running for re-election to a seat he won six years ago due to scandal. He served three terms during the 1980s and '90s before New Jersey Democrats plucked him from retirement—after the legal deadline had already passed—when it looked like Sen. Robert Torricelli might lose the election because of his ethical woes. Despite his age, Lautenberg remains the heavy favorite, but he has nevertheless attracted a colorful crew of challengers.

Among the first to climb aboard the merry-go-round was Anne Evans Estabrook, a real-estate executive and former head of the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce. Estabrook hoped to borrow a few pages from the playbook of Christine Todd Whitman, who parlayed an unexpectedly close Senate race against Bill Bradley into the state's governorship.

Like Whitman, Estabrook focused on taxes.

"Whether it is young families unable to buy a first home, working families struggling to make ends meet, or seniors who are selling their lifelong homes because they can't afford the tax bills—New Jersey is simply becoming unaffordable," she said in a statement upon entering the race. "Frank Lautenberg would make it worse by raising taxes again." The Lautenberg campaign didn't seem too worried in its competing statement: "We look forward to hearing her detailed plans for reversing President Bush's ban on stem cell research, providing health insurance to the thousands of uninsured children in New Jersey, and ending the Iraq war."

Estabrook was the preferred candidate of most New Jersey Republican leaders. She was everything they wanted: wealthy enough to finance her own campaign (she spent \$1.6 million between Dec. 31 and March), ideologically nondescript, and unlikely to threaten the state GOP establishment. They also knew what they didn't want—the other two declared Republican candidates. Ramapo College finance professor Murray Sabrin is the nation's most prominent Ron Paul Republican; state Sen. Joseph Pennacchio is a dentist from Morris County and one of the more conservative members of the legislature. They are both pro-life. Sabrin passionately opposes the Iraq War and nearly cost Christie Whitman re-election when he was the Libertarian Party's gubernatorial nominee in 1997.

Thus it was quite a blow to party leaders when Estabrook withdrew from the race on March 5 after a mini-stroke, leading to a frantic search for a Republican candidate who wasn't Sabrin or Pennacchio. An early prospect was Andy Unanue, a millionaire former Goya Foods executive with moderate leanings and support in the Republican-machine counties. But problems with Unanue emerged almost immediately.

It turned out that he had actually been living in New York since 2004, though he was still registered to vote at his parents' New Jersey home. He had been convicted of drunk driving and was forced out of Goya Foods for allegedly showing up to work intoxicated, among other things. Republican rivals ridiculed him as a "playboy nightclub owner," unacceptable even in the home state of the Bada Bing. Unanue didn't even bother to cut his ski vacation short, spending the brief life of his campaign in Vail, Colorado.

Unanue declared his candidacy on Easter and was out of the race by Tax Day. In the interim, Republican leaders all the way up to presidential nominee John McCain tried to recruit biotechnology executive John Crowley as a replacement. Crowley was tempted but ultimately said no. "In my heart I really wanted to find a way to do this," he told the *New York Times*. "But in my gut, I decided that now is not the time." Crowley called it "an intensely personal decision," yet it was less wrenching for New Jersey Republicans who confessed to the *Times* that they did not know where the would-be candidate

stood on “the war in Iraq, the economy and abortion rights.”

Finally, former Congressman Dick Zimmer agreed to run in Unanue’s place. Zimmer served three terms in the House before losing an expensive 1996 Senate race to Robert Torricelli, 53 percent to 43 percent. Zimmer ran for his old congressional seat in 2000, but lost to Democrat Rush Holt by a little more than 1,000 votes. “Zimmer is the frontrunner. He fits the profile of what people think a Republican needs to be to win in New Jersey,” says John Weingart of Rutgers’s Eagleton Institute of Politics. “Pro-choice with a few footnotes and fiscally conservative with fewer footnotes.” Sabrin communications director George Ajjan describes Zimmer differently: “He’s a liberal loser lobbyist.”

Pennacchio’s campaign is trying to get Zimmer disqualified from running in the GOP primary. Their contention is that Unanue, a nonresident campaigning from the Colorado ski slopes, was never a legitimate candidate and his exit from the race doesn’t create a vacancy on the ballot—and therefore Zimmer cannot replace him. As the *Philadelphia Inquirer* put it, “Pennacchio ... is considering suing Zimmer or Unanue or whomever it takes to keep Zimmer from running.”

New Jersey is notoriously lenient in enforcing its ballot requirements, as the Republicans learned during the last contest for this Senate seat. But in the extremely unlikely event that the effort to disqualify Zimmer succeeds, the result would be the New Jersey GOP’s worst nightmare: a Sabrin-Pennacchio primary. To get an idea of what such a match-up would be like, imagine the 2008 Republican presidential field being narrowed to Ron Paul and Duncan Hunter.

In fact, Paul is actively supporting Sabrin’s campaign, something few self-described Ron Paul Republicans can say. “Dr. Sabrin published an op-ed in the *New York Times* criticizing the

Federal Reserve in 1976, the same year Ron Paul was elected to Congress,” says Ajjan. “These two men have been in the fight a long time.” The connection has helped Sabrin raise money “in 47 out of 50 states.” Toward the end of April, Paul will be heading to the Garden State to headline a fundraising reception for the candidate. Sabrin supporters are calling it “Freedom in New Jersey Day.”

Sabrin is sometimes more willing to play party loyalist than Paul. “He is supporting John McCain for president in November,” Ajjan says, something Paul has given no indication he will do. Similarly, while Sabrin is strongly antiwar, he is more inclined than Paul to take the George Aiken line: declare victory and go home. “Our brave men and women accomplished their mission and won the

achieved “NOW!” according to his website). Before he entered politics, his views could be a bit more eccentric. Under the pseudonym Joseph Penn, he wrote *The Nationalist Manifesto*, which included proposals for putting the homeless in military camps, promoting the abortifacient RU-486 as an “alternative” to abortion, and changing the color of currency every few years to thwart the black market. Pennacchio claims to have “evolved away from” many of these opinions.

The Republicans aren’t having all the fun. Centrist Congressman Rob Andrews announced that he would challenge Lautenberg in the Democratic primary, angering many party leaders. But Andrews has also received the support of South Jersey Democrats who resent their northern counterparts’ control of

## IMAGINE THE 2008 REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL FIELD BEING **NARROWED TO RON PAUL AND DUNCAN HUNTER.**

Iraq War by removing Saddam Hussein,” he says. “Americans continue to support our troops and approve going after the terrorists who attacked America on September 11th.” He describes our continued involvement in Iraq as a fruitless attempt to “end another country’s civil war.”

Then again, Sabrin can also be more radical. He has promised to resign from Congress if all combat troops don’t come home from Iraq by September 2010. He is recruiting a slate of congressional candidates and Republican convention delegates willing to take the same pledge. Sabrin shares Paul’s longstanding commitment to free-market economics, as well as his traditional conservative views on abortion and immigration.

“Jersey Joe” Pennacchio is running a more conventionally Republican campaign, though he takes a populist line on energy independence (to be achieved in 10 years) and securing the borders (to be

the state party. Andrews’s relative youth (he’s 50) and regional backing could help him overcome his vote to authorize the Iraq War—in a Sabrin-Andrews race, the Democrat would be the prowar candidate—and give Lautenberg a scare.

Either way, New Jersey hasn’t sent a Republican to the Senate since Clifford Chase’s last victory in 1972. Experts don’t see that changing. “Either Democrat would be the frontrunner, even against Zimmer,” says Weingart. “Unless Lautenberg’s health changes radically, I don’t see people voting Republican. If Andrews wins the primary, I don’t see how they beat him at all.” The GOP candidates’ supporters no doubt beg to differ. No matter what happens, this much is clear: Jersey politicians can put on almost as good a show as Bruce Springsteen. ■

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# Mission Accomplished?

May 1 will mark five years since George W. Bush stood on the deck of the *U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln* and triumphantly pronounced the “end of major combat operations.” Since then, we have incurred 97 percent of the war’s casualties and have spent an additional \$473 billion, but Iraq still isn’t the beacon of freedom we were promised. For an explanation, we turn to the war’s most enthusiastic supporters:

## LIBERATION THEOLOGY

“Support for Saddam, including within his military organization, will collapse after the first whiff of gunpowder.”

—Richard Perle, chairman, Defense Policy Board, 7/11/02

“After liberation the streets of Basra and Baghdad are sure to erupt in joy.”

—Vice President Dick Cheney, 8/26/02

“Desert Storm II will be a walk in the park.”

—Kenneth Adelman, member, Defense Policy Board, 8/29/02

“If we come to Baghdad, Damascus and Tehran as liberators, we can expect overwhelming popular support.”

—Michael Ledeen, Freedom Scholar, American Enterprise Institute, 9/02

“We shall be greeted, I think, in Baghdad and Basra with kites and boom boxes.”

—Fouad Ajami, professor of Middle East studies, Johns Hopkins, 10/7/02

“You’re going to find, and this is very important, you’re going to find Iraqis out cheering American troops.”

—Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, 2/23/03

## CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL AND NUCLEAR, OH MY!

“There is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction. There is no doubt he is amassing them to use against our friends, against our allies, and against us. And there is no doubt that his aggressive regional ambitions will lead him into future confrontations with his neighbors—confrontations that will involve both the weapons he has today and the ones he will continue to develop with his oil wealth.”

—Vice President Dick Cheney, 8/26/02

“We know that he has the infrastructure, nuclear scientists to make a nuclear weapon. ... [W]e don’t want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud.”

—National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, 9/8/02

“[Saddam’s] regime has amassed large clandestine stocks of biological weapons, including anthrax and botulism toxin and possibly smallpox. His regime has amassed large clandestine stockpiles of chemical weapons, including VX and sarin and mustard gas.

—Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, 9/18/02

“We know that [Saddam] has stored secret supplies of biological and chemical weapons throughout his country.”

—Former Vice President Al Gore, 9/23/02

“It is clear ... that left unchecked Saddam Hussein will continue to increase his capacity to wage biological and chemical warfare and will keep trying to develop nuclear weapons.”

—Sen. Hillary Clinton, 10/10/02

“Saddam Hussein certainly has chemical and biological weapons. There’s no question about that.”

—Representative Nancy Pelosi, 11/17/02

“Our conservative estimate is that Iraq today has a stockpile of between 100 and 500 tons of chemical weapons agents. ... [Saddam] remains determined to acquire nuclear weapons. ... these are not assertions. These are facts, corroborated by many sources...”

—Secretary of State Colin Powell, 2/5/03

“We know [Saddam has] been absolutely devoted to trying to acquire nuclear weapons, and we believe he has, in fact, reconstituted nuclear weapons.”

—Vice President Dick Cheney, 3/16/03

“We know where they are. They’re in the area around Tikrit and Baghdad and east, west, south, and north somewhat.”

—Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, 3/30/03

## THE MISSING LINK

“I think Iraq is, actually, the big unspoken elephant in the room today. There’s a fair amount of evidence that Iraq had very close associations with Osama bin Laden in the past.”

—William Kristol, editor of *The Weekly Standard*, the day after 9/11