



Capanna Wins Lansing Democratic Endorsement

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by Dan Veaner

State Senate candidate Paloma Capanna was in Lansing last week, where she scooped up the Lansing Democratic Committee endorsement for her run against Republican incumbent Michael Nozzolio. Capanna met with Democrats at Lansing Community Center for an hour of talk and refreshments. "Paloma Capanna has insightful, practical ideas and she has a knack for bringing people together to find solutions," says Lansing Democratic Committee Chair Hurf Sheldon. "Paloma's wonderfully spirited and community focused campaign shows what an effective legislator she will be."

Capanna was in Lansing at the end of September last year when she kicked off her campaign with a 150 mile walk across the 54th district. Starting from her Webster home base, she finished the walk at Myers Park. Lansing is the southern-most town in the district. "We have the most beautiful senate district in the State of New York," Capanna says. "I will say that from now until the end of time, because it is the Fingerlakes Region and it is the shores of Lake Ontario and everything in between."

Capanna says the beauty of the region offers unique opportunities for opening up new industries and creating new jobs. "One of the things we can look at is eco-tourism," she says. "We also have a great territory for renewable energy research and development. The fact that we already have agriculture as a base, and farmers that really are on the cutting edge of trying to find those alternative fuels. We have the topography for wind research."

She says that closed factories are a 'silver lining' because of their potential to jump-start new industries without building a whole new infrastructure to house them. "New York State has money for research and development of green energy in rural counties," she says. "We qualify for these monies. More than \$300 million has already been awarded, but gee, guess what? Our incumbent hasn't gotten us a dollar of that money yet."

While Eliot Spitzer's meteoric fall last week was a shock to all Democrats, it may turn out to benefit Capanna's campaign. She says she has developed a relationship with now Governor David Patterson in his roles as New York Senate Minority Leader and top strategist for the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee. Capanna says she has been consulting with Patterson throughout her campaign and expects the connection to continue. "I'll certainly be asking for that endorsement on Monday," she said last week.

Asked about issues that Lansing residents care about, Capanna offered a point of view and plans to address them. Economy of scale was a theme, especially for big dollar items like taxes and health care. Capanna suggested that taxes should be administered by the state,

taking the financial burden and duplication of collecting taxes off the backs of local municipalities and counties, and simplifying the process.

"Every single municipality has got to have tax collectors and bookkeeping processes, and enforcement processes, and foreclosure attorneys, and resale attorneys for properties that have been taken for failure to pay taxes," she says. "If the State of New York was doing that through a centralized office immediately we take the burden off the municipalities and we create efficiency of scale."

On her Web site she takes a similar approach to universal health care, saying that costs will be reduced when more people are in the system. "Your cost for state-administered health insurance will be reduced by expanding the pool of people who are covered through a single plan and by eliminating private insurance profits," she says. "Your cost will come down even further by eliminating bad debt/free care that drives up costs of those who are paying. More importantly, your quality of care goes up when doctors and hospitals regain the 30% of their time that is lost to billing paperwork."

Capanna also talked about state aid for school districts, saying that communities in the 54th district have not gotten a fair share. She advocated a state-wide formula based on actual enrollment, not waiting ten years for new enrollment counts.

"Paloma Capanna is a smart and hard working family attorney who sees first hand the losses we suffer as a society when families are taxed beyond their means and left without a health support system," Sheldon says. "Eighty percent of the uninsured are employed. Paloma's commitment to community and demonstrated intense work ethic will benefit Lansing and the 54th district greatly."

It was inevitable that the topic of the Lansing library would be raised. Lansing Democrat Dan Konowalo said that he objects to 'member items,' money that individual senators can award to projects in their districts. "There shouldn't be any," Capanna agreed. "It distorts the democratic process. Meritorious issues like libraries should just be part of the routine budget process. Libraries to public schools -- what other cornerstone of our country is there? It's not a question that we want libraries that are free and open to the public. Make it part of the regular budget. Substantive programs that have merit should be part of the budget process."

Capanna stresses the grass roots nature of her campaign. So far she has raised about \$20,000 from 400 donors. In January she pledged to limit individual campaign contributions to \$1,000 per donor and urged Nozzolio to do the same. "When you figure out that the median household income in our area, median household being for two people, is \$43,000 before taxes, you know we are not buying influence in Albany," Capanna says. "So it's time for us to change that. We took a pledge that we would limit campaign contributions to \$1,000 per person. I asked my opponent if he would sign it. He gave me no response. The newspapers then asked if he would sign it. He gave no response. So I think we have our response on that."

In keeping with this one person at a time approach, Capanna has launched a series of appearances at coffee shops across the district. She meets people at the door, exchanging a coupon for a cup of coffee for their contact information, and chats about issues and politics. "These events have an easy going dynamic of campaign goes to the public, where they are, at

independent coffee shops and family-owned restaurants," she says, lamenting the demise of the Triangle in King Ferry.

"What happens is special," she explains. "It sparks conversations among people who share breakfasts with each other, who call from one table to the next, where the waitresses sprinkle in their remarks or their refereeing while pouring and hustling big plates of home-cooked food. It's about real life, real people, real issues."

Capanna has a uphill battle challenging the generally popular Nozzolio. Sheldon says that Tompkins County Democrats have a unique opportunity to change the face of the Senate, because of three strong candidates in the three senate districts that divide the county. "Aubertine has already won, Barber has an excellent chance against Seward and I would rate Paloma's prospects highly if she keeps campaigning the way she has been."

Lansing Democrats were impressed. After the reception they voted unanimously to endorse Capanna.