

Schundler Says DiFrancesco Bent Rules to Bring Franks Into Race

By PAUL J. PEYTON
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WEST ORANGE — After months of preparing to face Donald T. DiFrancesco in the Republican gubernatorial Primary Election, Jersey City Mayor Bret Schundler is now preparing to go up against former Congressman Bob Franks.

The Westfield native and first GOP Mayor of Jersey City since World War I, charged that Mr. DiFrancesco "changed the rules of the election" just five weeks before the June 5th primary election was to be held. The election is now slated for June 26. Mr. Schundler called the changes to the election process, "an exceptional occurrence in our history."

First, the date of the election was changed from June 5 to June 26; then the date to pull out of the election and find a replacement was postponed to May 8th; next, gubernatorial candidates became eligible for additional state campaign funds as a result of a longer campaign; and most recently the bulk of DiFrancesco's \$770,000 campaign funds are now likely to move into Mr. Franks' war chest.

Republicans have said state legislation was passed due to the GOP challenge to the approved new state legislative district map as it relates to how the minority vote is spread out among legislative districts under the new map. A decision on that case was expected after press time.

In addition, Mr. Schundler has

charged that Mr. DiFrancesco has changed laws to enable Mr. Franks to be assigned the Republican ballot lines for endorsed candidates in violation of county bylaws, which stipulate that the party hold conventions so that committee members can choose the candidates.

"We were five weeks out from the election, with me having gone from way behind to surging ahead," the Mayor explained. "He (Mr. DiFrancesco) called a time out and used a lot of muscle to get legislators to postpone the election. And then he brought in his old district mate, Bob Franks and changed the law so that he could give him \$700,000 (in campaign contributions), which is a little bit above what has historically been the campaign contribution limits in New Jersey."

The candidate also charged that Mr. DiFrancesco used his authority as Senate President to enable Mr. Franks to gain Republican ballot lines for endorsed candidates.

The Jersey City Mayor and former All-Star Westfield High School player, explained that laws were changed to give Mr. Franks \$1.5 million in additional taxpayer funds for the campaign.

Mr. Schundler, who has spent \$2 million on his quest to gain his party's nomination, had prepared to spend \$5 million in the primary. He said he will apply for additional campaign funding given the now extended primary election.

"I was always convinced that if he (Mr. DiFrancesco) was our candidate we would be blown out by Jim McGreevey and we would lose control of the legislature," he explained. "So in spite of those calls to leave the race I stuck it out."

Last week, just days after kicking off his campaign at an under attended rally in Lyncroft, Mr. DiFrancesco withdrew from the race and was replaced by Mr. Franks, who nearly defeated Jon Corzine in the race for the United States Senate last year.

"What occurred last week was truly remarkable in what it shows about his (Mr. DiFrancesco's) determination to hold onto power despite his clear electoral weakness."

In terms of campaign issues, Mr. Schundler said income taxes have jumped since the days of Governor Jim Florio while state debt during that period has quadrupled without voters having an opportunity to have a say on the issue.

Mr. Schundler said he believes property taxes are "unnecessarily high." He said legislators seem to issue mandates on municipalities and school districts so they can gain special interest endorsements. He said these mandates are neither efficient or effective in providing services.

"I got in (to the race) to make changes with regard to the way government works so that we can lower property taxes, lower income taxes, get the tolls off the parkway, reform our schools by improving standards and accountability and expanding parental choice," the candidate said.

He also vows to reverse the Mount Laurel decision for low to middle income housing in order to restore local power to towns to fight suburban sprawl.

Mr. Schundler has served as Mayor of Jersey City since 1993. The city has only six percent registered Republicans. Mr. Schundler won the majority in three of the city's five housing projects when he was reelected in 1993.

He is the longest serving mayor in Jersey City in half a century.



ENTERING THE RACE... Former Congressman Bob Franks holds his daughter, Kelly, while waving to supporters during last week's announcement that he is running for Governor.

Franks Replaces DiFrancesco In Race for Governor's Office

By PAUL J. PEYTON
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KENILWORTH — Just 24 hours after a somber Acting Governor Donald T. DiFrancesco suddenly pulled out of the Governor's race, former four-term Congressman Bob Franks officially jumped into the contest last Thursday.

Mr. Franks nearly defeated Jon Corzine in the race for the United States Senate last November, a race in which he was outspent 12 to 1.

The former Congressman takes the place of Mr. DiFrancesco who pulled out of the race after saying he no longer wanted to endure the scrutiny placed on him by media reports of his business and financial dealings.

Mr. Franks, in kicking off his campaign before 200 enthusiastic supporters at the Kenilworth Inn stated, "Today is a great new day for New Jersey Republicans — but more importantly, it's a great day for New Jersey."

The former Congressman is no stranger to Trenton, having served in

the State Assembly for 13 years. He also served several terms as state GOP chairman.

Bringing a message of reforming Trenton, Mr. Franks said he would push for term limits for the state's 120 lawmakers, to end the influence Political Action Committees have over legislators, and to create the position of State Auditor General to protect the interests of taxpayers.

He also cited skyrocketing property taxes and "unchecked development" and traffic congestion as campaign issues.

"I want to shake up the political process," he told supporters. "You can't create a new era if you drag along all the rules from the old era."

Mr. Franks, noting the importance of this year's gubernatorial election, told supporters that, "For too long Trenton has been nibbling around the edges of real problems that New Jerseyans face everyday."

He later said his remarks were addressed toward a "culture" that has

existed in Trenton for many years regardless of which party has control of the legislature.

Looking ahead to a potential Franks Administration he said, "Throughout my career in public service, I have been a problem-solver — a uniter, not a divider. And that's the kind of Governor I intend to be."

Reporters questioned the fairness of Mr. Franks late entry into the GOP race, given the campaign of Jersey City Mayor Bret Schundler.

In response, Mr. Franks said the GOP party has always had one goal in mind — "wanting to field the strongest possible candidate in what is going to be an extraordinary competitive and challenging race in November" against Woodbridge Mayor James McGreevey, the Democratic Party nominee. "I am honored that the (Republican) Party has identified me as that candidate."

He said he believes State Supreme Court Judge Peter Verniero should resign, citing the lack of confidence state residents now have in the judge. Also, Mr. Franks feels that racial profiling should be outlawed.

The candidate told reporters he would not accept tobacco money or funds from the National Rifle Association for his campaign war chest.

Mr. Schundler, a native of Westfield, filed legal action last week to prevent Mr. Franks from entering the race.

The suit challenges legislation signed by the Acting Governor which postpones the primary election until June 26 and, as a result, provided more time for the GOP to find a replacement candidate for Mr. DiFrancesco. A hearing will be held tomorrow, May 4, on Mr. Schundler's argument.

A number of officials quickly endorsed Mr. Franks, including former Governor turned Environmental Protection Agency administrator, Christine Todd Whitman.

"He is a strong candidate and there is no more qualified person in either party," she said. "New Jersey demands a candidate of vision, values and character. On all counts, Bob Franks answers the call."

Congressman Michael A. Ferguson added, "Bob is the candidate who can unify the Republican Party and lead GOP candidates, up and down the ballot, to victory in November."

In addition, Assemblyman Richard H. Bagger (R-22nd) of Westfield said, "He (Mr. Franks) is definitely the right person to step in. There is no question about it."

Mr. Bagger served on the three-member Committee of Vacancies which voted on April 25 to support having Mr. Franks replace Mr. DiFrancesco on the GOP line. New Jersey's GOP County Chairmen voted 18 to 1 to ask Mr. Franks to step into the race.

"He is known from one corner of New Jersey to another. He is extraordinarily popular with grass roots Republicans. He will be able to step in and continue this campaign without losing a beat."

Former Westfield Councilwoman Gail Vernick said, "I think it is a wonderful opportunity for the State of New Jersey to have Bob Franks as our candidate for Governor."

Although promising an issue-oriented campaign, Mr. Franks told reporters that New Jerseyans will witness "a campaign the likes of which you have never seen."

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