Boston Globe Coverage of the 8th Congressional District Election

June 14, 1998–August 30, 1998
By Alan Lupo, Globe Staff

(Alan Lupo is roaming the 8th Congressional District, writing a series of pieces about the personalities, issues and communities that he encounters.)

It was only appropriate that Susan Tracy, one of 10 candidates seeking the Democratic nomination in the 8th Congressional District, was munching on a cheeseburger while her portly interviewer wolfed down a steak at The Stockyard.

Said dining was historically accurate because The Stockyard is a restaurant on Market Street in an area of Brighton, where, from 1873 to 1957, cattlemen and butchers sold and slaughtered livestock on a 60-acre abattoir easily accessible to Watertown merchants and customers.

Beyond that, Tracy bills herself as the meat-and-potatoes candidate in a race that features candidates as diverse as the district they wish to represent. They are seasoned pols and newcomers, of moderate means and wealthy, white, black and Latino, male and female, straight and gay.

Tracy is certainly playing for a woman's vote, and, as the only gay candidate, that growing vote, too. But what she stresses most are her working-stiff roots, which she intends to parlay against her opponents, as her new campaign brochure clearly illustrates.

"She's one of us," it says on the front page. "And always will be."

Translation: One, she doesn't forget where she comes from, specifically, Brighton; in a larger sense, Boston; in a cosmic sense, much of the predominantly urban district, which includes Chelsea, Somerville, Cambridge, Watertown, Belmont and the northern tier of Boston. Two, she holds no high-and-mighty aspirations to become interplanetary chief consul.

Inside the folder, the subtlety disappears.

"Susan Tracy. She's not wealthy or flashy. She's not a political rerun or a celebrity. She's just one of us. And always will be."

Translation: At least three candidates, Chris Gabrieli, John O'Connor and Thomas Keane, are wealthy. At least three candidates, Ray Flynn, Marjorie Clapprood, George Bachrach, and possibly a fourth, Alex Rodriguez, and fifth, Charles Yancey, and sixth, Michael Capuano, are in Tracy's "rerun" category. At least one, Clapprood, a former talk show host, is a celebrity and "flashy."

For much of the interview, Tracy joked and laughed easily. She is down home, a hard worker who has gained the admiration of some important Toms: House Speaker Tom Finneran, with whom she served in the Legislature; Boston Mayor Tom Menino; and Tom McIntyre, director of the Bricklayers (Union) International Non-Profit Housing and a former vice president of that union.

Finneran, of Mattapan, is with her. Menino keeps his own counsel. McIntyre told his own pal, Ray Flynn, that he had made a commitment to Tracy and would stick with it, and it does not hurt her that there are many active and retired bricklayers in Allston and Brighton.

Years ago, Tracy was an intern for Bachrach when he was a state senator representing a chunk of the district, and she later worked for Flynn when he was mayor of Boston. She also served with Clapprood in the Legislature.

"Now," said the 37-year-old Tracy, "it's a new generation's turn."

The question is how Tracy expands her base from Allston and Brighton, which, she estimates, could count for 9 percent of the total primary vote. Geography, however, is not the only way to measure a base, she contended.

"Constituency groups become even more important in a 10-person race," she said. "I won't ask for support just because I am a woman, but it is an issue of fairness. We have 10 congressmen and two senators, 12 voices in Washington, and not one of them female.

"There's an urban component, too," she said. A person who represents this district should understand urban, blue-collar issues. It's incredible that there are 17-year-olds who did well in high school and who are accepted to college who don't go, because they can't afford it. They put it off. We should be able to help them with more work-study grants, more Pell grants."

Then there is the gay constituency, spread throughout the district and, unlike some of the silk-stocking voters of Beacon Hill and Back Bay and, at times, black and Latino voters in Roxbury and Dorchester, inclined to vote.

Many gays come from somewhere else. Tracy has pointed out that she lives where she grew up.

"Most people move away to be who they are," she said. "I hope to set a precedent that you don't have to do that, that you can stay and be all that you can be. This neighborhood has been wonderful to me. It's been proud and accepting."

Tracy talked of delivering constituent services, of how a person elected to Congress "can make a
difference with the day-to-day stuff," from helping get care for someone's sick mother to fixing a fouled-up Social Security check.

"Beyond that," she said, "if someone said to me, 'If you could do only one thing, what would it be,' I'd say the debate on pension and retirement issues. My father worked for the railroad for 42 years. He has a decent pension, but there are not many people who work that long for one place. And what about the others who work for themselves and are supposed to put away $4,000 a year in that IRA but find there are some things more pressing than putting away that money?

"What do you do," she asked, "so you do not end up old and poor? Old and poor is not a good place to be, and there are a lot of them in that place. It's especially critical for women with children who interrupt their work and lose out on years of service and pension money.

"It scares me," she said, "that they're talking about privatizing the Social Security system. That's way too risky. We've got to make sure we have, and I know it's a cliche, that safety net. We talk about portability in health care. Maybe we should talk about pension portability."

Even when discussing such issues, Tracy was at ease, always ready to interrupt for an anecdote, but, at one point, near the end of the conversation, she stopped smiling. She stopped when her companion jokingly asked if she would remain in the race at least until he wrote his story about her. There had been rumors that she was feeling squeezed between Flynn and Clapprood and speculation that she might drop out.

"I am not dropping out," she said, jabbing her right forefinger at her lunch companion. "I am in this race to the end. I am not dropping out."

In his race to win the Democratic congressional primary, Boston City Councilor Thomas Keane has labeled himself a (Paul) Tsongas Democrat. The late US senator and presidential candidate had pushed for new solutions to old problems and had become known to some as a centrist Democrat.

So, when addressing the issue of affordable housing in a recent forum, Keane, noting that government funds were drying up, said, "I'll fight for affordable housing, but we need new strategies.

"Universities let students flood into the housing market," he said as an example. "Every year, the federal government gives billions to universities. It's time for a quid pro quo. They need to take responsibility by building housing for their students."

Left perhaps for a subsequent discussion was that, when universities try to build dorms, they often run into neighborhood opposition.

The often-tense relationship between universities and working-stiff neighborhoods has been a nagging problem in such 8th District communities as Allston, Brighton, the Back Bay, Cambridge and Somerville.


By Alan Lupo, Globe Staff

In describing how they never fargo even one vote, the East Boston Tonys, Anthony "The Great" Albano and Tony Cannata, reminisced about how they dragged a young guy out of a courtroom where he was about to be sentenced, brought him to the polls, and then returned him to court, from whence he was indeed sent away for a spell.

"We pulled him outta the courtroom," Cannata recalled with much pride. "He was going away. After he voted, we took him back to court, and then he went to the can."

"We don't like to lose," said Cannata. "Once our names are on the dotted line, we work. We have a lotta fun doing politics. We eat good. We drink good. But we work. If it can't be fun, who needs it? After working all day, who needs another job?"

This year, this legendary East Boston pair are working for John O'Connor of Cambridge, an environmental activist who is spending big bucks to win the Sept. 15 Democratic primary in the 8th Congressional District. Nine other Democrats are also trying to replace US Representative Joseph Kennedy, who is leaving.

East Boston is a crucial, high-voting section of the district, which also includes Chelsea, Cambridge, Somerville, Watertown, Belmont, and a slew of Boston neighborhoods. Some observers suggest the contest could be decided in Eastie, a working-stiff neighborhood that has long suffered from the environmental byproducts of Logan Airport, two tunnels, a highway, rotting docks, and nearby oil farms.
O'Connor, an Irish-American millionaire married to Carolyn Mugar, an American Armenian whose family fortune came from Star Market, would seem an unlikely candidate for Cannata and Albano to push in this largely Italian-American province.

Opponents say they are doing so only because they're being paid. Albano, 50, chief security officer at East Boston High, the father of three, and raising a niece and nephew, and Cannata, 56, a State House employee and father of two and raising two nephews, make no apologies for making a buck.

"If the guy wants to pay me," Cannata said, "that's OK. But this has nothing to do with money. He may be a millionaire 10 times over, but he talks our language. He's for real. He's sensitive to East Boston's problems. He is a fighter."

A few hours earlier, Cannata and Albano had brought out a small army of sign carriers to the sidewalks and safety island outside the Wood Island MBTA station. O'Connor, a one-time community and consumer organizer, enthusiastically rushed from one commuter to another, handed out his glossy brochure and went into his spiel.

Later, in the back room of the 84 Bennington Street Restaurant, Cannata, like a proud father, exulted, "We got a candidate running around, shaking hands, it makes our job easier."

A couple of weeks earlier, the two ran a time for O'Connor in the same back room.

"We had over 100 people here," Albano said, "and 98 of them are with us. We lost Pixie Palladino to Flynn, and another guy is still borderline."

The "job" Cannata referred to is to get out the vote. These two guys, who never lived anywhere but Eastie, parlay their years in the neighborhood along with Albano's 25 years of helping a few generations of high school kids who grow up and remember. They play politics the old fashioned way: Work hard for a candidate and, should he win, go to him for payback.

The payback might be providing a job or filling a pothole. Whatever it is, the officeholder solidifies his position; the voters remember the good deeds, and Cannata and Albano increase their already acknowledged clout.

"That's what we bring to the O'Connor campaign," Cannata said. "Somebody needs a light fixed. We do it. Some mother wants her kid to go to college. We try to make it happen. We don't always hit a home run, but people know that with us, they got a shot at the apple."

To get out that vote, they and a core group of pals, like Domenic Marchesi and Anthony Maffei, work on voter identification. They have a computer disc of trusted voters, and they keep adding to it. In the weeks before election day, about 15 of them call about 1,000 to 1,500 voters and push their candidate. On election day, 20 or more persons work the phones to call those same voters and make sure they go to the polls. If anyone needs a ride, no problem.

"We never wanna hear," Cannata explained, "that we lost by two votes because Mr. and Mrs. Francesca didn't get a call."

Beyond the phone calls, Cannata and Albano work the streets. They put up signs. They paste bumper stickers on the backs of cars. They send out "Dear Friend" cards, asking those friends to support their candidate.

"They call me to ask me who to vote for," Albano said. "When they don't get a 'Dear Friend' card, they think I've died."

Albano, once a star high school sandlot athlete, is very much alive. When he walks around Eastie, motorists yell for him and pedestrians embrace him.

Cannata, straddling his chair with its back pressed against his chest, spread his hands about a foot apart and said of his partner, "His mouth is this big." Then, spreading his hands further apart, "His heart is that big."

"We build relationships," Cannata said, "and they last in East Boston. Respect was the key word in the house. When you respect people, they respect you back. One hand washing the other is not a bad axiom."

The loyalist

In the rarified atmosphere of a downtown high-rise, Harry Grill, attorney at the law firm of Kirkpatrick & Lockhart, presents his brief, not a legal brief, but, rather, a case for the candidacy of his friend, Ray Flynn.

The ambiance of the 13th floor of One International Place is quite a stretch from the neighborhood paths that Flynn has traveled from his modest South Boston home, first to the State House as a rep, then to City Hall as a councilor and mayor, then to Rome, as ambassador to the Vatican.

Through it all, Grill argues, Flynn kept true to his essential beliefs, that a politician's job is to fight for those who are poor, alienated, dispossessed, hard at work at tough jobs and, often, out of the downtown loop.

Now, Flynn wants to travel that path to Washington to represent the 8th Congressional District. To do that, say observers, Flynn must collect much money, resurrect a once-potent organization and overcome both bad publicity and a
sense that he is a has-been running for any available office and fighting for yesterday's liberal ideas.

Harry Grill scoffs at what passes for conventional wisdom. The onetime VISTA volunteer and Mass. Fair Share organizer has been with Flynn for 15 years. He was there, managing the successful mayoral campaigns in the halcyon days, and he was there, fielding the tough questions about campaign finances and an alleged drinking problem in the more recent unpleasant times.

"He is as vibrant and as in touch with the voters as I've ever seen," Grill asserted. "He thrives on the one-on-one, on the marathon of campaigning. He's as connected as he has ever been, and I've been with him since 1983."

Flynn runs, said Grill, "because he is concerned that in this drift to the center, there is a sort of selfishness, that there are people without concern for the working families. He understands personally what people go through. He's part of people's lives. He's been there for the sorrow, and he's been there for the joy."

Flynn is raising money, Grill said, and is building an organization that includes both longtime loyalists, newcomers and a lot of labor union members. The hallmark, however, of a Flynn campaign is not Flynn the organization man, but Flynn the loner. It is not an insult, simply an adjective, and it is not peculiar to him. His mayoral predecessor, Kevin White, was once billed as "the loner in love with his city."

For Flynn and some other politicians, the key is instinct. It is often personal and may resist description or explanation.

"He knows how to pick his spots," Grill said. "He knows where the votes are, and he knows how to find them."

"When you knock on a door," Grill continued, "you get a sense of what people's concerns are. We've never been into focus groups. We go into the neighborhood, where people live. We don't need people coming from Washington into Boston to tell us what the people here think.

"He is the best politician in the race, the hardest working candidate and the one with the strongest record to run on. I don't know how much money you need to supplement that, but I also know all the money in the world can't buy that."

Grill, raised Jewish in the Bronx, and Flynn, raised Irish Catholic in Southie, might seem an odd couple, but they share the belief that public service is not to be laughed at and that politics is less a science than an art form.

"We're not technicians," Grill insisted, "but artists."

---


By Alan Lupo, Globe Staff

The Town Diner at the corner of Mount Auburn Street and Bigelow Avenue in Watertown serves moussaka, which is Greek, and meatloaf, which is working-stiff Americana. Up Bigelow is a Greek Orthodox Church and the Armenian Cultural Center. Across the street is a sign advertising "Fresh Italian Sausage, Sweet & Hot."

This is as much a part of George Bachrach's territory as the tonier precincts of Belmont and Cambridge. He was the area's state senator in the early 1980s, and when he voted for liberal measures, he recalled the other day, critics would tell him, "Hey, Bachrach, it's easy for you to vote that way. You have a liberal district."

Bachrach, sipping orange juice in one of the diner's booths, laughed and asked a rhetorical question: "Do you want to poll the people in this diner? Or the people in North Cambridge? Or the people in Oak Square, Brighton?"

These were the less-than-predictably liberal areas of his state Senate seat and remain so in the 8th Congressional District he and nine other Democrats are seeking to represent in the Sept. 15 primary.

Bachrach, an unreconstructed liberal, said those same people supported him "because they felt I was being straight with them."

Now, 12 years after whipping 10 other Democrats but finishing second to Joe Kennedy in that year's congressional contest, Bachrach is again counting on his old state Senate base of Watertown, Belmont, Allston, Brighton, and part of Cambridge to give him a leg up in what, so far, is a wild-card race to succeed Kennedy, who is retiring.

He has promised to stay true to his beliefs and not, as other Democrats across the nation have done, move to a centrist landscape for fear of alienating some voters.

"Bachrach doesn't back down," his campaign literature says. "He stands up. To entrenched political power. To big money special interests. To political bullies like Newt Gingrich."

In 1986, he was 34, single and
consumed with politics. Now, he is 46, married with two young sons, gray-haired and, like many parents in politics, ready to admit to angst over how to best divide his time between family and public service.

He has been out of public office for a dozen years, and during that time, in 1994, he lost a Democratic primary for governor. Some observers contend he is yesterday's news, that he cannot compete with the name recognition of former Boston Mayor Ray Flynn and former talk show host and legislator Marjorie Clapprood, or with the multimoney campaigns being waged by activist John O'Connor and entrepreneur Chris Gabrieli and, possibly, Boston City Councilor Thomas Keane.

Others running are Somerville Mayor Michael Capuano, Boston City Councilor Charles Yancey, former state Rep. Susan Tracy, and former Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination chairman Alex Rodriguez.

Bachrach has heard it all.

"We are raising money at a good clip," he said, "and should get $300,000 by June 30 and are on track to raise a total of $750,000."

His own poll, taken by Tom Kiley, shows him second behind Flynn but leading among liberals and strong among "the more affluent, better educated, very progressive constituency." That was his strength in 1986 and, he said, remains so.

"I'm the tortoise in this race," he said. "I'm just grinding it out. We've got the strongest natural base in the district. We're working from the bottom up."

Some speculate that if Bachrach can nail down about half his normal base, his poll numbers will climb into the 20s. At that point, his people will target other potential Bachrach-friendly areas, such as West Somerville, Allston, Brighton, the South End, Jamaica Plain, Back Bay, and Beacon Hill.

Factor in some hotly contested state races in places such as Cambridge and West Somerville, and that means a high turnout in his pockets of strength. If other "progressive" candidates fall behind, sources reason, their voters could go to Bachrach.

Bachrach does not seem intimidated by the odds. He recalled taking on both Governor Michael Dukakis, a Democrat, and Governor William Weld, a Republican, on the issue of adequate child care. He questions what may now be conventional wisdom about the benefits of charter schools and vouchers. He has no problem criticizing his party's leader, President Clinton, for failing to push ahead with health care and election reforms.

He can point to a long record of fighting for home health care for the elderly, day care for kids, handgun control, and against the death penalty, term limits, and tax cuts that he contends hurt the most vulnerable. "I've been around long enough," he said, "to know the magnificent work you can do and the horrific life you can lead in public service, and I can't tell you I am not conflicted. But I want to be working on affordable housing, health care, day care. It's what drives me."

Rodriguez, 30 years later

Alex Rodriguez had been on this route once before. He had hit the streets, knocked on the doors, made the speeches, exhorted people to elect him to the state Legislature.

He would win in his South End territory, but would lose to the Irish-Americans from Mission Hill. Even in losing, however, the 27-year-old social worker and community activist of Puerto Rican roots kept smiling and promised, "Sure, I'm going to run again. It's the most fun I've ever had in my life."

That was 1968, and life, he said the other night, has a way of deferring one's plans. Now, Alex Rodriguez, has decided to deliver on his 30-year-old promise. This time, it's for the 8th Congressional District seat, and this time, he's got a bigger base of support, three decades of experience in local, state, and national government and social activism and the skills that come with maturity.

"I know how to organize a campaign," he said. "I'm not rushing. I'm a wise old bull, not a young bull." Oh, yeah, he added, as he relaxed with his wife, Bettie Baca, on a couch in a South End house before making his formal announcement to a racially diverse audience one block away, he is having a lot of fun again.

One problem for him is that the Latino vote is traditionally small; the black vote, if it turns out, appears to be divided by a few candidates, and the "progressives" could be split among Rodriguez, Susan Tracy, Bachrach, John O'Connor, and Charles Yancey.

Rodriguez, attacking the math and the presumptions, laid out a scenario in which he, now seen as an underdog, could win.

"I love that big money has brought black and Latino operatives into the other camps," he said, for example. "It dissipates their strength. They do top-down politics. We'll do the grass roots."

So, in his first mailing, Rodriguez didn't "tell people to vote for me, but to watch me, listen to me. People remembered those letters. At the parade in Charlestown, they came up to me and mentioned those letters, because they were personal, because I signed them."
Rodriguez said he knows the drill, where to get lists of voters, how to identify them by computer and then bore in on those likely to support him.

"Our computer message," he said, "will say, 'It's the votes, stupid.' It's not the process. It's the votes. And every day, my word to my folk is going to be, 'Did you get a vote today? Give me the name.'"

The campaign will start with 350 "friends of Alex," each of whom will be challenged to come up with 10 names by the end of June. Then, those 3,500 will deliver the names of 35,000 likely voters.

Having worked the Bunker Hill Day breakfast and parade in Charlestown by engaging Townies, having met, he said, a lot of white ethnics who said they'd be with him, Rodriguez contended he could challenge such Charlestown favorites as former Boston Mayor Ray Flynn and Somerville Mayor Mike Capuano.

Rodriguez believes he can expand his natural base from the South End, Roxbury, Chelsea, and that strip of Cambridge from Harvard Square to MIT.

"There won't be any vacations in this campaign," said the former director of the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination and deputy assistant secretary in the US Treasury Department. "We'll go from 7 in the morning to 12 at night. We'll do it with organized chaos, by being able to move on the ground.

"I am going to surprise everybody," he promised.

A short time later, at the Jorge Hernandez Cultural Center, he made another promise, this time to a crowd of whites, blacks, Latinos, and Asians, to bring their passion for social justice to Washington.

This, he said, would mean fighting for a $6.75 minimum hourly wage, funding affordable and mixed-income housing, protecting small businesses from "undue burdens of regulation and taxation," improving education and transportation.

"Remember," he said, "that ultimately all humans are striving for the same thing: just a little more income so we can live comfortably and a lot more justice so we can live equally."


By Alan Lupo, Globe Staff

In campaign mode, she is Tip O'Neill in heels.

Marjorie Clapprood doesn't just shake a hand, she smothers it and holds onto it and then stares into the eyes of a potential voter and says, "Can I say, 'Hi?' I'm looking you in the eye and asking you for your vote."

She is an arm-grabber, a slapper of backs and shoulders.

"She is about the best retail campaigner I have ever seen in my life," says Jim Spencer, one of her consultants and a veteran of many campaigns.

Spencer should know, because he once worked for another top "retail campaigner," Joe Kennedy, whose announced intention to retire from the 8th Congressional District seat spurred Clapprood and nine other Democrats to run in the Sept. 15 primary to succeed him. Kennedy, in turn, succeeded Thomas "Tip" O'Neill Jr.

O'Neill, a barrel of a man with a thick shock of white hair and bushy eyebrows, enveloped all comers, whether old pals or total strangers. He slapped backs, pumped hands and joked one into submission. When he finished with a person, the subject would think he had been friends with the US Speaker of the House for a lifetime.

Clapprood, a state representative in the 1980s, the Democratic Party's lieutenant governor candidate in 1990, and a radio talk show host, has the moves.

Her critics, including some opponents, call it celebrity politics.

"It has nothing to do with celebrity," she said the other day in Cambridge's Central Square. "It has everything to do with familiarity. There's a difference."

Clapprood, who recently moved from Sharon to Watertown, contends people know and respect her more for the content of what she has done as a politician and advocate for women, gays, and the poor than for the flash and glamour that she exudes.

As she worked the streets, as she hit the beauty shop, the barber shop, the cobbler's, the coffee house, the bar and the bus stops, citizens responded to both familiarity and celebrity. Some knew her from what she had done; others simply recognized her as a personality.

Whatever the source of contact, Clapprood exploited it with the personal touch.

"I listen to you all the time," a barber told her, though she has been off the talk show for months.
"I'd like your support," she said, and he pledged it. Then she opened the door to the shop wider. Every chair was full. All heads turned to her, and she yelled, "I'm Marjorie Clapprood, and I'm running for the 8th Congressional District. Are we excited?"

Central Square is on the fault line of urban America, more so than, say, Harvard Square or Kendall Square. It is a gritty, busy place, where whites, blacks, Latinos, Asians, straights and gays easily mingle. It is caught in the crosscurrents of those who would gentrify it and those who would preserve it as is.

Nobody raised that dicey issue the other day, not even as the candidate fielded questions on Cambridge Police Detective Frank Pasquarello's weekly cable television call-in show.

But one issue raised there served to illustrate Clapprood's argument that she brings not only legislative skills and passionate advocacy to the job, but also a sense of politics as personal, of government as an extension of her own family history.

At one point, Pasquarello worried out loud about mingling drug addicts, alcoholics and others with serious problems with the elderly in public housing developments.

"The introduction of the mentally ill, drug dependent and alcoholics to elderly housing came about," Clapprood contended, "because we no longer provide for those with such problems. My father was a brilliant man, but he was an alcoholic, and the VA Veterans Administration hospital took care of him until he died, and the government helped my mother with five kids."

Clapprood repeatedly makes the connection between how government helped her family and how she believes it should get back in the business of helping others.

"My politics are simple to read," she said in an interview that day. "If a mother falls ill and needs hospital care, I want to make sure she gets that care. If a kid needs protection from bullies at school, I want to make sure he gets it."

The 8th District includes some of the nation's most activist, "progressive" constituencies, fond of giving litmus tests to candidates for any and all offices. Some of those constituents are less enamored of constituent services than they are of more cosmic issues.

Clapprood, who has fought for family support systems, gay rights, health care for the poor, and pro-choice issues, would seem to be a natural fit for such groups, but she prides herself on what she regards as an independent spirit and is tougher, for example, on cracking down on pedophiles than some civil libertarians might prefer.

"Despite attempts to pigeonhole me," she said, "I am not a pigeon."

The 8th, a predominantly urban district that includes half of Boston, the cities of Chelsea, Cambridge and Somerville, and the towns of Watertown and Belmont, is a sinecure for Democrats. The other Democratic candidates are former Boston Mayor Ray Flynn; Somerville Mayor Mike Capuano; two Boston city councilors, Tom Keane and Charles Yancey; former Brighton state Representative Susan Tracy; environmental activist John O'Connor; businessman Chris Gabrieli; former state and federal official Alex Rodriguez; and former state senator and 1986 congressional candidate George Bachrach.

Clapprood's staff has opened three offices, from which people at phone banks have made 3,600 calls a week to target voters, Spencer says. As of June 30, the campaign raised almost $251,000, far short of the $700,000 or more it had hoped to attract in such a multicandidate field.

Clapprood is competing with Tracy for the women's vote and hopes to become the one prochoice alternative to Flynn, who is antiabortion.

Chris Gabrieli

A woman standing near the entrance to the Lori-Ann Donut Shop on Charlestown's Bunker Hill Street looked with the shock of recognition at the tall, bespectacled, curly-haired man approaching her with outstretched hand.

"The guy in the commercial!" she yelled, testimony to the enduring power of television.

"The guy" is Chris Gabrieli, millionaire businessman, father of four, and one of the 10 Democratic candidates running in the Sept. 15 primary to replace Joe Kennedy in the 8th Congressional District.

It turns out the woman does not live in the district, though she said she knows lots of folks who do, and she and they will see Gabrieli a lot more, first, because he intends to spend about $3 million on television, and second, because he says he will wear out shoe leather to meet voters personally.

What had caught the woman's attention via TV had been Gabrieli's assault on health maintenance organizations. He is pushing for what he calls a "patients' bill of rights." His criticisms touched her, because she said she had been victimized by an HMO.

This, he contended moments later in an interview, is the kind of conversation he has been having throughout the district, and it proves to him that people care about ideas, contrary to conventional wisdom.
"When we get past the inside politics stuff," he said, "and actually talk to a woman like that, they tell you their hopes and fears, and they open up to you.

"I believe politics is changing. The politics of ideas is potent."

Equally potent, many observers would say, are money, organization, and a voting base of friends, supporters from previous campaigns, and fellow ethnics, straights, gays, women, or whatever labels a candidate may choose to play up.

Gabrieli has more money than any other candidate. He said he wants to push ideas more than rely on the traditional political support system of who knows whom, whose friends will agree to support whom, and, "I'm Italian, too."

Having said that, Gabrieli assured an interviewer that he was pragmatic.

"Am I not going to deal with the grassroots?" he said. "Of course I am. Am I not using ethnic identification? Of course, I'm hoping my Italian name helps."

Actually, Gabrieli is a Hungarian-American. Both his parents emigrated to America from Hungary, to which his father's family had moved years earlier from Venice. There are not believed to be many Hungarians in the 8th Congressional District. The Italian name is bound to help among older Italian voters in places like East Boston. The only other Italian name in the race belongs to Somerville Mayor Mike Capuano, whose father was an Italian-American and whose mother was Irish-American.

The confluence of, and conflict between, the politics of ideas and the politics of ethnicity, organization and networks is especially obvious in a place like Charlestown.

Across from the doughnut shop is the Bunker Hill Burying Ground, which, for most of this century, was home to more Yankees and other non-ethnics than the rest of what had become an Irish-dominated, working-stiff neighborhood. That profile, however, slowly began changing in the early 1970s, as increasing numbers of middle-class whites, many of indistinct ethnic background, began moving into Charlestown.

The working stiffs called themselves Townies. They came to call their newer neighbors Toonies. There has been both conflict and cooperation between the two groups.

Gabrieli, as do other candidates, contends he can appeal to both, that his campaign of ideas transcends ethnic, racial and class barriers, that all people worry about education, health care and how to make a living.

"Take the Pell Grants, for example," he said, referring to federal aid to college students. "Many people today go to college part time, or at night after working all day. Those grants are not set up for them. That's a simple thing we should do, to go back and look at this formula.

"Another example," he said, "is that most candidates don't understand what it is like to work for themselves. This affects mostly women and also older men who have been downsized out of jobs. We should encourage them, but they get taxed on both sides of Social Security if they're self-employed. If they were working for a company, that company would pay part of the tax. And their health care plans are unbelievably expensive."

Gabrieli, who comes from a think-tank background, seems to enjoy the meet-and-greet of campaigning, the proverbial pressing of the flesh.

As he was driving a van from Somerville to Chelsea, Mike Capuano, candidate for Congress, was talking about the heavy money that one of his competitors, Chris Gabrieli, was spending on television.

Gabrieli, a Back Bay businessman, had spent about $400,000, and reportedly had gone up from 1 percent to 4 percent in the polls. That's about $133,000 per percentage point.

"Why not just give every voter $250 each?" the Somerville mayor cracked, as he negotiated the back streets from his home base of

---


By Alan Lupo, Globe Staff

As he was driving a van from Somerville to Chelsea, Mike Capuano, candidate for Congress, was talking about the heavy money that one of his competitors, Chris Gabrieli, was spending on television.

"Why not just give every voter $250 each?" the Somerville mayor cracked, as he negotiated the back streets from his home base of
strength to a smaller but similar community that could deliver a heavy vote to him. "Hell, for $250, some of my people might not even vote for me."

A week earlier, a special meeting of the Chelsea City Council opened with the Pledge of Allegiance. Capuano and his wife, Barbara, stood near the doorway and dutifully recited it. He then turned to a reporter and, with a wide grin, announced quietly, "I just took a count, and half the candidates didn't know the Pledge of Allegiance."

The five-term mayor likes to joke. He is serious about wanting to become the next congressman from the 8th Congressional District, where he is one of 10 candidates running in the Democratic primary to replace Joe Kennedy, who is retiring. But he sees no reason why campaigning in Somerville, Chelsea, Watertown, Belmont, Cambridge, and half of Boston cannot be fun.

Capuano’s critics say he can be abrasive. He has heard this before.

"If the people in Somerville really took that to heart," he said, "how would I be getting 70 percent of the vote there? I have a persona. I don't try to hide it like some may do in order to be everyman."

Capuano brings to the job both the rough edges of a workingman’s little city and the book smarts of Dartmouth College and Boston College Law School. Those dual personas reflect the two faces of Somerville.

From the time he first served as an alderman in 1977 to now, he saw Somerville change drastically. It shifted from a tough industrial city known for corrupt politics and wiseguys to a commuter community increasingly populated by middle- and upper-income college graduates.

Add in the arrival of immigrants of color, and Somerville neatly represents much of what the 8th District has become, a diversity of race, ethnicity, income and attitudes.

Capuano is banking on both his personas to take him to Washington.

The intellectual side of him has mastered the arcane details of housing policy, community reinvestment, and industrial redevelopment, and he boasts of having improved the city’s school system, created the state’s first local environmental strike force, and prompted cable television competition.

The street-smart political side has created what he contends is a finely honed organization that will outperform those of other candidates.

"The only way to win, he has said repeatedly, is to go door to door."

"If street work still matters," he contended early in the campaign, "I don't see how anyone can keep up with us."

That was in late May.

Since then, Capuano has raised at least $250,000 of the $300,000 he had said he would need to get "a place at the table."

His large, sprawling headquarters in Davis Square sports an assignment board filled with jobs for volunteers.

"Somerville accounts for about 16 percent of the turnout," he said. "Part of my job is to get that vote up. I believe in numbers. They say a lot. Let's be serious. A congressional campaign can't turn out big numbers, unless Joe Kennedy is in it. My job is to get my voters out."

"I'm guessing a turnout of 75,000," he said. "I can affect that in pockets only. So it's the whole idea of targeting where I go, who I go to."

That means he must spend a lot of time in high-voting precincts where he seems strong: Somerville, Chelsea, Charlestown, East Boston, and parts of Belmont and Cambridge.

So, he was heading back to Chelsea, which accounts for about 5.6 percent of the vote, but which, in his words, is ‘open territory.’

"Nobody can lay claim to Chelsea," he told Mario Zullo, a political player who runs Park Cleaners. "It's open warfare here, and I intend to win."

Zullo and his wife, Elena, liked that. Police officer Andy Troisi, born and bred in Chelsea and brother of a pol, had brought Capuano to Zullo's place and to the homes of family and friends who had agreed to put up Capuano's signs.

"Whatever I can do," Zullo told Capuano, "I'll do for you. It's nice to see a good Italian boy."

Capuano seems not to be worried about Gabrieli or seven of the other candidates: George Bachrach, Marjorie Clapprood, Tom Keane, John O'Conn, Alex Rodriguez, Susan Tracy, Charles Yancey.

Ray Flynn, he says, is the person to beat, especially in Chelsea and Charlestown, where the former Boston mayor reputedly has strong support among working stiff.

But as Andy Troisi, introducing Capuano to a Chelsea City Hall employee the other day, said, "He's one of us, you know?"

"Yeah," the woman said. "I know. I've heard."

In politics, "one of us" is high praise.

From Kennedy to Tsongas
It was bingo night at St. James Armenian Church's Cultural and Youth Center on a tree-lined street in Watertown, and in the lobby, a woman, standing in line to get her bingo cards, touched Tom Keane on the chin, and exclaimed, "He looks like a Kennedy."

In Massachusetts politics, this is
not a bad thing to look like, especially in the 8th Congressional District, where two of the last four incumbents were Jack Kennedy and now Joe Kennedy.

"It's the plastic surgery," Keane joked, beaming.

Outside the hall, Tom Keane, the father, looking younger than his 73 years, wore a perpetual smile as he passed out his son's campaign fliers. Backing him up was daughter Bridget, one of 11 Keane offspring. Showing up moments later was Brian, yet another, who had managed three state presidential primaries in 1992 for the late Paul Tsongas. Back at the candidate's Boston City Council district office in the Back Bay, was Betty Ann, the mother, working at a desk near the doorway.

Between the Keane parents, their 11 sons and daughters, eight sons- and daughters-in-law, and some of the 19 grandchildren, the candidate already has a substantial political organization. Add to them members of Brighton's political Rufo clan plus volunteers and paid staffers, and Keane becomes a player.

If voters want to make comparisons with those early Kennedy family efforts of legend, Keane will not discourage them. He talks less of Kennedy, however, than he does of Tsongas. Over and over (and over and over), he calls himself a Tsongas Democrat. This, he says, sets him apart from the "traditional" Democrats against whom he is running in the Sept. 15 primary.

"It's economic pragmatism and social liberalism," Keane said. "It's where the people think Democrats ought to go."

So, on what would a Tsongas Democrat spend tax dollars?

Education, he said, was his priority, and a balanced budget should mean more federal money to fully operate kindergartens, run after-school programs to 6 p.m., and support the kind of nurturing that kids need even before they hit school.

So, by pushing for more federal funds, on one hand, and supporting tough standards and charter schools, on the other, Keane reasoned that both Democrats and Republicans could find grounds for cooperation.

"What if the surplus disappeared and we had to make cuts?" he asked rhetorically. "The pat answer is to cut defense spending. It's not going to provide the huge savings some think, nor is it as politically feasible as they think. You would need cuts across the board.

"If I had to choose the department of Housing and Urban Development or education, I'd choose cutting HUD. I'd cut programs rather than increase the deficit, because a large deficit equals a lousy economy, which translates into more families in trouble, more abuse, more crime, more desertion, more suicides."

Keane, for example, supports NAFTA, the controversial North American Free Trade Agreement, which many Democrats have opposed. Opponents feel it hurts American workers. Supporters contend it is an inevitable element of free trade, which, in turn, creates more jobs and opportunities.

"The protectionist, isolationist view," Keane argued earlier in the evening, on the way to Mattapan Square, "is doomed to fail, and we can't protect our borders."

Keane said his City Council experience enables him to take a pragmatically local view of government to Washington.

"I come to the race with an understanding that politics is very much local," he said. "I think Mike Capuano understands that too. I'm not sure the others do."

Whatever he brings, he must, as must the others, first get the votes. To help do this, he predicted, he will have raised by mid-July about $407,000. He has 13 paid workers and more than 300 volunteers who do stand-outs with signs and drop literature.

He is counting on a 10 percent turnout in his Back Bay-Beacon Hill-Mission Hill-Fenway district, a number that some observers regard as too optimistic.

"The rap on my district," he contended, "is that they don't turn out to vote. They don't for local elections, but they do for national elections."

Where does he go from there for votes?

"I think the total vote will be between 80,000 to 100,000 maximum," he guessed. "So, the winning margin will be roughly 20 percent. I don't think Ray Flynn goes beyond 18 percent, and I think Marjorie Clapprood and I have the best potential growth into the teens."

Keane said he has strength in the South End, home base of candidate Alex Rodriguez, and Bay Village and boasted, "I'll beat Susan Tracy in Brighton, where I have the best organization of anywhere. I have a good organization in Cambridge now."

He predicted he would finish first or second in Boston's black neighborhoods, home of fellow councilor Charles Yancey.

In Mattapan Square, Charles Vann and Jeffrey O'Neal, two campaign volunteers, guided Keane from one small business establishment to another.

Outside the Avenue Tavern, Vann smiled knowingly and said, "People don't really know where the real voters are. Well, Joe Sixpack votes. Ray Flynn knows that. That's
Yancey hoping for big payoff on his '92 gamble; Sees loss to Kennedy as step to higher profile.

By Alan Lupo, Globe Staff

In less than two months, Boston City Councilor Charles Yancey will know if his 1992 gamble paid off.

That year, Yancey ran against incumbent Joe Kennedy in the 8th Congressional District's Democratic primary. He figured he would lose, and he did. The idea was to increase his presence on the political landscape beyond that of representing Mattapan and part of Dorchester on the City Council. Maybe, he and others reasoned then, he would even get a jump-start on other candidates should Kennedy ever abandon the seat.

This year, Kennedy announced he was leaving, and 10 Democrats are competing for the primary vote on Sept. 15 to represent Cambridge, Somerville, Belmont, Watertown, Chelsea, and half of Boston.

Yancey is one of them, and though the district is close to 40 percent minority, Yancey, who is black, and Alex Rodriguez, the only other minority candidate, are still seen by most observers as the two stragglers in a race in which white candidates, as is often the case in these parts, have laid claim to minority supporters, volunteers, and staffers.

The eight-term councilor has raised only $21,900, the least of the 10 candidates, and he represents a constituency that has the greatest need for government attention while often displaying the most apathy on Election Day.

Yancey is, however, by his own admission, a stubborn sort. Ever since he began running for office in 1979, he has been criticized for failing to make alliances on the council and for having insufficiently honed political reflexes. Yet, when the smoke clears, he remains smiling and seemingly unruffled.

In an interview two weeks ago, he contended that his campaign has 300 volunteers, that he would raise more than $300,000 by primary day and that, "within a couple of weeks, you'll feel a strong presence of the Yancey-for-Congress campaign."

He contended that the large field helps him, that if he could capture 25 percent of the vote, he could win. He won 20 percent of the vote in 1992, he said, and 20 percent "in a multicandidate race is a big deal."

An analysis of that 1992 race shows Yancey won 18 percent of the total vote. He won 22 percent in Boston, 16 percent in Cambridge, 14 percent in Somerville, 20 percent in Belmont, 14 percent in Watertown, and 9 percent in Chelsea.

One theory is that with Kennedy out, Yancey's old numbers either go up or, at least, hold steady. Politics, however, is not a science. Numbers are not always dependable. Also, some candidates have strong geographic, ethnic, or other identifiable bases.

Two candidates, for example, are women, Susan Tracy and Marjorie Clapprood, and Tracy is also gay. Yancey and Rodriguez split the minority community vote, and both former Boston Mayor Ray Flynn and City Councilor Tom Keane can claim black support. Yancey's Somerville support could diminish in the presence of that city's mayor, Mike Capuano. George Bachrach, former state senator and 1986 congressional candidate, is expected to pull heavily in Belmont and Watertown. Then, there are the two millionaire candidates, John O'Connor and Chris Gabrieli, the former of whom competes with Yancey and others for the bulk of the "progressive" vote.

What separates him from the rest, Yancey said, is his experience as a local legislator.

"I have more experience in the legislative branch of government than any opponent," he said, pointing to his 15 years in office. "You also need someone who understands the hopes and dreams of the constituents of the 8th District. I've lived my whole life in the district. In Congress, it's important to know how to get things done in a hostile environment, and I've been able to get things done for my constituents."

For a dozen years, Yancey has sponsored a book fair, in which 26,000 new books have been given to children. Last year, he successfully fought for $10 million in capital funds for a new Mattapan library.

Yancey asserts that beyond constituent services, he has been ahead of his time on such issues as disinvestment in South Africa and cosponsored another that prevented
tobacco representatives from passing out free cigarettes.

Finally, there is the obvious issue of race.

"I provide a vital voice," Yancey said, "for people who have not been represented in government and feel neglected and ignored. This is an opportunity for the 8th District to diversify its delegation. Massachusetts has never elected a black to the US House."

Whether that resonates will depend on what kind of vote Yancey can produce for himself in such places as Mattapan, North Dorchester, Roxbury, the South End, and parts of Cambridge.

So last week, four of Yancey's volunteers were holding signs in Roxbury's Grove Hall during the morning rush hour. On the Blue Hill Avenue safety island, a half-dozen of O'Connor's people were pumping for their candidate. A few moments later, a large red van with Gabrieli signs plastered all over it drove by.

In the doggiest dog days of this summer, every candidate is slogging and scraping for every vote; as Yancey had noted, in a field of 10, a 20-to-25 percent vote just might win it.


By Alan Lupo / Globe Staff

On a safety island on Blue Hill Avenue in Roxbury's Grove Hall neighborhood, Tom McGuire, campaign volunteer extraordinaire, tied one end of his O'Connor-for-Congress banner to a utility pole, grabbed the other end, and awaited the morning rush-hour traffic.

He then proceeded to put both life and limb in jeopardy.

McGuire would proudly display the banner to the cars passing in front of him and then run backwards onto the other side of the avenue, thereby enabling motorists and passengers who just passed him to again see the sign in their rear-view mirrors.

"Is there anything more fun than this?" he bellowed, grinning and dodging traffic coming from the other direction.

In John O'Connor's well-funded, high-tech campaign for the Democratic Party nomination to replace Joe Kennedy in the 8th Congessional District, McGuire and the other five sign bearers on the safety island are the key to the Cambridge activist's attempt to overcome the nine others in the Sept. 15 primary.

His internal polls, he said in an interview at his spacious headquarters not far from Central Square, show him running third behind former Boston Mayor Ray Flynn and Marjorie Clapprood, a former state representative and talk show host, "and they're in a statistical dead heat."

"We're right on target," he contended. "I knew from the get-go that I was not the most well-recognized candidate, the handsomest, or even the richest."

Chris Gabrieli, a Beacon Hill businessman, is the richest. Flynn, Clapprood, Somerville Mayor Mike Capuano, former state senator George Bachrach, former state representative Susan Tracy, and Boston City Councilors Tom Keane and Charles Yancey were presumed to be better known. Former Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination chief Alex Rodriguez was well known before he left four years ago to work for the Clinton administration in Washington. Handsomest remains an opinion, with Keane, Clapprood and Rodriguez thought to be contenders.

"But I am the best organizer," O'Connor said, "with a 20-year resume to prove it. I've moved from the bottom half of the race to the top tier in the last two months."

The secret, said O'Connor and those who work with him, is to use only a third of his $1.5 million for media advertising and use most of the rest in field organizing and research.

O'Connor, who has organized both locally and nationally for environmental and consumer causes, said he already had 750 to 1,000 volunteers and hoped to have close to 2,000 by election day to pull out his targeted vote.

So, he is forking out $103,000 a month for 32 full- and part-time staff members, ranging from technocrats working the computers in his air-conditioned offices to neighborhood wardwheelers working the hot summer streets. He is also running a "school" for 18 young people drawn from all over the country. They get board and $10 a day for food, and their job is to help recruit more neighborhood volunteers.

O'Connor already had a base upon which to build, he said, due to his 20 years of organizing around issues ranging from fighting utilities,
to working with Armenian and Irish groups, to sponsoring neighborhood ball clubs.

"The volunteers," explained Natasha Perez, his deputy director, "are knocking on doors on their streets and phone-banking people in their neighborhoods."

Perez and her staff keep a running tally of voters for, against, and undecided; a total of voters recruited to the day; the number of signs placed and coffee hours scheduled, and the number of election-day volunteers recruited.

On Sept. 15, the job of those volunteers will be to make sure that O'Connor's 30,000 or so targeted voters get to the polls. That figure, she said, is even higher than the 25 percent to 27 percent needed to put him over the top.

If it works, what, then, would O'Connor bring to Washington?

"I am going to continue the battle," he said, "to break up the utility monopolies, lower rates and clean our air. I have been at this issue for 20 years, and I can't walk away from that fight."

As would other candidates, he would try to increase education funding and improve access to health care. The difference?

"I want Newt Gingrich," O'Connor said, "to say to his people, 'We better give Massachusetts the help it needs, or he'll make my life unbearable in Georgia.' "

In Georgia?

Indeed, O'Connor contended, and Texas and a lot of other states where he has made alliances with grass-roots activist groups, ranging from trade unions, to environmental movements, to those concerned with Ireland (he's fifth-generation Irish) and Armenia (his wife is Armenian-American).

"So," he argued, "I am the only one who is more than just another safe vote in the delegation. I am someone with a national network to pressure those congressmen from other states who may not be with us."

Meanwhile, O'Connor, whose stiffness in his TV ads belies a natural exuberance, is honing in on such local issues as airplane noise in East Boston and air pollution in Chelsea and Charlestown.

O'Connor and his campaign manager, Jim Braude, a veteran of progressive-issue campaigns in Massachusetts, also insist on a heavy research component so that the candidate not only identifies problems, such as air and noise pollution and inflated pharmaceutical costs, but also comes up with solutions. In the end, though, it is, as with any campaign, the candidate meeting the citizen. As O'Connor talked issues with a reporter, a utility worker showed up to check on a meter. O'Connor jumped up, crossed the room, collared the guy, launched into a stump speech on utilities, and signed the man up as a supporter.

In a 10-person race, every vote truly does count.


By Alan Lupo, Globe Staff

From across the 8th Congressional District come Ray Flynn sightings, as if he were some bird that everyone thought was extinct.

One day, Flynn is seen jogging by himself near Harvard Square. One evening, he and his wife, Cathy, are walking down a Watertown street. On another night, as a woman takes her dog out on Webster Stree in East Boston, the first people she sees are Ray and Cathy Flynn.

There are times when the former mayor of Boston and ambassador to the Vatican is without the entourage one comes to expect of a candidate for Congress. At times, he seems to be waging a stubbornly lonely campaign.

Indeed, until recently, many had written off his political career and saw him as yesterday's news. Most of the nine other candidates in the Democratic primary and most observers, however, see Flynn as the one to beat in the race to represent Watertown, Belmont, Somerville, Cambridge, Chelsea and half of Boston.

"When he first announced for Congress," said a supporter of one of Flynn's opponents, Boston City Councilor Thomas Keane, "I thought he was crazy. But now I see it's almost like a stroke of genius." An ally of Boston Mayor Thomas Menino, who has had an on-again, off-again relationship with his predecessor, said of Flynn, "It never fails to amaze me about how right his political judgment is. He has an innate sense of the right race, at the right time, in the right place."

When Flynn left Boston for his Vatican posting in 1993, after a 23-year career as a state representative, city councilor and mayor, he was one of the most popular politicians in the city's history. By last year, however, his
popularity had plummeted after a campaign finance scandal that sent one of his friends to jail, criticism of his performance as ambassador and a scathing Globe report on his drinking.

For those with a sense of Boston's political history, the Flynn story was reminiscent of the saga of James Michael Curley, the late mayor, governor, congressman and city councilor who had repeatedly attained hero status and fallen from grace, only to resurrect himself time and again.

This comparison became especially poignant when, in the wake of the criticism leveled against him, Flynn announced for governor in January. That campaign went nowhere, and on April 29, Flynn switched gears and said he would run for the congressional seat being vacated by Joe Kennedy.

By then, as had happened with Curley, some former friends and allies had deserted him, and the conventional wisdom was that Ray Flynn might be seen as a pitiable figure, a shadow of his former persona, running for any available seat.

Three months later, the conventional wisdom is that Flynn is the lead candidate, with anywhere from 18 percent to more than 20 percent of the vote already locked up, a formidable percentage in a 10-person field. "I've seen a dramatic change in his demeanor when he was running for governor and couldn't make any headway," said Robert Consalvo, a Flynn friend and Boston Redevelopment Authority employee. "It seems he is a different person, like the old Ray again in this campaign. The zing is back in his voice and his step. It makes me feel good to see him like this again. He took such a beating the last few years, and it really got to him. This seems to have rejuvenated him."

"He's out every day," Consalvo said. "He's enthusiastic about campaigning. He believes he has the right experience for that district, which always has been a district of heavyweights, and he's got more experience than the others running. And he's proud of his foreign policy experience. That is something new for him, so it really has broadened him."

This is essentially Flynn's message, which is printed boldly on his campaign signs and banners: "A Proven Leader."

"While other candidates are talking about these issues," asserted Harry Grill, a lawyer and Flynn loyalist, "Ray Flynn has taken decisive action on issues of concern to people in the district, be it health care, education, job creation."

Flynn has loyalists in the black and Latino precincts of Mattapan, Dorchester and Roxbury, and strength in the high-voting, white ethnic neighborhoods of East Boston, Charlestown and Chelsea. While Keane and millionaire businessman Chris Gabrieli talk of new solutions, Flynn hammers away at his longtime theme of relief for working families and the poor.

What he adds to that urban record of fighting for affordable housing, health care, parks and playgrounds is a dimension that this son of Southie never had dreamed he would attain.

Flynn brought to his ambassadorship the same hands-on style he had employed as a mayor. That had to rankle State Department traditionalists. For Flynn, it confirmed his instincts that one does not readily compromise when reaching out to the least powerful, whether they're in Charlestown's Bunker Hill projects or in Uganda, Somalia or India, where he saw poverty at its worst.

The other day, as he worked Charlestown, shaking hands with the Edison employees in a bar on the Somerville line, posing with kids to whom he had donated shirts for a street hockey tournament at the James F. Donovan Court, reminiscing with the guys at the Knights of Columbus in Charlestown, greeting campaign contributors at a lawn party, Flynn verbally jogged from cosmic issues of AIDS in Uganda and hunger in Somalia to his penchant for remembering a local name or face and making sure that person got a hello.

"I've always considered myself as being for the underdog," he said, "but those experiences overseas convinced me that the sensitivity I have for poor people is important in politics today. It made me a better person."

"I have a son suffering from depression, and I was almost beginning to feel sorry for myself, and then I spotted this guy in India, in a village where there had been an earthquake, pushing bricks away from a mound that had crushed down on his house. He had lost his wife and two of his children, and was desperately searching for his other child, who he assumed was dead. It was so hot, the bodies were decomposing, and wild dogs were roaming the area. He wanted to find and cremate the child so the dogs wouldn't get to the child."

"I almost said, 'Thank God.' My son has a family that's going to stand with him. He's got good medical care and good friends, like the Cardinal Bernard Law, who have spent time with him."

After he saw the people in India lining up by the hundreds to receive emergency aid, and after he heard
them saying, "Thank you, America," he said he found it "mind-boggling to hear these politicians like Jesse Helms saying, 'Let's shut off aid.' "

Flynn asserted it is both a record of local accomplishments, which he said his opponents cannot match, and the personal and political perspectives he gained from his overseas experience that qualify him to go to Washington. Unlike some other candidates, Flynn shrugged off questions about what vote total and percentages he would need.

"I let others figure that out," he said. "The strongest thing I have going for me is personal contacts with people that I've built up over the years. It's still the most effective way of campaigning."

A strategist for former state representative and talk show host Marjorie Clapprood, seen as running second to Flynn, contends that some potential Flynn voters desert him when they learn of his anti-abortion history.

Flynn's camp retorts that as mayor, he never interfered in abortions performed at Boston City Hospital.

"Yes, he's pro-life," said Grill, who is pro-choice, "and he's also pro-woman, pro-family, pro-working people, and pro-poor, and has a strong record to back that up."

Flynn's people debunk the theory that his numbers have peaked. On election days, they say, the previously "undecideds" vote pretty much as do the rest of those at the polls. In other words, they do not, like lemmings, suddenly flock to or away from one candidate.

Besides Flynn, Keane, Gabrieli and Clapprood, the other candidates are Boston City Councilor Charles Yancey, former state Representative Susan Tracy, Somerville Mayor Michael Capuano, former state Senator George Bachrach, community activist and former state and federal official Alex Rodriguez, and consumer and environmental activist John O'Connor.


By David Warsh

The Eighth is the most famous congressional district in Massachusetts, possibly in the nation. Created by gerrymander in 1942, the district has been represented by James Michael Curley, John F. Kennedy, Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill Jr., and, most recently, Joseph P. Kennedy II. Now with Kennedy going back to private life, the seat is up again, and its new occupant will immediately step into a national as well as a local role.

The significance of the district stems, not so much from colorful history, but from the political energy generated by the tension between the oldest Americans and the newest. The Eighth contains half of Boston, plus the old satellite cities of Cambridge, Chelsea, Somerville, and Watertown, as well as the leafy suburb of Belmont.

The congressman from the Eighth represents also all the successive waves of immigrants who came after - the Latin Americans and the Portuguese as well as the Irish and Italians. All that history means a never-ceasing search for common ground.

No wonder that Gerald Sullivan and Michael Kenney wrote in "The Race for The Eighth," their book describing the memorable year (1986) in which Joe Kennedy won the seat, that it was possible "there was not a more liberal district in the United States."

Has it changed?

With just over two weeks until the decisive primary - there is a Republican, Philip Hyde III, on the ballot, as well as an independent, Anthony Schinella, but neither has a ghost of a chance in November - many persons believe the contest now has come down to a two-person race. The final face-off between former Boston Mayor Ray Flynn and Somerville Mayor Michael Capuano is a consequence of the large field.

For months, it had been a three-person race, depending on whose partisans you talked to: Marjorie Clapprood, Flynn, and Capuano (she's the radio talk show host and former state legislator); or George Bachrach, Flynn, and Capuano (he's the durable liberal who lost to Joe Kennedy in 1986). Or Susan Tracy, Flynn, and Capuano (she's a former state rep with strong liberal credentials).

The three millionaires - software entrepreneur Chris Gabrieli, environmental activist John O'Connor, and Boston City Councilor Tom Keane - failed to attract much support despite liberal applications of cash. The two minority candidates, Alex Rodriguez and Charles Yancey, were unable to get beyond their small bases. Peter Galbraith, former ambassador to Yugoslavia (and son of the famous Harvard economist), dropped out of the race.

So now it is simply Flynn and Capuano, because it is pretty clear
that none of the others has a chance of beating Flynn, who long ago coasted to a lead in the polls on the strength of name recognition. (Some polls still show George Bachrach in the race, but as a lobbyist-lawyer long out of office, he has little street-level organization.)

On the surface, Flynn and Capuano are remarkably similar.

Both are hometown boys, husbands of strong women, sons of parents who were themselves deeply rooted in their communities. Both have been successful mayors, with excellent records on racial issues. Flynn rode into office on the strength of his peacemaking during Boston's busing crisis in the 1970s. Capuano has presided over the smooth racial integration of his city. Each possesses unmistakable star quality; each is a person you're glad to be around. (Disclaimer: I live in Somerville and have known Capuano slightly for many years; I work in Boston and have covered Flynn in various connections.)

There, however, the similarity ends.

Capuano is 46, Flynn is 59. The Somerville mayor still has kids at home. A graduate of Dartmouth and Boston College law school, he has been elected five times mayor of his city of 90,000, but much of his career lies ahead.

Flynn's family of six children, on the other hand, has been raised; his formative days as an All-American basketball player at Providence College are far behind (though he still jogs six or eight miles a day). For many years he was a state representative and city councilor; after three terms as mayor, he spent four controversial years in Rome as Bill Clinton's ambassador to the Vatican and occasional emissary to global disaster spots, before resigning.

Capuano is quick, hot, sometimes pugnacious. Flynn is slow, mild, low-key to the point of sometimes being glassy-eyed. Flynn is populist in his sentiments; Capuano is a lunch-bucket technocrat. He likes budget and policy debates; his mastery of the nuts-and-bolts of government programs is Clintonesque. Flynn specializes in symbolic politics and the human touch. (As mayor, he made a habit of bounding into burning buildings.)

Within his administration, Capuano is leaderly. He possesses a good sense of how markets work and how they fail. He initiated cable competition and privatized his city's garbage collection - but otherwise brought city services in-house through retraining and higher pay. No city worker lost his job, and flex-time, job-sharing, paid parental leave, and on-site day care became staples of union contracts.

Flynn, on the other hand, often has been guided by his aides, for good and ill. His city planner Stephen Coyle was a spectacular success, but his campaign bookkeeper went to jail for embezzling. In Rome, it was said that after weeks of not coming to the embassy, he had to call an aide when he could no longer remember the building's access code.

On the fundamental issue of schooling, the mayors' records are worlds apart. The Boston schools are still a mess, despite a determined effort by Tom Menino, who has been mayor since 1993; they suffered from considerable inattention on Flynn's watch. Somerville schools, on the other hand, are up and coming; average class size is 19, and six new schools designed to serve as community centers as well have been built.

Perhaps most significantly for voters in the Eighth, the candidates differ sharply on the issue of abortion. Capuano is prochoice; Flynn is prolife. Nor do they differ only on life in the womb. Flynn opposed various school sex education measures while Capuano lobbied successfully in his socially conservative city for sex education, as well as counseling on sexually transmitted diseases, family violence, and gender equity.

The next person to represent the district could be in Washington for a long time. Capuano plays well with others; he would contribute to the strength of his state's delegation. Flynn is unaccustomed to team play. The Eighth won't lose reputation for political originality with either candidate. But it has much to gain from choosing the younger man.